

Perceptions of Social Status in Chinese American Children: Associations With Social Cognitions and Socioemotional Well-Being

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Children's perceptions of social status during middle childhood may play a role in their socioemotional development; however, these processes have not been fully examined within a cultural framework. The present study used an integrated conceptual framework (Mistry et al., 2016) to examine relations between perceptions of social status, social cognitions regarding race and status, and socioemotional well-being in elementary-age Chinese American children of immigrant parents ($N = 109$; 7–10 years old). Individual interviews, behavioral tasks, and parent- and child-completed questionnaires were used to assess children's perceptions of their social status, their racial associations with social status, and 2 indicators of their socioemotional well-being. Results from logistic regression models indicated that, compared with younger children, older children made more references to education as an indicator of social status and fewer references to purchasing power. Children also associated images of White children with positions of high social status at greater-than-chance frequencies. Finally, lower subjective social status in children was associated with children's self-reported social loneliness, even accounting for parent-reported measures of socioeconomic status. Our results suggest that Chinese American children's perceptions of their own and others' social status may reflect a growing awareness of cultural values and societal stereotypes of race and social status and may also be an important factor in their socioemotional well-being. We discuss implications of our findings for future research on perceptions of social status among ethnic minority and immigrant youth.

What is the public significance of this article?

Children's perceptions of both their own and others' social status are important components of their socioemotional development during middle childhood. For Chinese American children from immigrant families, these processes may be shaped by specific sociocultural experiences and may play a critical role in their understanding of race and social status, as well as in their socioemotional well-being.

Keywords: perceived social status, immigrant children and families, racial/ethnic stereotypes, socioemotional well-being, middle childhood

Middle childhood is a developmental period in which children become increasingly aware of stereotypes, social identity, and group affiliation (Akiba, Szalacha, & García Coll, 2004). As such,

children's perceptions of social status may become particularly salient during this period. In contrast to socioeconomic status (SES), which is typically assessed using objective measures of

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income, education, or occupation, children's subjective social status (SSS) reflects their own perceived position in a socioeconomic hierarchy. Likewise, children's perceptions of others' relative social status (RSS) reflect their understanding of those individuals' relative positions in a socioeconomic hierarchy. Although research on children's perceptions of social status is still in its early stages (Odgers, 2015), previous research with adolescent populations has highlighted age-related, developmental changes in this domain (Goodman, Huang, Schafer-Kalkhoff, & Adler, 2007) and suggests that perceived social status may be a stronger predictor of health and well-being than objective measures of SES (McLaughlin, Costello, Leblanc, Sampson, & Kessler, 2012).

The implications of SSS for health and well-being are of particular interest, given that children are aware of socioeconomic inequalities even in early childhood. Although their perceptions of their own social status are often inaccurate at this age (Rauscher, Friedline, & Banerjee, 2017), by middle childhood, children from both low- and middle-income families are well aware of not only their own status in the social hierarchy but also the negative perceptions held about the poor (Weinger, 1998, 2000). Moreover, the indicators used by children to assess their own and others' social class may shift gradually over the course of development from an emphasis on external, observable characteristics (i.e., possessions as signals of wealth) to more abstract indicators such as societal prestige (Flanagan et al., 2014; Ramsey, 1991).

The existing research on children's perceptions of social status has been marked by two critical limitations. First, little effort has been devoted toward examining children's perceptions of social status within a cultural framework. Although work has connected these perceptions to variables such as views of fairness, gender, education, focus on current events, and social class (Flanagan et al., 2014; Mistry, Brown, White, Chow, & Gillen-O'Neel, 2015; Weinger, 2000), how culture connects to children's interpretation of status is relatively unexplored. Such an approach might illustrate how children's perceptions of both their own and others' social status relate to and reflect their sociocultural experiences, values, and beliefs. Second, though the effects of SSS on socioemotional well-being in adolescence and adulthood have been well-documented (Goodman et al., 2001, 2007; McLaughlin et al., 2012), we do not know whether SSS is also associated with socioemotional well-being earlier in development, when these notions of status are just beginning to form.

Both demographic and sociocultural characteristics make Chinese American children of immigrant parents an ideal population in which to examine perceptions of social status in middle childhood. Chinese Americans are one of the largest, fastest-growing, and most socioeconomically diverse immigrant groups in the United States (Taylor et al., 2012). Socioeconomic diversity within this population is particularly pronounced in domains of education and income. Though over a quarter of Chinese American immigrant adults over 25 hold postgraduate degrees, over a third have only a high school diploma or less (López, Cilluiffo, & Patten, 2017). Likewise, although the median income of Chinese American immigrants exceeds national averages, a higher percentage of Chinese American immigrants also live in poverty (16.7% vs. 15.1% of the U.S. population; López et al., 2017).

Given these sociodemographic characteristics, Chinese American children of immigrant parents represent a wide range of experiences with education, income, language proficiencies, and

other indicators of social status (Louie, 2004; Zhou & Lee, 2017). Moreover, a number of socialization practices identified in previous research with Chinese and Chinese American families, such as an emphasis on effort, self-improvement, and education as means to success (Luo, Tamis-LeMonda, & Song, 2013), are directly relevant to perceptions of social status and how it is attained. Finally, although previous studies have examined racial and ethnic stereotypes of Chinese American youth (Kim, Wang, Deng, Alvarez, & Li, 2011; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004), little is known regarding the stereotypes held by Chinese American youth themselves. In particular, no previous research has tested how stereotypes regarding race and social class may be endorsed among Chinese American children in middle childhood.

The present study examined two specific questions. First, we examined how Chinese American children's perceptions of social status are reflected in two social cognitions: their assessments of their own SSS and their racial associations with others' RSS. Second, we examined how SSS is associated with Chinese American children's socioemotional well-being. By studying these processes in a preadolescent, ethnic minority sample of children from immigrant families, this project identified potential sociocultural influences on children's experiences and understanding of perceived social status and also identified potential points for clinical intervention with this population.

Perceived Social Status Within a Cultural Framework

A theoretical model recently proposed by Mistry et al. (2016) provides a cultural framework for examining perceived social status and social cognitions in childhood, as well as for examining the effects of perceived social status on children's socioemotional well-being. Within this model, Mistry and colleagues integrated three concepts. First, they emphasized how children's developmental circumstances and outcomes can be influenced by specific contexts, such as immigration status or the socioeconomic milieu of the family. Second, they considered specific domains of individual development, such as a child's identity formation, their conformity or resistance to socialization goals, and their psychological health. Third, they discussed how these contexts and domains of development are interconnected through culturally informed interpretive processes—how socializing agents, such as parents, engage in a process of cultural “meaning-making.” In sum, cultural ideologies provide an interpretation of specific contexts for the developing child and, as such, play a critical role in domains of the child's development.

This integrated conceptual framework can be applied to examine perceptions of social status specifically among Chinese American children of immigrant parents. For these children, immigration, race and ethnicity, and social status can each function as what Mistry and colleagues (2016) identify as pertinent developmental contexts. For example, previous research with Chinese American immigrant families indicated that changes in financial standing (Zhou, Lee, Vallejo, Tafuya-Estrada, & Sao Xiong, 2008), exposure to racial or ethnic discrimination (Kim et al., 2011; Qin, Way, & Rana, 2008), and family aspirations toward educational or professional advancement (Louie, 2004) can all serve as salient contextual experiences in children's development. These contexts are likely interpreted by parents and other socializing agents through a process informed by the shared values and experiences

of their ethnic group: Parents, peers, and others may emphasize certain markers of social status, underscore means and challenges of societal advancement, or provide children with broader narratives of race and social status (Li, 2004; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Finally, these culturally interpreted contexts can be reflected in key developmental domains, namely, children's perceptions of their own and others' social status, and aspects of their socioemotional well-being.

Perceived Social Status and Social Cognitions in Chinese American Children

Within the integrated conceptual framework, children's exposure to culturally informed interpretive processes may be reflected in two types of social cognitions relevant to perceived social status: the indicators used to assess their own SSS, and their racial associations with others' RSS.

Indicators of Subjective Social Status

As suggested by the Mistry et al. (2016) model, children's attunement to particular indicators of social status, such as racial or ethnic stereotypes, occupational prestige, or educational attainment, reflects shared cultural values and ideologies that have been interpreted through parents and other socializing agents. However, this raises the question of how children's understanding of social status might be socialized through a cultural lens. For example, although previous investigations have operationalized SSS solely in terms of monetary wealth (Mistry et al., 2015), for Chinese American children in immigrant families, educational attainment may also be culturally interpreted as a salient marker of social status. Beginning as early as preschool, Chinese American parents devote more structured time to their children's academic-related activities, place a greater emphasis on quantitative indicators of academic assessment, and participate in more systematic teaching at home compared with European American parents (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Huntsinger, Jose, Larson, Balsink Krieg, & Shaligram, 2000; Huntsinger, Jose, Liaw, & Ching, 1997). As cultural views on education might be socialized and internalized as aspects of ethnic identity (Smith, Atkins, & Connell, 2003), and given increasing awareness of ethnic identity in middle childhood (Akiba et al., 2004), we expected Chinese American children's references to education as an indicator of SSS to increase over the course of socialization (i.e., with age).

Theories of cognitive development and cultural socialization both suggest that during middle childhood, children will shift toward more abstract, complex indicators for SSS. Although children as young as preschool show awareness of differences in wealth, the signals that they rely upon for evaluating social status are limited to concrete indicators such as clothing and possessions (Ramsey, 1991). As children's experience widens and their knowledge, memory, and information-processing abilities improve over middle childhood (Flavell, 1992), their indicators likely become more abstract, including factors that they come to realize are indirectly associated with wealth (Flanagan et al., 2014), such as references to a person's level of education or societal prestige. Similarly, cultural socialization theories suggest that parents may not introduce more complex topics such as discrimination or racial inequality until middle childhood or adolescence (Hughes et al.,

2006). Within the present sample, Chinese American children's references to race, societal inequality, or structural factors as indicators of SSS were also expected to increase over the course of middle childhood.

Racial Associations With Relative Social Status

Within the integrated conceptual framework, children's understanding of race and social status can be conceptualized as a developmental domain that is shaped by culturally informed interpretations of relevant contextual experiences. Existing theories provide two specific ways in which Chinese American children's racial associations with RSS may reflect these processes. First, according to the stereotype content model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), White Americans, as members of a valued mainstream group in the United States, are theorized to function as societal prototypes—even to non-White Americans—and are stereotyped as being high in competence and likability (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008). Second, as minorities in the United States, Asian Americans have been characterized as being "racially triangulated" between Whites and African Americans (Kim, 1999). The view of Asian Americans as "model minorities" or "honorary Whites" (Tuan, 1998) has perpetuated perceptions of RSS with White Americans at the top, African Americans at the bottom, and Asian Americans in the middle (Hartlep & Hayes, 2013; Xu & Lee, 2013).

To the extent that Chinese American children have experienced these dominant narratives of race and socioeconomic stratification, the integrated conceptual framework suggests that these experiences would be reflected in developmental domains, namely, in their associations between race and social status. Though previous research with primarily European American children indicates endorsement of positive stereotypes of White and Asian children (e.g., as wealthy and academically high-performing, respectively) and negative stereotypes of Black children (e.g., as underperforming academically; Pauker, Ambady, & Apfelbaum, 2010), to our knowledge, no research to date has examined these associations specifically among Chinese American youth. Indeed, research on the socialization of racial stereotypes among Asian American families as a whole is sparse (Juang, Yoo, & Atkin, 2017). Although evidence suggests that Asian American children may be exposed to negative parental attitudes toward members of other racial groups (Nelson, Syed, Tran, Hu, & Lee, 2018; Tran & Lee, 2010), this research has primarily utilized retrospective accounts from older adolescents and emerging adults and has focused largely on general attitudes of mistrust or avoidance toward members of other racial groups.

To extend the limitations of the literature, the present study directly assesses the endorsement of racial stereotypes in Chinese American children and focuses specifically on racial stereotypes associated with social status. Within this sample, we expected that children would be more likely to associate positions of high social status with White rather than Black or Asian children and positions of low social status with Black rather than Asian or White children.

Perceived Social Status and Socioemotional Well-Being

The final aim of this study was to test whether perceptions of lower SSS are associated with poorer socioemotional well-being in Chinese American children of immigrant parents. Previous re-

search with this population has examined a number of factors that may contribute to poorer social and emotional functioning, including temperamental characteristics (Chen & Tse, 2010), challenges of acculturation (Chen et al., 2014), and experiences of bullying and discrimination (Grossman & Liang, 2008; Zhou, Peverly, Xin, Huang, & Wang, 2003). Most relevant to the present study, Chinese American adolescents' reports of their family's economic stress (e.g., extent of parents' financial worry, frequency of family conflicts over money) were found to predict depressive symptoms in later adolescence (Mistry, Benner, Tan, & Kim, 2009). However, no previous research with Chinese American youth has examined whether SSS has similar effects on socioemotional well-being. By examining associations between SSS and socioemotional well-being among elementary-age children, we extended previous research connecting SSS and outcomes in adolescence (Quon & McGrath, 2014). Specifically, the emergence of social comparison and an increasing awareness of self relative to others (Akiba et al., 2004) suggest that children's perceptions of lower SSS during this developmental period may elevate fears of negative evaluation (La Greca & Stone, 1993). Such fears may in turn be associated with both internalizing problems (Hayden et al., 2013) and lower social acceptance (Ginsburg, La Greca, & Silverman, 1998).

Summary: Study Hypotheses

We examined three sets of hypotheses. First, in asking Chinese American children to provide indicators of SSS, we expected references to education and other complex markers to be more frequent among older children. Second, we expected Chinese American children to associate White children, rather than racial minorities, with the highest position of social status and to associate Black children, rather than White or Asian children, with the lowest position. Finally, we expected that lower SSS would be associated with internalizing problems and social loneliness, even controlling for family SES.

Method

Participants

Participants were 109 children between the ages of 7 and 10 years (47 girls; $M = 9.08$ years, $SD = .93$; 17 were 7-year-olds, 32 were 8-year-olds, 36 were 9-year-olds, and 23 were 10-year-olds) and one of their parents (100 mothers, nine fathers; $M = 39.88$ years, $SD = 5.03$). Participants were recruited from a major U.S. metropolitan area and surrounding suburban neighborhoods through community centers, participant referrals, and social media. All children were either first-generation immigrants (born outside of the United States, 37.1% of the sample) or second-generation immigrants (born in the United States with at least one parent who was born outside of the United States). Almost all participating parents were born in China ($n = 107$); one participating parent was born in Hong Kong and another was born in Vietnam. All children had two parents who identified as Chinese or Chinese American, with the exception of one nonparticipating parent who was identified as Chinese-Hispanic. Participating parents had been in the United States for an average of 10.90 years (range = 0.42–33.00 years, $SD = 7.58$ years). The majority of participating parents

reported speaking only Chinese at home (65.1%). By contrast, based on parents' reports, the majority of children (64.2%) spoke both Chinese and English at home. Approximately a quarter of the parents (22.4%) had less than a high school education, and another quarter (25.7%) had completed graduate work. Sociodemographic characteristics of participating parents in the current sample were comparable with characteristics of those in the broader Chinese American population (Taylor et al., 2012; Zong & Batalova, 2017).

Procedure

All research procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at Wellesley College (Protocol title: "Stress and Well-Being in Chinese American Immigrant Families"). As part of a larger research study on Chinese American immigrant families, each child participated in a 1.5–2-hr assessment with the participating parent at a college research laboratory or urban community center. Following informed consent procedures in which parents provided written consent, and children provided both verbal and written assent to participate, each child and parent was interviewed individually in their preferred language(s) of choice (Mandarin, Cantonese, or English) by bilingual researchers. All measures that had not been previously administered in Chinese were forward- and back-translated by bilingual researchers. The majority (95.4%) of parents completed measures in Chinese, whereas the majority of children (90.8%) completed measures in English. Children's open-ended responses that were provided in Chinese were translated into English by bilingual researchers.

Parent report of socioeconomic status. Parents provided basic demographic, immigration, and socioeconomic information. SES was measured by two separate indicators: total household income and parents' level of education. Each participating parent provided estimates of their family total income over the past 12 months (including welfare, disability benefits, and child support) and years of education for both of the child's parents. Parents' years of education were averaged to create a composite variable.

Children's subjective social status. Children assessed their own SSS based on a measure adapted from Adler et al. (1994). Children were shown a numbered 10-rung ladder and were told that children at the top of the ladder were from families in the United States that had the most money, the best education, and the best jobs, whereas children at the bottom of the ladder were from families in the United States that had the least money, the least education, and the worst jobs or no job. Children were asked to choose a numerical value representing their own family's position on the ladder, then provided an open-ended response explaining how they knew their families were at that position on the ladder. These open-ended responses represented children's indicators of SSS.

Children's indicators of subjective social status. Children's indicators of SSS were coded into categories. Following Mistry et al.'s (2015) procedures, two coders independently coded a random subset of responses (approximately 30% of total responses) into a comprehensive set of 17 categories. Each of these categories was then aggregated through consensus into one of eight summary categories. Five had been previously identified by Mistry et al. (2015): (a) purchasing power ("references to money as a resource and how money is used"); (b) source of income, wealth, and assets

("references to where money comes from"); (c) psychological affect ("references to the emotions, judgments, or values associated with having [or not having] access to material resources, or money"); (d) social references ("comparisons with other points on the SSS or SES spectrum, comparisons with other individuals, or reflections upon interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences"); and (e) structural factors ("references to societal, institutional, or family sociodemographic characteristics"). An additional three categories were identified: (f) parent designation (explicit designation of social status by parents); (g) educational attainment (references to child or parent educational opportunities or quality), and (h) do not know/other. Each response could be coded into multiple categories but could be counted only once in each category. Interrater reliabilities for each category were acceptable (Cohen's κ s ranged from 0.73 to 1.00).

Children's racial associations with relative social status. Children were presented with the same ladder stimulus used in their own SSS rankings and were asked to think about and describe an imaginary child from the top of the RSS ladder. Children were then presented with a sheet containing 12 cartoon images of children's faces, comprising seven White, two Asian, and three Black children. These proportions approximate the racial distribution of the geographic area from which children were recruited. Participants were asked to select the image that most closely resembled the child they were visualizing. To increase the salience of the imagined child's identity, the participant was then asked to provide a name for the imagined child. The entire procedure was then repeated for an imaginary child whose family was at the bottom of the social status ladder.

Children's socioemotional well-being. Child- and parent-reported measures were used to assess two aspects of children's socioemotional well-being: social loneliness and internalizing problems. Children responded to the Children's Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale, a 21-item scale adapted from Asher, Hymel, and Renshaw (1984), and used previously with Chinese families (Chen, Li, Li, Li, & Liu, 2000; Yang, Chen, & Wang, 2015). For children who indicated a preference for Chinese ($n =$

10), researchers read items from the previously used Chinese translation of the scale (Chen et al., 2000). Items contained statements about children's social experiences ("It's hard for me to make friends") and were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all true* to 5 = *always true*). Items were read verbally to each child by a bilingual researcher, and children indicated their response for each item. Parents completed the Internalizing Problem subscale of the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). In the present sample, alpha reliabilities were .86 for children's reports of loneliness and .87 for parents' reports of internalizing problems.

Results

Descriptive statistics for study variables are displayed in Table 1. Most children (66.9%) self-identified as middle class (i.e., rankings of 5–7), which is consistent with previous research on SSS in preadolescents (Mistry et al., 2015) and older samples (Evans & Kelley, 2004). Also consistent with previous research (Goodman et al., 2001), children's age was negatively associated with SSS, $r = -.21$, $p = .031$. Children's SSS was not significantly associated with either indicator of family SES (parent education level and family income; $ps > .05$). No gender differences were found across main variables.

Perceived Social Status and Social Cognitions

Children's indicators of subjective social status. Children provided an average of 1.80 unique indicators of family SSS ($SD = 1.04$). Similar to Mistry et al.'s (2015) results, purchasing power was the most commonly referenced indicator of SSS, followed by references to sources of income, wealth, and assets (Table 2). As hypothesized, children cited educational attainment as an indicator of SSS. Figure 1 depicts the proportion of children in each age-group who referenced a particular category. To test our hypothesis that use of indirect indicators of SSS (education, psychological affect, and structural factors) would become more prev-

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	<i>N</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Child gender					
Female	47	43.1			
Male	62	56.9			
Parent gender					
Female	100	91.7			
Male	9	8.3			
Child age	109		9.08	.93	7.33–10.70
Parent age	109		39.92	5.04	28.83–52.28
Parent education (years)	109		13.57	4.11	0–20
Estimated annual family income	104		\$70,824	\$84,388	\$2,423–\$400,000
Child SSS			6.48	1.73	2–10
<4.5	8	7.3			
5–7	72	66.9			
>7–8	13	11.9			
>8	16	14.7			
Social loneliness (Child report)	108		42.86	11.46	24–81
Internalizing problems (Parent report)	109		35.34	4.97	25–62

Note. SSS = subjective social status.

Table 2
Proportion of Children Using Each Indicator of Subjective Social Status

SSS indicator category	Percentage (%) of children using indicator	Sample responses
<i>Purchasing power</i> References to money as a resource and how money is used	68.8	"We have food and home"; "I don't tell my mom to buy me everything every day"; "We have a regular amount of money"
<i>Source of income, wealth, and assets</i> References to where money comes from	46.8	"Dad and mom works"; "Every day my dad goes to work and gets a lot of money"; "Since my dad is a lawyer, he earns a lot of money"
<i>Social references</i> Comparisons with other points on the SSS ladder or SES spectrum, comparisons with other individuals	24.8	"I guess our family isn't necessarily most poor . . . but we are not the most rich either"; "Dad doesn't earn as much money as rich people do"; "I'm higher than average at my school"
<i>Education</i> References to the child's or parents' education level or quality	20.2	"I go to the best school, one of the best schools at town"; "Me and my sister would always get As and 3s and 4s on our report card"; "Dad has a PhD"
<i>Do not know</i>	8.3	"I don't know"; "I was just guessing"
<i>Psychological affect</i> References to emotions, judgments, or values associated with access to material resources, or money	7.3	"Sometimes I feel unlucky but most of the time I feel like they give me a chance to do something I like"; "My mom doesn't complain about money"; "Because we usually get along if we are not really like mad"
<i>Other</i>	5.5	"Because they are older"; "Dad uses cards rather than cash"
<i>Parent designation</i> Explicit designation of social status by parents	4.6	"My mom told me we are not rich"; "My dad told me how much money he gets every day"; "Because my mom always buys whatever I want and she never says she's so poor"
<i>Structural factors</i> References to societal, institutional, or family sociodemographic characteristics	2.8	"Mom supposed to have job, but has to now take care of baby sister"; "We don't always live together"

Note. SSS = subjective social status; SES = socioeconomic status.

alent with age, separate logistic regressions were conducted using children's age as a predictor of references to each indicator category of SSS. Children's age was positively associated with references to educational factors, $\chi^2(1) = 5.33, p = .021$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .075$, Exp (B) = 1.86, Wald = 4.90, $p = .027$, but negatively associated with references to psychological affect, $\chi^2(1) = 5.03, p = .025$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .12$, Exp (B) = .35, Wald = 4.08, $p =$

.043, and age was not associated with children's references to structural factors. Though not specified in hypotheses, children's age was negatively associated with references to purchasing power, $\chi^2(1) = 6.68, p = .010$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .08$, Exp (B) = .55, Wald = 6.20, $p = .013$.

Children's racial associations with relative social status. To examine children's associations of race and RSS, a chi-square

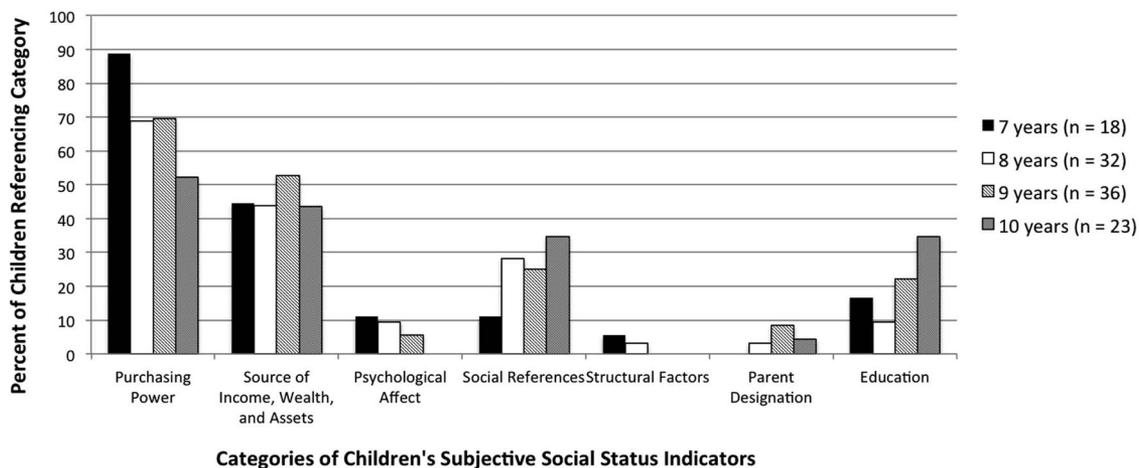


Figure 1. Percent of children referencing each indicator category, grouped by age.

Table 3
Observed and Expected Frequencies of Children's Image Choices by Status and Race

High-status choice	Low-status choice							
	White		Black		Asian		Total	
	Obs	Exp	Obs	Exp	Obs	Exp	Obs	Exp
White	42 (38.9%)	36.75 (34.0%)	21 (19.4%)	15.75 (14.6%)	19 (17.6%)	10.50 (9.7%)	82 (75.9%)	63 (58.3%)
Black	7 (6.5%)	15.75 (14.6%)	0 (.0%)	6.75 (6.3%)	2 (1.9%)	4.50 (4.2%)	9 (8.3%)	27 (25.0%)
Asian	7 (6.5%)	10.50 (9.7%)	7 (6.5%)	4.50 (4.2%)	3 (2.8%)	3.00 (2.8%)	17 (15.7%)	18 (16.7%)
Total	56 (52.9%)	63.00 (58.3%)	28 (25.9%)	27.00 (25.0%)	24 (22.2%)	18.00 (16.7%)	108	

Note. Obs = observed frequencies; Exp = expected values. To represent the proportion of White, Black, and Asian images, expected values were calculated by multiplying the probability of each outcome (e.g., choice of a White child to represent the high end of the socioeconomic status ladder and an Asian child for the low end, given the number of children of each race presented) by the number of participants ($N = 108$).

analysis compared children's high-status choices against their low-status choices by race. Observed frequencies for each choice category were compared with those expected by chance, given the racial distribution of the pictures presented (Table 3). Overall, the observed distribution differed significantly from chance, $\chi^2(4, N = 108) = 24.94, p = .000$. Consistent with hypotheses, when selecting an image to represent a child at the top of the social status ladder, most children (75.9%, compared with 58.3% expected by chance) chose an image of a White child. Following procedures outlined by Sharpe (2015), examination of the standardized residuals for high-status choices revealed higher-than-expected selection of White children (standardized residual = 2.39), lower-than-expected selection of Black children (standardized residual = -3.46), and as-expected selection of Asian children (standardized residual = -0.24). In contrast to our hypotheses, for the bottom of the social status ladder, an examination of standard residuals did not indicate selections for any race that were higher or lower than expected by chance (standardized residuals: White = -0.88; Black: 0.19; Asian: 1.41). Finally, combinations of choices for high and low status revealed two other significant patterns. First, no participant chose images of Black children to represent both high and low status (standardized residual = -2.60). Second, the combination of White for high status and Asian for low status was above chance (standardized residual = 2.62).

Subjective Social Status, Socioeconomic Status, and Socioemotional Well-Being

Given nonsignificant zero-order correlations between child-reported social loneliness and parent-reported internalizing problems, $r = .16, p > .05$, two separate hierarchical linear regressions were conducted predicting children's social loneliness and children's internalizing problems from SSS and measures of SES (family income and average parent education). Children's age was included as a covariate in the first step of each regression because of its positive correlation with SSS. As hypothesized, higher SSS was uniquely associated with lower social loneliness (Table 4). However, neither SSS nor parent-reported measures of SES were associated with parent-reported internalizing problems.

Discussion

The development of the social self is a critical task of middle childhood. Results of the present study suggest that children's perceptions of both their own and others' social status may play a part in this process and may reflect experiences of children's sociocultural contexts. Furthermore, our results identify children's perception of their own social status as an important factor in their socioemotional well-being during middle childhood. Our examination of these processes in middle childhood, a key period for the development of ethnic identity and group

Table 4
Children's Subjective Social Status and Family Socioeconomic Status as Predictors of Socioemotional Well-Being

Predictor	Dependent variable: Child-reported social loneliness			Dependent variable: Parent-reported internalizing problems		
	B	β	ΔR^2	B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1			.001			.02
Child age	.32	.03		-.70	-.13	
Step 2			.20***			.04
Parent education	.49	.18		.04	.03	
Family income	-.03	-.20		-.01	-.18	
Child's subjective social status	-2.79***	-.43		-.25	-.09	

*** $p < .001$.

stereotypes (Aboud & Amato, 2008; Pauker et al., 2010), suggests that education or intervention vis-à-vis the intersections of race and social status might be worthwhile, if not essential, during this developmental era.

Social Status and Ethnicity in Middle Childhood

Our findings contribute new cultural perspectives to our understanding of how children understand their own position in a socioeconomic hierarchy. The references to education as an indicator of SSS in our Chinese American sample highlight the relation between cultural values and perceptions of SSS as a promising direction for future research. Moreover, the fact that these references to educational attainment were more frequent among older children in our sample is consistent with theories of ethnic identity development and suggests that children show more evidence of these culturally instantiated views of social status over the course of middle childhood.

These findings complement those indicating that the value of education is socialized by Chinese American parents as early as preschool (Huntsinger et al., 1997; Li, 2004; Luo et al., 2013). Consistent with previous research indicating increasing salience of ethnic identity over the course of middle childhood (Corenblum, 2014), our findings suggest that for some Chinese American children, education is associated with social status, particularly by preadolescence. Notably, children's references to education as an indicator of social status were not limited to parents' educational attainment (e.g., "My dad has a PhD") but also to their own educational performance and opportunities ("I go to the best schools," "I get all As"), suggesting a connection between their own academic success and their families' status. More broadly, the less-frequent references to purchasing power and more-frequent references to educational attainment among older children suggest that over this age range, children become able to see past possessions as the primary indicators of wealth and begin to recognize how a more distal indicator, such as education, might lead to higher status. The relatively few references to structural factors in our sample are consistent with previous work (Mistry et al., 2015) and suggest that unlike adolescents (Flanagan et al., 2014), children in middle childhood are not consistently aware of systemic biases that affect social status.

Though consistent with our hypotheses, these results are tempered by two limitations. First, although we interpret Chinese American children's references to education as reflecting culturally instantiated values, education as an indicator of status is prevalent in many cultural groups, and children's references to education in this study might have been primed (along with purchasing power and sources of income, which were also mentioned frequently) by the description of the SSS ladder. As we are unaware of previous studies of SSS in elementary-age children that have also included education as a potential indicator of status, cross-cultural investigations using the protocol of the current study are necessary to examine whether references to education vary across ethnic-cultural groups. Furthermore, although children's references to purchasing power and education were related to age, the interpretation of these findings as reflecting developmental change is limited by the study's cross-sectional design and would be strengthened by

longitudinal investigations documenting individual changes in children's indicators of social status over time.

Perceptions of Social Status and Race in Middle Childhood

In addition to examining ethnic influences on children's perceptions of their own social status, the current investigation tested whether Chinese American children would make assumptions about a novel child's racial identity, given information about their RSS. By doing so, our results provide preliminary evidence for the ways in which Chinese American children understand intersections of race and social status. In particular, children's above-chance associations of White American children at the top of the social status ladder suggest that stereotypes of White Americans as societal ideals have already been partially internalized by middle childhood. By contrast, the images chosen by children to represent children at the bottom of the ladder did not indicate above-chance racial associations. One interpretation of this latter finding is that children are less attentive to or aware of stereotypes relating to those at the bottom of the ladder because more attention is directed toward those at the top (Fiske, 1993). If so, middle childhood might be a significant window for intervention in preventing the development of these stereotypes.

We have theorized, based on the conceptual framework proposed by Mistry et al. (2016), that these stereotypes are the result of contextual experiences (e.g., observations of adults or peers in different positions of social status) that are interpreted through culturally informed socialization processes (e.g., narratives regarding individuals occupying different positions of social power). The fact that we did not specifically assess these socialization processes is a limitation of the present study; a more holistic test of the integrated conceptual framework would identify ways in which parents, peers, or other socializing agents shape children's views on social status. Cross-cultural comparisons with children in societies with different racial hierarchies can also provide a more nuanced test of the theory that children's racial associations with social status are shaped by experiences in their sociocultural contexts.

Subjective Social Status and Socioemotional Well-Being

The final aim of the present investigation was to test whether children's perceptions of their own position on a socioeconomic hierarchy were uniquely associated with their socioemotional well-being, above and beyond effects of objective indicators of SES. By examining these associations within a population at elevated risk for socioemotional difficulties, we sought to evaluate SSS as a potential target for future socioemotional interventions. Complementing research with older children and adolescents (Goodman et al., 2007), higher SSS was associated with lower social loneliness in this sample. By demonstrating these associations in an even younger sample, our findings suggest that the processes of social comparison common in middle childhood might extend to comparisons of SES. Though the cross-sectional design of the current investigation precludes conclusions of directionality, our findings highlight the impor-

tance of attending to the process by which children interpret their family's social status and how they view themselves relative to others in the United States.

The significant associations between SSS and children's socioemotional well-being were unexpectedly limited only to children's self-reported loneliness and did not extend to parents' reports of internalizing problems. As SSS has been consistently linked with internalizing problems in older adolescent samples (Quon & McGrath, 2014), the consequences of low SSS might manifest as more tangible indicators of social isolation in middle childhood (e.g., difficulty making friends) but as more psychological indicators of internalizing problems later in adolescence (e.g., feelings of anxiety or worthlessness). What also remains to be identified are the precise mechanisms by which children's SSS contributes to their feelings of social loneliness. For example, children's positive or negative emotions about their SSS might be tied to their attributions for how they attained that position. Critically, the nonsignificant associations between measures of family SES and children's SSS in this sample indicate that children in this developmental period still lack an accurate understanding of their family's actual socioeconomic standing. As such, interventions facilitating the social or emotional adjustment of ethnic minority children of immigrant parents may be informed by an assessment of children's perceived social status.

Conclusions

Social status and economic inequality have long been intertwined with discourse on race and immigration. By examining perceptions of social status among ethnic minority children of immigrant parents, the present study targets the intersection of these constructs and suggests that by middle childhood, children have formulated views of their own and others' social status, and in some cases, these views may present risks to socioemotional well-being. Closer examination of the specific nature of these views might prove fruitful for our efforts to help children understand, manage, and address issues of social and economic inequality over the course of development.

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