

EXPLORING THE COLLEGE PATHWAYS OF ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE STUDENTS AND THE MODEL MINORITY MYTH

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Contrary to the model minority myth that portrays Asian Americans as academic all-stars over-represented in elite four-year institutions, half of all Asian American college students do in fact attend community colleges, and many experience myriad challenges. This exploratory study investigated the community college pathways of Asian American community college students, the role of family and culture in shaping expectations for higher education, and participants' perceptions of the model minority myth and the degree to which this myth influenced their college experiences.

Institutional practices and policies, or lack thereof, that support the success of this highly diverse population were also studied. Purposeful sampling was used to gather a sample of 28 students, who self-identified as Asian American and attended one of the three largest community college districts located in North Texas. The sample included 16 males and 12 females, whose ages ranged from 18 to 49 years old, with a mean age of 24. Data collection involved a demographic questionnaire and semi-structured individual interviews. The participants represented 13 different ethnicities, and nine were members of more than one ethnic or racial group. Ten participants were foreign-born citizens, and all of the participants had at least one foreign-born parent.

Qualitative data provided description rich information that shed light on the expectations, experiences, and views of Asian American community college students, a virtually unstudied population. Consistent with current literature on Asian American college students, the findings suggest many Asian American community college

students struggle with tremendous cultural and familial pressures for succeeding academically, and many described their experiences with racial microaggressions related to model minority stereotypes that they perceived their peers and instructors to have held. Recommendations for policy and practice designed to improve educational outcomes for Asian American community college students are addressed.

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# THE INFLUENCE OF MODEL MINORITY STEREOTYPES ON ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

## Introduction

The college experiences of Asian American students are typically viewed as natural and highly successful. Popular media's model minority stereotype portrays Asian American college students as intellectual overachievers requiring few educational resources and favored by their professors (Fong, 2002; Lee, 1996; Suzuki, 1989; Wu, 2002). A perception exists that Asian American students are "taking over" college campuses, especially private four-year institutions (Chang, 2008; Wang & Teranishi, 2012). For decades, media headlines have referred to Asian American students as "Whiz Kids" (Brand, 1987), and the *New York Times* declared, "Stellar academic achievement has an Asian face" (Kristof, 2006, p. 13). Even award-winning television shows such as *Grey's Anatomy* have introduced viewers to characters like Dr. Cristina Yang, an overachieving Asian American female medical doctor who graduated top of her class at Stanford University School of Medicine (Rhimes, 2005). Media headlines or mainstream media's portrayal of Asian Americans often exemplifies a model minority stereotype.

The prevalence of the model minority stereotype extends beyond mainstream media, affecting other societal systems, including institutions of higher education. Model minority stereotypes continue to portray Asian Americans as brilliant students with goals of excelling in America's most selective four-year institutions (Lee, 1996; Suzuki 1989, 2002). These assumptions lead many policy makers and scholars to exclude Asian Americans from the policies and programs that aim to increase postsecondary access,

equity, and success of minority groups (Museus, 2014). Subsequently, within many institutions, the needs of Asian American college students are often overlooked, financial resources and developmental programs are scarce, and the recognition of Asian Americans in the community college sector is almost nonexistent (Teranishi, 2010). However, enrollment data that have been disaggregated by institutional type indicate community colleges enroll the largest concentration of Asian American college students than any other sector of higher education (Teranishi, 2010). Although the stereotypes suggest Asian Americans are taking over Ivy League institutions, the number of Asian Americans attending public two-year colleges continues to increase faster than the number of Asian Americans attending four-year colleges (Museus, 2014; Teranishi, 2010).

#### Asian American Student Population

Asian American students reveal a broad range of academic abilities, achievement, and aspirations. According to Suzuki (2002), “the Asian American population consists of at least fifty ethnic subgroups that differ enormously in cultural background, historical experience, and socioeconomic circumstances” (p.25). Therefore, it is unrealistic to maintain an assumption that Asian Americans, regardless of differences in these factors have perfect SAT scores and strive to graduate summa cum laude from Ivy League universities. In fact, a significant number of Asian Americans attend two-year colleges and struggle with serious academic, economic, and linguistic challenges (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education [CARE], 2008, 2010; Escueta & O'Brien, 1991; Museus & Kiang,

2009; Museus & Vue, 2013; Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, & Parker, 2009; Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, McDonough, 2004). Although some people embrace the “model minority” as a positive image, the majority of Asian American students suffer from the extreme pressures and academic demands sustained due to the dangerous stereotypes and cultural pressures (Lee, 1996; Park, Endo, & Goodwin, 2006; Suzuki, 1989).

### Community College Pathways

Social class assumes an important role in the development and diversity of a student’s college pathway (Li & Wang, 2008). The road to college might be wide open for many students of middle to upper class, whereas students of lower socioeconomic status have limited access to college opportunities. Community colleges act as financial, geographical, and academic pathways to higher education for disadvantaged students (Townsend, 1997). Research suggests many Asian American students experience significant academic, economic, and linguistic challenges and choose to start out at community colleges for the open admissions and lower tuition rates (Teranishi et al., 2009). It is important for educators to recognize that many Asian American community college students are disadvantaged and experience limited access to college opportunities (Gasman et al., 2008). It is imperative that students from lower socioeconomic communities receive adequate guidance and support throughout the college admissions process. Table 1 reproduces 2011 CARE Report data to show how the Asian American enrollment in public two-year community colleges increased from 1985-2005, whereas the enrollment in public four-year colleges decreased. The trend of

Asian American students enrolling in community colleges at a faster rate than four-year colleges is expected to continue (CARE, 2008; 2011).

Table 1

*Percentage of Asian American Total Enrollment in Two-Year and Four-Year Public Institutions*

	Two-Year Colleges	Four-Year Colleges
1985	41.7%	41.8%
1995	44.6%	40.1%
2005	47.3%	38.4%

Source: IPEDS, U.S. Department of Education, Fall Enrollment, CARE (2011)

Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat exists when social structure and stereotypes shape the academic identities and performance outcomes of societal groups (Steele, 1997). It basically implies that intellectual performance may mirror other’s expectations and stereotypical influences. Claude Steele (1997) defines stereotype threat as follows:

The event of a negative stereotype about a group to which one belongs becoming self-relevant, usually as a plausible interpretation for something one is doing, for an experience one is having, or for a situation one is in, that has a relevance to one’s self-definition. (p. 616)

Therefore, because society views Asian Americans as the model minority, all Asian Americans are expected to perform well in school and on tests. Some may view the pressure and motivation to work harder to be a positive aspect of the stereotype for Asian Americans. The pressure to perform at a higher standard academically might motivate an Asian American student who is struggling in a class, to seek extra assistance so that he/she will be able to conform to the model minority stereotype and

do well in the class. On the other hand, the pressure to live up to the stereotype could create anxiety that impairs academic performance resulting in low academic success. Thus, the positive aspects of Stereotype threat could have negative outcomes.

On that note, the model minority is problematic for Asian Americans who do not conform to the stereotype. The vast majority of Asian American students are not overachieving intellectuals from well-to-do families (Suzuki, 1989). The pressure to attain such standards can be psychologically harmful, especially for someone who may already exemplify low achieving characteristics and low self-efficacy (Hsin & Xie, 2014).

Just as the research focusing on the educational experiences of Asian American college students in general is limited, the empirical research exploring the college choice of Asian American community college students is lacking as well (Kim & Gasman, 2011; Liu, 2007; Teranishi et al., 2004). Half of all Asian American college students attend community colleges (Teranishi, 2010), and a significant number of these students are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and encounter serious needs and challenges while transitioning to college (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education [CARE], 2008, 2010; Escueta & O'Brien, 1991; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Museus & Vue, 2013; Teranishi et al., 2009; Teranishi et al., 2004). Higher education policymakers and practitioners need empirical knowledge to better understand and effectively serve Asian American community college students (Museus & Vue, 2013). The gap in the knowledge base on Asian American community college students must be improved so the experiences of this population will be recognized and valued (Kim & Gasman, 2011; Lew, Chang, & Wang, 2005; Museus & Chang, 2009). This exploratory study investigated how model minority

stereotypes influence the educational experiences and perceptions of Asian American community college students. The qualitative analysis provided a deeper understanding of the expectations, experiences, and views of Asian American community college students.

### Critical Race Theory Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) is one theoretical perspective that is widely recognized as being a credible research tool for critically examining the true representation of Asian American college students (Museus, 2014; Pendakur & Pendakur, 2012). Therefore, CRT is the theoretical framework that guided this study. CRT centralizes the stories and encourages storytelling among Asian American students to collect real life experiences that have never been told (Pendakur & Pendakur, 2012). CRT is important because the act of storytelling delivers new information, and can be therapeutic for the storyteller who may be struggling with the long-term negative effects of racial oppression (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Pendakur & Pendakur, 2012).

During the 1970s, critical race theory (CRT) was originally established to challenge racial oppression existing within the racist legal system and provide support to racial minorities who were victims of racism within the legal institutions (Delgado, 1995; Degaldo & Stefancic, 2001). Challenging the dominant paradigms in higher education, CRT acknowledges the unique educational experiences of Asian Americans and addresses the racial inequalities that result through normative practices (Delgado, 1995; Museus 2014). CRT has been successful in critiquing deficit thinking and providing alternative pedagogies and methodologies to encourage the “unlearning” of

racial stereotyping (Buena Vista, Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante, 2009; Museus, 2014; Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002; Teranishi et al., 2009). Therefore, CRT is an ideal model for challenging the stereotypes and assumptions that impede the development of policies and programs that are crucial for the success of Asian American college students.

### Methods

The philosophical approach utilized throughout this qualitative study reflected the social constructivist worldview, which focused on understanding the participants' personal views and experiences (Creswell, 2009). This qualitative study used a holistic approach in exploring, describing, and explaining the educational experiences of Asian American community college students through the use of words and observation (Krathwohl, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Museus and Vue (2013) stress the importance of utilizing qualitative methodology to develop a deeper understanding of the college-going process and experiences of Asian American college students. Therefore, to fully assess the educational experiences, I utilized qualitative techniques and semi-structured interviews to collect in-depth information from Asian American students who attended community colleges. Participants were invited to share their personal experiences and views regarding their college experiences by completing a demographic questionnaire and participating in one semi-structured interview (Merriam, 2009).

## Site Selection

The sites for this study included several community colleges within the three large community college districts located in north Texas. Pseudonyms were used to distinguish the three community college districts: Northern Community College District, Southern Community College District, and Western Community College District. These specific districts were selected to reach a larger number and diverse group of Asian American community college students in north Texas. In 2011, Northern Community College enrolled 2,137 (7.8%) Asian students out of the total enrollment of 27,179; Southern Community College enrolled 6,946 (8.8%) Asian students out of the total enrollment of 78,549; and Western Community College enrolled 3,319 (5.8%) Asian students out of the total enrollment of 56,806 (RAND, 2011). Table 2 shows a comparison of the number and percentage of Asian students enrolled in each community college district, to the Texas overall enrollment of Asian community college students (28,712) in 2011.

Table 2

### *Community College District and State Enrollment of Asian Americans*

	Northern Community College	Southern Community College	Western Community College	Texas Overall Enrollment
Total number of students	27,179	78,549	56,806	743,155
Total number of Asian students	2,137	6,946	3,319	28,712
Percentage of Asian students	7.8	8.8	5.8	3.9

Source: RAND, 2011



## Sample

Purposeful sampling is recognized as an appropriate qualitative sampling technique used for selecting participants with the most knowledge specific to a study (Merriam, 2009). This study utilized purposeful sampling to recruit 28 Asian American community college students, who were actively completing degrees, certificates, or planning to transfer to four-year institutions. The criteria for the participant selection included: (1) community college students who self-identified as Asian American, and (2) community college students who were at least eighteen years of age.

The sample consisted of 16 males and 12 females, whose ages ranged from 18 to 49 years old, with a mean age of 24. Twenty-five of the participants received a high school diploma or GED in the United States and three participants completed high school in Asia. Additionally, two of the participants already had college degrees from Vietnam universities, but believed that completing a college degree in America was necessary for their career goals. Seventeen of the participants were traditional students that attended community college directly after high school, and six participants started at four-year universities but had reverse transferred to the community colleges. Two students had a bachelors or master's degree, but returned to the community college to complete certificate programs, and one student was concurrently enrolled in classes at both the community college and university. Two students attended Western Community College District, 11 students attended Northern Community College District, and 15 students attended Southern Community College District.

The participants in this study represented 13 different ethnicities, and nine were members of more than one ethnic or racial group. Ten participants were foreign-born

and all of the participants had at least one foreign-born parent. Seventeen of the participants were of Southeast Asian descent, seven participants were of East Asian descent, and four participants were of South Asian descent. Of the ten participants that were foreign born citizens or also known as first generation immigrants, seven had immigrated to the United States before the age of thirteen and would also be classified as 1.5 generation. The remaining 18 participants were born in the United States and had foreign-born parents. Native-born citizens that have foreign-born parents are generally classified as second-generation immigrants, but two of these participants also had one native born parent, which could also classify them as third generation immigrants. Furthermore, nineteen participants were classified as first generation college students since their parents had never attended college in the United States. Of the other participants, six had parents who had earned four-year degrees and three had parents who had earned two-year degrees. The participants in this study reflected an incredibly diverse group of students with unique backgrounds, interests, and experiences.

### Member Checking

The primary method implemented in this study to address credibility and trustworthiness consisted of member checking, also called respondent validation (Merriam, 2009). To ensure credibility of the data, I audiotape recorded and transcribed each interview word for word and emailed the interview transcriptions to the participants (Krathwohl, 2009). The process of member checking increased the trustworthiness of this study when the participants were asked to review the transcriptions and verify the

accuracy of the data (Creswell, 2009). The 28 participants were sent individual emails that included the interview transcription, the web link to the APIASF Scholarship Application for 2015-2016, and the web link to a brief follow-up survey (Appendix H) that inquired if the participants were interested in participating in a member check focus group. The focus group allowed for additional member checking to be completed and offered the participants an opportunity to learn about the experiences of other Asian American community college students.

Eleven participants completed the survey and five participants said they were interested in participating in the member check focus group. However, two participants actually attended the member check focus group. The two students were native born citizens (2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants). One student was a Vietnamese/Japanese American female who had just recently transferred to a four-year university in north Texas. Her father had an associate's degree and her mother had received no education past grade school in Vietnam. The other student was an Indian American male who had just started his second semester at the community college. He was a first generation college student. The students introduced themselves and updated me on what had happened since the original interviews. The male student admitted that he was not involved in campus activities because he was in a hurry to finish his credits and transfer to a university. He expressed his gratitude to me for emailing the APIASF Scholarship application to him and said he planned to apply. The female student was thriving in several campus activities at the university and encouraged the male student to take his time and get involved at the community college. She was awarded a prestigious transfer scholarship for her campus leadership at the community college and shared helpful

advice about the scholarship with the male student. The male student was very interested in applying for transfer scholarships and appreciated for the information.

The students shared positive thoughts about their individual interviews and explained how they felt reading the interview transcriptions. I presented an outline of the interview findings and the students shared their approval and interjected personal comments. For example, I stated that a number of the students became emotional during the interviews, and the female volunteered that she was one of the emotional students. She admitted that she had a similar discussion about her family and culture during the interview for the prestigious transfer scholarship and also became emotional in front of the scholarship committee.

I was pleased to hear the female student had continued to openly discuss her ethnic and cultural experiences following the initial interview. Like several of the participants, the female student had started the initial interview somewhat guarded and reluctant to disclose too much about her ethnicity. She was aware of the stereotypes, but had never heard of the “model minority myth” prior to the interview. After I explained the history surrounding the model minority myth, the student was intrigued and then completely opened up. Both students were satisfied with their decisions to participate in the study and gained new perspectives about being Asian American college students. I hoped the interviews had sparked a new awareness about Asian American stereotypes for the other participants and also inspired them to continue sharing their experiences and teaching others about the harsh reality of these stereotypes.

## Findings

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the influence of model minority stereotypes on Asian American community college students' experiences. This section will present key findings from interviews of 28 students who self-identified as Asian American and attended one of three large community college districts located in north Texas. This section begins by acknowledging how model minority stereotypes influenced the students' perceptions and overall education at the community college. It also addresses the impact of stereotypes on students' education and how some students' have responded to the stereotypes.

### Influence of Model Minority Stereotypes on Students' Education

Asian American students are thought of as academic super stars that graduate at the top of their classes, win excessive amount of awards in national academic competitions, and over-populate our elite colleges and universities (Fong, 2002; Suzuki, 1989; Wu, 2002). The model minority myth implies Asian American students are overachievers who establish exceptional academic achievement. However, Asian American community college students represent a large proportion of Asian American students who do not fit the model minority stereotypes; yet still must overcome the repercussions of the stereotypes throughout their education.

The participants expressed different perspectives and experiences related to the model minority stereotypes. All of the students were aware of the stereotypes that suggested Asians are smarter and better at math, but few of them knew the history and racist underpinnings of the model minority myth and stereotypes. The younger

participants were more vocal about their frustrations with the stereotypes, whereas the older participants were more docile on the topic.

### Student Experiences and Perceptions

The students alluded to a stigma associated with Asian American community college students, which implies they are only there to improve their English language skills. A female student explained how she feels her community college instructors and peers perceive her at first.

I think that when they look at me, they expect me to not know a lick of English. And they expect me to be like socially awkward, so I think I surprise them because I'm so Americanized.

A male student said people usually mistake him to be an international student.

Quite often people think that I'm an immigrant or foreign exchange student and they're surprised that I speak English very well, or at all.

Another student said it was not unusual for instructors or classmates to question why she was attending a community college rather than a university. She felt most people acted like there must be something wrong with her because she wasn't attending a university.

They hear me talk and then they find out that I'm born here. Then they're like, "What are you doing here then?" I'm not an international student so obviously there's no reason for me to be here, and they know my GPA or they ask for it. And I just tell them my GPA. But then they're like, "What are you doing here with that GPA and why...?" And my major is very unusual so people are even more confused why I'm there.

Sixteen participants described experiences when other students asked them for help with math assignments. One participant said he's been in situations where other students have asked to copy his homework.

The stereotype, it's kind of like a given that Asians are going to get an A or Asians are not going to need that much instructional help, or they don't need tutoring. But I can honestly say in some classes, people are going to be like huddling over me and they are going to be like, "Dude, can I get your work?" But I was very good about being, "No, I can't give you the work."

Another student said some people didn't believe him when he said he wasn't good in math and couldn't help them.

I take my math classes and stuff and you know, Asians are expected to be smart and I'm not the brightest math person. So there have been some times when people look to me for help and I'd be like, "I don't know." And then they're like, "But you're Asian. You're Asian." and I'm just like "I don't know."

A female explained that fellow students in her Chinese class assumed she did well in the class because of her Asian heritage.

One example would be in Mandarin class. They were like, "Of course you get this. You're Korean, you should be able to get Chinese." Excuse me. What? Whoa, okay...

Several students reported that they believed their professors expected more from them because of their Asian heritage. Some professors actually told the students they expected more from them because they were Asian. One student described an experience when his professor stereotyped him as looking "smart."

One of my teachers said, "Yeah, you're really smart, man. I expected you to be like that when you walked in." Now I didn't know if that meant because I was Asian or just because he thinks I look smart.

Another student described an experience when he believed a professor held him to a higher standard for being Asian.

Last semester, I took English 1301, the most basic of the English college courses. And during my senior year in high school, I took AP Literature and was doing college level work for the most part, so I thought this course was extremely easy. Strangely enough though, my professor held me to a really high standard. She was giving everyone As when she was giving me Bs. I remember one student wrote a paper about how fun her trip was at the mall and I wrote a paper about education reform and I got a B on it. And the other student got an A. That

definitely felt like she was holding me to a higher standard. I don't know if it was good or bad. I guess it's good because she's challenging me and pushing me harder, but at the same time I felt like it was a bit unfair.

## Impact of Stereotypes on Students' Education

The impact of the stereotypes varied among the participants. Several of the students felt pressure to live up to the expectations, whereas others felt frustrated because they were unable to meet those expectations. One participant, who also attended college in Vietnam, said she thought the pressure was intense. She did not deal with the stereotypes in Vietnam, and struggled with how to manage the expectations and pressure.

People want help in the Math class, they're like, "You're Asian so you must be good in math." So it's kind of like, I cannot be bad. I feel really pressured to be good and to help the other students.

Students struggled with taking on too much or knowing when to say no. One student felt it was necessary to increase her efforts to meet the expectations of their professors, peers, and family.

I feel like a lot of people look at Asian people as being very smart or proficient at a certain subject. So that made me feel I had to do extra if I wasn't good at something. I had to work harder and do more.

The students, who did not resemble the model student stereotypes, felt like they had failed or there was something wrong with them. One student said she was a disappointment because it was taking her longer to graduate.

There is an expectation where Asian Americans are supposed to be like smarter and since I'm going at such a slow pace compared to other students, it's like I'm a disappointment or something.

Another student described how overwhelming it was for him because he was held to a higher standard in a subject that is challenging enough without the extra expectations.



I feel a bit pressured because I'm a Mechanical Engineer major and of course that involves a lot of Math, so I'm taking a lot of difficult Math courses. The stereotype is Asian Americans are really good at Math. I consider myself pretty good at Math but I'm not necessarily a genius or anything. I'm honestly just as good as the next guy when it comes to math. But I feel that's held me to a higher standard when it comes to that subject. And I'm expected to get straight As a lot and I try my hardest to, but it's not as simple as people make it seem for Asian Americans.

### Exploiting the Stereotypes

A small number of participants referred to the stereotypes as positive and believed the stereotypes helped their education in certain ways. The oldest participants found truth in the stereotypes and embraced the model minority myth. Some students believed the pressure of the stereotypes was what kept them motivated, and others took advantage of the extra attention from their professors. One student said the stereotype gave him confidence to pursue a career in healthcare. Hearing Asians are smart and become doctors made him feel confident he had selected the right career path.

There's this stereotype that Asians are smart and they're all going to go to college and be doctors or something. I don't know if that really motivated me, but that gave me confidence. Definitely. But I wouldn't say it motivated me since I knew what I wanted to do when I was in high school.

Another student believed her Asian heritage and stereotypes helps her to stick out among her predominately white community. She plans to become a minister and admitted to using her ethnicity and the model minority stereotypes to gain the attention of her peers and recruit for her ministry.

Like anywhere I go, even in my ministry, I'm the only Asian person so I stand out for sure. And I think it gives me a one up on everyone. Sometimes I think it's unfair for a lot of people, but God gave it to me, so I'm going to use it. I stand out and people notice me more, and then I say, "Have you heard about God?"

A 19 year-old female, who was educated on the history of the model minority myth, explained how she used her experiences and knowledge to educate her community college peers about the negative impact of the model minority stereotypes. After transferring from a small private university to the community college, she made the personal decision to stop conforming to the racial stereotypes and jokes. She wanted other students to be aware of the microaggressions and casual racism surrounding the stereotypes and jokes.

I'm more aware of microaggressions and casual racism now. At my last college, I was the only Asian at the school and there was a girl who was obsessed with K-Pop - problem on its own. She would be called the "Little Korean" and I would be called "Taco Chino." I took great offense to that, but I would laugh at it because I could only say, "No, that's wrong, that's really racist" so many times. You realize that you have to conform if you're living with these people on-campus. And now going back, I didn't have to laugh. That was really racist. I'm over all that now and I'm taking charge. I was always shy growing up and it was because the arch type or character of an Asian woman or Asian American woman is submissive and quiet. I think me speaking out really messes with that and now I feel people approach me differently. But now I'm starting to impact people I'm around. People come up to me and say, "I didn't think about that before, until you mentioned it." So I'm taking a more active role. Yes, sometimes interactions with my peers are a lot more dicey, but I realize I'm not taking a submissive role all the time and I'm actually speaking out.

### Discussion

The findings suggest the participants' had different experiences with and perceptions of the model minority stereotype. The majority of the participants had never heard of the term "model minority myth" but they were familiar with Asian stereotypes, which I consider to be extensions of the model minority myth. Actually, many Americans are unfamiliar with the term and do not know the model minority myth was originally established to sustain racial oppression and inequality during the civil rights movement

(Chang, 2008; Fong; 2002; Museus, 2014; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 1989; Teranishi, 2010; Wu, 2002).

In 1966, Asian Americans were first publicly denoted as the “model minority” after two national magazines published articles that highlighted the achievements and perseverance of Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans (Fong, 2002). Released during a period of national turmoil among blacks and other minorities, these articles alluded to the idea that equal opportunity existed for all minorities (Li & Wang, 2008). The media advocated that Asian Americans had endured the most extreme cases of hardship and prejudice, yet they were not complaining and demanding public assistance like the other minorities (U.S. News & World Report, 1966). The Model Minority stereotype has been described as an expression of “racist love” because although it has been referred to as a positive stereotype, its underlying purpose is to maintain the white race as the supreme racial group within a diverse society (Chin & Chan, 1972; Lee, 1996; Wu, 2002).

When students first mentioned the stereotypes during the interviews, I asked them to explain their views on the stereotypes. The student’s responses generally reflected one of three perceptions, which I identified as colorblind (positive), conflicted (mixed), or contempt (negative). A brief description of each perception is provided.

- 1) Colorblind: Students perceive the stereotypes as positive. Most likely, they are unaware of the model minority myth’s history.
- 2) Conflicted: Students are conflicted between what they feel is wrong and what they hear is true about the stereotypes. They are aware of the positive and negative aspects of the model minority myth.

3) Contempt: These students perceive the stereotypes as offensive. They are aware of the history of the model minority myth and want to debunk it.

One participant explained how his instructor called him out on the first day of class as “someone he could tell as soon as he walked in the classroom was really smart.” The student’s perception of this model minority stereotype was conflicted. What was the instructor really saying? What does this mean for the other students in the class? There were other students who felt their instructors held them to higher standards and/or expected more from them because they were Asian American. The findings suggest instructors are unaware of the discriminatory repercussions of the model minority myth, and the adverse effect of the stereotypes on all students, not just Asian Americans.

Another common model minority stereotype depicts Asians as genius mathematicians. The findings suggest there is an intense pressure placed on Asian American community college students to help their peers with math courses. The participants said the demands for help are overwhelming. One participant, who is not strong in math, told another student he was unable to help him, but that student insinuated that he was lying. Students also mentioned that other students have also requested to copy their work. Current research suggests that the model minority stereotypes can be detrimental to the Asian American students’ college experiences on a daily basis (Museus, 2014).

The model minority myth is problematic for Asian Americans who do not fit the stereotype. The pressure to attain such standards can be psychologically harmful, especially for students with low self-efficacy and students who are viewed as deviant

minorities (Hsin & Xie, 2014; Lee, 1994; Museus, 2014). One participant shared that she felt like a disappointment because it was taking longer to complete her degree. Other participants said they would need to work harder to meet the expectations, and felt it was necessary to overcompensate to make up for any shortcomings.

Another participant's perception of the model minority stereotypes was contempt and she was on a personal mission to educate the students at her community college about the origin and racist underpinnings of the model minority myth. She was determined to educate community college students of the microaggressions and casual racism surrounding the stereotypes and jokes.

The model minority stereotypes claim all Asian Americans have higher-than-average incomes, represent one ethnic racial group, intellectual overachievers, have low rates of psychological disorders or stress, and attend elite four-year institutions. However, these model minority stereotypes were hardly represented among the Asian American community college students in this study. For example, 1) Several participants received public assistance or depended on the Pell grant to afford college. 2) Four students were biracial and multicultural. 3) The students did not have perfect grades. In fact, a few of them admitted to struggling in some courses and having low GPAs. 4) One participant openly discussed her experience with battling depression and another participant talked about the emotional aftermath of surviving cancer twice and making a mid-life career change.

## Implications and Recommendations

The findings from this study provide implications for practice for college officials to consider when developing programs focused on improving the college experiences of Asian American community college students. Similar to other literature providing implications for opportunities that allow Asian Americans to explore their culture and identity, such as Asian American studies programs and courses, and guest speakers and diversity panels presenting on racism and Asian Americans (Goza & Ryabov, 2009; Museus, 2014; Museus, Maramba, & Teranishi, 2013; Pak, Maramba, & Hernandez, 2014; Ryoo & Ho, 2013), the implications for this study include the implementation of diversity coaching incorporated into orientation programs, student success classes, and multicultural courses. The commitment to establishing a culturally sensitive faculty, staff, and student body is also a successful recommendation for serving Asian American community college students. These implications align the needs of Asian American community college students to campus programs and student services that assist students in establishing a sense of belonging and completing college.

### Diversity Coaching for Faculty, Staff, and Students

Institutions of all types could benefit from implementing diversity coaching into multicultural programming for faculty, staff, and students. Community colleges, which are known for enrolling the largest number of minority students, should incorporate some form of diversity coaching into the student orientation programs, student success classes, and multicultural courses. The commitment to encouraging diversity, equity, and excellence should be a priority of community colleges because it increases the

positive social outcomes for students of all races and ethnicities. The findings from this study demonstrated the need for diversity coaching because only a few students were aware of what their colleges were doing to help Asian Americans and minorities in general succeed, and most felt multicultural awareness was not a priority at their college. Diversity coaching could be accessible to new students entering the community college by incorporating it into the new student orientation programs and student success classes, which are required for first-year students at most colleges. Diversity coaching would be an additional benefit in multicultural courses because it may reach a variety of other students enrolled in foreign language and ethnic studies courses.

There is also a need for establishing a culturally sensitive faculty, staff, and student body in community colleges. The findings from this study provided information that students were not always satisfied with the treatment from faculty, staff, and peers. Faculty and staff could benefit from diversity coaching as well. One participant reported that his instructor called him out in front of the class and said he looked smart. Although the student, who the comment was directed, was okay with it, the comment may have offended another student in the class. At the same time, the instructor may not have realized that what he said could offend someone. Diversity coaching could be incorporated in curriculum or training that encourages faculty, staff, and students to use culturally sensitive language and actions.

#### Future Research

The voices of Asian American community college students should be included in the future research on policy and practices to improve the college access and success

of this student population. In preparation for the increasing number of Asian American students entering community colleges, college officials must recognize the diversity and disparity that exists among the Asian American population (CARE, 2008, Lew, Chang, & Wang, 2005; Suzuki, 2002). Consistent with previous research, one way to make this happen is to encourage researchers to promote new research on Asian American community college students (Kim & Gasman, 2011; Museus, 2014; Museus & Chang, 2009). Museus (2014) and his colleagues identified Asian American community college students as a “critical population” or Asian American group that has a substantial presence in higher education with little knowledge and scholarship existing on them.

Furthermore, Asian American students are frequently excluded from educational resources such as equal opportunity programs, financial support, and scholarships that provide supportive services to minority students. (Suzuki, 1989; Teranishi et al., 2004). Due to reasons that parallel the model minority myth, people may assume Asian American students do not need educational assistance or resources (CARE, 2008).

Southeast Asians are recognized as the latest group of immigrants representing the minority group with the lowest number of college degrees (Park, Endo, & Goodwin, 2006). Therefore, this subgroup could greatly benefit from equal opportunity programs and financial support resources for college. As suggested by participants in this study and included in other literature (Museus, 2014), the other student groups that would benefit from further research include transracial Asian American adoptees, multiracial Asian Americans, and international Asian students. Educators must defeat the model minority myth, recognize the division and disparities, and develop new programs and resources to assist Asian Americans with college access and choice. Overall, more



empirical research is necessary on Asian American community college students. Similar to other literature that focuses on minority student success (Bourdieu, 1977, Hsin & Xie, 2014; McDonough, 1997), Asian American students should also be encouraged to spread their college knowledge in an effort to enhance the college capital, educational resources, and support for college access among their ethnic communities.

Asian American community college students are a diverse group with a variety of cultural influences, educational experiences, and academic aspirations. Despite what the model minority depicts, half of all Asian American college students choose to attend community colleges rather than four-year colleges, and many experience myriad challenges. It is important for researchers to focus on the current experiences of Asian American students, and disregard outdated information that is based off of misconceptions.

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APPENDIX A  
EXTENDED LITERATURE REVIEW



## Introduction

This extended literature review begins with a historical summary of Asian Americans, the Model Minority Myth, and the impact of the model minority stereotypes on Asian Americans and society. This chapter explains the ethnic diversity, family characteristics, and cultural expectations of Asian Americans and examines the academic aspirations and achievement of the population. It addresses how stereotype threat influences academic performance and acknowledges the limited research surrounding the college experiences of Asian American community college students. Finally, this chapter provides an overview of community colleges and Asian American community college students. This review of literature concludes with a description of the theoretical framework that encompasses this study.

## Problem Statement

Asian Americans have been recognized as the fastest growing minority population attending American colleges (Nakanishi, 1995; Teranishi et al., 2004), yet they are frequently omitted from research focusing on postsecondary access and equity for racial and ethnic groups (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Teranishi et al., 2004). After reviewing five popular peer-reviewed academic journals in the field of higher education - *Journal of College Student Development*, *NASPA Journal*, *Journal of Higher Education*, *Research in Higher Education*, and *The Review of Higher Education* --Samuel D. Museus (2009) concluded that less than one percent of the published articles included research on Asian American or Pacific Islander college students. The gap in literature surrounding Asian American students stem from the false assumptions that college

access is easy for all Asian Americans and that it is pointless to study a group that is achieving collegiate success at astonishing rates (Museus & Chang, 2009).

Consequently, Asian Americans have arguably become the most misunderstood population in higher education (Chang, 2008) due to the negative influence of model minority stereotypes and the lack of empirical research encompassing this diverse group (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suyemoto, Kim, Tanabe, Tawa, & Day, 2009).

The literature that is available on Asian American students is heavily influenced by stereotypes, false insights, and oversimplified, aggregated data (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Museus & Vue, 2013). Both scholars and some federal agencies claim that Asian Americans do not face the same issues as other racial minority groups or do not fit the patterns to be considered “underrepresented” (Museus & Kiang, 2009). These assumptions contribute to the lack of inquiry and research focusing on the educational experiences of Asian Americans. Therefore, it is important for researchers to study the realities surrounding the educational experiences of Asian American college students and debunk the misconceptions (Museus, 2009, 2014; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Museus & Vue, 2013).

### Purpose of the Study

Museus and Vue (2013) stressed the importance of utilizing qualitative methodology to develop a deeper understanding of the college-going process and experiences of Asian American college students. Contrary to the model minority myth, Asian Americans do in fact attend community colleges with serious expectations and

challenges that deserve to be recognized and addressed rather than discredited and disregarded (Chang, 2008; Museus & Vue, 2013).

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the community college pathways of Asian American community college students and to examine how family and cultural pressures influence their college experiences at the community college. The qualitative analysis provided a deeper understanding of the expectations, experiences, and views of Asian American community college students. This study also reviewed institutional practices that were in place to assist Asian American community college students. Data collected for this study sought to benefit administrators, student development officials, policy makers, and faculty with identifying, understanding, and addressing the needs of Asian American community college students.

### Research Questions

In an effort to investigate the community college pathways of Asian American community college students, this study implemented a qualitative protocol. The following research questions guided this exploratory study:

1. How do family and cultural expectations influence the college experiences of Asian American community college students?
2. What are Asian American community college students' perceptions about their college experiences?
3. How do model minority stereotypes influence the experiences and perceptions of Asian American community college students?

4. What practices and policies are in place at community colleges to help Asian American students succeed?

This study produced much needed data on the overall experiences of Asian American community college students by encouraging them to reflect on their community college pathways. The research questions explored how family, culture, the model minority myth, and institutional practices and policies influence the experiences and perceptions of Asian American community college students.

### Significance

To prepare for the growing number of Asian American students entering community colleges, college officials must acknowledge and understand the diversity and disparity that exists among the Asian and Pacific Islander (AAPI) population consisting of over fifty ethnic subgroups (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education [CARE], 2008, Lew, Chang, & Wang, 2005; Suzuki, 2002). One way to make this happen is to encourage researchers and practitioners to pursue and promote new research on Asian American community college students (Kim & Gasman, 2011; Museus, 2014; Museus & Chang, 2009). Museus (2014) and his colleagues identified Asian American community college students as a “critical population” or Asian American group that has a substantial presence in higher education with little knowledge and scholarship existing on them. This study utilized a qualitative methodology to implement fundamental practices that involve observation, semi-structured interviews and data analysis; all of which were

necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the needs and experiences of Asian American community college students (Museus & Vue, 2013).

Additionally, this study engaged a new generation of Asian American college students in qualitative research, which enriched their awareness of the significance of Asian American studies and culturally sensitive educational research (Suyemoto et al., 2009). The Asian American student participants involved in this study were asked to individually share their own educational experiences to increase the empirical knowledge on Asian American college students; which in turn contributes to the improvement of their education and the Asian American college student population entirely (Suyemoto & Kiang, 2003; Suyemoto et al., 2009). In addition to the individual interviews, the students were invited back to participate in a focus group that provided them the opportunity to participate in member checking (Merriam, 2009) and inquire about the experiences of other Asian American community college students. It is hoped that the results of this study will empower the Asian American student participants to continue participating in or leading future studies focused on improving college access and success of Asian Americans. Scholars have identified a student-as-researchers model, similar to community-based learning among Asian American students, to be a successful practice for expanding the visibility and scholarship of Asian American community college students (Museus & Chang, 2009; Suyemoto & Kiang, 2003; Suyemoto et al., 2009).

Finally, the results of this study may be utilized to establish implications for college officials to consider when developing programs that focus on improving the college access and success of Asian American community college students. Research

suggests that the implementation of Asian American campus outreach programs, diversity training incorporated into orientation programs, and culturally sensitive faculty/staff are successful recommendations for serving Asian American community college students (Lew, Chang, & Wang, 2005). The implications established in this study align the needs of Asian American community college students to campus programs and student services that assist underrepresented students with developing a sense of belonging and completing college.

#### Definition of Terms

- Asian American – U.S. citizen who self-identifies as a descendant of East Asia, Southeast Asia, or South Asia.
- Asian American ethnic groups identified by U.S. Census categorized by region:
  - East Asians – Chinese, Iwo Jiman, Japanese, Korean, Okinawan, and Taiwanese.
  - South Asians – Asian Indian, Bangladeshi, Bhutanese, Maldivian, Nepalese, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan.
  - Southeast Asians – Bruneian, Burmese, Cambodians, Filipino, Hmong, Indonesian, Laotians, Malaysian, Thai, Singaporean, and Vietnamese.
- Pacific Islander – A person who self-identifies as a descendent of Native Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.
- Pacific Islander ethnic groups identified by U.S. Census categorized by region:
  - Polynesians – Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Tahitian, Tongan, and Tokelauan

- Micronesians – Chamorro, Guamanian, Mariana Islander, Saipanese, Palauan, Carolinian, Kosraean, Pohnpeian, Chuukese, Yapese, Marshallese, and I-Kiribati
  - Melanesians – Fijian, Papua New Guinean, Solomon Islander, and Ni-Vanuatu
- Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) – Racial and ethnic classification of Americans who self-identify as descendants of Asia, Native Hawaii, and the Pacific Islands (U.S. Census, 2010).
- Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) – A minority serving institution of higher education that has student enrollments of at least 10% AAPI and at least 50% of the students eligible to receive Pell grants (Asian Pacific Islander American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2011; Ching & Agbayani, 2012).
- Model Minority Stereotype – Notion that Asian Americans as a monolithic group achieve universal and unparalleled academic and occupational success (Li & Wang, 2008; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 2002).
- College Choice – The developmental process students’ employ to make decisions if they want to go to college, researching college options, and selecting the college to attend (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).
- Community College – Two-year public institution that offers associate’s degrees and certificates.

## Asian Americans and the Model Minority Myth

The model minority stereotype will continue to remain the most pervasive and dominant stereotype about Asian Americans (Kawai, 2005) as long as the mainstream media continue to uphold it (Zhang, 2010). Cultivation theory implies that the media are critically involved in shaping an individual's perception and social reality (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1980). As long as popular media continue portraying Asian Americans as the model minority, people will continue to believe it. The stereotypes about social groups that are activated through media content potentially cause people to create misleading assumptions of the stereotyped groups (Perse, 2001; Zhang, 2010). Previous studies show the media's stereotypical representation of Asian Americans as academic overachievers is consistent with the general public's perceptions and judgments of Asian Americans (Taylor & Lee, 1994; Zhang, 2010). Asian American success stories that personify the model minority stereotypes are consistently highlighted in the media, causing individuals to internalize that all Asian Americans have similar experiences and accolades. Among these misled individuals are educators who blatantly prefer the Asian American students to other minority groups (Lee, 1996; Suzuki 1989, 2002).

### Historical Summary

In 1966, Asian Americans were first publicly denoted as the "model minority" after two national magazines published articles that highlighted the achievements and perseverance of Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans (Fong, 2002). The first article, William Peterson's "Success Story: Japanese American Style" was published on



January 9, 1966 in the New York Times magazine. Peterson (1966) exemplified the diligent work ethic, passive demeanor, and phenomenal success of Japanese Americans as prevailing paradigms for other minorities to model. The U.S. News and World Report published a similar article on December 26, 1966 titled, "Success Story of One Minority Group in the United States." This article praised Chinese Americans for overcoming severe adversity and discrimination, becoming model citizens, and achieving economic success with hard work, thrift, and morality (Fong, 2002; U.S. News & World Report, 1966). Released during a period of national turmoil among blacks and other minorities, these articles alluded to the idea that equal opportunity existed for all minorities (Li & Wang, 2008). The media advocated that Asian Americans had endured the most extreme cases of hardship and prejudice, yet they were not complaining and demanding public assistance like the other minorities (U.S. News & World Report, 1966). The overall rationale was that if Asian Americans could overcome adversity and achieve success on their own in America, then Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans should as well.

Consequently, the media's implication of a model minority provoked a public divide among minority groups and abetted a racial hierarchy (Fong, 2002, Lee, 1996). The Model Minority stereotype has been described as an expression of "racist love" because although it has been referred to as a positive stereotype, its underlying purpose is to maintain the white race as the supreme racial group within a diverse society (Chin & Chan, 1972; Lee, 1996; Wu, 2002). Although some Asian Americans initially accepted the label as complimentary and genuine, many resented being used as a "shining example" to discredit other minorities (Suzuki, 1989).

## Influence of Model Minority Stereotypes

To determine how differently the model minority stereotype is viewed among Asian Americans, Stacey Lee (1996) conducted a seminal study involving Asian American students attending a large American High School and discovered that a division existed among the identity groups. Four Asian American identity groups were recognized among the students, including two groups favoring the model minority stereotype and two groups opposing it. Lee (1996) found the Korean-identified, and Asian-identified students or those who considered themselves to be more Asian than American, embraced and attempted to live up to the model minority stereotype. On the other hand, “New Waver” students or lower-achieving Asians, and Asian American-identified students or those who identified themselves to be both Asian and American, rejected the model minority stereotype as “racist propaganda, charging that it was inaccurate and harmful to inter-racial relationships between Asian Americans and other racial minorities” (Lee, 1996, p. 117). This division is a realistic representation of how the Asian American population in general views the model minority myth.

Lee’s (1994) research suggests the Asian-identified and Korean-identified students strive to be model students and conform to the model minority stereotypes because they believe this approach will earn the respect from white counterparts and improve their social mobility in America. In Lee’s (1994) study, the Korean student subgroup consisted of high achieving students who worked hard to achieve the highest overall grades. In this study, many of the Korean students felt that they were superior to and smarter than the other Asian subgroups. These students admitted that hard work and academic success were significant obligations instilled by their parents and culture

(Lee, 1994). Although it is common for American students to be involved in extracurricular activities and have numerous outside interests, Korean American students remain primarily focused on their academics and are less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities.

Although popular culture tends to glorify the model minority myth, many scholars recognize the detrimental consequences and widely stress the inaccurate, misleading, and problematic effects of it (Chang, 2008; Fong; 2002; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 1989; Teranishi, 2010; Wu, 2002). Additionally, critics of the model minority myth continue to take advantage of all opportunities to publicly refute the stereotype and advocate for racial equality.

The model minority myth is dangerous because it tells Asians and other minorities how to behave, it is used against other minority groups to silence claims of equality, it silences the experiences of Asian Americans who can/do not achieve model minority success, and it causes some Asian Americans to use the stereotype to judge their self-worth and possibly lose their identity. (Lee, 1996, p. 125)

Nevertheless, despite the effort and evidence refuting this dangerous stereotype, the media and our education systems continue to support the widespread perception that “Asian Americans have overcome racial discrimination and are more successful than even whites” (Suzuki, 2002, p.23). This assumption is unfair and disheartening to the large portion of Asian Americans who regularly experience tremendous racial barriers, personal hardships, and numerous challenges. The model minority myth is a false reality and it is vital for researchers to commit extra effort to discrediting it. “By refuting the model minority myth, advocates are embracing a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be Asian American and a community with special needs” (Gasman, Baez, & Turner, 2008, p.117).

## Diversity of Asian Americans

Although the model minority stereotype originally focused on Asian Americans of East Asia (Chinese, Japanese, Korean), it has grown to include Asian Americans of South Asia (Asian Indian and Pakistani), Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Hmong), and the Pacific Islands (Polynesia, Micronesia, Melanesia, Guam, Samoan, Tonga) as well (Accapadi, 2012). The U.S. Census Bureau categorizes all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) as “Asian American” with the total population including over fifty ethnic groups speaking more than three hundred languages (Teranishi et al., 2004; Wang & Teranishi, 2012). It is important to realize that many AAPIs are members of more than one ethnic or racial group and the diversity of the AAPI cultures and communities are expected to continue expanding for years to come. Asian Americans are currently the second-fastest growing racial group in America (Kim & Gasman, 2011). When acknowledging the different socioeconomic characteristics, cultural backgrounds, and historical experiences of Asian Americans, it is preposterous to assign the label “model minority” to such a large and diverse population.

Considering that Asians comprise 60% of the world's population, lumping them together in a single category is tantamount to grouping the remaining 40% of the world's population into one category under the blind assumption that they must share characteristics in common. (Suzuki, 1989, p.18)

To better understand the backgrounds and experiences of Asian American college students, it is important to recognize the diverse situations surrounding Asian migration to the United States. In general, Asian immigrants are more likely to enter the United States seeking opportunity and success, whereas Asian refugees are more likely to migrate under conditions out of their control, such as being forced to flee their homeland due to war or risk of political persecution (Museus, 2014; Portes & Rumbaut,

1996). Consequently, Asian refugees with little or no formal education and limited English-language proficiency prior to arriving in America typically experience a higher level of difficulty adapting to a new culture (Zhou & Bankston, 1998). In addition, Asian American descendants of earlier immigrants (predominantly from East and South Asia) have already established widespread communities and supportive resources, and descendants of refugees from Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands find themselves struggling on their own or attempting to survive in disadvantaged ethnic communities with limited resources (Museus, 2014).

Research utilizing disaggregated data suggests Southeast Asians experience more socioeconomic disparities than other ethnic groups, as well as hold college degrees at rates lower than the national average (Hune, 2002; Museus, 2009; Museus, Maramba, & Teranishi, 2013). In comparison to East and South Asians, Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders tend to struggle the most financially or must depend on public assistance to survive (Fong, 2002; Lee, 1996; Wu, 2002). These situations offer convincing evidence of the vast backgrounds, disparities, and outcomes that exist among the Asian American ethnic groups.

Although it is true that many Asian Americans have accomplished a great deal in a short time, a significant number of them are disadvantaged and uneducated, exhibiting opposite characteristics of the model minority stereotype (Fong 2002). Contrary to the media hype that Asians are “outwhiting the whites,” the poverty and unemployment rate for Asian Americans is considerably higher than that for whites (Suzuki, 2002; Wang & Teranishi, 2012). For example, Asians of lower socioeconomic status are likely to live in Chinatowns and Manilatowns, which are inner-city ghettos

located in the most impoverished areas of cities (Suzuki, 1989). Survival in such an underground economy involves working multiple low wage jobs, limited English language ability, and little access to formal education. Consequently, the educational barriers continue to persist due to the lack of economic and cultural capital (Lareau, 1987) among the disadvantaged groups. Therefore, it is unrealistic to assume that all Asian Americans achieve universal academic and occupational success, especially when there is evidence that many are struggling to survive in desperate situations (Fong, 2002).

#### Academic Aspirations and Achievement

Asian American students are thought of as academic super stars that graduate at the top of their classes, win excessive amount of awards in national academic competitions, and over-populate our elite colleges and universities (Fong, 2002; Suzuki, 1989; Wu, 2002). The model minority myth implies Asian Americans are overachievers who establish exceptional academic achievement. Though this statement is overly exaggerated, national data suggest the majority of Asian Americans are diligent students and value academic success (Hsin & Xie, 2014; Lee, 1996; Museus, 2014; Peng & Wright, 1994). Using the 2006-2010 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data reproduced from Sam Museus (2014), Table 3 lists the percentage of Asian Americans by ethnicity that do not have high schools diplomas and the percentage of Asian Americans by ethnicity that have earned Bachelor's degrees. According to the national data in Table 3, several Asian American ethnic groups are lagging behind the national population on bachelor degree attainment rates, and Southeast Asians have the highest

percentage of high school dropouts or individuals without high school diplomas, in comparison to the other Asian ethnic groups (Museus, Maramba, & Teranishi, 2013).

Table 3

*Percentage of Asian Americans without High School Diploma and with Bachelor's Degree by Ethnicity*

Ethnicity		Percent without High School Diploma	Percent with Bachelor's Degree
<b>National Population</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>East</b>	Chinese	19	52
	Japanese	6	48
	Korean	8	54
	Taiwanese	5	72
	Okinawan	31	11
	Asian Indian	7	76
<b>South</b>	Pakistani	13	55
	Sri Lankan	7	57
	Filipino	7	49
<b>Southeast</b>	Malaysian	9	56
	Thai	17	43
	Hmong	39	14
	Indonesian	6	49
	Vietnamese	29	26
	Cambodian	38	13
	Laotian	33	12

Source: Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS): 2006-2010, 5-year estimates, Museus (2014)

In an attempt to understand differential achievement among minority groups, John Ogbu (1998) introduced a cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance to frame his research on minority education in America. This theory identifies the societal factors and school dynamics within minority communities and divides them into two significant categories: the “system” and “community forces” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The “system” focuses on the treatment of minorities in education in regards to educational policies, pedagogy, and returns for their investment or school credentials. The “community forces” examine how minorities perceive and react to their treatment and the historical foundation of their minority status (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). An example of “community forces” would be the college students’ perceptions and responses to learning, or the personal values, relationships, and beliefs that the students hold for their education and school. The historical recognition and understanding of how a minority group was established as a minority group, is significant to how the individuals within the minority group will perceive themselves within both society and an educational setting. Ogbu (1998) suggests that the differences among minorities in school performance lie in the differences in their community forces (p. 161).

To elaborate, the literature states that there are two types of minorities existing within a society: those that come and settle for the same reasons as the dominant group and those who have been made a part of society against their will (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). In other words, there are minorities that are prepared to adapt to the societal norms and there are minorities that are not. Voluntary minorities are defined as those who voluntarily immigrate to a country in search for a better life and involuntary



minorities are those who were brought to a country through slavery or conquest (Lee, 1994). According to Ogbu & Simons (1998), Korean Americans fall under the category of “voluntary minorities” who pursue academic achievement rather than the category of “involuntary minorities” or slave-descended minorities who reject it. Ogbu’s work finds that voluntary minorities tend to have an optimistic outlook on education and do well academically whereas involuntary minorities tend to have a pessimistic outlook on education and struggle academically. Therefore, one should expect voluntary minorities to be more likely to exhibit characteristics of the model minority stereotypes than involuntary minorities. This supports the idea that the voluntary minority cultural influences may encourage some Asian Americans to conform to model minority stereotypes within educational environments. These claims might also imply that minority group members establish static responses to school systems (Pollock, 2008). Overall, the societal expectations of Asian Americans match with the cultural aspirations of many Asian Americans and remain static within the educational system.

### Family and Cultural Expectations

Several theories attempt to explain why Asian Americans place significant emphasis on academic achievement. One popular idea is that cultural values and ethnic-immigrant family practices have a positive influence on academic achievement (Hsin & Xie, 2014; Teranishi et al., 2004). The Confucian ideals that are deep-rooted in the families of many Asian Americans place a high value on education, self-discipline, family unity, public morality, and social responsibility (Park, Goodwin, & Lee, 2003). The Confucian tradition supports the principles of moral education, compliance to authority,

respect for elders, taciturnity, strong social hierarchy, and male dominance (Park, Goodwin, & Lee, 2003). Consequently, this may explain one reason Asian Americans succeed in public school environments and are at times favored by their teachers (Hsin & Xie, 2014). Teachers appreciate the Asian American student's respectful and passive character and accept that these students rarely initiate class discussions until they are called on (Park, Endo, & Goodwin, 2006).

Studies suggest there is a relationship among immigrant settlement, adaptation in American society, and educational achievement (Hsin & Xie, 2014; Teranishi et al., 2004). John Ogbu (1974) attributes the academic achievement of Asian Americans to their social status as an immigrant minority who arrived in the United States by choice, as opposed to other minorities who were incorporated into the United States against their free will due to slavery, conquest, or colonization (Teranishi et al., 2004). For example, many Asian American immigrants for the most part make personal decisions to leave their home country with a goal to attain the American dream, and they arrive in America with a purpose. Therefore, Asian Americans are generally optimistic from the beginning that an education will benefit them socially and economically, whereas other minority groups with different experiences and goals might disagree. It is also understandable that minorities, who are forced to move to the U.S. against their will, may choose not to adapt to the societal norms and could experience difficulty in achieving success.

Drawing from John Ogbu's work, Stanley Sue and Sumie Okazaki's (1990) theory of "relative functionalism" implies that the high academic performance of Asian Americans is derived from a parents' perception of blocked mobility or limited economic

or occupational opportunities (Fong, 2002; Teranishi et al., 2004). Parental support and influence has a significant effect on a student's academic aspiration and achievement (Peng & Wright, 1994). Due to the limited opportunities available in noneducational areas, Asian Americans place a high emphasis on academic achievement (Fong, 2002). Asian Americans believe academic success will help them achieve a better job, higher income, and higher status (Suzuki, 1977). An example of relative functionalism would be when parents encourage their children to succeed in school as a means to advance their mobility and opportunities. Similar to Bob Suzuki's (1977) work, relative functionalism considers discrimination to a factor contributing to the limitation of opportunities for advancement in noneducational areas. For example, Asian American immigrants may possibly gravitate to quantitative fields such as engineering and sciences due to their perceived language limitations (Fong, 2002).

Ogbu and Simons (1998) state, "The treatment of minorities in the wider society is reflected in their treatment in education" (p. 161). This coincides with the academic perspective that suggests Asians do well in school because their parents, teachers, and peer groups expect them to do well (Schneider & Lee, 1990). The reality is that these stereotypes continue to persist because they are deeply embedded in the minds of people across America (Museus, 2014). Therefore, if our society considers Asian Americans to be model minorities, then it is not surprising that educators expect Asian Americans to be model students.

The research on East Asian American immigrants shows many East Asian American parents believe success and prestige are measured by money and the academic achievement of their children (Kim, 1993). Therefore, East Asian American

students believe that it is their cultural responsibility to bring prestige to their parents by performing well in school and attaining a college degree from a top tier college or university. Although many people generally wish to debunk the model minority stereotypes, East Asian Americans, such as Korean Americans may believe the model minority myth offers an advantage to achieving their cultural goals and improving societal status (Kim, 1993). Therefore, East Asian Americans are likely to personify relative functionalism because they embrace the model minority myth with the belief that education allows for social mobility within a discriminatory society (Park, Goodwin, & Lee, 2003).

Statistics contend that Southeast Asian immigrants are undereducated, poverty-stricken, linguistically isolated, illiterate, and highly likely to drop out of school (Park, Endo, & Goodwin, 2006). But it is unfortunate that due to the model minority assumptions, many Southeast Asian Americans will be overlooked throughout their educational experiences and will miss the necessary assistance and resources vital for academic success. Southeast Asian Americans are recognized as having the highest dropout rate with about half of the student population dropping out of school during the 5<sup>th</sup> grade (Li & Wang, 2008). Several Asian American college students, especially recent immigrants encounter tremendous personal, psychological, and academic challenges that negatively affect academic persistence. For example, many Asian American immigrants lack adequate English skills, hindering their ability to communicate, thus resulting in extreme psychological stress and alienation. Linguistic challenges are recognized as a major problem in relation to academic achievement for Asian Americans (Park, Endo, & Goodwin, 2006). The language barrier limits the

students' opportunities of educational advancement and establishes the need for remediation courses during college. Thus, community colleges offer the best resources for these students.

### College Pathways

Asian Americans have been identified as the fastest growing minority population attending American colleges, (Museus, 2014; Teranishi et al., 2004) and popular opinion claims that Asian Americans are “taking over” college campuses (Wang & Teranishi, 2012). Such statements create misleading assumptions that college access is not an issue or concern for Asian Americans. However, 6% of the total national population enrolled in higher education institutions (Park, Goodwin, & Lee, 2003). Additionally, 67% of the Asian American student population attends only two hundred colleges located within eight states, with institutions in California, New York, and Texas enrolling almost half of all Asian American college students (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education [CARE], 2008). The large number of Asian Americans attending colleges within just a few states gives a false impression of high overall national enrollment. Consequently, the low numbers of Asian American college students attending institutions within the other 42 states are more likely to be overlooked or dismissed altogether. Therefore, Asian Americans from all areas of the U.S. should be considered in research, policy, and practices to improve college access for the entire population. Additionally, it is important to recognize that Asian American college-going students can use their college knowledge to enhance the

college capital, educational resources, and support for college access among their communities (Bourdieu, 1977, Hsin & Xie, 2014; McDonough, 1997).

The literature reveals that compared other minority groups, Asian American students have the highest expectations for degree attainment and are likely to become early advocates for higher education (Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Kim & Gasman, 2011; Peng & Wright, 1994). However, contrary to the model minority myth, Asian Americans are far from attaining the exaggerated postsecondary success that the myth falsely implies. For example, the model minority myth implies that Asian Americans are “over-represented” in elite four-year institutions of higher education (Suzuki, 1989). However, the model minority myth neglects to acknowledge that the state of California has the highest Asian American student population in the nation, and half of the Asian Americans enrolled in higher education attend two-year colleges (Chang, 2008). The reality that Asian Americans make up only 6% of the total higher education population, with half of its population attending two-year institutions, hardly represents the model minority’s perfect image. Therefore, the model minority myth portrays a misleading representation of postsecondary access and choice for Asian Americans.

For decades, scholars have studied college choice in an effort to explain the processes that students engage in when selecting colleges to attend (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006). Additionally, research addressing the family and cultural issues affecting the college choices of racial and ethnic groups has increased (Freeman, 1999; Hurtado et al., 1997; Kim, 2004; Perna, 2000). Although some studies (Kim & Gasman, 2011; Teranishi et al., 2004) have focused specifically on

exploring the college choice processes of Asian Americans attending four-year institutions, several scholars acknowledge the importance of expanding future studies to explore how different immigration histories and ethnicities affect the college choice processes of Asian American students attending other types of postsecondary institutions, such as community colleges (Hurtado et al., 1997; Teranishi et al., 2004). For example, Southeast Asian Americans are more likely to enter two-year colleges and have a lower number of college degrees in comparison to other minority groups; attesting that ethnic disparities in baccalaureate degree attainment exists among Asian Americans (Park, Endo, & Goodwin, 2006). The disparity of college graduates among Southeast Asian Americans continues to hinder the postsecondary access and choice of this population. Therefore, additional attention should be focused on improving the college access and choice of Southeast Asian American students (Museus, 2009; Museus & Chang, 2009). Mainstream media should stop portraying Asian Americans as students who only attend elite four-year institutions and support services should be readily available for Asian American students who could benefit by attending two-year colleges.

Furthermore, Asian American students are frequently excluded from educational resources such as equal opportunity programs, financial support, and scholarships that provide supportive services to minority students. (Suzuki, 1989; Teranishi et al., 2004). Due to reasons that parallel the model minority myth, people may assume Asian American students do not need educational assistance or resources (CARE, 2008). The reality is some Asian American subgroups have existed in America for generations, and have established educational programs and resources as a means of assistance within

their ethnic communities (Hsin & Xie, 2014). However, there are still a large number of immigrants and refugees among the Asian American population living in isolation, disadvantaged due to poverty, and struggling to survive with little educational knowledge (Li & Wang, 2008). For example, Southeast Asians are recognized as the latest group of immigrants representing the minority group with the lowest number of college degrees (Park, Endo, & Goodwin, 2006). Therefore, this subgroup could greatly benefit from equal opportunity programs and financial support resources for college. Educators must defeat the model minority myth, recognize the division and disparities, and develop new programs and resources to assist Asian Americans with college access and choice.

A study conducted by Teranishi et al. (2004) examined the college application experiences of Asian American students. The study determined that among the Asian American subgroups, Chinese and Korean American students are likely to complete a higher number of college applications, as well as apply and attend the most selective institutions, whereas Filipino and Southeast Asians were likely to submit the least number of applications to the less selective colleges. Therefore, the Chinese and Korean Americans attending the four-year colleges could be considered the higher-achieving students, and the Filipinos and Southeast Asians would be included in the one-half of the Asian American student population attending two-year colleges and likely would be referred to as the lower-achieving students. This study provides more evidence of the differences and division existing among the college access and choice experiences of Asian American students.



## Community College Pathways

Since the beginning, community colleges have been caught in the middle of secondary and postsecondary education reform and are even referred to as the “bridge” between the two. Community colleges were originally developed as extensions of secondary schools, but eventually adopted a separate mission and curriculum that was more similar to higher education (Rasch, 2004). The two-year or associates degree is a unique attribute that distinguishes community colleges from high schools and universities. Today, 42% of America’s first-time freshmen attend community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014) for a variety of reasons including the open access, financial purposes, remedial education, and P-16 partnerships. However, with the remediation rate at 60% for entering community college students (Kirst, 2008), it is no surprise that the majority of high school graduates who choose to attend community colleges are academically unprepared for a four-year university.

To improve community college access and success, several community colleges have implemented national bridge programs and projects, offering outreach and information to young students and families as they begin to consider college. The bridge programs consist of administrators and college student leaders working together in providing high school students with a plan to help them meet their educational goals and to ensure they feel comfortable with college when they get there (Mensel, 2010). Examples of bridge activities could be community college students mentoring high school students with the college registration process, or community college administrators inviting high school students to campus to participate in various pre-college events and programs (Mensel, 2010).

Although bridge programs were initially established to assist high school seniors, it has since expanded to reach students and parents as early as fourth grade (Mensel, 2010). Bridge projects and other P-16 initiatives focus on improving college access and student success at community colleges, and have been established in part by investments of numerous private foundations. The Lumina Foundation and seventeen other funders launched “Achieving the Dream”, a national initiative committed to improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged students. The Ford Foundation’s “Bridges to Opportunity” works with community colleges in six states to combine the academic and workforce missions of colleges in order to help low-income and nontraditional students meet their goals. According to Burdman (2009), “Investing large amounts of money in community colleges is a relatively new philanthropic endeavor” (p. 31).

Most notably, community colleges have also taken a leadership role in improving college access and supporting the P-16 movement by implementing paraprofessional teacher education programs such as the Associate of Arts in Teaching (AAT) and supporting accelerated learning initiatives such dual credit programs (Rasch, 2004). The community colleges’ P-16 initiatives offer high school students opportunities to prepare early for college by participating in and completing college coursework. Three nationally recognized P-16 partnerships between high schools and community colleges that have proven to be successful are Dual Credit and Concurrent Enrollment Programs, Tech Prep and 2+2+2 Programs, and Middle and Early College High Schools (Schuetz, 2000).

## Texas Community Colleges

Established in 1965 by the Texas Legislature, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) acts as a governing body for the Texas higher education system and collaborates with the legislature, governor, governing boards, and higher education institutions to meet the goals of the state's higher education plan. "The goal of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) is to provide affordable, accessible, and high-quality higher education that prepares individuals for a changing economy and furthers the development and application of knowledge through instruction, research, and public service" (THECB, 2004). The THECB establishes state higher education plans, coordinates degree programs, and administers state and federal programs.

The THECB (2004) estimates that 60% to 70% of future college students in Texas will start out in public two-year institutions. RAND's statistics for Texas (2011) show Asian students made up 3.9% of the total enrollment in Texas community colleges during 2011 (Table 4). However, the largest growth of Asian American two-year college enrollment is happening in the Midwest and South (CARE, 2008). According to CARE (2008), the two-year college enrollment of Asian Americans increased by 86% in the South and 75.2% in the Midwest between 1990 and 2000. Texas experienced a 33.1% increase of Asian American community college enrollment from 1998-2007 (CARE, 2010). In considering this data and the reality that Asian American enrollment in public two-year community colleges is increasing at a faster rate than enrollment in four-year colleges (CARE, 2008; 2011), it is important for scholars to commit to increasing the number of empirical studies that analyze the experiences and outcomes of Asian

American community college students so that their future needs will be addressed and they will be successful (Museus, 2014).

Table 4

*Texas Community College Demographics*

	Texas Community College Total	Texas Community College Percentage
Total number enrolled	743,155	-
Total number Asian	28,712	3.9%
Total number American Indian	3,511	0.5%
Total number Black	103,243	13.9%
Total number Hispanic	272,452	36.7%
Total number White	288,614	38.8%

Source: RAND, 2011

The state of Texas is establishing new projects to increase the success of college students statewide. In 2000, the THECB implemented a comprehensive plan titled “Closing the Gaps by 2015” that consists of goals and strategies for achieving the essential resources required for Texas to compete in a national and international economy. The four major goals that have been identified in the “Closing the Gaps by 2015” plan are to increase college enrollments, increase number of college students who persist, strengthen the reputation of colleges through nationally recognized programs, and increase the level of funding for federal science and engineering research (Bricker, 2008).

The governance of community colleges plays an important role in the results of the “Closing the Gaps by 2015” program. Due to the important position of Texas

community colleges, state officials have been involved in the development of several P-16 initiatives throughout the state. P-16 efforts resulted in passing of the 79<sup>th</sup> Texas State Legislature House Bill 1 (2006) that mandates an alignment of curriculum that ensures an easy transition from high school to college. This law requires regular communication between K-12 and higher education institutions and aims for all high school graduates to be college-ready (Bricker, 2008). This law combined with successful statewide P-16 programs should benefit Texas greatly, as well as assist in meeting the Closing the Gaps goals.

### Theoretical Framework

During the 1970s, critical race theory (CRT) was originally established to challenge racial oppression existing within the racist legal system and provide support to racial minorities who were victims of racism within the legal institutions (Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Challenging the dominant paradigms in higher education, CRT acknowledges the unique educational experiences of Asian Americans and addresses the racial inequalities that result through normative practices (Delgado, 1995; Museus 2014). CRT has been successful in critiquing deficit thinking and providing alternative pedagogies and methodologies to encourage the “unlearning” of racial stereotyping (Buena Vista, Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante, 2009; Museus, 2014; Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002; Teranishi et al., 2009). Therefore, CRT is an ideal model for challenging the stereotypes and assumptions that impede the development of policies and programs that are crucial for the success of Asian American college students.

Teranishi et al. (2009) identifies three principles of CRT that are effective tools utilized to identify the influences of higher education research, policies, and programs for Asian American college students: students' voices, interest convergence, social justice (p. 59). For example, the CRT principles encourage researchers to listen to the voices of Asian American college students; highlighting their individual stories for better clarification of their overall college experiences (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). CRT supports the interest convergence element that promotes the collaboration of ideas and goals to identify both the valuable and detrimental effects of policies and decisions effecting Asian Americans college students. Finally, the social justice component of CRT aims to identify educational policies in the United States that are viewed to be unfair to Asian American college students, or people of color in general (Stovall, 2006; Teranishi et al., 2009). CRT scholars specializing in specific racial and ethnic groups have established critical race perspectives and research that utilizes the core tenets of CRT to study the perceptions and experiences of special populations (Museus, 2014). In 1995, Latina and Latino scholars introduced Latina and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit), which adopts the anti-subordination foundation of CRT to identify and address the concerns of Latinas and Latinos in society (Museus, 2014; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). One decade later, Brayboy (2005) presented Tribal Critical Theory (TribalCrit), which uses CRT as a framework to analyze and understand the traditions and realities of indigenous people and communities (Museus, 2014).

## Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit)

Asian Critical Theory or AsianCrit is an emerging analytical framework that applies CRT with the latest knowledge about Asian American experiences to create a set of exclusive tenets that are specifically designed to examine and understand how racism affects Asian Americans (Museus, 2014; Museus & Iftikar, 2013; Pak, Maramba, & Hernandez, 2014). Similar to LatCrit and Tribalcrit, the purpose of AsianCrit is not to substitute the tenets of CRT, but rather to utilize specific tenets that will assist with addressing how racial oppression affect Asian Americans (Museus, 2014). AsianCrit consists of seven tenets; four tenets combine CRT principles with the racial realities of Asian Americans, and the other three tenets reflect a blend of the original CRT principles (Museus, 2014; Museus & Iftikar, 2013).

Museus and Iftikar (2013) identifies the seven tenets of AsianCrit:

1. *Asianization* refers to the reality that society racializes and racially oppresses Asian Americans in distinct ways. An example would be how society groups all Asian Americans into a monolithic group and stereotypes Asian Americans depending on the current interests of the white majority, i.e. “honorary White model minorities” or “yellow peril threats.”
2. *Transnational Contexts* stresses the importance of recognizing how historical and contemporary economic, political, and social processes have affected the lives of Asian Americans. Examples would be how immigrations laws were revised to bring highly educated immigrants (South Asians) to the United States to fulfill the job market and technological needs, and the displacement of many Southeast Asian refugees after U.S. military intervention in Southeast Asian countries.

3. *(Re)Constructive History* recognizes the invisibility and silence of Asian Americans in American history and advocates for the recreation of a historical Asian American narrative that includes the voices and contributions of Asian Americans, to strengthened Asian American identity and awareness. An example would be the need to increase the knowledge of the historical struggles of Southeast Asian Americans to better understand and address the current conditions of this ethnic group.
4. *Strategic (Anti)Essentialism* acknowledges that the ways Asian Americans are racially categorized is influenced by oppressive economic, political, and social forces in society, and emphasizes the fact that Asian Americans can also be involved and influence the process of racial categorization as well.
5. *Intersectionality* stresses that racism, social oppression, racial identity, and social identities systematically intersect to shape the environments and experiences of Asian Americans.
6. *Story, Theory, and Praxis* suggests the collaboration of counterstories, theoretical work, and practice is essential for investigating and supporting the experiences of Asian Americans. "AsianCrit analyses assert that stories inform theory and practice, theory guides practice, and practice can excavate stories and utilize theory for positive transformative purposes." (Museus, 2014, p. 27)
7. *Commitment to Social Justice* aims to advocate for the elimination of racism, sexism, heterosexism, capitalism, and other forms of oppression.



## Summary of Literature

The scholarly literature that exists on Asian American college students is limited and centered primarily on the quantitative studies involving the analysis of test scores and grade performance (Gloria & Ho, 2003). Although these studies are significant, additional empirical research is necessary to examine the overall issues influencing the adaptation of Asian Americans to college. Further investigation is essential to discrediting the model minority assumption that Asians American college students seldom experience challenges. The lack of adequate research examining the environmental, social, and psychological experiences of Asian Americans hinders the development of policies and practices that are essential for addressing the overall needs of Asian American college students (Museus, 2014; Teranishi et al., 2009).

To dispute the implications of the model minority myth, Asian Americans have not achieved full equality and participation in American Society (Suzuki, 1989, p. 16). In other words, Asian Americans have not succeeded to the extent of what mainstream media proclaim. In reality, Asian Americans have excelled no more than any other minority group, once you consider the group in its full entirety. The model minority myth creates a division among Asian Americans that separates the overachievers from the underachievers or the voluntary minority subgroups from the involuntary subgroups. Although it may benefit some, it hinders many others. "The model minority stereotype does not reflect the increased evidence of Asian American underachievement, dropout, and socioeconomic gap" (Li & Wang, 2008, p. 217). As Asian Americans continue to be the second-fastest growing minority population in the U.S., it is important for educators,

researchers, and policymakers to recognize that the minority group's education gap is widening as well.

Stacey Lee's (1994) study suggests the ethnic groups of East Asian descent place a high value on academic success and East Asian Americans are more likely to emulate the model minority stereotype than other Asian American ethnic groups. Historically, cultural traits mirroring model minority stereotypes have positively influenced the academic success of East Asian American students. Although some minority groups wish to ignore or discredit model minority myths, many East Asian Americans want the phenomenon to remain static within society and believe the stereotypes are beneficial to their minority group status within America's educational system.

Although some East Asian Americans believe the model minority myth offers a cultural advantage, it is important to recognize that not all Asian American subgroups feel the same. As the educational research implies, Asian Americans are a diverse group of individuals with a variety of educational experiences, aspirations, and opposing views on the model minority myth. Although the majority of Asian Americans place a high value on academic achievement, the overall educational experiences of Asian Americans reflect a combination of successes and failures. The individuals who want the myth to be accurate will embrace it, whereas others will chose to dismiss it. Ultimately, the cultural influences and aspirations of specific minority groups play a significant role in the behavior and achievement of minorities.

As this study presents, Asian Americans are a diverse group of individuals with a variety of cultural influences, educational experiences, and academic aspirations.

Although Asian Americans place a high value on academic achievement, their academic choices and experiences are influenced by a number of cultural and environmental factors. Despite what the model minority depicts, many Asian Americans choose to attend community colleges rather than four-year colleges. It is important for researchers to report on the current educational realities of Asian American students, rather than reference outdated research that is originated on misconceptions. CRT and AsianCrit framed this study and provided the conceptual lens for interpreting and understanding the realities and individual experiences of Asian American community college students (Museus, 2014).

APPENDIX B  
DETAILED METHODOLOGY

## Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the community college pathways of Asian American community college students and to examine how family and cultural pressures influence their college experiences at the community college. The qualitative analysis provided a deeper understanding of the expectations, experiences, and views of Asian American community college students. This study also reviewed institutional practices that were in place to assist Asian American community college students. Data collected for this study sought to benefit administrators, student development officials, policy makers, and faculty with identifying, understanding, and addressing the needs of Asian American community college students.

## Research Questions

In an effort to investigate the community college pathways of Asian American community college students, this study implemented a qualitative protocol. The following research questions guided this exploratory study:

1. How do family and cultural expectations influence the college experiences for Asian American community college students?
2. What are Asian American community college students' perceptions about their college experiences?
3. How do model minority stereotypes influence the experiences and perceptions of Asian American community college students?
4. What practices and policies are in place at community colleges to help Asian American students succeed?

This study produced much needed data on the overall experiences of Asian American community college students by encouraging them to reflect on their community college pathways. The research questions explored how family, culture, the model minority myth, and institutional practices and policies influence the experiences and perceptions of Asian American community college students.

### Design of Study

In preparation for this study, I conducted a pilot study to guide the development of the research plan and to determine how the design of study and research protocol will work in practice (Beebe, 2007, Prescott & Soeken, 1989). According to Yijin Kim, author of *The Pilot Study in Qualitative Inquiry: Identifying Issues and Learning Lessons for Culturally Competent Research* (2010), “A pilot study is a small-scale study designed to inform a main study” (p. 191). I utilized the pilot study to test out the research protocol on eight Asian American community college students and identify necessary revisions. I was able to gain familiarity with the student population and recognize and resolve participant burden (Beebe, 2007). Due to the participants’ busy work and class schedules, I had to be flexible to meet when and where it was most convenient for the participants. Many of the participants had other responsibilities and obligations that took precedence over their education, such as family and jobs.

Seven Asian ethnic groups were represented among the eight participants; all of whom exemplified different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The majority of the participants had never openly discussed their ethnicity and educational experiences and half of them became emotional during the interviews. However, all of the

participants believed that the pilot study was important and offered to participate in future studies. The pilot study reiterated to me the vast diversity of Asian Americans and the significance of studying a population that is often excluded from scholarly research. The findings from the pilot study were presented in a poster presentation at a national research annual conference.

### Sample

Twenty-eight participants completed individual interviews. Table 5 shows demographic data for the sample that consisted of 16 males and 12 females, whose ages ranged from 18 to 49 years old, with a mean age of 24.

Table 5

*Student Demographics*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity (M=Mom, D=Dad)</b>	<b>Asian Descent</b>	<b>Generation Immigrant</b>	<b>Highest Degree</b>	<b>College</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>CC Objective</b>
+Male	18	Asian Indian	South	2	HS Diploma	Southern	Biology Nursing	Transfer to 4-yr
+Male	18	Japanese (M), Filipino (D)	Southeast	2	Int. HS Diploma	Northern	Culinary Arts	Associate Degree
Male	19	Taiwanese (D), White (M)	East	3	HS Diploma	Southern	Business Accounting	Transfer to 4-yr
+**Male	19	Asian Indian	South	1.5	HS Diploma	Southern	Biology/MBA Pre-Med	Transfer Credits
+Male	19	Vietnamese	Southeast	2	HS Diploma	Southern	Mechanical Engineering	Transfer to 4-yr
+Male	19	Vietnamese (M), White (D)	Southeast	3	HS Diploma	Northern	History	Transfer to 4-yr
Male	19	Vietnamese	Southeast	2	HS Diploma	Northern	Video Game Design	Transfer to 4-yr
+Male	19	Vietnamese	Southeast	1.5	HS Diploma	Northern	Computer Software Engineer	Transfer to 4-yr
*Female	19	Korean	East	2	HS Diploma	Southern	International Global Studies	Transfer to 4-yr
Male	19	Vietnamese, Adopted	Southeast	2	GED	Western	English & Political Science	Transfer to 4-yr
+*Female	20	Filipino	Southeast	1.5	HS Diploma	Southern	Kinesiology	Transfer to 4-yr
Female	20	$\frac{3}{4}$ Vietnamese $\frac{1}{4}$ Japanese	Southeast	2	HS Diploma	Western	Hotel Restaurant Admin Culinary	Transfer to 4-yr
+Male	20	Afghanistan	South	1.5	HS Diploma	Southern	Business International	Transfer to 4-yr
Female	20	Chinese (M), Cambodian (D)	Southeast	2	HS Diploma	Southern	Human Resources	Transfer to 4-yr
Female	21	Vietnamese	Southeast	2	HS Diploma	Northern	Business, Organization al Behavior	Transfer to 4-yr
*Female	21	Indonesian	Southeast	2	HS Diploma	Northern	Biology or Journalism	Transfer to 4-yr

*(table continues)*



(continued)

Gender	Age	Ethnicity (M=Mom, D=Dad)	Asian Descent	Generation Immigrant	Highest Degree	College	Major	CC Objective
+Male	21	Vietnamese	Southeast	2	HS Diploma	Northern	Computer Science	Transfer to 4-yr
+Female	21	Japanese (D), Latino (M)	East	2	HS Diploma	Southern	English	Transfer to 4-yr
+*Female	23	Korean	East	1.5	HS Diploma	Northern	English	Transfer to 4-yr
+*Female	24	Vietnamese	Southeast	2	HS Diploma	Southern	Business Administration	Transfer to 4-yr
Male	24	Asian Indian	South	2	HS Diploma	Southern	General Studies	Transfer to 4-yr
+Male	26	Chinese	East	1	Int. HS Diploma	Southern	Electrical Engineering	Transfer to 4-yr
+Female	26	Laotian (M), Vietnamese (D)	Southeast	2	HS Diploma	Southern	Psychology	Transfer to 4-yr
+*Female	28	Vietnamese	Southeast	1	Int. College Diploma	Northern	Business Accounting	Transfer to 4-yr
+Female	30	Laotian	Southeast	2	HS Diploma	Northern	Elementary Education	Transfer to 4-yr
+Male	37	Taiwanese	East	1.5	MBA, B.S. Computer Science, Business	Southern	HART Heating, Air	Certificate
+Male	43	Korean (M), White (D)	East	1.5	B.S. Electrical Engineer	Northern	Computer Programming C++	Certificate
+Male	49	Vietnamese	Southeast	1	Int. Medical Degree	Southern	Healthcare	Transfer to 4-yr

+First generation college students

\*Started at university and reverse transferred to community college

\*\* Concurrently enrolled at both community college and university

Int. = International degree/diploma

### Participant Recruitment

I first identified community college officials such as advisors and faculty that directly worked with Asian American students. From this point, I requested in person or through email for the community college officials to provide recommendations and

contact information of students that met the criteria for the sample. College officials from Northern Community College District and Southern Community College District confirmed student permission before sharing personal recommendations and student contact information with me. College officials at Western Community College District directed me to the college's student organization webpage to find email addresses for the student officers and faculty advisors of each student organization. As advised by the college officials, I emailed the student officers and faculty advisors of several student organizations and requested student recommendations for the study.

I contacted the prospective students by email (Appendix E); explained the purpose of the study and requested individual interviews. Snowball sampling, which is the most common type of purposeful sampling, was implemented to recruit additional participants (Merriam, 2009). Following each interview, I encouraged the participants to identify and recruit other Asian American community college students for the study. I continued with the snowball sampling process until the participant saturation was reached and the information became redundant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

## Interviews

The qualitative strategy of inquiry for this study consisted of phenomenology, in which data was drawn from individual interviews with the Asian American community college students (Merriam, 2009). I started each interview with distributing an Institutional Review Board (IRB) participant consent form to each participant. After reviewing the IRB participant consent form, I asked the participants to sign and return the form immediately. Each participant received a copy of the IRB consent form

For organizational purposes, I first asked the participants to complete a demographic questionnaire (Appendix F) that was utilized for collecting and analyzing demographic data on the students. I collected detailed descriptions of the participants' community college experiences and views by conducting semi-structured interviews and allowing the flexibility of open discussion throughout the interviews (Merriam, 2009). The semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix G) included a mix of more and less structured questions that are consistent in addressing the research questions, which guided this study (Merriam, 2009). The individual interviews were conducted in a comfortable conference room setting, in which the participants were offered bottled water. Due to the semi-structured format, the length of time for each interview varied depending on the participants' responses. The participant interviews were audiotape recorded, transcribed verbatim, typed, and coded into themes for data analysis (Merriam, 2009).

### Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis process was implemented in the study to answer the research questions (Merriam, 2009). To begin the data analysis process, I first thoroughly reviewed the demographic questionnaires and listened to the audiotape recordings of the interviews to gain a general understanding of the overall data (Creswell, 2009). I enlisted the assistance of one family member, one doctoral student, and a professional digital data transcription service to transcribe the interviews. I carefully reviewed and edited each transcription to double check that the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The interview transcriptions were individually typed and saved electronically in Microsoft

Word document files stored on a password-protected laptop computer. The audiotape recordings and transcriptions of the interviews were organized and labeled in folders to create an inventory of the entire data set and improve the accessibility of the data during the analysis (Merriam, 2009). I also created and secured a backup copy of the entire digital data set on an external hard drive. The external hard drive, hard copies of data, and all field notes were stored in a locked file cabinet located in a secure office setting.

## Coding

While reviewing and organizing open-ended data, I identified central themes that emerged during the data collection (Merriam, 2009). I initiated the process of open coding to identify categories of information that responded to the research questions, and then performed axial coding and selective coding to explain how the categories are connected to a core category (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). I utilized the qualitative data-analysis software NVivo to assist with the process of coding the data into the central themes and categories (Krathwohl, 2009; Merriam 2009). To complete the entire coding process, I assigned codes to each line of text in the interview transcriptions. The use of qualitative computer data-analysis software made the coding process faster and more efficient than coding the data by hand (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative data-analysis software and coded data were downloaded to the password-protected laptop computer and stored in a secure office setting.

## Credibility and Trustworthiness

In order to conduct an ethical and accurate study, qualitative research must ensure credibility and trustworthiness (Merriam, 2009). Several procedures were executed to establish credibility and trustworthiness throughout this study. First and foremost, I followed proper procedure to obtain permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study (Creswell, 2009). I reviewed the IRB consent form with the participants and requested that each participant to sign and return the form before the interview started. I continued to follow the IRB guidelines so that the participants would remain well informed and the study would remain ethical.

## Member Check Focus Group

In addition to sending an email with the follow-up survey (Appendix H), I sent a text message to the 28 participants with the web link to the brief follow-up survey, which inquired if the students were interested in participating in a focus group for the purpose of member checking. Eleven participants completed the survey and seven participants said they were interested in participating in the member check focus group. I emailed the date, time and place of the member check focus group to the seven interested participants. Two students replied that they had schedule conflicts, but the other five students said they were available. In a final effort to increase attendance at the member check focus group, I called the participants who had not completed the follow-up survey to personally invite them to the member check focus group. I talked with two students on the phone and left messages for the other students. The two students that I spoke

with sounded enthusiastic about the member check focus group invitation, but neither of them could attend because they had to work. Both students said they were still interested in participating in future meetings.

The member check focus group took place at a popular restaurant café centrally located in north Texas. Out of the five students who confirmed through email or by phone that they would attend the member check focus group, two students showed. The two students were native born citizens (2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants).

The member check focus group and lunch lasted two hours and member checking took up over half of the meeting. The students shared positive thoughts about their individual interviews and explained how they felt reading the interview transcriptions. The female student stated that she used the word “like” too many times. I presented an outline of the interview findings and the students shared their approval and interjected personal comments. For example, I stated that a number of the students became emotional during the interviews, and the female volunteered that she was one of the emotional students. She admitted that she had a similar discussion during her interview for the prestigious transfer scholarship and also became emotional in front of the scholarship committee. After hearing her admit this, I realized that the other students probably did not feel comfortable meeting in a focus group and rehashing emotional experiences with complete strangers. Also, the two students who attended the member check focus group continued to do well in college and had exciting updates to share. I realized that this might not have been the same for many of the other participants. To show my gratitude, the two students received free lunch and were compensated \$20 each for their generosity.

## Reflexivity

Reflexivity, also known as the researcher's position involves the process of the researcher self-reflecting on personal biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the proposed study (Merriam, 2009). With this in mind, I am an Asian American employed in a student services position at a community college and I am committed to helping community college students succeed. Additionally, I have first-hand experience dealing with the burdens and ramifications that the model minority stereotypes impose on Asian American college students. For example, I can relate to the uncomfortable mix of emotions that many Asian American students feel after being told, "You look smart" or "You must be great at Math." Whether intentional or unintentional, the underlining meaning of these fictitious assumptions can be infuriating for many Asian Americans. Consequently, I am also familiar with the feelings of inadequacy and isolation that many Asian American students suffer when they are mistreated by family or society for not "fitting" the model minority image.

The model minority myth supports the idea that all Asian American college students attend elite four-year institutions and attain high rates of success. The stories endorsing this myth are highlighted most in mainstream media and scholarly research. It is infrequent that information is shared in mainstream media about Asian American community college students, and extra effort is required to find information related to this topic printed in scholarly publications. This is disturbing, especially because half of all Asian American college students attend community colleges (Teranishi, 2010). Why isn't more attention focused on Asian American community college students? I suspect

one major reason Asian American community college students are often invisible in research is because they do not “fit” the model minority image. With this in mind, I was focused on learning more about the experiences of Asian American community college students. Why did they choose to attend a community college and how did their family and community respond to their college choice? What are community colleges doing to help Asian American students succeed?

The researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative interview studies (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Merriam, 2009). There were a number of motives driving me to complete this study. Primarily, the gap in the research surrounding Asian American community college students must be addressed, especially because this population is continuing to increase at higher rates. It is essential that community college professionals, such as myself, learn more about this growing population and how to help them succeed in college. Additionally, I wanted to offer Asian American community college students the opportunity to voice their experiences and opinions. For many of the participants, my interview was the first opportunity in where they were asked to discuss their experiences and perceptions regarding college. It was also the first time that the students participated in a dissertation research study. I hoped that each participant was able to benefit in some way, personally or scholastically from the interview. Finally, I am a transracial Asian American adoptee who was raised since infancy in a predominately White family and community. Although, I experienced a fair amount of societal stereotypes and pressures as a student, I was not raised in an Asian culture and I did not struggle with intense family/cultural expectations and traditions. Therefore, I recognized that my educational experiences were different than many of the



participants. Keeping this in mind, I expected to be more of an outsider than an insider during the majority of the interviews. However, the outsider involvement was valuable in my interviews because I had more questions for the participants, than I had ideas or assumptions concerning their experiences (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 1991).

### Delimitations

The delimitations that I utilized were selected for this study because the locations of the colleges were of close proximity to myself. The study focused on the experiences and perceptions of community college students who self-identified as Asian American and were at least 18 years old. Therefore, high school students who were enrolled in dual credit courses at the community colleges were not eligible to participate in this study.

### Limitations

This study was limited by location and participant selection. The sample included Asian American community college students from the northern section of a single state. Therefore, the results of this study should not be intended to portray all Asian American community college students. Additionally, participant selection included snowball sampling, which may yield similar student experiences.

APPENDIX C  
COMPLETE/UNABRIDGED FINDINGS

## Introduction

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the community college pathways of Asian American community college students and to examine how family and cultural pressures influence their college experiences at the community college. This chapter will present key findings from interviews of 28 students who self-identified as Asian American and attended one of three large community college districts located in north Texas. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 49 years old, with a mean age of 24. Sixteen participants were male and twelve were female. Four research questions guided this study: (1) How do family and cultural expectations influence the college experiences for Asian American community college students? (2) What are Asian American community college students' perceptions about their college experiences? (3) How do model minority stereotypes influence the experiences and perceptions of Asian American community college students? (4) What practices and policies are in place at community colleges to help Asian American students succeed?

Three categories of findings emerged from the semi-structured interviews:

1. Family and Cultural Expectations
2. Personal journey to the community college
3. Institutional support for Asian American community college students

This chapter begins by emphasizing the diversity that exists within the Asian American population and this study, and acknowledging that the participants' ethnic identities were unique to each individual. What follows is an explanation on how the participants' family and cultural expectations influenced their educational aspirations and college choice. The chapter also reports the participants' personal journey and college choice,

and how model minority stereotypes influenced the students' perceptions and overall education at the community college. Finally, the chapter concludes by recognizing practices in place at the participants' community colleges to support Asian American students.

### What kind of Asian are you?

Due to the depth of the data collected, it is important to emphasize the magnitude of diversity that exists within the Asian American population. The U.S. Census Bureau categorizes all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) as "Asian American" with the total population including over fifty ethnic groups speaking more than three hundred languages (Teranishi et al., 2004; Wang & Teranishi, 2012). Altogether, the participants in this study represented 13 different ethnic groups, including nine students who were members of more than one ethnic or racial group. Several of the participants were born in the United States or moved here as young children, and most of them identified with being more American than Asian. However, all of the participants had at least one foreign-born parent or strong ties to their Asian heritage, and some identified themselves as being equally Asian and American. Altogether, 28 stories were shared that depicted a multitude of family, cultural, and educational experiences, but the participants' ethnic identities were unique to each individual. The findings from this study describe the unique stories of the participants, but do not portray the perceptions and experiences of all Asian American community college students.

"What kind of Asian are you?" or "Are you Chinese, like what are you?"

Participants said these questions were commonly asked by their peers and instructors.

The students reported conflicted feelings about these questions. These questions have underlying assumptions implying their peers and instructors perceive them as Asian outsiders or forever foreigners, rather than Americans (Museus, 2014). As discovered in this study, these underlying assumptions tend to disregard how Asian Americans actually perceive themselves. Like many participants in this study, one male participant identifies with being more American than Asian American.

I feel like I'm more American than Asian American. I feel like the Asian background is there because there has to be that. I can't really control that. But as for me, myself, I feel like I'm pretty American.

Another participant is offended and annoyed by the insensitive way people inquire about her ethnic identity.

I get so offended when people ask, "Are you from Korea?" I'd be like, "No, I was born here." But then they say, "But where are you really from?" I've actually said, "My mom's uterus." I said that line because I got so annoyed.

A male participant whose mother is Vietnamese and father is white explained why he only tells people he is Vietnamese, even though he identifies with being white as well.

When I say that (I'm also white), it throws them off a little bit. Mostly, they see Asian so they expect me to say Asian.

When another bi-racial participant is asked about his ethnic identity, he determines how to answer the question by the race of the person asking.

It depends on who's asking the question. Because most people that are pure Asian would look at me and think I'm more White. But then if you were completely white, you would look at me and identify me as more Asian.

A female participant stresses that being Asian American does not define her identity.

Sometimes I feel like people think that your identity is in your race, when it's really not. I'm just a normal person who just needs help, and I just need an education. Growing up, I didn't ever think about it (race). I'm just like, "I don't see my own skin."

When the participants were asked about their Asian American identity, their responses reflected a combination of social, racial, and ethnic identities. As college students, many of the participants were just beginning to form identities and worldviews that were independent from the complexity and pressure of their family and culture.

### Family and Cultural Expectations

The participants in this study represented 13 different ethnicities, and nine were members of more than one ethnic or racial group. One participant was a transracial adoptee, who was raised in a white family but had reunited with his biological Asian family. Eighteen students were native-born, but all of the participants had at least one foreign-born parent. The family histories of the students coincided with the literature that distinguishes the experiences of Asian immigrants and refugees. Asian immigrants generally enter the United States seeking opportunity and success, whereas Asian refugees tend to migrate to the United States under conditions out of their control, such as being forced to flee their homeland due to war or risk of political persecution (Museus, 2014; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Nineteen participants were first generation college students, whose parents had never attended college in the United States. Among the other participants, six students had parents with bachelor's degrees and three students had parents with associate's degrees. To best describe the different family and cultural backgrounds, the participants' experiences are summarized by Asian origin: south, east, and southeast.

## South Asians

Four participants were of South Asian descent. Two native-born students had parents from South India, and another student was born in South India but moved with his family to the United States when he was two years old. These three participants' families believed America offered a better future and settled in North Texas because they had family already established in the area. The South Asian American or Indian American students in this study were devoted to their family and culture, and also received positive support from their family and community in return. Indian Americans also prefer the term Desi to refer to the diaspora in South Asia (Ching & Agbayani, 2012). One student explained how his family ultimately ended up in the United States.

Just like anybody else back in the day, they came here for opportunity. India is kind of crowded. America, everybody wants to come to America. At first, they didn't even know they were going to come to America. My mom, she has eight sisters. The oldest one, a lot older than her obviously, she got one of those job visas to come here and then she filed for her sisters (to come to America), which one (sister) is my mom. And then my parents came here.

Another student who is 1.5 generation said his parents decided to leave South India and move to the United States so he could receive a higher quality education. Students who are classified as 1.5 generation immigrated to the United States before the age of thirteen.

It was a simple choice of they knew that the basic education over there was okay. But they knew that the higher studies were here and that is what they wanted. They realized for us, the opportunity would be here.

This student also explained that his parents had earned college degrees in India and had established an upper class life style there. In India, his father was a pharmacist and his mother was a nurse. However, they believed America offered better opportunities for

their children. They left their established careers in India to start over in the United States.

He (father) became a sheriff (in America). Of course he was a pharmacist in India but he didn't want to go any further with studies (in America) because he knew that pharmacy school would take up a lot of time and money, especially when we were still getting established with a home and stuff like that. He didn't want that extra pressure to take away from our education. So he decided to go and try out for sheriff and he got it. Now he's been there for about 15 years.

When asked to describe how his parents have influenced his educational aspirations, one student explained that he recognizes his parents' hard work and the sacrifices they have made for him. He wants to do well and make his parents proud.

I would say mostly it is by the tedious work they've done in the background. Of course they don't tell me every day, "You know, we're busting our butts, working eight hour shifts" and stuff like that. But I can tell, even without them telling me. I can tell that they're doing all this for me. I think they'd be retired by now if I weren't here. And I think at the end of the day, it's all about just being humble about it and just doing what you need to do. And everything will fall into place for them. That's what they've mainly taught me. But it's affected me a lot for sure.

Another student explained there is an expectation in the Indian culture to do well in science and establish a career as a doctor in the medical field. Although, his parents always wanted him to be a doctor, they are okay with him becoming a nurse.

Truthfully they've influenced a lot especially being in the Indian community. Everybody expects you to be, you know, a doctor, probably a really high nurse or something like that. OT, PT, so many different Ts you don't even know. Like pretty much that's kind of the heritage. Indians are supposed to be really smart so you expect them to go into like science fields. So my parents, they always wanted me to do cardiovascular, or something like that. But a nurse is great also, to them.

The student expanded on what it was like growing up in the Indian culture and with the pressure from his parents and community to strive for a career in medicine.

Well initially when I was growing up, I was good at science and math. It was natural. Then as the years came along, we started understanding and started thinking about our futures. That is when my parents, around 12, 13 (years old), is



when we started really talking about the future. "What do you want to be?" Being a kid, obviously I listened. But as I grew older I started to, what do you say - "objectify," know the good and bad. It's not all about the money. It's about doing something you love, not doing something you hate. I mean if you're going to tell them you want to be an engineer, they'll probably say, "Back in the day, engineering used to be a good job *but...*" They also think about the economy. So we have talks like this, but they want you to go into a job that obviously will be sustainable. That's what they feel.

The student explained how he felt about the family and cultural pressure to pursue a career in medicine.

When I was growing up, I used to think, "Man, it's just because I'm Indian we have to do this." But now I'm starting to notice that there is some realistic value in what they say. Because I'm seeing so many families, Indian families even, that are struggling because of degrees that really don't earn that much money or there are a lot of people in it (those career fields). It's just hard to get a job.

Another student explained how he felt about the educational expectations of his family and culture. He doesn't like the pressure but he believes a college education is necessary.

I'd say that the (family and cultural) standards are set pretty high and so to actually live up to the expectation (to get a college degree) is something that I'm pursuing to do. I don't like it (pressure) that much. But the fact is that the reality of life is that we all do need jobs, the market is very competitive, and the best way to get it is with a world-class education.

This 24 year-old student formed this realization after working low wage jobs and deciding he wanted to achieve more.

I think I started forming that expectation after I started working in between school and actually getting a job, because I didn't have a job through high school. After coming to community college, I got my first job and then I did in-between jobs part-time. Then the semester before the last one, I was working part-time and the longest period I worked for was a year and a half with one company. I was a receiving associate at Macy's Galleria, unloading trucks and doing inventory. So just working a pretty low wage job, you know kind of put things in perspective. Do I want this for the rest of my life or do I want to pursue something better?

I asked one student to explain how his parents would have responded if he would have decided not to attend college.

Horribly! Yeah, I think they would have kicked me out honestly. Yeah, they would have cut me off personally wise. It's not the aspect of they hate me, but it's the aspect of losing my potential. And I can only see that aspect because it's if I messed up. I don't see that aspect of them being like, "Okay, we don't have the money so you can't go to college." Of course I don't see that aspect because they've done everything they could to come to this country and give me what they could offer. They did give up their life over there, which was pretty good actually. They decided to come here and be middle class. So I have no excuse honestly, not to go to college. I really don't.

Another student also said his family and community would not have reacted positively if he had decided not to attend college.

It'd probably be very negative (reaction if he did not go to college). Just because the community (South Indian) that I grew up in and I'm still in; it's actually frowned upon. So not going and getting an education when like everyone you know has an education, it's like ludicrous. They would look at it as ludicrous. I think it's just because of the way I grew up and that has a lot to do with it. I still would have gone to college.

The fourth student of South Asian origin was originally from Afghanistan and self-identified as Asian. With assistance from a refugee agency, his family moved to the United States when he was ten years old. He faced totally different cultural challenges, than the students from South India. The student described a complex history whereas he struggled to assimilate to the American culture as an adolescent. His family expected him to do well in school, but he lacked the guidance and discipline that was necessary to remain focused. However, his family supported him financially until his senior year of high school, so he would not have to work.

Education was most important, besides a job. They (parents) kept me from working until the last year of my high school, so (education was) definitely important. They certainly kept education a top priority. They expected me to keep grades around As or Bs, and definitely expected me to go to a university. They didn't know much about college. My dad does a little bit. They had high trust in

me (to do well). I had decent grades for two and a half years or three years. But as you grow older, you experience more things I guess. I was staying with my friends since I was attending a charter school. I was living with my friends so I guess their influence was... Yeah, so I kind of got distracted. I didn't perform as well as expected.

His parents had no formal education and were not familiar with the American education system. His father was employed as a maintenance worker and his mother stayed at home to care for his four younger siblings. They entrusted him to reside with friends and attend a charter high school, but he made poor decisions that delayed him from finishing high school. The student admitted that his parents were not involved in his education and were unaware of his personal struggles.

If they did know, they could have maybe helped me out in some way. But they trusted me and I guess I kind of ruined the trust. I kept getting distracted and stuff. At the place I was staying, we had a guardian and I kept getting in trouble with them. Because since I stayed there for about three and a half years, I kept getting bored and stuff. There was nothing to do, and usually no ride and no transportation. So yeah about senior year, I got my own car. I had transportation and I could anywhere I wanted and do anything. So I got in trouble with them for being late for the curfew and not doing chores. We had chores and stuff. And yeah, I got in trouble with the law, for drugs, only marijuana though, no alcohol or nothing. Yeah, I wasn't able to graduate. I just got caught with it (drugs) and they send you to a learning facility. But I wasn't able to complete it there either. Yeah, I think it was two semesters later that I finished high school.

He briefly discussed his struggles with drugs and alcohol and I suspect he was dealing with more challenges than he wanted to reveal. At the time of the interview, he was focused on continuing his college education and regaining his parents' trust. He was also retaking college courses that he had failed the previous semester. His refugee background and complicated history aligns with research that suggests Asian American refugees experience a higher level of difficulty adapting to the new culture (Museus, 2014; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Zhou & Bankston, 1998).

Overall, the South Asian family and cultural expectations had a positive influence on the students' decision to attend a community college. Although the students and parents were happy with their college choice, the students still dealt with challenges that discredit the model minority stereotypes. Among the four South Asian American students, one student said he failed and had to retake college classes, and another student admitted that he struggled with writing assignments due to language barriers. Two students also stated their families could barely afford to pay tuition so they were focused on finding scholarships. One student used his high school graduation money to pay for his college textbooks. Although the South Asian American students were satisfied with their college choice, they viewed the community college as a means to an end and were not interested in becoming actively involved in campus activities

#### East Asians

Seven participants were of East Asian descent. These seven students represented the East Asian subgroups: Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese, and Japanese. Three of the students were biracial including one male that was Taiwanese and white; one male that was Korean and white; and one female that was Japanese and Latino. The research on East Asian American immigrants suggests many East Asian American parents believe success and prestige are measured by money and the academic achievement of their children (Kim, 1993). East Asian American students tend to believe it is their cultural responsibility to bring prestige to their parents by performing well in school and attaining a college degree from a top tier college or university. Coincidentally, this group consisted of two students that had already earned a bachelor's degree or

master's degree, but they enrolled at the community college to pursue certificates. One of the participants decided to pursue a certificate in computer programming for personal reasons, but the other participant enrolled in the community college to complete a certificate for the sole purpose to helping his family.

One of the male participants pursuing a certificate had a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science and a Master of Business Administration degree but enrolled in classes at the community college to receive training and a certificate in Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Technology (HART). After living in California and working in IT for ten years, he returned to Texas to take over the family business, which involved managing an apartment complex. His parents were retiring and he was expected to continue the business. The student believed the HART certificate was necessary for repairing the air conditioners in the apartments. Although his experience at the community college was valuable, he said there is a negative stigma associated with Asian American community college students.

I know that for Asian Americans if they say they're going to a community college, they probably are a little bit ashamed of it. If they're just going solely to a community college, rather than a higher-end college because there is pressure to go to those higher-level colleges. It is a cultural pressure.

He was raised in the cultural pressure but felt he did not fit the Asian American stereotype. His family moved from Taiwan to the United States when he was four years old because his father purchased a restaurant. It was the Fourth of July and he remembered the fireworks. His parents had high expectations for him and his older sister. His sister became a medical doctor and he was encouraged to become an engineer, but he was not a studious student like his sister. He wanted to attend the larger state university, but his parents wanted him to attend the local university so he

could live at home and help with the family business. His family did not have a positive influence on his education because he felt he was unable to meet his parents' expectations and compete with his overachieving sister.

The first part of my academic career I think they (family) kind of turned me off of academia and then when I came back to school after my undergrad, it didn't seem as critical that I appease their expectations and so I did a lot better. My sister made straight As from first grade through high school. I believe when she got into TAMS (Texas Academy of Mathematics and Science), she mellowed out quite a bit and then when she got to Berkeley, she was happy with Cs or just passing. But I remember when I was learning how to read; I was made fun of by my own sister for making mistakes. That really was not very constructive in terms of my motivation in learning.

One female participant explained that the growing up in New York City prepared her to be competitive student. She started out at a university in New York but was forced to leave after one semester due to financial hardship. Her Korean parents stressed the importance of college but were unable to help her with the expenses of college.

Education has always been stressed in my family. When I was younger, we weren't at the best financial status and I went to school and naturally excelled and the New York City public education system is one of the best in the country and going with that, it's also one of the most competitive and that competitiveness is drilled in you. College was always the end goal, I think. It was always going to happen. It's just a matter of how. But in recent years I think with the change in the financial situation, it was almost going to be like, "Can I afford to go to where I want to go?" "Do I have to sacrifice everything?" I was actually going to go to a different college before this, but that didn't work out because of financial aid. It's kind of just can I afford to go to where I want to go. I was going to go, it's more like when am I going to go and where am I going to go.

Another female described the expectations that her Korean family and community have of her becoming a doctor and earning a high salary.

They (parents) had a lot of hopes for me. Be a doctor and things like that. But I'm not honestly interested in being a doctor to be honest. I don't know. I think it's the Asian thing, where families hope big for their kids. They also have their friends around them with kids my age or older, and they're all doing really good things. One of them is a dermatologist and gets a whole bunch of money each year. My mom dreams of that I guess.

The same student acknowledged that she actually experienced more pressure from the Asian community, than from her parents.

To be honest, they (parents) haven't really, because they weren't home that often to begin with so I mean they would say things, but they never pressured me into things like that. I mean there's always that pressure where Asian people are smart no matter what they do and stuff like that, but I'm just average to be honest. I thought I should try to be better, but nowadays I'm just going to do whatever I feel comfortable with. There was a little bit of pressure (in the community). But when I grew up there were a lot of Asian people around me. But when I moved to The Colony, there wasn't as much pressure because the Asian population was pretty small over there. I think that maybe helped a lot because it was just me.

However, she admitted that she did not enjoy school and was taking college classes to appease her parents.

I don't really like school. So I mean just like at first I was like I don't want to go at all. But there was the pressure thing where like even if you don't do anything like doctor or go get your masters or anything, "At least get one degree from college" is what my dad says. So that's why I'm here basically. That's the biggest obstacle for me. It's just I don't want to be in school. I don't think I'll tell them that (I don't want to go to college) because I think they'll just laugh it off as a joke. Or my dad will get angry and start nagging me for an hour. I'd rather go to school than hear that.

A male participant explained that his Chinese family influenced his career choice to pursue an engineering degree and his family always expected that he would attend college.

My grandfather was a Chemical Engineer and then my uncle is a Mechanical Engineer. My dad is a Civil Engineer. My whole family is kind of involved in the engineering system, so that is why I want to become engineer. I think it's very common that a student should go to college. Yes, it's common sense. Yeah, they (parents) always tell me, "You should go to a four-year college and get a degree." That's the way to go.

A female student explained how her parents pushed her to work hard in school so she would establish a better life.

It's really interesting because I feel like they (parents) haven't really influenced me as much in my educational aspirations because they never went to college so they never really pushed for us to go to college. But although they never went to college, they still thought getting an education and studying in general was important. So they would push us to study. They would always push us to do better than we are, especially my dad. My dad, well coming from a Japanese background, he always thought education was really important, but he never pushed it unless he saw you giving the effort. So he saw me putting the effort of always trying to get my best grades. Then he helped me and then he pushed me. But my siblings, like my brother for instance, he doesn't really care about education at all so my dad doesn't really push him. My dad only pushes if he sees the effort. And my mom was always just like, "You have to get the education because I want you to have a better life than me." That's her reason.

A male student admitted that the academic pressure from his father used to bother him but his views have changed since he entered college.

My dad has probably mentioned studying or school in almost every conversation that I've had with him. He just always talks about it and you know it used to annoy me, it use to bore me. But once I hit college, I just saw all this great education, all these things I don't know. I just got really intrigued by it. And now every time I talk to him, I'm the one who starts the conversation and I'm the one that starts talking about college. Just talking about my plans and my dream to get a CPA, and stuff like that. Even though I'm just like a sophomore, I'm constantly talking about my dreams.

The East Asian American students were vocal and passionate about their experiences and perspectives. They were easy to talk to and disclosed a lot about their personal lives. Additionally, a few students were open and honest about feelings of frustration and resentment toward their Asian family or Asian community. Overall, the East Asian family and cultural expectations did not influence the students' decision to attend a community college. The students' feelings were neutral about their college choice. They enjoyed the community college, but the community college was not the initial college choice for five of them. With the exception of the one traditional student,



the East Asian American students were not interested in joining campus organizations or becoming campus leaders.

### Southeast Asians

Seventeen of the participants were of Southeast Asian descent. These students represented the Southeast Asian subgroups: Vietnamese, Indonesian, Cambodian, Laotian, and Filipino. This group included one biracial student that was Vietnamese and white, and the transracial adoptee that was Vietnamese. Research utilizing disaggregated data suggests Southeast Asians experience more socioeconomic disparities than other ethnic groups, as well as hold college degrees at rates lower than the national average (Hune, 2002; Museus, 2009; Museus, Maramba, & Teranishi, 2013). Southeast Asians tend to struggle the most financially and depend on public assistance to survive (Fong, 2002; Lee, 1996; Wu, 2002). Seven of the participants in this group were raised by a single parent and three of the participants were parents. Collectively, the group reported that their parents expected them to do well in school and go to college but their parents did not have the knowledge and resources to help them get to college. A female student explained how she figured out how to get to college on her own because her parents did not know how to help her.

They never really taught me anything about college and stuff like that, and then high school I just kind of did it on my own. So how they influenced? I think they didn't really influence it in a positive way, which is sad, but it's just true. And sometimes they'll just be like, "What are you studying?" and I'll tell them and they're not really excited about it or anything. So I think when you don't have something, it makes you learn how to be that thing. Since I didn't have someone teaching me about school; it made me want to learn about school more. That's the thing, they expect you to do well but they don't teach you how or show how you would do that.

Her parents divorced when she was three years old and her father raised her and her older brother. Her mother remained in the area, but remarried and had other children. She felt that her lack of college knowledge resulted more from the dynamics of her divided family, rather than her ethnicity.

I don't think that my lack of knowledge about college is from my ethnic background. I think it's how my parents were divorced and split up and just how broken my family was. So I don't think it had a lot to do with my ethnicity or anything like that. I think it just came from my family values and what happened and those dynamics.

She explained that her Vietnamese heritage inspired her to do well in school and to value and take advantage of the educational opportunities in America.

I just think about how my dad came over here for education and I know he doesn't talk about my education a lot. But he says he came over here to learn and America has so many different things to offer than Vietnam would. Because it (Vietnam) is not as nice and privileged as we are here. So I think being Asian and being able to come to school when I know that I have 30 million cousins in Vietnam who don't get this opportunity. So I want to take advantage of it and utilize it.

Her father was unemployed and worked carpentry jobs from time to time. She was a Pell Grant recipient and acknowledged that her father's financial situation helped her qualify for financial aid.

I think knowing that my Dad would do anything if I asked him to, so I don't really ask him for anything unless I desperately need it. So, if I ever have emergencies like, Oh my car broke down, he'll give me money to help me. But when it comes to school, I think the government has helped a lot more than my parents have. But his (father) financial situation has allowed me to get financial aid, so that's good too.

One 30-year-old female was born in America shortly after her parents and older siblings moved from Laos to the United States. Her family struggled on government assistance and with adjusting to the cultural differences.

Growing up, I would say we were poor because when my parents first came over from Laos, they weren't working. So we had (Government) assistance. And, the neighborhood we lived in wasn't good. I don't think education was really very important to them (parents). They were more just trying to adapt to this culture. Where education in America is like okay, you have to get an education. I think growing up in Laos; it was more you got to learn how to work to survive. You would have a rice field and get up early in the morning and do your chores.

She realized the value of education early and was motivated to do well in school and to be the first in her family to attend college.

I've enjoyed going to school since elementary and I was the first in my family to actually go to college. But I felt like my situation where I grew up, education wasn't really a priority. It was like a "Make it how you can" situation. So, I always felt in order for me to get anywhere in life or to make it, I would have to pursue a higher education. So, that kind of motivated me to want to do well in school. I was always like, "I have to get As." I'm still like that to this day. I cannot get anything less than an A. If I do, I will freak out. So, I think it helped me as far as wanting to do better than the circumstances when I was growing up.

One male student, who was the first in his Vietnamese family to graduate from high school, explained why he made the personal decision to distance himself from his family and pursue a college degree.

Through the span of my consciousness, up to about three years ago, I just got sick and tired of the repetition we were doing. How we constantly, every party, get-together, everything, every birthday, every weekend; it's drink, gamble, and stay up until two in the morning. I stay with the kids, watch and play video games. That got really repetitive and I just got really sick of that and got really distant from my family because I wanted to stay away from all that. Now I'm trying to push away from my family and where I grew up. I'm expanding my knowledge base through college, and that's the only way I could think of how they (family) influenced.

Another male student described how his oldest brother influenced his education because his Vietnamese parents did not know how to help him achieve his educational goals. His brother also attended a community college and then graduated from a public four-year university.

I feel that this affects us a lot but we move a lot. I'm done moving but we've moved about every other year. I've been to four high schools and it really has changed the dynamic of my family. I moved around a lot, so family was really important to me. Seeing that as a kid you move every year, you kind of lose your friends every year. I was really close with my brothers and sisters and I still am. And I feel like that's a different dynamic than most families. Some people are just brothers and sisters. For me, I consider my brothers and sister some of my best friends. This is where I think things get a little non-traditional. My parents were not involved in my education at all. It's not because they didn't want to be; it's because they didn't know how to be. They just said, "Make sure you get good grades." But they never told me what to do at all, they never checked up on my grades. My parents didn't know how to be involved in my education but my oldest brother was. He (brother) was seven years older than me, so he was kind of like a second father figure in a sense by looking over my grades.

However, he explained that his parents were currently helping him pay tuition because he did not complete the FAFSA correctly and was not awarded financial aid.

Right now they help me a lot financially. For example I didn't fill out my financial aid correctly. I filled it out but I filled it out incorrectly and I didn't get any scholarships this semester. My mom and my dad have both been helping me pay for college. Luckily, the community college tuition and the books are really cheap. If I were at a university, this would be a little bit more difficult.

A female student, who transferred from a four-year university to the community college after becoming pregnant, explained that the tradition in her family is to graduate from a university. She moved from the Philippines to Texas when she was ten years old and was one of nineteen grandchildren. Her paternal grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, father, stepmother, and siblings lived in Texas.

They (entire family) moved here for all of us to graduate and have a better life than they did. When they were in the Philippines, they were really poor and so moving here was a really big change for them. Then my uncles, aunts, and cousins got really good jobs. Out of all the grandkids, I'm the first one to have a baby, but I'm not the oldest. My oldest cousin is like 30 something, but she's a workaholic. Most of them (cousins) are older and all of them graduated from a university and they all have their Bachelors.

Another female explained that her problems with drugs, alcohol, and money ruined the relationship with her Indonesian parents. She first attended a four-year university but

failed out. She was trying to regain the trust and support from her parents and was working two jobs to cover her living expenses and tuition at the community college. She changed her major from journalism to biology to satisfy her parents.

Both my parents were born and raised in Indonesia and my dad came here when he was nineteen years old. He went to college, got a degree, then just worked his way up, and now he owns his own company. My parents are really strict, like most Asian families. I got into huge trouble by the time I hit mid-high school and basically I was on my own until now. I'm not financially able to pay for school so there were some deals that were made and I have to try getting my GPA up, and work with what I've got. Then maybe my parents will help finance it (college tuition). My parents did not take a second look at what I did. I feel like most American families would probably let it slide or would help out, and I definitely had to learn a lesson. Now I'm barely getting back on my feet and that's with begging and pleading and struggling with my parents. I basically took advantage of what I had.

A female student described how her divorced parents had different opinions and expectations about her education. Her father moved from Vietnam to the United States alone at the age of 16. He worked as a bus boy to put himself through school. He earned an Associate's degree and worked as a Machine Specialist. Her mother moved with her sister from Vietnam to the United States later and did not finish school. She worked as a school custodian.

It was mainly my father who pushed my brother and me to aim for A's. Growing up, we received some cash for getting all A's. Then once we reached high school, if we got an 89 or below, we would get like yelled at. There are a lot of emotional scars. My dad told me he was disappointed in me for choosing my educational path (culinary arts). He said, "Try being an accountant." I was like, "No dad, because that is not me." My mom was like, "Good job. I'm so proud of you." She tells a friend, "Oh my daughter is making hundreds, making A's." I think it's because my mom's side family, they're very poor. I think she only went up to like elementary education because in Vietnam you pay for everything. She doesn't understand the educational area as much as I do. She believes that at school you learn every single thing in the world, but that is not true.

A male student who was adopted when he was one month old described his unique family background. His biological parents were Vietnamese and his adoptive parents

were White. His adoptive mother passed away when he was three years old, so his adoptive father raised him. He was homeschooled and traveled around the world with his adoptive father. After taking the GED preparation classes at the community college, he made the decision to complete his associate's degree and transfer to a university. He had recently reunited with his biological parents and spent the weekends with them. With the exception of his deceased adoptive mother, he will be the first college graduate among his adoptive and biological families.

My father was very literary but he didn't necessarily believe in formal education. There were always books in the house and we always read extensively. With his background in drama, he always liked European literature and we read that extensively, especially in the homeschooling curriculum that we adopted. With the homeschooling background, my father was supportive but he didn't necessarily push college. My family, they do value ideas a lot. But again it's that distinction between learning and education that they believe in.

He acknowledged that even as a transracial adoptee, his Asian American heritage still influenced his educational aspirations.

Being adopted, it certainly changes the relationship. But I think even being estranged from that (Asian) heritage; there is this sort of expectation that you will succeed academically. So I think that helped motivate me to some degree.

The Southeast Asian American students embodied a greater need for public assistance for their family and financial aid for college. Over half of the seventeen students in this study were lower socioeconomic status or depended on Pell grants to pay for college. Research suggests that Southeast Asian American students are sometimes viewed as deviant minorities, and associated with the negative stereotypes like academically inferior dropouts, welfare sponges, and gang members; rather than model minority stereotypes (Lee, 1994; Museus, 2014). The majority of these students were on their own throughout their entire college journey because their parents lacked

the knowledge, resources, and cultural capital to help them, or the parents did not understand the value of college. As suggested in the literature, the majority of the students' parents were refugees with little or no formal education and limited English-language proficiency (Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Several of the parents were unemployed or worked low wage jobs as nail salon technicians, housekeepers, or construction workers.

The Southeast Asian students were the most emotional during the interviews, and a few of the students broke down and cried when talking about their family and cultural expectations and experiences. Some students said they were expected to earn perfect grades and their parents hit or yelled at them if they earned Bs. One student knew her parents worked extremely hard to make it in America, but she was frustrated because her parents expected her to have the same goals and drive to be the best at everything. Many students felt conflicted with trying to be a typical American college student and remaining committed to their Asian family and cultural expectations.

### Pressure to Achieve

Several theories attempt to explain why Asian Americans place significant emphasis on academic achievement. Research suggests cultural values and ethnic-immigrant family practices have a positive influence on academic achievement (Hsin & Xie, 2014; Teranishi et al., 2004). The Confucian ideals that are deep-rooted in the families of many Asian Americans place a high value on education, self-discipline, family unity, public morality, and social responsibility (Park, Goodwin, & Lee, 2003). The family and cultural expectations reported by the participants reflected Confucian

tradition in the sense that the participant's families stressed academic achievement as a means to attaining social mobility. One female student described how the pressure to succeed academically and to bring honor to her family, was rooted in her Vietnamese heritage.

There were no Bs allowed in our family. You had to make straight As. I remember being in fifth grade, and I made an eighty-nine in Math, I got the biggest whooping ever. But, my mom always taught me, "You need to always work harder than the white male because if it came down to it, and it was between you and him, and your credentials are the same, they're going to pick you over him." So, my goal was to be better than my fellow students and to always bring honor to the family because we're all we have. Everything that we do reflects on our family. Whether you get pregnant at sixteen or you go off to do great things, it reflects on your family, and that is something that I carry with me to this day. She (mother) got those views from our culture and through her experiences. In Vietnam, education is very important because not everyone is afforded that opportunity. I think over there, to even go to grade school; you have to pay for it. So through her experiences and knowing that getting an education is your way out of poverty or your way to a good life; I think that's where she got it from, just overall culture.

The students that were unable to endure the family and cultural pressures exhibited self-defeating behaviors. One student, who used drugs and alcohol in the past to cope with feelings of inadequacy, continued to feel she could never meet her family's academic expectations.

People expect you to be better, and good, and smart. Which is true and I don't really fit into all of that. Plus I've grown up with three sisters, including a twin sister; who are all geniuses. I kind of fell out of that pattern and went my own way. So I kind of don't take it (pressure to achieve) into consideration anymore because I've already failed at it.

The cultural pressures that exist are also detrimental. Even though another student surpassed his family's educational expectations, he still presented a self-defeating attitude regarding his academic performance in comparison to other Asian Americans with higher GPAs.



I'm the only one that actually even completed high school (in his family). So in terms of my background, I kind of went a little bit beyond. But you kind of have to compare it to a whole bunch of eggs in a basket outside your home. I don't think I performed as well as probably a lot of other Asian Americans. I didn't get that high of a GPA. I don't think I did very well compared to most of the Asian community.

A number of participants acknowledged how their family and community influenced them to consider careers in healthcare or engineering. One student described how his parents encouraged him to seriously consider a career in Radiology after he completed his culinary arts program.

They (parents) were the ones who were pressuring me to go into Radiology because they said that the pay was good and it was in demand. But I was like, "I really want to do Culinary." My parents said, "You can do your Culinary, but just remember, you're young so you can still do Radiology." That's why after I finish Culinary, I can see if I want to change to Radiology and if that will take me anywhere. But for now, I'm good with Culinary Arts. It's a fun experience.

Another student explained that she planned to pursue a career in the medical field but was not interested in becoming a nurse like her aunts and cousins. Her major is Kinesiology and she is considering physical therapy.

All my aunts and some of my cousins, they're in the medical industry and like most of my aunts are nurses. My dad is always like, "Oh, you can be a nurse and do this." But he was never really pushy. I don't want to be a nurse because all of my aunts are nurses and my cousin is a nurse. So I strayed from being a nurse, but I knew I wanted to be in the medical industry. That influenced me into wanting to be in the medical field.

A male student explained that people tend to think he is pursuing a career in medicine simply because he is Asian; but he said he is genuinely interested in the medical profession. He is considering a career in orthopedics.

## Personal Journey to the Community College

Today, 42% of America's first-time freshmen attend community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014) for a variety of reasons including the open access, financial purposes, remedial education, and P-16 partnerships. The participants' personal choices and paths leading to the community colleges reflected these reasons, as well as other unique experiences. Before entering the community colleges, twenty-five participants received a high school diploma or GED in the United States and three participants completed high school in Asia. Additionally, two students already had college degrees from Vietnam universities, but needed additional education in America to achieve their career goals. Seventeen of the participants were traditional students that attended community college directly after high school, and six participants started at four-year universities but reverse transferred to the community colleges. Two students already had bachelor degrees, but returned to the community college to complete certificate programs, and one student was concurrently enrolled in classes at both the community college and university.

### Roadblocks to College

The road to college might be wide open for many students of middle to upper class, whereas students of lower socioeconomic status have limited access and opportunities for higher education. Community colleges serve as the most financially, geographically, and academically accessible pathways to higher education for minorities (Townsend, 1997). Due to the lesser expense and open access of community colleges, students of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to attend a two-year college than

a four-year college. Teranishi et al. (2009) found that Asian American students who attend community colleges are more likely to experience significant academic, economic, and linguistic challenges. Over half of the students in this study received Pell grants or other types of financial assistance; so paying for college was not considered an obstacle for many at that time. The majority of the students also had jobs or lived with their parents to save on living expenses. The nineteen participants that were first generation college students agreed that the lack of family support and knowledge about college were the major obstacles in their college journey. One student said her Laotian parents did not understand the value of a college education and pressured her to get a job. It took some time before her parents supported her decision to further her education.

There were some barriers because I didn't feel like at first I had the support from my parents because they don't know anything about college or higher education. So when I finished high school, I think they had expected me to just go find a job, but I didn't want to do that. I wanted to go to college because I knew that would help me find a better job. So, I think that was definitely one of my barriers, was just trying to make my parents understand what I was doing at the time.

Another student described different barriers stemming from her strict Vietnamese family. Her parents forced her to attend a university directly after high school even though she was not personally ready for college. She failed out of the university, moved away, and worked at Wal-Mart for a few years. Eventually, she enrolled in community college and moved back in with her parents. Although, her parents supported her education, they did not support the extracurricular activities or social aspect of college.

My mom and my dad are really strict, typical strict Asian parents, so they kept me really sheltered my entire life. I took going to the university, not as an opportunity to get my education, but the opportunity to run wild and do my own thing. Now I'm twenty-four and I'm at the community college. I live with my strict parents and I have a curfew even though I'm twenty-four. Last year, I was president of the

Student Government Association and we had late meetings and I would come home at ten, sometimes eleven. So when I would come home, they (parents) would be like, "Why are you going and coming home so late?" I think for a while they thought that I was out dealing drugs or doing something bad. She (mother) always says, "Don't lie to me. Do not do inappropriate stuff. You're coming home late. It's not good for girls to be coming home so late." That sucks because everyone else has all the freedom in the world. That's why I left when I did because there's no freedom.

A male student learned the hard way that it takes more than just making good grades in high school to go to college. Although he planned to start out at the university, community college was the only affordable option because he did not complete his FAFSA correctly and could not get financial aid.

College overall is not just firsthand knowledge, it's a learning experience and you don't learn it all in high school. There's a huge language barrier and culture barrier because like my parents, they want to help but they don't really know how. They keep telling you to make good grades but the fact is making good grades throughout high school really is not enough to be successful in college. You really have to know the ins and outs of applying for financial aid and scholarships. A lot of my friends got scholarships and full paid housing at large universities. They (friends) had the background knowledge because their parents went to college and mine didn't. I feel like that's affected me a lot. They see that you're an Asian American and they see that you're doing really well in school. So they're going to assume that you're going to be fine when you go to college, but that's not always the case.

With the exception of the two older students who had moved to the United States within in the past decade; the other 26 students did not report language to be a barrier to getting to college. However, other obstacles that affected college access and success were reported. One female acknowledged that her mental health was a personal obstacle that affected her education. She had a history of battling severe depression and had to monitor her stress and anxiety levels as a college student. A male student admitted his learning disability was an obstacle in college. He was born with XYY Syndrome, which is a rare genetic condition that delays an individual's development and

learning. The disorder affects people differently but in his case, he was developmentally delayed from birth until thirteen years of age. His ability to learn continued to be slower than average, which impeded his college performance. Additionally, four participants acknowledged past or present problems with drugs and alcohol, which were recognized as serious roadblocks to college access and completion.

### College Support System

Ten students reported that they had received individual support and guidance about college from teachers, school counselors, and mentors. The students said their high school counselors distributed college information, discussed different college admission requirements, and helped with ACT and SAT preparation. A few students said their counselors helped them complete the FAFSA and organized college visits. One student said he utilized the GO Center resources at his high school, which is a college and career outreach initiative in Texas provided by the Higher Education Servicing Corporation (HESC).

The school I went to luckily had a GO Center. And for those who aren't familiar with the GO center, it's basically a counselor that specifies on college. I visited the Go Center frequently just asking questions, what should I do next, where should I apply, what deadlines are due. They helped research and help me to know what to look at.

Another student described how his 9<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher mentored him through high school. She found creative ways to push him to complete his schoolwork and keep his grades up. He remained in touch with her after he graduated.

She was my English I teacher in high school. If it wasn't for her, I don't think I would have made it this far. She was such a motherly person while I was in school and when I didn't want to be at school. But she was there and she pushed

me essentially, and I had a lot of fun with it. If it wasn't for her, I don't think I would have enjoyed school as much I did.

One student recognized two high school teachers who really helped him with the college application process. One teacher stayed late after school every day to help students complete scholarship applications.

There are only a certain amount of teachers that actually care about what you do. I had two teachers. I had an accounting teacher and a biology teacher who really went above and beyond. It's like I was one of their children to them. They'd call or text me, "What do you need help with? Anything you need, I'm there."

Several students said they were involved in student organizations, athletics, and programs like Upward Bound during high school, which helped them prepare for college. A female student said she learned a lot about time management and self-discipline by taking on leadership positions on her sports teams. She continued to use those skills in college.

Since I was a captain of the softball and volleyball teams, I learned a lot about responsibilities. It was pretty much responsibilities and a lot of multi-tasking since there were a lot of hours put into those activities and then school. So it helped me balance and not break under pressure.

The parents with college degrees were able to provide excellent support for college. One participant described how his Vietnamese parents, both with bachelor's degree, offered the most encouragement about his goal to be a video game programmer. The student's community college had a specialized video game design partnership with the four-year university. The student's mother had researched the program online and arranged for the student to start the program at the community college, which made it easier for him to transfer to the university later. The student moved from Kansas and resided with relatives so he could attend the community college.

I know it (education) was very important to them, but they were also understanding unlike most of the Asian parents. The general belief is that they're really strict or something, but not my parents. I was lucky enough to have parents really encouraging my studies and what my career goals were. They really pushed for what my dream was, which is why they let me move down here. They encouraged me to pursue what I wanted to do. They also stressed the importance of maintaining good grades. Since my dad is a manager, he gives me insight into managerial positions and how they look at grades and stuff in the hiring processes.

### Community College Pathways

With or without guidance and support, each participant made the ultimate decision to attend a community college rather than a four-year college or university.

One first generation college student explained that it felt like a safe decision to start at the community college because college was somewhat scary to her since she was the first one in her family to go to college.

It's more closer to home and the cost was a big deal, even though I received some grants to help pay. I felt like it was a good start for me. I guess I was kind of scared to just jump into a four-year college. So, I think that helped my decision to choose a community college. I liked the smaller classes and that the classes weren't all over the place. I felt like it was more homely.

Another student decided the community college was a good place to start after seeing the mistakes that her brother made at the university. She did not want to make the same mistakes as her brother and felt the community college was more manageable.

My older brother graduated high school early, then went to a large four-year university, and then just kind of blew it. He just blew off two years of college, got arrested a lot, and got involved in a popular Vietnamese fraternity. He got so caught up in that, drugs, selling and doing them, and drinking. And the university was not cheap. So he blew two years of tuition and living expenses. He's just getting back on his feet when he should already be graduated. I think he influenced me to not take college for granted.

Several students felt pressured to attend the university rather than the community college. One student said he decided to save money and start out of the community college, despite what his parents and Indian community expected from him.

Initially they (parents) wanted me to go to a university and in the Indian community, everybody expects you to go to a university. But it was my decision to go to the community college, not theirs. They supported me, though. My original plan was to go to a university, but then I noticed that I could take those same classes here at the community college for \$150 or \$200 compared to thousands of dollars. I mean, goodness. So I made it my decision to come here.

Another student explained that her mother said she would not be proud of her if she attended a community college. Her mother felt the education at a community college was second rate compared to the education at a university.

I liked the community colleges because they said you could get the same credit for a class, but at a cheaper rate than at a university. But when I told her (mother) that I was going to go to community college, she said that she did not like that. She wanted me to go straight to a university and she would be proud of me if I did that instead.

The same student justified why she went against her mother's wishes and decided to attend a community college rather than the university.

I didn't want to take out loans and I didn't want to be in debt. The community college is cheaper and I can work full-time and pay for classes. But I can only go part-time because that's as much as I could afford. And the community college classes transfer to a university. It just seemed like a smarter option at the time.

A different student described how her entire family pressured her to attend a university rather than a community college because their community and relatives in Asia would recognize the university's name. The community college does not carry the same level of prestige as a university.

In our family, my aunts, uncles, and grandparents; they do care about the namesake and a university carries a big name. I'm the very first-born child here in America and I went to community college. The reason why they didn't like it



was because it's community college and the name is not known like the university. It's just all for the namesake, when you go to the university.

One student said he was pressured by his older brother to start out at the university because his brother wanted him to have the best college experience.

My brother started at the community college and transferred to the university. But he wanted me to start at a university because he wanted me to have the full four-year university experience. He felt that he didn't get the chance to have it and he really wanted the best for me.

Another student admitted that the college admissions process scared her and she was afraid to be rejected from a university. She decided to attend the community college because it offered the same classes, inexpensive tuition, and open admissions.

Basically, I was afraid to be rejected (from a university) and I decided to look for easier colleges. I took a tour of the community college and I started seeing that community colleges were not as bad as what people told me. At first, people would tell me community colleges were horrible and there's no point to go to them. But I saw that community colleges were pretty much just like universities, but cheaper. I'm very money oriented so when I heard cheaper I was like this is where I should go. Plus, I heard that they accept everyone and I would not be rejected.

### Community College Perceptions

For the most part, the participants were satisfied with their experiences at the community colleges. One student admitted that education had never been a priority and he did not realize the value of college until he was there. After working dead-end jobs for two years, he started classes at the community college and his views about college changed.

I was lethargic in high school. I calculated the proper plan, like how much work I can get through and just get my (high school) diploma. Because I didn't have any plans at the time to go past high school. I took a two-year leave after high school just because I didn't really want to do this college thing. But then I got sick and tired of working for someone else. So I came here and I found out this is a place of social interaction and a mine for information and knowledge. It's fun here.

Several participants were involved in campus activities and held leadership positions in student organizations at their community colleges. Some students were surprised at first to learn they could be actively involved in student organizations at the community college. One female admitted that she was much more engaged in the college campus than she had expected to be. She was a Student Ambassador, officer in the Student Government Association (SGA) and president of the Phi Theta Kappa honor society.

Community college is a lot better than I thought. I wasn't expecting the worst but I thought at the community college, I'd show up and I'd leave. But I found myself getting really involved because my college has good connections and networks. It has strong connections with all the universities. They're very supportive when it comes to transfer students because they understand that everyone is there to essentially transfer somewhere one day. And I've been getting really involved, way more than I thought I would with SGA and Phi Theta Kappa. These organizations have helped me create a lot of networks and given me a lot of opportunities.

College can be intimidating for many first generation college students. One student described how the community college environment helped her overcome her fear of talking to professors. The community college's small size and accessibility of the professors provided a smoother transition into the college-going culture.

When I first started, I was scared to talk to my professors. I guess you just feel like you don't want to look stupid, so you are scared to ask questions or scared to ask anything. I felt like they (professors) expected you to just know what to do. But now, I know it actually helps you to go talk to your professors because they are there to help, and they're not there to fail you. So that was one of those things I did overcome. I think the community college environment has helped me because it's not overcrowded and it's easier to talk to your professors. They (professors) can communicate with you because they don't have as many students as they would at a university.

Some students stated they were embarrassed at first to admit that they were attending a community college rather than a university. The stigma associated with community colleges is not well received by the Asian American immigrants who want the best for

their family. One female student admitted that at first she avoided any association with her community college on social media because she did not want her network of friends on Facebook to think less of her. Another student acknowledged the same feelings at first but her views changed after she started utilizing the resources available at the community college. She made connections with important people at the community college who helped her find an on-campus job and a prestigious transfer scholarship.

At first, for me to say that I went to a community college, it was a little bit tough because I felt others would look down upon me. But my view has totally changed since coming here. It doesn't matter what school you go to. It just matters what initiative you have. Take advantage of all the resources, because once you meet someone who knows everything, the door's will open for you.

#### Institutional Support for Asian American Community College Students

The participants were asked to discuss what their community colleges were doing to help Asian Americans succeed. The answers consisted of consecutive “nothing” and shoulder shrugs. The participants were unaware of any resources available at their colleges that specifically supported the success of Asian Americans. One student described how his college had a Japanese Culture Appreciation Club that educated students about the Japanese culture.

The college has the Japanese Culture Appreciation Club. The members are all fans of Manga and Anime movies and show their appreciation. It's not a club for Japanese people. It's not a club of just obsessing over those shows or whatever they watch. They also like a lot of the culture, weaponry, and history. They appreciate the Asian culture.

Another student said he was unaware of any resources or student organizations specific for Asian Americans at his community college, but he felt confident that would change in the future due to the growth of Asian Americans in the area.

It's very unique because I think a lot of Vietnamese students are there so actually, the number is increasing. The Vietnamese community around my

community college is becoming bigger and bigger. I believe that eventually they will have some more influence in the college.

### Lack of Scholarships for Asian Americans

Several participants discussed their frustration with finding scholarships that were specifically for Asian Americans. They said there are plenty of scholarships that are specific to other racial minorities, but barely any scholarships for Asian Americans.

One student said it was rare for him to find Asian American scholarships and asked me to help him search.

To tell you the truth, when I was applying for scholarships throughout the year, I couldn't find any Asian American scholarships. I found a lot of African American scholarships but I could not find any Asian American scholarships. I'd go to scholarship sites and there'd be like minority listings and I couldn't find any Asian American scholarships. I found a few throughout the year but I didn't get them. But they're kind of rare. I don't know if I'm searching incorrectly, or looking in the wrong places.

Another student alluded to the idea that the lack of scholarships available for Asian Americans could be related to the stereotype that Asian Americans are affluent and do not need financial assistance.

But then when you think about it, there's a stereotype that Asians are rich and this and that. Sometimes I feel like all the scholarships go to African Americans or Mexicans because they're low income, but then again there are some Asian Americans who get Pell grants. But there are no scholarships.

One student searched online for national scholarships that were available for Asian Americans but did not feel confident that she was qualified to receive one. There are a lot of excellent candidates that apply for the small number of scholarships.

I know about the Asian American Pacific Islander scholarship fund and I follow their blog and I talk with people who have received it. They're very understanding, and wonderful, their community is great, and they're all very active. But I know for something like Korean American Scholarship Fund, I look at the recipient's list and they're going to Cornell, Columbia, Yale, or Harvard. I'm like, "Are they even going to look at my application?"

## Resources for Minority Students

The students were also asked to explain all that is happening at their community colleges to help minorities succeed in general. One student acknowledged that his community college has a multi-cultural student association that hosts multi-cultural activities to raise appreciation for different cultures.

I'm not involved in activities, but from my observation, they have a very strong multi-cultural student association. Every single year they have an activity to raise appreciation for the multi-cultural cultures in the school, and the faculty is very supportive.

Another student listed minority student organizations and programs at his community college that were focused on improving the success of minority students. He attended a community college that was minority majority and it had a large number of minority students who held leadership positions in student organizations.

There's a lot: Black Student Organization, International Friendship Club. League of United Latin American Citizens, The Rising Star program, and TRIO. Because most of the people there are actually minorities, everyone in the clubs is basically a minority. The Rising Star program is given to college students in their first year. Like if you want to take summer classes or winter classes, that's when Rising Star kicks in. I actually didn't get it because I got the Pell grant. But since I already have a Pell grant that covers the regular semester, Rising Star covers those special semesters. There's also Phi Kappa Theta, which is the national honor society group and it's mostly minorities. There are no white students in that club. Most of the people in the higher positions (student organizations) in the college are all minorities.

One student acknowledged that her community college offered several programs for minorities and encouraged minority students to participate, but most of the minority students do not participate. She said her community college wants to help minorities succeed by offering unique opportunities and encouraging minority students to take on student leadership positions.

There are a lot of programs out there. Especially, because the majority of students who go to community college don't have a lot and their family income is very low. So they do offer programs and they give out leadership roles to build our resume and to make our essays stronger. They help minorities out. But the thing is though, a lot of students don't take advantage of it or they don't ask.

A student pointed out that his community college has changed through the years to help support and accommodate different minority students.

The fact that they've become very Spanish oriented. I can see a lot more text and there's a lot more Spanish in dictation. It's a different environment now. It was a lot more orientated to white students, but now I feel like it's more oriented to helping different ethnicities.

Another student considered the Accuplacer placement exams and developmental courses to be resources that were offered at his community college to help minorities succeed. He was mostly referring to the minority students who would also be classified as international students.

I know for sure that they do have the Accuplacer tests and that puts students into categories so they can better see where their strengths are and put them in developmental classes, whether that is for English, reading or math. I was actually in a developmental math class. I know a lot of the Asians come from India, they start out with developmental classes, and they work their way up. If you're trying to sign up for a class, like an English class, and you just came from India, it is beneficial that the school has the tests.

Finally, most of the participants were unaware if their community college did anything to support the success of minority students. Many students said they were the only Asian American students in their classes and they were not interested in being involved in student activities at their community college.

There's no diversity here or like I really don't think I've noticed any, being Asian American. There's really nothing. Everyone seems practically the same to me.

APPENDIX D

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Summary

This exploratory study investigated the community college pathways of Asian American community college students and examined how family and cultural pressures influenced their college experiences at the community college. This study also explored how model minority stereotypes influenced students' perceptions and education, and reviewed institutional practices and policies that support the success of this diverse and complex population. Twenty-eight participants completed individual semi-structured interviews. At the time of the interviews, the participants were enrolled in one of three large community college districts located in north Texas.

The sample consisted of 16 males and 12 females, whose ages ranged from 18 to 49 years old, with a mean age of 24. The participants represented 13 different ethnicities, and nine were members of more than one ethnic or racial group. Ten participants were foreign-born citizens, but all of the participants had at least one foreign-born parent. Nineteen participants were first generation college students, whose parents had never attended college in the United States. Among the other participants, six students had parents with bachelor's degrees and three students had parents with associate's degrees.

The qualitative analysis provided a deeper understanding of the expectations, experiences, and views of Asian American community college students. However, the findings from this study describe the unique stories of the participants, but do not portray the perceptions and experiences of all Asian American community college students. As revealed in the current literature on Asian American college students, the findings suggest many Asian American community college students also struggle with



tremendous pressure from their families and culture, and endure discriminatory repercussions of the model minority stereotypes by their peers and instructors. The findings from this study suggest Asian American community college students take ownership of their college choice and make decisions about their education that are not always supported by their family, community, or model minority stereotypes. Asian American community college students reveal a multitude of identities that cannot be exclusively described in a uniform manner. Additional findings suggest the resources and programs tailored specifically to support Asian American students are limited to non-existent at community colleges.

This chapter is composed of three sections. The first section is a summary of the study followed by a discussion of the findings and conclusions from the study. The third and final section provides implications for policy, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

### Summary of Study

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the community college pathways of Asian American community college students and to examine how family and cultural pressures influence their college experiences at the community college. Four research questions guided this study: (1) How do family and cultural expectations influence the college experiences for Asian American community college students? (2) What are Asian American community college students' perceptions about their college experiences? (3) How do model minority stereotypes influence the experiences and

perceptions of Asian American community college students? (4) What practices and policies are in place at community colleges to help Asian American students succeed?

Three categories of findings emerged from the semi-structured interviews:

1. Family and Cultural Expectations
2. Personal journey to the community college
3. Institutional support for Asian American community college students

The theoretical framework that guided this study was critical race theory (CRT), which is one theoretical perspective that is widely recognized as being a credible research tool for critically examining the true representation of Asian American college students (Museus, 2014; Pendakur & Pendakur, 2012). CRT centralizes the stories and encourages storytelling among Asian American students to collect real life experiences that have never been told (Pendakur & Pendakur, 2012). CRT is important because the act of storytelling delivers new information, and can be therapeutic for the storyteller who may be struggling with the long-term negative effects of racial oppression (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Pendakur & Pendakur, 2012).

During the 1970s, CRT was originally established to challenge racial oppression existing within the racist legal system and provide support to racial minorities who were victims of racism within the legal institutions (Delgado, 1995; Degaldo & Stefancic, 2001). Challenging the dominant paradigms in higher education, CRT acknowledges the unique educational experiences of Asian Americans and addresses the racial inequalities that result through normative practices (Delgado, 1995; Museus 2014). CRT has been successful in critiquing deficit thinking and providing alternative pedagogies and methodologies to encourage the “unlearning” of racial stereotyping (Buenavista,

Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante, 2009; Museus, 2014; Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002; Teranishi et al., 2009). Therefore, CRT is an ideal model for challenging the stereotypes and assumptions that impede the development of policies and programs that are crucial for the success of Asian American college students. An emerging analytical framework that applies CRT with the latest knowledge about Asian American experiences to create a set of exclusive tenets that are specifically designed to examine and understand how racism affects Asian Americans is Asian Critical Theory or AsianCrit (Museus, 2014; Museus & Iftikar, 2013; Pak, Maramba, & Hernandez, 2014). CRT and AsianCrit provided the conceptual lens for interpreting and understanding the realities and individual experiences of Asian American community college students (Museus, 2014).

## Discussion

In addition to family and culture, there were other factors that had significant influence on the college experiences of Asian American community college students. Some participants were pressured by their family and community to attain a college degree. However, the majority of the families lacked the knowledge, resources, and cultural capital (Lareau, 1987) to assist the students with the college-going process. Therefore, some students took ownership of their college choice and even made decisions that contradicted what their family and community supported. For example, the family members of several students had preconceived notions about community colleges and pressured the participants to attend universities. But the participants were well aware of their socioeconomic or academic limitations that hindered them from attending a university. Some students said their parents were okay with taking out

school loans to attend the university, but the students did not want to take out schools loans. The students would rather attend the community college and remain debt free, than have to take out a school loan to attend the university. This was an interesting finding because my generation of college students took out every possible school loan solely to attend the university and to have the full four-year college experience.

Other students initially had applied to the four-year institutions but were denied admission, or some students confessed they were afraid to apply to a university for fear of being rejected. The open access admissions, remedial education courses, and low tuition rates offered at the community colleges were the major deciding factors for the students. Ultimately, the participants decided the community college was the best choice to make for achieving their educational goals.

#### Reverse Transfer Students

Six students initially started at a university, but ended up transferring to the community college. All six students were female and three were first generation college students. Two students reverse transferred from the university to the community college due to financial issues, three students reverse transferred because they failed out of the university, and one student reverse transferred because she got pregnant and moved back to her parent's home to receive help with the baby. Three of the students were engaged in student organizations at their community colleges, whereas the other three students had no interest in being involved on campus.

One of the reverse transfer students did not disclose to me that she had reverse transferred to the community college after failing out of the university. I was informed of

this information before the interview but the student was unaware that I knew. She proceeded through the entire interview claiming to be a traditional student who entered the community college directly out of high school. She said that she visited the four-year colleges while in high school, but she decided to attend the community college. However, by the end of the interview the student confided that she disliked school and was only at the community college to appease her parents. Her GPA was extremely low and it was obvious she had no interest in school.

Another student reverse transferred from the flagship university to the community college after she became pregnant. She was a Biology Pre-med major at the university and planned to become an OBGYN. She said that after talking to other family members who worked in the medical field, she decided that medical school was no longer an option for her since she was a new mother. She decided to change her major to Kinesiology, which she believed would be an easier major for her, and then she would continue onto PT graduate school to become a Physical Therapist. I asked her if she had met with an academic adviser to discuss the change in major. The student admitted that she didn't believe in asking for help from advisors because she can get that information from her relatives who have already graduated from college.

### First Generation Immigrants

Three participants were first generation immigrants who had recently entered the United States after the age of 21. The perspectives of these individuals were unique and their experiences were similar to international students because they enrolled or had taken English second language and developmental courses. The youngest

participant was 26 years old and had received his citizenship the previous year. He selected the community college because of the low tuition rate and positive reputation. He had recently changed his name to the same name of an American super hero because he “felt fear” each time one of his professors tried to pronounce his Asian name in class. He felt American community college students were not as serious about their education as college students were in his native country. He suggested that I focus my research on international students because they are more serious and need more assistance.

The next first generation immigrant student was a 28 year-old female who had been in America for five years. She had received a college degree in her native country before relocating to America. She started out at four-year institution but transferred to the community college when she learned about the low tuition rate. The language was her main obstacle because her peers would dismiss her as soon they heard her speak. She was frustrated that other students were not more helpful, but the harsh treatment also pushed her to work harder to learn the language. She was surprised about how casual her college instructors were with their students. She said college instructors in her native country were very intimidating, but not in America. She also shared her frustration about her peers asking her to help with math courses.

The final first generation immigrant student was a 49 year-old male who had originally moved to the United States thirteen years prior but had to return to his native country a few times during that time span. In his native country, he was a Medical Doctor whose specialty was Oncology. He received the equivalent Medical Doctor diploma in America and worked at the MD Anderson Cancer Center while he was

studying for the physician's license to practice medicine. Due to the language deficit, he was dismissed from the program and returned to his native country. After two years, he returned back to America and enrolled in the community college to pursue a degree in nursing or physicians assistant. He was frustrated that he's unable to receive a license to practice medicine even though he has the equivalent diploma.

He works as part-time biology tutor for the community college. He is married and is improving his English by learning from his 6 year-old daughter and 7 year-old son. He embraces the model minority myth and believes it is true. He admitted that his wife and him expect his son to become a priest and his daughter to attend Harvard University or Yale University. That is his American dream.

#### Transracial Adoptee

The transracial adoptee student faced different challenges at the community college than the other Asian American Students. Since he was homeschooled, the community college was his first experience with public education and learning in a formal classroom setting. It was also his first experience dealing with the public stereotypes and questions from his peers and professors regarding his Asian American identity. Our interview took place during his second year at the community college and it was clear that he was still processing it all. When he initially contacted me to schedule an interview, he was unsure if he was a qualified candidate for the study because he had been estranged from the Asian heritage for so long. As a transracial adoptee myself, I know it can be awkward and even uncomfortable discussing your Asian American identity and heritage, especially with a total stranger. I commended him for

doing the interview because his experiences emphasize the diversity that exists among Asian American community college students.

### Pressure from Other Asians

Although the research suggests Asian American parents tend to place the highest expectations for education on their children (Kim, 1993), the students in this study said they experienced more pressure and criticism from their Asian American parents' friends, than they did from their parents. They admitted some of the expectations that Asian Americans place on their children include attending top tier universities, establishing prestigious careers, and earning high salaries; but these expectations were not consistently enforced in their families. One student said her parents would passive aggressively remind her about the success of their friends' daughter and the nice stuff she could afford to purchase because she was a doctor. However, the student said the pressure subsided a lot after her family moved away from the predominately Asian community and into a predominately white community.

Another student who was a traditional Asian American student decided to attend the community college because he was accepted into the Rising Star program, which covered the extra college expenses not covered by the Pell grant. Although his family supported his college choice to attend a community college, he did not receive the same support from his peers. There were two Asian American peers that teased him during his senior year in high school for choosing to attend a community college and they nicknamed him "Star Student." He said the other Asian American students thought attending a community college was just as bad as not attending college at all. Other



participants admitted that they did not have many Asian American friends, but were close friends with other racial minority students.

### Personal Well-Being

Many students demonstrated an interest and need for support services but their families did not approve of counseling services or even believe depression was real. Some students moved out of their parent's house because they felt the family demands were too much. One student confessed that her Asian family and community were extremely racist against other racial minorities. This student was a lesbian and in a relationship with a black female. Her parents disapproved of her being gay on many levels, but they were most unhappy because her girlfriend was not Asian.

Other students in this study mentioned they had a history of serious drug and alcohol addiction that had led them to be estranged from one or both parents. One student admitted to masking their insecurities by telling jokes or acting out for attention. He said his ideal career goals included moving to a state where marijuana was legal and obtaining a license to grow and distribute. His confession reminded me of something that another student had mentioned. The other student said he did not like the Asian American comedians who have become famous on YouTube because they have created an Asian stereotype that all Asians are comical and crave an audience.

I noticed that several students were over-involved in student organizations, held multiple leadership positions on campus, and also managed jobs outside of school. I concluded that some students were overcompensating for their inadequacies by being over-extending themselves in activities and taking advantage of every available student

leadership position at the college. For example, one student had an extensive resume listing his college activities and student leadership roles, but he had failed a class the previous semester and his activities continued to take priority over his classes. He was also disappointed that he was not accepted to a four-year college. Somehow he had decided that being over-involved in activities and having a large network of contacts would help him with transferring to a university; more so than having decent grades.

### Institutional Support

The findings in this study suggest Asian American community college students are excluded from the institutional practices and programming tailored to minority student success. The participants were unaware of any resources available at their colleges that specifically supported the success of Asian Americans. But one student said his college had a popular Japanese Culture Appreciation Club that focused on educating students about the Japanese culture.

Two participants attended a community college in the Southern Community College District that is an Asian American Native American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISI). Because their community college qualifies as an AANAPISI, it receives federal grant funding to offer programs focused on assisting AAPI college students (Museus, 2014; Pak, Maramba, & Hernandez, 2014). AANAPISIs are the latest minority serving institutions that have at least 10% AAPI enrollment and at least 50% degree seeking students receiving federal financial aid (Pak, Maramba, & Hernandez, 2014). The two students are older non-traditional students who are not involved in

campus activities student organization, so they could not tell me anything about AANAPISI programming.

Several students said they were unable to find scholarships that were specifically for Asian Americans. Many students must find transfer scholarships or they will not be able to afford tuition at the university. Several of the participants received the Pell grant, but there were a number of students whose parents' income disqualified them from receiving the Pell grant, but they still did not have enough money to pay the college expenses. I emailed the annual application for the Asian American Pacific Islander Scholarship Fund (AAPISF) to the participants and encouraged them to apply. The students pointed out there were several scholarships that existed for other racial minorities, but barely any scholarships for Asian Americans.

The students were also asked to explain all that is happening at their community colleges to help minorities succeed in general. The findings suggest there are a few community college that support institutional practices and programming tailored to minority student success. Community colleges that have strong Multi-cultural Student Associations tend to sponsor year round multi-cultural activities to raise appreciation for different cultures. The minority majority community colleges encourage minority students to hold leadership positions within the student organizations. Other students mentioned resources offered at their community colleges that were tailored for helping minority students succeed, such as Spanish dictation textbooks, developmental courses, and English Second Language courses. The majority of participants were unaware if their community college did anything to support the success of minority students. Many students said they were the only Asian American students in their

classes and they were not interested in being involved in student activities at their community college.

### Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from this study provide implications for policy for college officials to consider when developing policies focused on improving the college experiences of Asian American community college students. The implementation of institutional policies that establish opportunities or spaces for Asian Americans to explore their culture and identity, such as Asian American studies programs and courses, and guest speakers and diversity panels presenting on racism and Asian Americans (Museus, 2014; Museus, Maramba, & Teranishi, 2013; Ryoo & Ho, 2013). These implications align the needs of Asian American community college students to campus policies promoting opportunities for Asian American students to explore their identity development and engage in dialogue to share their stories, struggles, and achievements (Museus, 2014). Providing opportunities and exposing Asian American students to literature, storytelling, and open discussions will enhance the development of their Asian American identity so they may develop a better understanding of themselves and their place in a multiracial environment.

### Asian American Scholarships

Several participants reported they were unable to find scholarships available specifically for Asian Americans, but scholarships were available for every other racial minority. I understand it is not a quick and simple process to find new scholarships to

offer students. However, community college officials could consider implementing a scholarship search service or designate a scholarship advisor on campus to assist students with their scholarship search and completing the application process.

### Conclusion

This study produced much needed data on the college experiences of 28 Asian American community college students by encouraging them to reflect on their community college pathways. CRT and AsianCrit framed this study and provided the conceptual lens for interpreting and understanding the realities and individual experiences of Asian American community college students (Museus, 2014). The findings from this study provided information on how family, culture, the model minority myth, and institutional practices and policies influence the experiences and perceptions of Asian American community college students.

APPENDIX E  
INVITATION EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Prospective Participant,

(Recommender) gave me your email address and said that you may be interested in participating in my research study. I am a Higher Education Ph.D. Candidate at the University of North Texas and part of my dissertation research surrounds the college experiences and perceptions of Asian American community college students.

Currently, I am in the process of interviewing Asian American community college students and would love the opportunity to meet with you. I will only need about one hour of your time, just to ask you about your experiences at (insert community college name) thus far.

Please let me know if you're interested in meeting with me and when a good time/day would be for you to meet.

I appreciate your time and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Amanda E. Hamm  
Higher Education Ph.D. Candidate  
University of North Texas

APPENDIX F  
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

What did you receive pre-college?

High School Diploma

GED

What year did you complete High School/GED? \_\_\_\_\_

If attended high school, what was overall GPA: \_\_\_\_\_

High School Activities: \_\_\_\_\_

What community college do you attend? \_\_\_\_\_

What semester/year did you start community college? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your major? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you involved in activities at your community college? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please list: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your community college objective?

Complete Certificate

Complete Associate's Degree

Transfer to four-year Institution

If plan to transfer, which four-year university/college? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your tentative transfer semester/year? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you currently have a job? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, what is your job? \_\_\_\_\_

Number of work hours per week: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have post-college plans? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**Identity**

What is your ethnicity? (Circle more than one)

Chinese	Iwo Jiman	Japanese	Korean	Okinawan	Taiwanese
Bruneian	Burmese	Cambodian	Filipino	Hmong	Indonesian
Laotian	Malaysian	Thai	Singaporean	Vietnamese	Asian Indian
Bangladeshi	Bhutanese	Maldivian	Nepalese	Pakistani	Sri Lankan
White Caucasian	Black African	Hispanic Latino	Native American	Pacific Islander	Other

What language(s) do you speak at home? \_\_\_\_\_

**Family**

With whom do you live?

- Self
- Parents
- Spouse
- Other Family Members  
Please Explain \_\_\_\_\_
- Friends

Do you have children? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, how many \_\_\_\_\_

Select parents' (or other) and siblings' highest level of education. (Please check boxes)

Education Level	Father	Mother	Sibling 1	Sibling 2	Sibling 3
Some High School					
High School/GED					
Some College					
Associate's					
Bachelor's					
Master's					
Doctorate					

What is your father's occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your mother's occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX G  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Please tell me a brief family history, particularly as you were growing up?
  - a. How did your family influence your educational aspirations?
  - b. How did your family influence your college choice?
  - c. How did your Asian American identity affect your educational aspirations?
  - d. How did your Asian American identity affect your college choice?
2. Did you feel there were any obstacles or barriers to believing that college was possible for you?
  - a. How did you deal with these barriers?
  - b. In what ways were these barriers connected to your family?
  - c. What role(s) did your family play as you dealt with these barriers?
  - d. How were these barriers connected to your Asian American background?
  - e. How did you deal with these barriers?

*If participant says that he/she had no obstacles, ask:*

- Why do you believe you did not experience any obstacles?
  - Could you provide examples of individuals you knew who might have experienced barriers to believing college was possible?
3. As you were deciding to attend college, please describe any individuals who helped you in the process?
  4. How did your high school counselor or teachers adviser you about college?
  5. Please describe any groups (peers, informal, and formal) that helped you in deciding to prepare for, apply to, select, and then attend college? Describe any social networks (neighbors, extended family, religious, employers); community or school organizations/programs (school, local, summer bridge, regional, national).
  6. Please explain how and why you made the final decision to attend a community college?
  7. How did your family respond to your decision to attend a community college?
  8. How did your peers and others respond to your decision to attend a community college?
  9. How has your Asian American identity affected your interactions with faculty within your community college?
  10. How has your Asian American identity affected your interactions with fellow students within your community college?
  11. How has your Asian American identity influenced your overall community college experience?

12. What is your community college currently doing to help Asian Americans?
13. What is happening at your college to help minorities succeed overall?

APPENDIX H  
FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

What is your first and last name?

What is your email address?

What is your phone number? (optional)

Which option best describes your current status?

- I am currently not enrolled in college
- I am still enrolled at the same community college
- I am currently enrolled at a different college/university (please list institution name below)

Are you interested in participating in a brief member check focus group with other students to discuss the interview findings?

- Yes
- No

What has changed in your life personally and/or professionally since the interview? Briefly explain.

What is your community college currently doing to help Asian Americans? Anything different since the interview?

What is happening at your community college to help minorities succeed overall? Anything different since the interview?

Do you wish to continue receiving email updates about this study and Asian American student research and resources?

- Yes
- No

Please share any questions and comments. Thank you so much!

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