THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED:

SOUTHEAST ASIAN AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATES'

COLLEGE-GOING EXPERIENCES

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This hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry uses a social, cultural, and aspirational capital framework to explore the college-going experience of Southeast Asian American undergraduates to account for divergent experiences that get lost in generalizations about Asian Americans. Drawing from the college-going experience of Vietnamese and Cambodian American undergraduates at a public research university, this study provides valuable insight into the complex set of social realities for immigrant and/or refugee students and families and strategies students use to navigate their multiple worlds in their quest for a higher education and thus informs education policy and practice. Drawing from Seidman's (1991) phenomenological interview series, data collection entailed in-depth individual interviews of seven Southeast Asian American undergraduates and analysis of participant-selected artifacts.

The two primary findings—1) intimate familial relations are paramount to college-going and 2) bounded college-going habitus inhibits smooth path to university—signal variability across the three forms of capital due to tensions participants experienced when engaging with

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their respective environments. One form of capital could compensate for limitations in another, for example, the interplay of which changes over time in accordance with a student's lived experience.

While schools facilitate and validate the notion of higher education as the pathway for success, it is imperative to consider family structure *and* influence in order to understand how multiple complex and at times competing influences interact to impact college-going for Southeast Asian American students. Tapping into the dynamic interplay of aspirational and cultural capital through intimate familial relations was one primary strategy participants utilized to facilitate their college-going. Participants possessed a college-going habitus developed in part by parents' high educational values and college/career aspirations and expectations. Additionally, older siblings attending or as recent college graduates facilitated college-going for younger siblings thru the various roles they played such as advisor, tutor, role model, and surrogate parent. This research points to an interdependent approach to education that challenges previous literature. Participant experiences suggest that familial roles and responsibilities are blurred, thus creating the argument for an interdependent conceptualization of family as an institutional context that influences the educational experience and outcomes of Southeast Asian American students.

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

The steps leading to college enrollment and completion are issues not only for the individual and institution, but also for the nation. As demographics shift, we need to be aware of the complexity of populations that fall under pan-racial categorizations such as Asian Americans and experiences that facilitate and hinder their transition from high school to postsecondary education. The goal of this research is to move beyond data that mask the diverse educational experiences of Southeast Asian Americans by qualitatively exploring individual students' paths to university and how they invest in education through the dispositions they acquire, the resources available to them, and the choices they make as a result. The frameworks of habitus (Bourdieu, 1986), social (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988), cultural (Bourdieu, 1986), and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) frame this exploration.

Scholars stress that access to postsecondary education continues to be a barrier subgroups within the pan-Asian categorization such as Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and Vietnamese Americans (Hune, 2002; Oliva & Nora, 2004; Teranishi, Lok, & Nguyen, 2013). Data that homogenize Asian Americans mask the diverse educational experiences and needs within the population and tend to reinforce the model minority stereotype, thereby concealing difficulties some Asian Americans face. Because of this, some Asian Americans get lost in the system and are in essence denied access to resources that could otherwise direct them toward a path of graduating from secondary school or continuing with and completing a postsecondary education

(Hune, 2002).

On the surface, Asian Americans fare well when it comes to the educational pipeline, but certain ethnic groups within the Asian American population struggle to even finish high school (see Figure 1). Larger proportions of subgroups from South and East Asia have higher levels of educational attainment compared to their Southeast Asian American peers. Between 29 percent to 38 percent of Hmong, Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese Americans 25 years or older have less than a high school diploma compared to under nine percent for their South or East Asian American peers with Indian, Korean, Japanese, and Taiwanese backgrounds (Teranishi et al., 2013).

Although research has shown that academic preparation, measured by high school GPA, is a strong predictor of enrollment and persistence (Allen, Robbins, Casillas, & Oh, 2008; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009; Titus, 2004), it can be the non-academic, external pressures that result in students not matriculating let alone completing a degree program (Spradlin, Rutkowski, Burroughs, & Lang, 2010). While some studies focus on barriers for minority students' participation in postsecondary education, few consider how students navigate their different worlds and succeed despite obstacles known to hinder their access to postsecondary education (Nuñez, 2005).

More research is needed to understand the particular strengths and needs Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and Vietnamese Americans as research and institutions of higher education tend to treat Asian Americans as a monolithic group (Ngo & Lee, 2007). To better understand the pipeline to higher education for ethnic subgroups within the Asian American population and account for the divergent experiences that get lost in the generalizations about Asian Americans, my interest is in learning how Southeast Asian American undergraduates make meaning of their

college-going journey. I am also concerned with how habitus and social, cultural, and aspirational capital promote or constrain their capacity to negotiate institutional contexts throughout this process. Exploring the interplay of habitus and multiple capitals is personally significant due to my own college-going experience. I believe expectations and choices are bounded by economic and sociocultural conditions that serve as opportunities and constraints. I believe change happens through interactions within and outside of oneself.

With these issues in mind, this research is guided by several assumptions. One, the college-going process is an inherently complex phenomenon influenced by social and cultural dynamics within family, community, and school contexts. Two, minority or marginalized individuals who have lived through their own college-going experience can provide valuable insight into their complex set of realities and strategies they used to navigate their multiple worlds in their quest for a higher education. Habitus and social, cultural, and aspirational capital are the frameworks through which I examine how seven Southeast Asian American undergraduates experience and understand their college-going journey at an Eastern public research university.

Appreciating the complexity of the college-going experience, I employ hermeneutic phenomenology as the methodology to explore the experiences of my participants. This interpretive approach describes the meaning of the lived experience of a phenomenon for participants and therefore allows them to situate themselves within larger contexts that frame their experience. Given that interpretation frames all knowledge, the researcher also resides within the boundaries of the research. My own path to higher education as a result becomes part of the context of the study as I interpret participants' experiences through my own interpretive lens just as they interpret their experience through their own interpretive lens.

1.1   PROBLEM STATEMENT

The media are rife with headlines calling for higher standards and accountability in K-16 education so students acquire the academic and technical skills needed for the United States (U.S.) to remain competitive in the 21st century knowledge economy. One proxy for such knowledge is formal educational attainment. Through 2018, it is projected that 63 percent of jobs in the U.S. will require some form of postsecondary education, and the demand for workers with two or more years of postsecondary education will far exceed supply (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). A college education in the U.S. is often a prerequisite for higher earnings and social mobility (Grodsky & Jackson, 2009; Louie, 2007). Benefits include, but are not limited to, the likelihood of lower levels of unemployment, higher occupational status and earnings, and higher levels of civic participation (Baum & Payea 2004; Leslie & Brinkman 1988; Perna 2003; Perna 2005). Given the demand for a more educated workforce and the individual and societal advantages of continuing education, President Barack Obama, in his address to a joint session of Congress (2009), urged "every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training" (para. 64). His goal is for the U.S. to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020 in order to "out-educate" and "out-compete" the rest of the world (Obama, 2011, para. 38).

Raising educational attainment of the U.S. population requires education policy to consider career and educational pathways and motivations for enrolling in and completing an education program (Louie, 2007). Research suggests students' social, cultural, human, and economic capital prior to and after enrolling in higher education determine their educational trajectory (Cabrera, et al., 2006; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Inquiries into diverse populations suggest that white and minority populations have different

processes for accessing resources necessary for attending higher education (Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Kim, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Perna & Titus, 2005; Wells, 2008). Further, differences exist *within* racial/ethnic groups (Teranishi, 2002). It is therefore valuable to situate Southeast Asian American students in their various contexts as a minority and marginalized population within the pan-Asian and dominant narratives.

Asian Americans rank highest in terms of school completion and college entrance, persistence, and completion (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Relying on aggregate data, however, presents a simplistic and inaccurate picture that ignores the diversity within the pan-Asian group and leads practitioners and policy makers to believe that the majority of this population is high-achieving (Lee, 2009). It is not until the Asian categorization is broken down into subgroups that striking differences emerge. Although Asians are more likely than Whites, Blacks or Hispanics to complete college, only 10 percent of Laotians and 11.5 percent of Hmong earn a degree compared to 31.9 percent of Japanese and 30.2 percent of Asian Indians (see Figure 1).
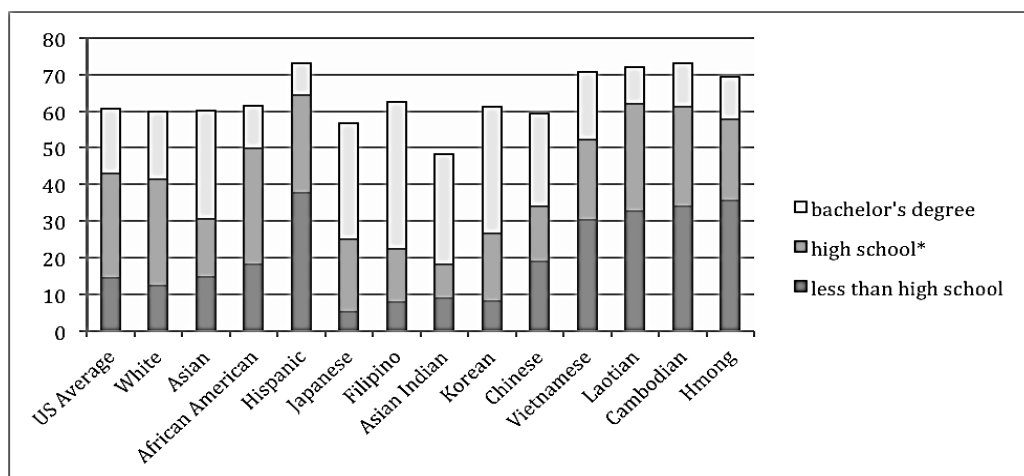
Figure 1. Educational attainment of selected groups 25 and over in the U.S.

* includes equivalency
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010)
Note: Missing from table are figures for 'some college' and 'graduate/professional degree.'

Teranishi, Lok, and Nguyen (2013) argue that difference in socioeconomic status is one of the leading contributors of educational attainment disparities within the Asian American population. The median Asian American family income is higher than that for all racial groups, which could be attributed to a higher proportion of Asian Americans with college degrees (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2013). Similar to educational attainment data, aggregating income data masks challenges of certain subgroups within the Asian American population as well. According to data from the 2013 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement, the 2012 national average for people living in poverty[1] was 15 percent. In the aggregate, Asians fared better than most with just under 12 percent below poverty compared to almost 10 percent for non-Hispanic Whites, less than 26 percent for Hispanics (of any race), and approximately 27 percent for Blacks (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2013). These numbers reflect those pulled from 2000 Census data that indicate the poverty rate for the total population and Asians is between 12 and 13 percent (Reeves & Bennett, 2004). Disaggregating the 2000 Census data shows that the poverty rate is highest among Hmong, Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese. Hmong Americans have a startlingly high poverty rate at 37.8 percent, followed closely by Cambodian Americans at 29.3 percent and Laotian Americans at 18.5 percent compared to Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans at 9.7 percent and 13.5 percent, respectively (Reeves & Bennett, 2004). Due to the "bimodal distribution" (Gloria & Ho, 2003) of educational attainment and socioeconomic status within the pan-Asian population, more attention needs to be directed toward understanding the educational trajectory of Southeast Asian Americans, particularly Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and Vietnamese Americans as these

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[1] A family is counted as poor if its pretax money income is below its poverty threshold. Money income does not include noncash benefits such as public housing, Medicaid, employer-provided health insurance and food stamps (U.S, n.d.).

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subgroups tend to be most understudied and at-risk, hence marginalized, among the Asian American population (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Yeh, 2004-2005).

This is particularly significant in light of changing demographics resulting in an increasingly larger and diverse Asian American population (Gloria & Ho, 2003; Kumashiro, 2006; Park, 2008). The largest population increases this past decade have been in the Hispanic and Asian populations (see Figure 2). Between 2000 and 2010, the Asian population experienced
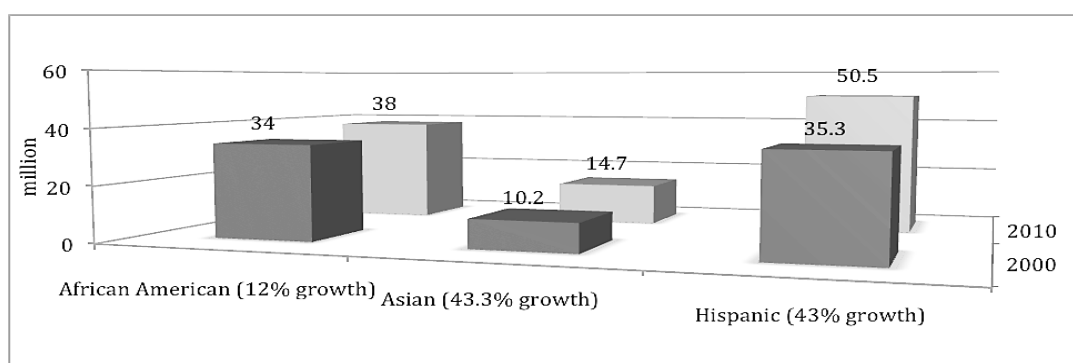
Figure 2. Population growth for largest minority groups in the U.S. (2000-2010)

Source: Humes, K. R., Jones, N. A., & Ramirez, R. R. (2011)

the fastest growth rate, increasing by over 43 percent (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). Census data of Asian alone groups indicate that from 2000 to 2010, the Hmong, Cambodian, and Vietnamese populations experienced a higher percentage of growth compared to the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean populations (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012). By the year 2050, the Census Bureau projects the Asian American population will be more than 40.6 million, almost 10 percent of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Within the Asian American population, over twenty ethnic subgroups exist, which can further be delineated by language (Teranishi et al., 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The projected growth of this heterogeneous population calls even more attention to the need for research on how K-16

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education can respond to the bi-modal distributions within the pan-Asian population.

1.2   SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To deconstruct the notion of Asian American students as a monolith and better understand the pipeline to higher education for Southeast Asian Americans as a marginalized and vulnerable population, this study qualitatively explores the path to university for selected Vietnamese American and Cambodian American undergraduates at an Eastern public research university by understanding how these particular students invest in education through the dispositions they acquire, the resources available to them, and the choices they make as a result.

Exploring Southeast Asian American students' path to university is relevant for several reasons. First, their presence on campuses supports a diversity agenda by expanding understandings of diversity and enriching the college experience of their peers. The Asian American population itself is significant due to the wide range of languages, religions, socio-economic levels, political leanings, English proficiency levels, and cultures that fall under the pan-Asian categorization. Exposure to such diversity enriches the college experience by "enhance[ing] the intellectual and personal impact of college" (Pascarella, 2006, p. 511). Increasing the diversity of the student population through increasing enrollment of underrepresented minorities contributes to the collective college experience.

Second, as demographics shift, issues of diversity increase in importance and institutional policies and practices need to address to the complexity of populations that fall under pan-ethnic categorizations such as Asian Americans (Chaudhari, Chan, & Ha, 2013). Understanding the college-going experiences of ethnic subgroups within the Asian American population sheds light

on the convergence of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, immigration status, gender, and context in shaping students' college-going experiences and ultimately decision making. Knowing the challenges and needs of diverse populations can advance educational equity through creating policies and programs designed to support these students based on an understanding of their personal contexts.

Furthermore, research suggests that social and cultural capital in the forms of parent and student expectations, obligations, and social networks within the family, school, college, and community impact students' educational experiences (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; McDonough, 1997; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Wells, 2008); differences in the significance of such forms of capital seem to differ across and within racial/ethnic groups (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Perna & Titus, 2005; Strange, 2000). Existing research tends to be quantitative in nature, "suited to establishing the existence of potential casual relationships" (Pascarella, 2006, p. 515), yet unable to capture nuances that help us understand "the processes and mechanism underlying [such] causal linkages" (p. 516). As a result, more qualitative research is needed on the significance of capital within racial/ethnic groups, which translates in this study to research on understanding how Southeast Asian American students navigate their social and institutional contexts along their path to university (Ng, Lee & Pak, 2007; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Yeh, 2004-2005; Park, 2008). Knowing their personal journey is an opportunity to understand their needs and challenges, which is particularly salient as research, schools, and institutions of higher education tend to treat Asian Americans as a monolithic group and focus instead on African American and Latino populations (Ngo & Lee, 2007).

This qualitative study focuses on the college-going experiences of Southeast Asian American undergraduates to account for the divergent experiences that get lost in the

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generalizations about Asian Americans. Doing so facilitates an understanding of how they navigate their social and institutional contexts along their path to higher education and can inform secondary and postsecondary education policy, programs, and services. In general, more research is needed on subgroups within the Asian American population (Coloma, 2006; Park, 2008); this study focuses on undergraduates with a Southeast Asian background as they are the most understudied and at-risk among the Asian American population (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Yeh, 2004-2005). I develop new perspectives on the college-going experience for what the literature identifies as a marginalized and vulnerable group. I operate under the premise that participants' description and understanding of their own experience can provide valuable insight into the complex set of social realities for Southeast Asian Americans and strategies they use to navigate their multiple worlds in their quest for a higher education. The primary research question and sub-questions guiding this study are:

- How do seven Southeast Asian American undergraduates at an Eastern public research university understand and experience their path to university?
    - How is habitus shaped by socio-cultural and institutional contexts?
    - How do social, cultural, and aspirational capital promote or constrain students' capacity to negotiate institutional contexts?

1.3   DEFINITIONS

Asian American as a category does not exist in Census data. Rather, "Asian" is used to denote someone with origins from the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. There are 19 racial and ethnic categories: Asian Indian, Bangladeshi, Bhutanese, Burmese, Cambodian,

Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Malaysian, Nepalese, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Thai, and Vietnamese. The largest groups represented in the U.S. of Asian Americans who self-reported being of one group or a combination of Asian and other group(s) are Chinese (3.7 million), Filipino (3.4 million), Asian Indian (3.2 million), Vietnamese (1.7 million), Korean (1.7 million), and Japanese (1.3 million), followed by Pakistani, Cambodian, Hmong, Thai, and Laotian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Unless otherwise stated, Asian American, students of Asian origin or students with an Asian background refers to students with East, South or Southeast Asian heritage. In some of the studies reviewed, Asian origin is not specified, but for the purpose of this research, the aforementioned will be assumed.

College-going refers to going to college; I interpret it broadly to encompass students' experiences leading to college, which includes influences throughout their education that shape their trajectory to university. I use "path to university" as a synonymous term for "college-going."

Unless identified otherwise, e*ducational aspirations* represent what people hope will happen and e*ducational expectations* represent what people think will happen. Expectations, Jacob and Wilder (2010) suggest, are someone's best guess of an individual's eventual attainment using available information (e.g., ability, family background, school quality, neighborhood) (p. 17).

Definitions for *first-, second-, and third-generation immigrants* follow those provided by Kim and Diaz (2013): first-generation immigrants are "foreign-born nationals who enter the United States for permanent residency" (p. 10); second-generation immigrants are born in the United States and have at least one parent who was foreign-born; and third-generation immigrants or higher are individuals born in the United States "with at least one second-

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generation immigrant parent" (p. 10). These are the definitions I use in reference to immigrant status unless stated otherwise.

Refugee, as defined in the Immigration and Nationality Act, is "any person who is outside of any country of such person's nationality … and who is unable or unwilling to return, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion" (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2013).

1.4 ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTERS

In addition to the introduction, this dissertation is comprised of seven chapters and an appendix containing the consent form and data collection instruments. In chapter 2, I outline the conceptual frameworks used in this study. I also present and review existing educational attainment and access and college choice literature that explores experiences informing college-going for Southeast Asian American students. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the study's research design and methodology. In chapter 4, I describe participant pseudonyms and present vignettes on participants' interpretations of their college-going experience. In Chapter 5, I explore the two sub-questions guiding this study through a thematic analysis that lays the groundwork for chapter 6. In chapter 6, I present and discuss this study's two primary findings through meta-themes. The two meta-themes— intimate familial relations are paramount to college-going and bounded college-going habitus thwarts smooth path to university—serve to highlight the essence of meaning of core influences that shaped participants' path to university

and allow me to reflect on and discuss the meaning of these influences in relation to the literature. Chapter 7 follows with the conclusion and implications for this research. Included is a summary of the research findings from chapters five and six and policy and practice recommendations.

2.0   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This section begins with an overview of the immigration patterns for Asian Americans, highlighting the historical contexts for the dominant Asian immigrant groups. I follow with the conceptual framework for this study, which includes habitus (Bourdieu, 1986) and cultural (Bourdieu, 1986), social (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988), and aspirational (Yosso, 2005) capital. I then review the relevant literature, which is organized thematically around discussions on educational achievement and attainment, the model minority myth, challenges to educational achievement and attainment, educational aspirations and expectations, and parental involvement and engagement. I conclude with a summary of the section.

2.1   HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR ASIAN AMERICANS IN THE UNITED STATES

Knowing the immigration history of Asian Americans helps situate them in the broader American racial landscape, providing a context for their growth, struggles, and accomplishments. Large-scale immigration of Asians, notably Chinese, began in 1852 after the discovery of gold in California. When the Gold Rush lost momentum and gold became more difficult to find, Chinese turned to construction of the transcontinental railroad (Fong, 2008). After the railroad was completed, Chinese workers transitioned to agriculture, manufacturing, retail, and domestic services. The Japanese, on the other hand, did not immigrate in large numbers until the 1890s.

Instead of coming to the continental United States, many immigrated to Hawaii as merchants and students. They began arriving on the United States mainland in the early 1900s as the need for agricultural laborers increased (Fong, 2008). They differed from the Chinese in that the Chinese were predominantly single men with little or no access to Chinese women (Weinberg, 1997), a reality that intensified after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which severely limited immigration and prohibited naturalization (Fong, 2008). As a result of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) and ensuing rise of Japan as a military power, the United States, through the 1907 Gentlemen's Agreement, prohibited the immigration of Japanese male laborers and instead admitted Japanese women (Fong, 2008; Weinberg, 1997). The Japanese were therefore able to start families and settle, becoming the largest Asian American communities at that time (Fong, 2008). Asian Indians and Koreans arrived in smaller numbers in the early 1900s to work in California agriculture. Korean immigration, however, was suspended shortly thereafter until the 1940s after their liberation from Japan (Fong, 2008).

After a series of local, state and federal discriminatory laws that reflected and perhaps inflamed anti-Asian sentiment, the American government reached a low point when it evacuated and interned Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. While they were being villanized by the media and the general public (Fong, 2008), Chinese Americans made headway in employment.

The United States began changing its discriminatory laws against Asians after World War II. Around 18,000 Chinese refugees, as a result of the 1949 Communist Revolution in China, were allowed to enter and stay in the United States. These individuals were professionals who easily found commensurate positions, integrated into American life, and became the foundation

of the Chinese American middle class; they were the reverse of earlier Chinese (Fong, 2008; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

The 1965 Immigration Reform Act, intended to encourage family reunification, increased the allocation of visas from 150,000 to 290,000, with a ceiling for the Eastern Hemisphere at 170,000 and 120,000 for the Western Hemisphere (i.e., the Americas, the western portions of Europe and Africa, and numerous territories in Oceania). Each country in the Eastern Hemisphere was allowed a maximum of 20,000. While countries in the Western Hemisphere previously had no such limit, it was the first time the Western Hemisphere itself had a visa limit (Center for Immigration Studies, 1995). In 1969, immigrant visas were allocated without preference to any country (Wong, 1998). Prior to immigration reform, Asian immigrants accounted for approximately 8 percent of the total immigrant population, whereas they accounted for roughly 43 percent of the total immigrant population in the ten-year period succeeding immigration reform (Wong, 1998).

During the 1970s, the Asian immigrant population consisted mainly of professionals, including the first wave of political refugees (i.e., the educated urban elite and middle class from Vietnam) before or after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. The U.S. government's involvement in the Indochina Conflict (i.e., Vietnam War: 1954-1975) to thwart the spread communism contributed to a refugee population for which it was responsible. After the fall of Saigon in 1975, the Khmer Rouge, a communist power, seized control of Cambodia. Within five years, the Khmer Rouge, under the command of Pol Pot, killed approximately one-eighth of the Cambodian population in an attempt to create an egalitarian agrarian society (Mir & Qureshi, 2010). Cambodians able to escape, either before or after the Vietnamese captured Phnom Penh, largely fled to Thailand or Vietnam (Lieu, 2003; Mir & Qureshi, 2010). Vietnamese and

Cambodian refugees were admitted to the United States, thus becoming the larger, more heterogeneous second and subsequent waves of refugees to the United States. These refugees were largely comprised of less advantaged people with fewer transferable skills, resulting in a bimodal class distribution for the Asian American population (Lee, 2009).

In 2007-2009, the percentage of foreign-born Asian Americans was roughly 60 percent, over 20 percent higher than that for Latinos. Between 2000 and 2009, almost one-third of the 9.2 million foreign-born Asian Americans entered the United States. Japanese and Hmong Americans are the only Asian American subgroups with majority native-born populations at 28 percent and 44 percent, respectively (Asian Pacific American Legal Center [APALC] & Asian American Justice Center [AAJC], 2011).

Despite changes in immigration and naturalization policies and regardless of ethnicity and socioeconomic class, Asian Americans continue to face discrimination and are viewed by many non-Asians as foreigners (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Chun & Zalokar, 1992; Lee, 2009). A 2001 study commissioned by the Committee of 100, a non-partisan organization committed to providing a Chinese American perspective to Asian American issues and U.S.-China relations, found that a quarter of those polled held negative attitudes toward Chinese Americans. According to the study, some feared that Chinese Americans had misplaced loyalty and believed that the growth of the Asian American population was not in the best interest of the United States (Martilla Communications Group, 2001). A follow-up opinion survey nine years later indicated improved attitudes, however other survey results complicate these findings. Almost half of the general public thought Asian Americans would be more loyal to their country of ancestry than to the U.S. Other questions looking at loyalties indicated that just over half of the general population believed Chinese Americans would support the United States over China in military

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or economic issues while approximately three-quarters of Chinese Americans indicated they would (Larson, 2009).

Positioning Asian Americans as foreigners in their own land excludes them from dominant discussions on race, which is heightened by the Black-White racial paradigm that exists in the United States (Chun & Zalokar, 1992). When they are included in discussions on race, it is usually as model minorities. In these instances, "Asian Americans' success," according to Lee (2009) "is used as proof that equal opportunity exists…they become 'honorary Whites,' a status that denies the fact that Asian Americans experience racism" (p. 6).

2.2   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Racial differences in academic outcomes and educational attainment are significant and call for attention. One premise underpinning this study is evidence that college-going experiences are shaped by an individual's background characteristics and institutional influences (Black, Lincove, Cullinane, & Veron, 2014; McDonough, 1997). In order to understand some of the disparities in academic outcomes between and within minority groups, it is useful to consider at "the actual process through which particular cultural and social resources become translated within particular educational contexts" (Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007, p. 2338). The frameworks of habitus (Bourdieu, 1986), social (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988), cultural (Bourdieu, 1986), and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) help to explore the extent to which families and students invest in education through the dispositions they acquire, the resources available to them, and the choices they make as a result.

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2.2.1   Cultural capital

Cultural capital refers to "class-based socialization of culturally relevant skills, abilities, tastes, preferences, or norms that act as a form of currency in the social realm" (Winkle-Wagner, 2010, p. 5). It is acquired through family and schooling. For Bourdieu, education serves as a device that selects and reproduces students based on a hierarchy of implicit and explicit qualities recognized by the dominant group (Naidoo, 2004). Families with the most valued forms of cultural capital are middle- and upper-class families (McDonough, 1997). Students who possess or have access to cultural capital are those who generally excel academically or perform better than their peers who are not equipped with cultural capital (Dumais, 2002; Mickelson, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Those who lack cultural capital may limit their educational options due to unfamiliarity with cultural norms or excel academically to compensate for less-valued cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; McDonough, 1997).

According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital, acquired primarily through family and schooling, is a class-based reproduction strategy that exists in three forms or "states"— embodied, objectified, and institutionalized—and is manifested differently in each one. In the embodied state it takes the form of "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" (p. 47), for example culturally based skills, tastes, or norms that allow one to appreciate and understand cultural goods. In the objectified state, it takes the form of cultural goods such as books. In the institutionalized state, it typically takes the form of educational qualifications. Both of the latter forms of cultural capital require embodied cultural capital before they can be realized. Cultural capital differs from other forms of capital in its obscure transmission and acquisition. It is similar to other forms of capital in that it is symbolic and only relevant in relation to a given field or environment (Bourdieu, 1986).

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In an educational context, cultural capital can be activated through parental involvement. Research suggests that certain forms of parental involvement, which were found to differ by race, seem to be valued more by the school than other forms (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Lee and Bowen's (2006) examination of parent involvement and the achievement gap found that frequent parent involvement at school coupled with high educational expectations was associated with higher academic achievement for White students. High educational expectations coupled with parent involvement of a different nature for some racial/ethnic minority parents (e.g., parents' management of their child's time at home) did not have the same impact.

The complication with different types of parent involvement and its potential impact on academic achievement is that schools are designed to support students and families from the dominant culture (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). If parents are not able to participate in a manner that conforms to school norms and expectations, they are at a disadvantage. This suggests that the cultural capital of the White parents in Lee and Bowen's (2006) study could be more aligned with that of the education system or setting. Racial/ethnic minority parents might be constrained due to time, language ability, knowledge of the U.S. educational system, or cultural differences (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Olivos, Gallagher, & Aguilar, 2010). In Thao's (2003) study on Hmong students, Thao found that although Hmong parents had high expectations for their children and wanted them to succeed in school, they felt they did not have the necessary skills or knowledge "to guide [their] children" (p. 40). Research thus demonstrates that social and cultural capital varies by race/ethnicity (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Thao, 2003), and students more equipped with valued forms of social and cultural capital or have the ability to find and access it, tend to do better academically and attend college (Koyama, 2007). According to Bourdieu (1997), individuals develop class-based strategies for

educational achievement that affect the type of college education students intend to pursue (McDonough, 1997). For the twenty-four high school females, in McDonough's (1997) qualitative study, she found that students search process was a function of their socioeconomic status and access to high school resources. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds experienced a "seamless" college choice process due in large part to their college-going habitus shaped by their families, communities, and schools.

2.2.1.1 Habitus Beginning in childhood and continuing through adulthood, habitus is the understanding individuals develop about their place in the world or a given field (Mickelson, 2003). It is the collective disposition that influences people's beliefs, expectations, and actions or "the sum total of one's cultural capital" (Winkle-Wagner, 2010, p. 8); it is their worldview. Habitus embodies students' background characteristics—such as gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status—and social and cultural capital through aspirations, attitudes, expectations, knowledge, and resources. Once internalized, a person learns growing up and as an adult what is possible or impossible given their 'position' in society. This is a fundamental concept in understanding how students make sense of the education system, form educational aspirations or expectations, and decide to invest in education (McDonough, 1997; Mickelson, 2003; Dumais, 2002). Simply put, students will often rise to their belief or understanding of their place in the world, which is bound by social class. If a student has been taught through his/her upbringing that they—*and people like them*—are capable of a given degree of academic and later occupational excellence or *only* capable of a given degree of academic and later occupational mediocrity or failure, chances are those expectations will turn into reality (Dumais, 2002).

Habitus is active in relation to a field, and a given field can contribute to different experiences and outcomes for students despite students' maintaining the same habitus across

fields (Reay, 2010). Field is a space in which symbolic capital is produced and deemed as valuable or not and thus also functions as a space of contention where dominant and subordinate groups struggle for control (Dumais, 2002). One simple example of this is bilingualism in the field of schooling. In a bilingual family, code-switching could be an accepted way of communicating and embody membership in a certain ethnic group. In a classroom where the teacher has no training or experience in linguistics, language acquisition, or multiculturalism, code-switching or language mixing could be interpreted as a deficiency. What was previously a normative communication style and value for the student is not only unacceptable in school, but could have detrimental ramifications if he is placed in remedial or special education, subject to low teacher expectations, or discriminated against.

Habitus in research literature has been used to explore the habitus of immigrants and low- and high-SES students to understand the forces that shape it and in turn its influence on college-going and the ways in which students engage in the college choice process (Griffin, del Pilar, McIntosh, & Griffin, 2012; McDonough, 1997). Griffin, del Pilar, McIntosh, and Griffin's (2012) research found that a high value of education coupled with high educational expectations shaped the habitus of Black immigrant students attending a selective research university. This was evident regardless of parents' educational attainment. Also shaping their habitus was a strong commitment to families. A degree at a selective institution was interpreted as a means toward social mobility for students and their families. The families of these students had clearly defined expectations since their migration to the U.S. was intentional and rooted in a desire for educational opportunities unavailable in their native country. This translated into students developing a college-going habitus at an early age. They did not aspire to a higher education; they expected one, motivated in part by their commitment to support their family.

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Rather than situating students within an individual context, McDonough (1997) explored how institutions shape habitus for high school students of different socioeconomic classes. If a school culture has low expectations for its low-income students and does not present them with opportunities they might not otherwise consider or know of, students are likely to make decisions from the same class-based habitus they entered school with. Schools, in such cases, reinforce social reproduction as students continue to operate from a class-based habitus. The cultural capital and class-based habitus of the parents and students in McDonough's study represented their understanding of academic ability and class and shaped assumptions they made about college-going and selection. Their habitus translated into "entitlement" (p. 152) students felt about their entrance and participation in certain types of institutions. Students' entitlement was connected to class in that those from a higher-SES family and school expected to attend the most selective institutions they could gain admission to while those from lower-SES families and schools expected to attend local 4-year or community colleges. In considering what informs students' decision to prepare for, enroll in, and attend college, habitus is thinking and believing what is possible. How habitus is activated depends largely on cultural and social capital.

2.2.2   Social capital

Social capital refers to social relations or connections that provide access to valued social goods. For Bourdieu (1986), social capital is

> the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition … which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (p. 51)

These "socially instituted" relationships take many forms, from a school, neighborhood, family, or ethnic group and are maintained by the exchange of tangibles and/or intangibles (e.g., money or knowledge, respectively).

The amount and degree of social capital one has is contingent on 1) "the size of network of connections he can effectively mobilize" (p. 51) and 2) the amount and nature of the capital of one's network of connections. Combined, these forces help determine the degree to which a given individual has access to economic resources and therefore will advance along certain lines.

In other words, it is not a neutral force people benefit equally from. Given Bourdieu's focus on social reproduction, his interpretation is one of "inclusion and exclusion" (Arneil, 2006, p. 8) whereby those in positions of power (e.g., elite in the dominant group) are able to maintain their positions at the expense of those from subordinate groups. Such positions of power allow them to tap into resources that advance their interests, while those from the working class, for example, are more than likely dependent on their own class-based "networks of connections," all of which perpetuate the status quo in terms of social class.

Unlike Bourdieu's relational social capital that focuses on (class) networks and resources (Arneil, 2006) that operate in a given social field, Coleman's (1988) social capital focuses on its function and is seen as a neutral resource individuals can utilize for their own gain. Social capital functions as multiple entities that 1) "consist of some aspect of a social structure and 2) facilitate certain actions of actors—whether personal or corporate actors—within the structure" (p. 98). A social structure provides resources for people (within that social structure) that promote their interests. However, participants in a given social structure benefit from most forms of social capital in that the benefits are typically not limited to the "receiver" or "provider," thus, in Coleman's perspective, making it a public good.

In Coleman's interpretation, there are three specific forms of social capital—or, what Portes (1998) refers to as mechanisms through which it is generated: 1) obligations and expectations, which depend on trustworthiness; 2) information channels; and 3) social norms tied to effective sanctions. What gives strength or legitimacy to the third form is the notion of closure within a social network or structure. Closure means that relationships in a given social structure have a certain degree of substance or weight that promotes adherence to norms and sanctions. Without a closed social network or structure, the benefits of that network cannot be realized. Social capital originates from relationships children have with their parents and from relationships parents have with other adults (Coleman, 1988).

Both Coleman's (1988) and Bourdieu's (1986) interpretations, have been applied to education in that social capital provides educational (dis)advantages for individuals, families or communities by facilitating access to valued social goods. For Coleman, the outcome is the creation of human capital. Even in the context of education, social capital is seen as important because education leads to the development of human capital. For Bourdieu, the outcome is capital and its relationship to the reproduction of inequality. Social capital is a class privilege whereas for Coleman, who extended it to include networks of non-elite groups, it is a public good.

Social capital is the ability of students to work within their networks to access information about college and obtain assistance with the college process. These networks could reside within the family through knowledgeable parents or other family members or within the school through teachers or college counselors. Parental involvement in particular is key in influencing students' academic trajectory and is often contingent on socioeconomic status and the information parents have about college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, &

Perna, 2008). Engberg and Allen (2011) found that low-income students enrolled in 2-year institutions tend to have "fewer aspirational influences, less frequent parental encouragement, less involved parents, greater numbers of peers with 2-year college plans, and lower usage of counselors, college representatives, and college publications/websites" (p. 801).

Research demonstrates the relationship between these forms of capital and students' habitus in shaping, for example, persistence. For 30 undergraduate students of color at a predominately White research university, "individual and collective cultural agents" provided students with information to help them successfully navigate the university environment (Museus & Quaye, 2009). For some, this came in the form of ethnic student organizations. One student commented on how their participation in one organization opened doors and presented opportunities previously unknown to them. Others commented on how participation in such organizations led to other rewarding contacts. For others, agents came in the form of mentors who helped them integrate into the university environment to facilitate their retention. These collective or individual connections validated students' cultural heritage and, by doing so, facilitated "adjustment, engagement and persistence" (Museus & Quaye, 2009, p. 87).

2.2.3   Aspirational capital

Despite cultural capital and habitus as frameworks for considering the formation and reproduction of college dispositions and expectations, a concept grounded in resiliency is a logical supplement for immigrant and refugee groups who maintain hope in the face of opposition. Yosso's (2005) aspirational capital provides this. Aspirational capital, one component of Yosso's model of community cultural wealth, advances the notion that individuals have

the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. This resiliency is evidenced in those who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals. (pp. 77-78)

This form of capital originated from research on the Chicana/o experience with education in the United States and the belief that structural barriers are surmountable. Despite having low educational outcomes, Chicana/o students and families maintain high educational expectations and aspirations (Solórzano, 1992). Aspirational capital is an asset that tends to reside in lower socioeconomic minority and marginalized populations. Its transmission is one of hope and upward mobility or the desire for a better life for oneself or one's children, however that is defined. Aspirational capital has since been found relevant for other minority groups as well. Basit (2012) found that it was a strong motivating force for young minority ethnic British citizens determined to realize their educational or career goals. Supporting Yosso's conceptualization, aspirational capital was interpreted as either an extension or substitute for social and cultural capital. For lower socioeconomic families with high aspirations for their children, aspirational capital was activated through support and encouragement and directing children toward resources that could provide the cultural capital they needed in fulfilling their goals.

Reddick, Welton, Alsandor, Denyszyn, and Platt (2011) argue that aspirational capital was also a key motivator for select African American and Latino/a university students who expressed that their parents were unaware of their academics or goals and provided them with no support or direction prior to university. For these participants, college aspirations stemmed from wanting a different life from that of their parent(s). One student remarked on becoming interested in school as a means of escaping teen pregnancy and jail. Some students were able to draw on their community for support, which ranged from positive role models to letters of

recommendation. Schools were often the only resort for those lacking both parental and community support. It is difficult to surmise how their academic trajectory would look had school-based college access programs not existed in these students' high minority, high poverty schools. Even with aspirational capital, students need access to reliable resources if the education they aspire to is to transform their lives.

Similar to the low-income minority students in Reddick et al.'s study, the Cambodian American college students in Tang, Kim, and Haviland's (2013) study experienced more non-academic support from parents in the form of encouragement opposed to active involvement in their academics. Parents' compensated for their unfamiliarity with the U.S. education system and limited English proficiency by imparting high aspirations and expectations. This occurred through sharing their histories and struggles as refugees and emphasizing the importance of a good education. Students' aspirational capital to attain a college education motivated them to navigate the education system the best they could. If college-going peers or reliable school-based resources were unavailable, students often persisted through a process of trial-and-error. One student commented on floundering in community college for four years before she understood the value of a four-year degree. Others mentioned receiving advice from high school counselors that negatively impacted access to more selective institutions. Research that taps into the lived experience of minority or marginalized students can further shed light on distinctions between influences on their college-going decision-making and behavior.

2.3   REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The relevant research reviewed for this study comes primarily from the educational attainment and access and college choice literature that explores experiences informing college-going for Southeast Asian American students. It is organized thematically around discussions on educational achievement and attainment, the model minority myth, challenges to educational achievement and attainment, educational aspirations and expectations, and parental involvement and engagement. Challenges to educational achievement and attainment will first present the unique issues immigrant and refugee students face followed by issues particular to Southeast Asian American students; the section finishes with a discussion on the cost of higher education and considerations for college-going. Under the umbrella of educational aspirations and expectations, I discuss how the value of education, educational aspirations and expectations, and family obligations drive students' college-going. Parental involvement and engagement touch on differences in support between parents, peers, and schools, and class-based strategies parents use to provide resources for their child's education.

2.3.1   Asian American educational achievement and attainment

The popular media and aggregate data on Asian Americans paint a bright picture in terms of academic excellence, including high school completion and college entrance, persistence, and completion. In 2012, the Pew Research Center released a report based on survey data of what was deemed a nationally representative sample of over 3,500 Asian Americans. This report, titled *The Rise of Asian Americans*, touted Asian Americans as "the highest-income, best-

educated and fastest-growing racial group in the United States" (p. v). These assertions are not new and are supported through aggregate data.

Asian Americans tend to have higher SAT and grade point averages than other racial groups. Xie and Goyette (n.d.) found that in 2000-01, Asians' average math SAT score was over 30 points higher than that for white students. Similarly, their average grade point average in 1998 was over 3.0 while that of their white counterparts was just under this mark. Furthermore, the U.S. average for people 25 years or older with less than a high school education is 14.4 percent; roughly the same holds true for Asians. In terms of postsecondary education, the U.S. average of people over 25 holding a bachelor's degree or higher is 28.2 percent while the average for Asians is 49.9 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Much of such aggregate data support the stereotype of Asian Americans as "model minorities" and mask disparities in educational outcomes and experiences within Asian American subgroups.

The reality is that ethnic subgroups within the Asian American population have varying rates of educational achievement and attainment. Larger proportions of subgroups from East Asia have higher levels of educational attainment compared to their Southeast Asian American peers. The largest percentage of Asian American subgroups 25 years or older with less than a high school diploma are Hmong, Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese at, respectively, 38 percent, 37 percent, 34 percent, and 29 percent (Teranishi et al., 2013). Compared to around 5 percent for Taiwanese and Japanese Americans with less than a high school diploma, these figures begin to shed light on the educational disparities within the Asian American population (Teranishi et al., 2013). Similar figures exist for those holding a bachelor's degree or higher. Not surprisingly, less than 15 percent of Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian Americans have

completed a four-year degree or higher, while over one third of the Taiwanese and Asian Indian American population 25 years or older have done so (Teranishi et al., 2013).

In a recent report calling for the collection and reporting of disaggregate data on pan-racial groups, Teranishi, Lok, and Nguyen (2013) point to differences in socioeconomic class as one of the leading contributors of educational attainment disparities within the Asian American population. Other factors are immigration patterns and the histories of the individuals and their respective countries. A large proportion of Asian immigrants enter the U.S. with a formal education, while others come from countries that offered limited educational opportunities (Teranishi, Nguyen, Choi, Pazich, He, Siqing, & Uh, n.d.). The Asian & Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund reports that almost 30 percent of adults in the Hmong community have only a primary school education (Teranishi, et al., n.d.).

While the 2012 Pew report depicting Asian Americans as models of economic and educational success was not wholly inaccurate, it was not entirely accurate either. It was flawed. What it did is perpetuate stereotypes by selecting a methodology that eliminated from their data collection and analysis the complex set of realities that exist for the ethnic subgroups that constitute the Asian American population. After criticism from Asian American advocacy groups, Pew updated their report in 2013 to include census data on a larger number of ethnic subgroups within the Asian American population, in addition to characteristics on the ethnic subgroups that tend to be missing from the dominant narratives on the educational achievement and attainment of minority populations.

2.3.2   Model minority myth

The model minority stereotype originated in the mid-1960s during a period of racial unrest in the United States. The term first appeared in a *New York Times* article, "Success Story Japanese American Style," in which the journalist, William Peterson, praised Japanese Americans for not being a "problem minority" (Peterson, 1966). Similar articles followed shortly thereafter, praising Chinese Americans for being model citizens who earned their status through hard work, diligence, and compliance without being dependent on assistance from the government.

Critics of the model minority stereotype felt that some politicians, journalists and White scholars at that time compared Japanese and Chinese Americans to Mexican Americans and African Americans in an attempt to illustrate and reinforce the notion that minorities *can* achieve the American dream and that peaceful integration *is* possible. One implication is that if other minority groups had an equally strong work ethic, one that reflects American meritocracy, they too could be successful (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Chun, 1995). In other words, it is convenient for the dominant culture to use Asian American values as a solution for racial inequalities. Another implication is that a concept such as model minority cannot exist without the opposite—"the concomitant lazy, underachieving black 'other'" (Lee, 2009, p. 7). Asian Americans, as a racial middle class, are used as a scapegoat, "diffusing hostility toward" Whites by other people of color (Matsuda as cited in Chou & Feagin, 2008, p. 16). The stereotype thus becomes a hegemonic device that maintains the status quo and attempts to set "standards for how minorities should behave" (Lee, 2009, p. 7).

This critical stance is not new and can be found in earlier literature such as a 1992 report by the United States Commission on Civil Rights that recognizes the model minority stereotype: 1) disparages other minorities; 2) takes attention away from issues and needs of Asian

Americans, especially those who fall far from the stereotype; 3) minimizes discrimination faced by those who could be seen as embodying the stereotype; and 4) creates unnecessary pressure for young people to perform, which has shown to lead to mental health problems including suicide (Chun & Zalokar, 1992; College Board, 2010).

Furthermore, Lee (2009) argues that in education when the dominant culture depicts Asian Americans as the model minority, the stereotype reinforces and advances not only the rhetoric of the achievement ideology promoted by neoliberals, but their educational policies that focus on standardized testing and accountability as well. The continual use of statistics to show the position of Asian Americans compared to other racial groups refers back to the discussion on using Asian Americans as the ideal all other students should aim for. In this case, however, White students join their minority counterparts since Asian Americans outperform Whites on so many indicators. Although test scores and other statistics indicate that Asian Americans lead in academics, aggregate data are misleading and conceal difficulties faced by some Asian Americans, especially those from Southeast Asia. Because of this, some Asian Americans get lost in the system and are in essence denied access to resources that could otherwise direct them toward a path of graduating from secondary school or continuing with a postsecondary education.

Enrollment in university, however, does not guarantee access to needed resources such as language programs; counseling; culturally aware staff, faculty and peers; or a welcoming and diverse campus environment. Because Asian Americans are often seen as the model minority, hence high achieving students free of problems, "institutions of higher education have tended to neglect and ignore the many serious problems and needs they have" (Suzuki, 2002, p. 29). Those who on the surface seem to embody the image still have to deal with the "negative consequences

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of the ostensibly positive image" (Suzuki, 2002, p. 22). Namely, the prejudice and discrimination students have to deal with not only from outside their racial group but at times within (Gao, 2010; Kawaguchi, 2003). Asian American students can feel extreme pressure from parents, instructors, and peers to perform, which for some could result in strained relationships and academic performance and psychological problems (Suzuki, 2002).

Chun and Zalokar (1992) contend that the general public's lack of knowledge about Asian Americans is not limited to the model minority stereotype but includes "unfamiliarity with the diverse histories, cultures and socioeconomic circumstances of Asian Americans" (p. 29). The Asian American pan-ethnic label itself obscures the heterogeneity of a population that represents a wide range of languages, religions, socio-economic levels, political leanings, English proficiency levels, and cultures.[2] In order to dismiss the myth of the model minority and lessen discriminatory attitudes or behaviors toward Asian Americans, it is important to understand their diversity and how sociocultural factors impact their educational experience and success.

2.3.3 Other challenges to educational achievement and attainment

2.3.3.1 Immigrant and refugee students The increasing numbers of immigrant and refugee students in U.S. schools face a set of unique challenges impacting their educational achievement. Using data from the Longitudinal Immigration Student Adaptation study, Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, and de Lardemelle (2010) found that family separation, school transitions, the process of English

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[2] According to the 2010 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), over 24 ethnic groups fall under the Asian categorization and over 18 Asian languages are represented on the *2010 Census Language Assistance Guides*. The national average for people living below the poverty line is 15.3 percent. For Asians it is 12.6 percent, 27.5 percent for Hmong, 21.9 percent for Cambodians, and 13.9 percent for Chinese.

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language acquisition, and social support networks influenced the academic trajectories for newcomer immigrant youth. In Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco's (2001) seminal research on the children of immigrants, they estimate that only around 20 percent of immigrant children come to the U.S. as a family unit. Separation from family can be for prolonged periods or in some instances result in permanent family divisions. Family separation only increases the need for quality social support networks. Such networks can reside in the school, family, or community and can smooth the transition to English medium instruction and a new education system (Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010).

Refugee students face additional hurdles beyond those experienced by other immigrants, some of which are considered forms of trauma. These could include loss of loved ones; fear of deportation; limited or no access to health care; insecure employment; unstable living arrangements; role reversals at home; nightmares; and stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination (Arzubiaga, Nogueron, & Sullivan, 2009; Landale, Thomas, & Van Hook, 2011; McBrien, 2005). Knowing the challenges some immigrant and refugee students face is significant because they can manifest in ways teachers might not recognize or be familiar with and can affect students' learning and well-being, both of which have implications for their educational trajectory.

A core issue within schools is how to navigate the process of English language acquisition for immigrant and refugee students. In 2012, the total number of English language learners (ELLs) was almost 4.5 million (California Department of Education, 2012). Asian Americans are the second largest group of ELLs in the public school system (APALC & AAJC, 2011). Among the total population, approximately one-third of the Asian American population is limited English proficient (LEP); over 40 percent of Laotian, Hmong, Chinese, Cambodian, and

Vietnamese Americans are LEP (APALC & AAJC, 2011). Greater percentages of ELLs tend to be placed at greatest risk for under-achievement, illiteracy, and high school incompletion (Aud et al., 2010) and be disproportionately enrolled in special education (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010) or identified as having a disability (de Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006). The lack of knowledge of the process that ELLs undergo as they learn English (Artiles & Klingner, 2006) and the adaptations they must make from their home culture to that of the classroom can lead some teachers to mistake bilingualism as a learning or language disability or misidentify ELLs lack of English fluency as a cognitive deficit (August & Hakuta, 1997; Ortiz & Artiles, 2010). Educational inequalities are complex and cannot be attributed to any single factor (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013). Students most at risk, often segregated by socioeconomic status (SES) and race, are subject to inequities when access to quality teachers, facilities, opportunities, and services is limited (Excellence and Equity Commission, 2013).

Despite the multiple challenges immigrant youth face, they tend to outperform their same-race and ethnicity peers who were born in the United States (Crosnoe & Turley, 2011). These trends tend to decline, however, as generational status increases. This "immigrant paradox," according to Crosnoe and Turley (2011), could be explained by influences from immigrants' home country, such as SES and levels of education, or degree of acculturation (Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2003).

2.3.3.2 Southeast Asian American students Research has shown that the structure of the family and education environment need to be considered to understand how various complex influences interact to impact attainment, particularly for students from immigrant families. Educational attainment for Southeast Asian American students can be thwarted by limited

English proficiency, as indicated in the preceding section; parental pressure; racism and racial violence (Fong, 2008; Tang, Kim, & Haviland, 2013); little or no access to college information, support, or community resources; low expectations from educators; and cultural and economic constraints (Tang et al., 2013; Um, 2003).

In an issue paper looking at the educational experiences of Southeast Asian university students, Um (2003) juxtaposed the findings of 106 surveys administered to Southeast Asian American university students in California and Massachusetts with roundtable discussions with undergraduate students, among other interest groups, from six states at the national 2000 Southeast Asian Youth Summit. Um (2003) identified altered family structure as one of the cultural constraints facing Southeast Asian American families. This group tends to have a higher rate of unemployment and underemployment for males, placing the female head of household in the role of primary income earner. For male students, this could be particularly problematic as they are then called upon to work in order to contribute financially to the family and either do not continue to higher education or once enrolled in a program of study, struggle with the additional pressure and end up leaving.

Another element shifting power relations within the family structure is language. In homes where the children's command of English surpasses that of their parents, children sometimes become translators or "information brokers" for parents and individuals outside the family (Conchas & Perez, 2003; Fong, 2008; Um, 2003). One male Vietnamese high school student shared that not only did he serve as translator, but family accountant and household manager as well; between school and family responsibilities, he was working over fifteen hours a day (Conchas & Perez, 2003). These children are forced into adult roles and responsibilities that can change the family dynamic; adults could become disempowered and put in positions where

their values of obedience, filial piety, and deference to the larger collective of family, for example, are being questioned by their children who grew up in the United States with a different and at times conflicting set of values (Fong, 2008; Um, 2003).

Students might find that cultural norms and practices conflict with personal and intellectual growth as well. For example, parents might push their children toward a certain career, hence educational trajectory, for reasons of job security or unawareness of available options in the United States (Fong, 2008; Tang et al., 2013). Cambodian American college students recount stories of parents attempting to convince them to major in a more lucrative field such as engineering or biology (Tang et al., 2013). Such expectations can create internal conflicts for students if they desire to explore their own goals yet feel the pull of family obligations or filial piety—respect and obedience toward one's parents. Tied to this dissonance is fear of failure as students are responsible not only for their personal success but their family's reputation as well (Conchas & Perez, 2003; Um, 2003). For students, high expectations coupled with the cultural value of filial piety might feel like parents demanding success versus encouraging success. The former is the value some parents, having been raised in Asia, operate from while the latter could be the value their child, having been raised in the United States, operates from (Um, 2003).

An issue not often dealt with in the literature but relevant to the discussion of cultural norms conflicting with personal values is the impact gender can have on access to education. Lee (1997) found that the degree of struggle Hmong American women experienced continuing their education depended to a large degree on the type of familial support they had. Although social mobility and financial security were primary motivators for wanting to pursue a 4-year degree and an indirect benefit for their families, some women were discouraged from doing so due to

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their family's belief that Hmong women should marry young and have children. Every Hmong American woman over 25-years-old in Lee's life history study on Hmong American women's pursuit of higher education commented on being pressured by family to marry when they were teenagers. Childcare was also an issue due to its prohibitive cost. If family members refused to assist with childcare, these women were left to their own devices or had to postpone their studies, perhaps indefinitely. Such lack of support could be interpreted as a negative form of capital, a reality Bourdieu and Coleman were criticized for not brining to their discussion (Portes, 1998). Hmong women in particular seem to be more vulnerable to traditional cultural norms that hinder participation in higher education. More research is needed on the effect gender has on educational aspirations and preparation for postsecondary education for Southeast Asian Americans. What Lee (1997) has shown, however, is that transformations seem to be taking place within an at times contentious context where social and cultural capital have facilitated or hindered the transition from high school to university.

The notion of social and cultural capital facilitating or hindering access to education extends across various fields or institutional contexts (McDonough, 1997). Although educational attainment for some students is impaired when parents have little or no formal education, limited English proficiency and/or inadequate or no understanding of the American educational system (Tang et al., 2013; Um, 2003), schools presumably could work with students and families in providing support and access to resources that would facilitate educational attainment. In some cases, schools simply fall short in doing so. Um (2003) found that Southeast Asian American college students felt ill-informed about and ill-prepared for college. They indicated that high school teachers and counselors provided support to selected students, notably white students on the accelerated track.

Given the prevalence of poverty in the Southeast Asian American community, the cost of higher education poses a real threat to Southeast Asian American students' enrollment in higher education. Research on the decision to attend college is based largely on economic approaches to college-going (Grodsky & Riegle-Crumb, n.d.). In deciding whether or not to attend college, expected benefits are weighed against expected costs and influenced by academic preparation and access to resources. Students and families factor in income and aid when determining benefits and costs of a postsecondary education.

In general, low-income students' enrollment tends to be more affected by high costs through decreases in financial aid or increases in tuition (Heller, 1997). Furthermore, research shows that low income students and families are more likely unaware of financial aid (Paulsen & St. John, 2007), the cost of a higher education, financial aid in relation to college costs, and the long-term benefits of attending one college over another (Grodsky & Jones, 2007; Perna, 2006), all of which have implications for whether or not students matriculate and the type of institution they attend. More recent research suggests that high-achieving students tend to be at a similar disadvantage if they come from low-income families. Qualified low-income students make decisions based on their financial circumstances and not their achievement because they, too, can be ill-informed about their options or have sociocultural issues preventing them from applying to more appropriate institutions (Hoxby & Avery, 2013). To what extent such unawareness applies to low-income Asian Americans, especially those with a Southeast Asian background, is unclear.

What is known from the research is that Asian Americans tend to rely more on employment income and assistance from family than they do loans to finance their college education (Chang, Park, Lin, Poon, & Nakanishi, 2007). While a financial aid offer in general is an important predictor of college enrollment among college applicants (St. John, 1991), financial

aid packages for Asian Americans seem to play a greater role in determining which college a student enrolls in and not whether or not they will continue with higher education.

Chang, Park, Lin, Poon, and Nakanishi's (2007) finding that Asian Americans are more likely to finance their higher education through earnings and family assistance seems puzzling given their lower incomes, concentration in high-priced metropolitan areas, and larger than average households. Chang et al. (2007) determined that first-time, full-time Asian American freshman in 2005 "were more likely to come from families with household incomes of less than $40,000 than the national population of freshmen" (p. vi). Increasing this disparity is the concentration of the Asian American population in high-priced metropolitan areas (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012) and their larger households than the national average (Chang et al., 2007). Given these findings, I would expect all Asian Americans to enroll in university at lower rates than their white peers.

Grodsky and Riegle-Crumb (n.d.) argue that research on the decision to attend college needs first to consider assumptions students and families make about college-going. They claim that many students do not consciously weigh the costs and benefits of higher education in deciding whether or not to attend college. Instead, students have a college-going habitus whereby they simply assume college is a foregone conclusion. Decisions do not center around whether or not to attend college, but rather which institutions to apply to. The point Grodsky and Riegle-Crumb (n.d.) raise could be relevant for Southeast Asian American students and is one this study considers. Are students making conscious decisions about whether or not to enroll in university or do they assume—based on their college-going habitus—college is the next, natural step after high school? How do assumptions about educational attainment influence students' understanding of financing a higher education? Considering such questions through the lens of

students' experience facilitates a deeper understanding of educational attainment across and within Asian American ethnic subgroups.

2.4   EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Research suggests that capital in the form of parental expectations or educational aspirations parents have for their children or those that students have for themselves contribute to college-going and college completion to varying degrees. By and large, however, parental and student expectations by race/ethnicity do not appear to account for differences in enrollment or retention across racial/ethnic groups. While some racial/ethnic groups might have higher expectations or aspirations for their children, most parents, regardless of race or ethnicity, seem to have relatively high expectations. How and to what extent expectations are realized and the role of parents is another question.

The impact of expectations coupled with immigrant generation status seems to be more significant for Asians in determining university enrollment. Glick and White (2004), using the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 and 1994, considered how participation in higher education was impacted by students' immigrant status and parental expectations and involvement. Parental expectations were gathered from the 1988 parent survey while students' expectations were taken from the 1994 survey to determine if students internalized parents' earlier "messages" (p. 282). Parents with first generation students have the highest educational expectations for their children, followed by those for second generation then third or higher generation students. However, in the first generation category, over 50 percent of parents of Asian origin surveyed expected their children to continue beyond college, while a significantly

lower percentage of parents with children from other racial/ethnic groups had similar expectations. In looking at students' own expectations, all students reported having high expectations. First and second generation Asian students seem to have higher expectations than their same generation counterparts, but differences in race diminish for those of third generation and higher.

Reinforcing Glick and White's (2004) findings, Louie (2001) found that parents of 1.5 and second generation Chinese American students have high educational expectations, meaning high expectations for college completion. Instead of focusing on racial or generational differences, Louie explored the impact of socioeconomic class. She found that regardless of socioeconomic class, Chinese American parents and students have high educational expectations.

Students and parents attributed this to "the Chinese cultural disposition toward education," (Louie, 2001, p. 448) which was manifest in students' diligence and parents' focus on having their children study harder than others (i.e., non-Asian friends or students). One student, reflecting on her experiences with African American and Hispanic friends in primary school, attributed her outlook to her academic success and faulted her friends for theirs; she felt their underachievement had less to do with their intelligence and more to do with their perception of school or education. While parents' comments echoed such sentiments, they additionally attributed their disposition, hence expectations, to their experience with the closed Chinese national exam system. With fewer options of quality higher education in their native country, Chinese American parents saw the American education system as one of opportunity not as influenced by class, believing that diligence coupled with academic achievement would lead to a greater likelihood of socioeconomic mobility for their children.

Both middle- and working-class parents and students shared this sentiment, which was interesting given that both were also operating within class-based strategies that inherently advantaged students from the middle-class. This collective sentiment could point toward a strong belief in meritocracy based less on race (Wells, 2008) and more on generational status coupled with cultural norms (Glick & White, 2004; Louie, 2001). First and second generation Asian American parents and students could have a higher degree of trust in the American educational system than their third generation and higher peers. The degree of trust could also be contingent on the nature of the education system the foreign born parents grew up with, as commented on by the parents in Louie's (2001) study. If parents are from a more closed system, the education system in the United States could be perceived as providing opportunities for their children, hence themselves if they are operating from norms that support filial piety. However, such influences could fade with time as first and second generation Asian Americans experience not only the American education system, but also employment in the private- and public-sector.

2.4.1   Family obligation

Family obligation as a motivator for attending higher education is particularly salient for students from immigrant families (Fuligni & Witkow, 2004). Students from immigrant families with East Asian, Filipino, Latin American, and European backgrounds reported a stronger sense of family obligation than their peers with U.S.-born parents (Fuligni & Witkow, 2004), but this "family-based desire to achieve" (p. 179) seemed stronger for students from Latin American immigrant families than it was for their peers.

In trying to breakdown the pan-Asian lens and investigate how cultural values contribute to university enrollment, ethnic subgroups have different interpretations of family obligation.

Chhuon, Hudley, Brenner, and Macias (2010) found that educational aspirations were tied to family obligation in their ethnographic study of ten high achieving, predominately low-income, Cambodian American undergraduates. Family obligation was interpreted as "maintenance of family face, serving as a role model to younger family members, and contributing to their family's economic well-being" (Chhuon et al., 2010, p. 38). One participant, for example, chose business as a major due to the perceived economic gains such a degree would produce for his family. Chinese and Vietnamese American students in other research indicated that obligation stemmed from an awareness of the sacrifices their parents made to facilitate their access to higher education (Conchas & Perez, 2003; Louie, 2001). For some, knowing the opportunities available to them through a more accessible education system compared to that in their parents' homeland increased their feeling of obligation.

Contrary to these findings, Lee (1997) found that the pursuit of a higher education for Hmong women was tied to the economic benefits a degree could provide coupled with increased independence. While theoretically their families would benefit from any economic gain, these women stressed education as a tool for greater independence. So strong was their aspirational capital that some participants indicated they would delay marriage so they could continue their education.

As presented previously in the discussion on other challenges to educational achievement and attainment for Southeast Asian American students, familial obligation is a complex phenomenon for these students. In the only qualitative study solely on Vietnamese Americans, Conchas and Perez (2003) detailed tensions students experienced between their desire to support their families and parental pressure to perform. Students spoke of "disgrace[ing] their family" if "they did not receive high marks" (p. 49). While their parents' histories and sacrifices motivated

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them to excel, the pressure at times could be consuming. By and large, family obligation appears to be inextricably tied to Southeast Asian Americans' college-going experience. Furthermore, family obligation in general seems to weigh more heavily on Southeast Asian American students. Although looking at the relationship between persistence and perceptions of emotional support and autonomy across racial groups, Strange (2000) found that Southeast Asian American students experienced a higher sense of obligation to honor their families compared to their white or Hispanic peers.

2.5   PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

Parental support through involvement and encouragement significantly influence students' academic trajectory (McDonough, 1997). Given that support has been shown to differ across and within minority groups (Chhuon et al., 2010; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Strange, 2000), it is helpful to distinguish between support as a form of involvement and as a form of encouragement when considering the role it plays in students' educational experiences. While encouragement tends to be passive and might impact students' academic trajectory through high educational expectations, support through involvement is more active and reflects parents' ability to engage with their children in school- or college-related matters (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). In a review of the literature on the impact school, family, and community connections have on educational achievement, Henderson and Mapp (2002) found that, across class and race, parental involvement is linked to increased student performance and engagement.

For high achieving, predominately low-income Cambodian American undergraduate students, family support seldom involved direct assistance with schoolwork or guidance with

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navigating their path to college, but rather "moral" supports or encouragement often driven by the utility of education for both parents and students (Chhuon et al., 2010, p. 42). Parents tried to create a home environment free of distractions so their children could concentrate on their studies. For some this was evident through ensuring their child was well-feed or occasionally excusing them from family responsibilities. Students and parents both were conscious of parents' limitations with being able to provide academic support, which stemmed primarily from low-levels of education, limited English proficiency, and unfamiliarity with the American educational system.

Students expressed gratitude with whatever support their parents could provide and looked to their high schools to bridge home and school transitions. Teachers and college-going peers provided guidance in navigating the education system prior to university. Peers assisted with homework and provided information on the college admissions and application process. Chhuon et al.'s (2010) peer related findings support Lijana's (2015) research on the college application and decision-making process for low-income African American high school students and their families. She found that African American seniors and their families lacking cultural capital necessary to ease the college application and decision-making process sought out information from trusted individuals, namely peers.

Aside from peers, caring teachers in Chhuon et al.'s (2010) research were also credited for smoothing difficult transitions between home and school and helping to develop college goals. Furthermore, participation in honors and AP classes and other college preparatory programs exposed students to a college-going culture missing from their home environment. While parental support tends to play a significant role in students' academic trajectory, the role of teacher support should not be overlooked, especially for immigrant students. Other research

illustrates that immigrant students are sensitive to the type of support received at schools, and teachers and counselors need to be aware of biases that fuel low expectations for some students (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Um, 2003).

Chhuon et al.'s (2010) study illustrates the complexities students face in navigating different worlds. More contextualized and nuanced understandings of students' paths to higher education would shed light on (un)conscious formation and activation of educational expectations and the role of networks in facilitating this process. Incorporating the perspective of parents on their experiences with their child's education would form a more complete picture by shedding light on strategies and circumstances students might not be aware of.

In the same vein, more research on gender differences in parental support. Much research addresses the significance of parental involvement and expectations in influencing students' academic trajectory (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008), but limited research considers gender differences in parental support for students generally and for Southeast Asian American students specifically. Existing research on minority students suggests that mothers are more influential than fathers in college preparation, planning, and choice (Horn & Nuñez, 2000; Noeth & Wimberly, n.d.). In an earlier body of research using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, eighth graders sought assistance from mothers with their educational planning, a finding consistent regardless of the mother's education level. Similarly, Noeth and Wimberly's (n.d.) more recent survey research on seamless educational transitions to postsecondary education for African American and Hispanic high school seniors in five of the largest urban public schools districts found that students identified mothers as more influential than either fathers or peers in their college planning process. Interestingly, Horn and Nuñez (2000) also found that students reported an increase in

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conversations with their fathers "as parents' highest education rose' (p. 33), suggesting that parents' education level influences parental involvement.

A possible extension of parental involvement but rarely addressed in the literature is sibling influence on college-going (Goodman, Hurwitz, Smith, & Fox, 2015). Siblings likely spend more time together compared to other influential figures such as friends and teachers (Kluger, Carsen, Cole, & Steptoe, 2006); exploring sibling involvement and engagement could be particularly significant for Southeast Asian American students who attend under resourced high schools or elect not to tap into high school based resources. Much of the research on sibling relationships highlights sibling support generally, particularly advice older siblings give to younger siblings (Tucker, Barber, & Eccles, 1997). Drawing from the sixth wave (i.e., 16-19 year olds) of the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions, Tucker, Barber, and Eccles (1997) found that respondents rely on older siblings for advice about life plans, including educational plans after high school. When high school students perceive parents lacking in cultural capital needed to facilitate their college-going process, students could turn toward older siblings for support and knowledge.

Furthermore, students could rely on older siblings because they are perceived as "caring agents" (Palmer & Maramba, 2015, p. 7). In a qualitative study the impact of social and cultural capital on college access for 34 Southeast Asian American undergraduates from five public, four year colleges and universities, Palmer and Maramba (2015) found caring agents critical in providing the cultural capital necessary for college access. Older siblings, other family, teachers, counselors, and peers were all identified as caring agents who facilitated acquisition of requisite capital through information, advice, and support for participants' transition to college.

2.5.1   Class-based strategies

Socioeconomic status has been shown to shape parents' strategies for accessing cultural and social capital that facilitates their child's educational attainment (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Lew, 2007; Louie, 2001; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). Despite the significant influence of class on educational achievement and attainment, few studies examine the class-based strategies employed by Asian American parents (Lew, 2007; Louie, 2001). Of those that do exist, findings corroborate similar research on other racial/ethnic groups (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008); namely, the ability for Asian American parents to translate their high educational aspirations into institutional support is largely contingent on socio-economic status (Lew, 2007; Louie, 2001). Chinese immigrant parents, regardless of class, employed strategies that involved social networks or "ethnic enclaves" to promote mobility for their children through education (Louie, 2001), whereas only the higher-income Korean immigrant parents in Lew's (2007) study utilized their capital to do so.

Using their financial resources, educational background, and time, Chinese middle-class parents provided their children with a range of options to advance their academic skills (Louie, 2001). These options ranged from private schools and/or lessons to regular, active involvement in their child's education. Chinese middle-class parents sought out private schools or higher quality public schools for the resources such institutions provided their child access to, such as a stronger curriculum and the opportunity to build relationships with more academically inclined peers. Involvement with their child's preparation for higher education occurred through participation in the university application and selection process by accompanying them on campus visits. If needed, parents took on more work to absorb the cost of their child's education

and activities designed to increase their academic preparedness in order to facilitate their access to higher education (Louie, 2001).

Similarly, higher-income Korean parents, whose children attended a math and science magnet school, paid for their children to attend after school academies to prepare them for high school and college (Lew, 2007). Parents were deliberate and strategic in using their Korean social networks to learn of these and other resources. What distinguishes them from those in Louie's (2001) study is their strategy of hiring a Korean consultant to work not only with their child throughout the college application process, but with them as well. The consultant, fluent in Korean, educated the parents on the U.S. educational system so they could be active participants in their child's education and college choice decision.

While lower-income families tend to have less financial capital, research shows they adopt their own strategies to facilitate their child's access to education. The working-class parents in Louie's (2001) study mainly relied on ethnic enclaves as sources of information. Theses ethnic enclaves were often the only source of information for these parents. The type of information they sought was similar to the high-income parents' existing knowledge such as the best public or parochial schools in the city. If parents were unable to move to the neighborhoods where these schools were situated, some used the address of a friend who lived in a more desirable area for enrollment purposes. Beyond such strategies, when parents did not have the educational background and time to directly assist their children with school, some students turned to peers or others for information or made college-related decisions in the dark. Turning toward others demonstrates an awareness of the need to utilize other forms of social capital to acquire the cultural capital needed in preparing for college.

Not all parents or students are able to call upon networks. For less fortunate students, their path to college or career can be paved with multiple challenges, as was the case in Lew's (2007) study with lower-income Korean American students participating in a GED preparation program because they dropped out of high school. Despite having high educational aspirations, their parents, mostly single mothers, simply did not have the time or resources to assist their child with their education. Tapping into ethnic enclaves did not seem to be an option for these families. Students shared that they were not well connected with their communities, but what exactly prevented them or their parents from establishing and utilizing such networks is not known. Instead, students expressed frustration with their schools, often feeling they were forced out despite knowing that continuing their education was in their best interest. Perhaps Um's (2003) research on Southeast Asian students can shed light on the situation of these working-class Korean parents. Um (2003) stressed that few quality community-based organizations that address the needs of particular ethnic populations are available. When they do exist, lower-income families often still have to contend with hurdles such as transportation and familial responsibilities.

Although research indicates that Asian parents tend to invest more in educational resources compared to their similar income white peers (Kao, 1995), relatively little is known about strategies Southeast Asian American families employ to translate their educational aspirations into support for their children. In 2000, the percentage of Hmong and Cambodians living below the poverty line was 38 percent and 29 percent, respectively (Reeves & Bennett, 2004). Such figures reveal a population that lacks the financial capital necessary to provide extracurricular or other tangible support for their children. Of the studies that do exist, support

tends to take the shape of encouragement or committing time to looking after grandchildren so their children can attend university (Chhuon et al., 2010; Lee, 1997).

2.6   SECTION SUMMARY

This section presents the conceptual framework for this research along with the literature relevant to the educational experiences of Southeast Asian American students, the focus for which was determined by the questions guiding this study. Together, the conceptual framework and literature review challenge the model minority myth and create space for a discussion on how college-going for marginalized groups is shaped by social and institutional forces. Grenfell and James (2004) refer to Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus as "a set of thinking tools" designed "to illuminate the social world" (p. 518). Research suggests that educational aspirations, parental support and encouragement, peer networks, and school- and college-based resources contribute to students college-going. Most parents and students, regardless of race or ethnicity, seem to have relatively high aspirations and educational expectations. The mechanisms through which they are realized and the role of parents is less clear and seems to vary across and within racial groups and be contingent on socioeconomic status and information parents have about college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008).

These findings point to two overarching issues: 1) the intersecting and powerful roles institutions, class, and race/ethnicity play in students' path to postsecondary education; and 2) the danger of considering educational attainment in the aggregate. The latter reinforces the model minority stereotype and fails to address the bimodal distribution of educational attainment and socioeconomic status within the pan-Asian population. Policy and practice need to consider how

Southeast Asian American students persist with their education in light of challenges they may face. The literature suggests they have a strong sense of communalism and belief in meritocracy, hence draw their educational aspirations and achievement motivation more from their families or communities than do their white peers. A careful distinction that needs to be made and better understood is the significance of various forms of capital across and within the Southeast Asian population. It could be that racial/ethnic minority students such as Southeast Asian Americans operate from a habitus that, according to Nuñez (2009)

> enables them to advance their educational attainment in the face of marginalizing social conditions … and orients them toward employing complex, seemingly inconsistent strategies of improvisation, such as utilizing certain forms of intercultural and social capital, to contend with exclusionary social conditions. (p. 42)

More research is needed to better understand the pipeline to higher education for this marginalized and vulnerable population and account for the divergent experiences and strategies that get lost in the generalizations about Asian Americans. Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, this research aims to elucidate such experiences by exploring challenges encountered and forms of capital utilized while navigating social and institutional contexts in the quest for a higher education.

3.0   RESEARCH DESIGN

Interpretive qualitative inquiry, which relies predominately on naturalistic methods, is an unfolding of meanings or interpretations built on inductive reasoning. While the numerical data or statistical analysis of quantitative inquiry can provide a global picture, qualitative inquiry goes deeper in an attempt to understand the subtleties, situation specific details or attributed meanings quantitative inquiry often cannot. Reality is constructed within through interpretations of interactions and experiences in a social world. As a result, truth is complex and not bound to quantifiable facts. It is the context and meaning this study aims to uncover through an inductive process that defines it as qualitative research (Maxwell, 1996).

In looking at college-going for Southeast Asian American undergraduates, my interest is in deconstructing the notion of Asian American students as a monolith by exploring how Southeast Asian American undergraduates understand and experience their path to university. In doing so, this qualitative study employs a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology (van Manen, 1990). A hermeneutic phenomenological approach to the phenomenon of college-going for Southeast Asian American undergraduates is appropriate for this study as it is "concerned with how something is in the world or the manner in which its existence unfolds" (Magrini, 2012, p. 3). Data collection entailed in-depth individual interviews and analysis of participant-selected artifacts. This study contributes to the education pipeline research for marginalized populations because it represents the development of a deeper understanding of how a selection

of Southeast Asian American undergraduates experience and make meaning of their path to university. In this chapter, I describe the elements of my research design.

3.1   METHODS

3.1.1   Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences that provides a method for how to understand the world. It is used to uncover, understand and describe the meaning and structure individuals assign to their experience of a phenomenon. Inquiry is based on descriptions of experience within a particular setting as perceived by an individual, making knowledge and reality subjective. It requires that researchers examine an individual's experience with a given phenomenon based on themes that emerge (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Phenomenology can be used with an individual or a group of people who experience the same phenomenon.

3.1.2   Hermeneutic phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology is different from phenomenology in that it is interpretive. Understanding is gained through reflective interpretation of "the underlying conditions, historically and aesthetically, that account for the experience" as it is described in the text (Moustakas, 1994, p. 10). Hermeneutic phenomenological research, as intended by van Manen (1990), is comprised of six research strategies that merge hermeneutics and phenomenology to form a human science approach to inquiry: (1) elucidating the nature of lived experience, (2)

investigating lived experience, (3) reflecting on essential themes, (4) writing and re-writing, (5) maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the lived experience, and (6) considering parts and whole (pp. 30-34). As such, human science inquiry is not designed to test theories or establish causation or to consider only particularity or universality. It "is empirical in that phenomenological knowledge is based on experience derived from data"; it considers particular and shared aspects of a phenomenon and leads to understanding a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990, pp. 21-23).

Elucidating the nature of the lived experience entails orienting myself to the phenomenon of college-going through formulating a phenomenological question and presenting my assumptions and pre-understandings. *Investigating the lived experience* requires me first to become familiar with the phenomenon through reflecting on and sharing my own experience before collecting the experiences of others. The means for data collection is varied. It could be through interviews; observations; diaries, journals or other forms of writing; and art. *Reflecting on essential themes* is the basis of hermeneutic phenomenological reflection. This is an iterative process of individually or collectively conducting thematic analysis, isolating thematic statements, reflecting on thematic statements and determining incidental and essential themes. *Writing and re-writing* includes identifying which narratives or anecdotes provide a rich example of the deeper meaning of the lived experience being described. This process, like the other strategies, is a recursive process to aid the construction of descriptions of participants' lived experience. *Maintaining a strong and oriented position* means reflecting and writing in an oriented way. *Considering the parts and the whole* is about balancing the research context. Since no standard procedure exists in human science research, it is imperative to maintain a balance between the explicit research methods and methodological openness. The procedures are fluid,

but must be aligned with a "particular project and [the] individual researcher" (van Manen, 1990, p. 163).

These strategies emphasize meaning, understanding, reconstruction of experience, interpretation, intersubjectivity, and written text. In doing so, the methodology facilitates an understanding and description of individual and shared aspects of a lived experience (van Manen, 1990). This research uses van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology given this study's aim to explore how Southeast Asian American undergraduates understand and experience their path to university.

3.1.3 Pilot study

During the 2012 spring term, I conducted a pilot study at a public, predominantly white, research institution to test the site, methodology, and conceptual framework proposed for this study. It was a phenomenological study exploring Southeast and East Asian American undergraduates' understanding of the value of education and impactful experiences leading up to and during their time in higher education through a social and cultural capital framework. I interviewed four undergraduate students in total. I used a semi-structured interview format based on previous research on factors that influence persistence and interviewed each participant once for 1.5-2 hours. Electronic member checks followed approximately two weeks after each interview. Participants included two females with Chinese heritage, one freshman and one junior; one sophomore female with Japanese heritage; and one senior male with Vietnamese heritage. The pilot interviews were not analyzed as part of this study.

The research site, a public, predominantly white, research institution, hereafter referred to as MW University, is located in a medium-sized city in the Midwest. For the 2011-2012

academic year, Asian, non-Hispanic students made up around 5-6 percent of the degree-seeking undergraduate population, exceeding the percentage of Hispanic students and comparable to the percentage of Black or African American students. I employed snowball or chain sampling to gather "information rich" cases for in-depth study or analysis (Patton, 1990). I recruited the four undergraduate students who volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews through three avenues: 1) personal contacts, 2) Asian student organizations, and 3) the Asian Studies Center (ASC) on campus. Notices were sent out electronically to students my personal contacts suggested and to members of the Asian student organizations, in addition to being included in ASC's weekly electronic newsletter. Over the course of one semester, each strategy yielded one student. Participant selection with the pilot site suggested that an institution with a larger percentage of Asian American undergraduates might result in a larger selection of participants. Further narrowing the criteria to one ethnic group or region would also facilitate analysis of individual and collective experiences. I decided to focus on Southeast Asian American undergraduates to deconstruct the notion of Asian American students as a monolith by understanding how Southeast Asian American students, as a vulnerable and marginalized population, invest in education through the dispositions they acquire, the resources available to them, and the choices they make as a result.

Additional changes to the research design involved modification of the methods. I found conducting one in-person interview and electronic member checks with participants limiting on several fronts. While I was able to collect personal histories and descriptive information on their paths to and persistence in higher education, the one 1.5-2 hour interview process felt somewhat perfunctory. I wanted more time to build rapport and trust with participants in order to yield more personal narratives and to aid my interpretation. Adopting Seidman's (1991)

phenomenological interview series for the current study broke interviews into three meaningful sections over time that facilitated relationship building and data collection. Furthermore, I replaced electronic member checks, which every participant did, with in-person member checks for the current study so they could serve as an extension of previous conversations.

Across the four participants, social and cultural capital in the form of parental and student expectations and social networks within the family, peer groups, and college were important in college preparation and persistence. Social and cultural capital appeared most influential prior to university matriculation. Those who expressed gaps in valued capital to confidently navigate their high school experience and the college application process looked to agents who did. Parents were not seen as possessing valued capital because all either earned their undergraduate degree outside the U.S. or never attended a postsecondary institution. Older siblings, friends, and information technology were primary sources of information. Despite participants utilizing various networks for information or assistance, there seemed to be a sense of forced autonomy due mainly from a perceived lack of parental support. This was particularly noticeable in the college preparation and application process and to a lesser degree later on. In speaking with participants about their experiences leading up to college, what interested me most was this tension between obligatory autonomy and agency or self-efficacy. This tension suggested contextual influences worth investigating and led me to incorporate Yosso's (2005) aspirational capital into the current study's conceptual framework.

3.1.4 Research site

The site for this study is a public research institution located on the East Coast, hereafter referred to as EC University (ECU); it is the largest institution in the state in which it is situated. ECU

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was selected due to the size of its Asian American population and ease of access. In fall 2013, Asian Americans represented approximately 15 percent of the total undergraduate population and had been the largest minority population on campus for the past three years. This suggests ECU was an appropriate research site for several reasons: One, ECU has several Asian American student organizations to tap into during the recruitment process. Two, given that Asian Americans represent the largest minority group at ECU, ECU as a research site was likely to yield more participants than a site with a smaller Asian American student population. Statistics disaggregating racial groups by ethnicity, however, do not exist, making it difficult to guesstimate the size of ECU's Southeast Asian American undergraduate population. Another factor contributing to the appropriateness of ECU as a site is its potentially socioeconomically diverse student body given that over 75 percent of its undergraduate population comes from in-state, an area known for its socioeconomic diversity. Diversity across participants contributes to diverse perspectives of the lived phenomenon of college-going, thus a deeper or more nuanced understanding of college-going for Southeast Asian American ECU undergraduates. Despite challenges with recruitment, which I outline below, the institution welcomed me conducting this study with its students and on its campus. Challenges with recruitment likely would have existed at any institution unless I worked directly with the population under study.

3.1.5 Recruitment

I used purposive sampling for this research and a criterion-based technique to identify potential participants and gather "information rich" cases for in-depth study or analysis (Patton, 1990). With purposeful sampling, I selected a site and individuals that "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2007, p.

125). Criterion sampling is appropriate for a phenomenological study because it is a prerequisite that all participants have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2007) and can provide information rich cases. These are cases that provide information about the phenomenon under investigation and have the greatest potential for contributing to its understanding and meaning through in-depth coverage of the phenomenon (Patton, 1990). The criteria for identifying participants as information rich cases for this study are: 1) undergraduate students enrolled at ECU; 2) students who self-identify as Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, or Laotian American; and 3) students who have at least one foreign born parent of Southeast Asian heritage.

Initially I sought first or second year undergraduates, thinking that participants who had more recently experienced their college-going years would be able more easily and accurately to recollect past events. Only ECU undergraduates in their second year and above elected to participate in this study. This still fits with the notion that interviewing students enrolled in university assumes that distance and time yields greater insight into events prior to university. Participants are asked to reconstruct past events, which, according to Seidman (1991), implies participants are able to distinguish more relevant past events from those that were less relevant. On a practical level, recruitment efforts would have greatly stalled if I upheld the first or second year requirement.

I recruited participants through professional contacts, ECU-based Asian student organizations, and strategically placed flyers on campus soliciting participants that met the aforementioned criteria (see Appendix C for sample script). I placed flyers in the student union building and on bulletin boards in colleges around campus. I did not post flyers in residence halls since I did not have access. I simultaneously contacted three ECU-based student organizations for assistance with recruitment. One center disseminated an electronic solicitation three times to

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its relevant student members from the summer of 2014 to fall 2014. Two participants responded to these email solicitations. Staff at two centers initiated four electronic introductions with students directly. Of those, three materialized into participants. I also worked with the Vietnamese Student Association (VSA) on campus to recruit participants during fall 2014. One of the study's earlier participants joined me in speaking at VSA's general board meeting. While I spoke to the study, she briefly talked about her experience and motivation for participating. I offered a $20 incentive for her time. Over 50 students were present. I handed out postcard-sized solicitations with pertinent details including contact information. Two potential candidates reached out to me the following day; one expressed continued interest and became the last Vietnamese female undergraduate to participate in the study.

These recruitment efforts yielded six out of this study's seven participants. After each participant's first interview, I asked participants if they knew of Southeast Asian American undergraduates who fit the criteria and potentially had a different experience, thus incorporating another opportunity to build maximum variation into the selection. This approach yielded one participant. Participants received an incentive of $10 per interview to participate.

Working with professional contacts proved the most effective recruitment method. Contacts had existing relationships or previous contact with potential participants. For students, this could have contributed to feelings of reciprocity or been a precursor to building trust with me as an unknown researcher. The least effective method was strategically placed flyers. I posted flyers on bulletin boards in areas in colleges where students either congregate or pass through. Given that all participants were recruited from existing networks, more time could have been spent on the front end building those relationships.

After potential participants contacted me to express interest in the study, I answered

questions if necessary and requested they fill out an information sheet to determine if they met the study's criteria previously outlined. One potential participant did not meet the criteria and therefore was unable to participate. She was Malaysian American and moved to the United States at the onset of her undergraduate studies.

During the first of three interviews conducted for this study, I received verbal consent from every participant. The informed consent agreement provided participants with the terms of the study, including researcher information, an overview of the research, compensation, potential risks and/or benefits, and their rights and confidentiality assurance by the researchers and the institution (see Appendix B for consent agreement).

3.1.6   Study participants

Participants in a phenomenological study are people who have lived the phenomenon and are willing and able to share rich descriptions of their experience. The number of participants can vary depending on the phenomenon under investigation and the number of "qualified" participants available (McMillan, 2000).

This study's sample is comprised of seven Southeast Asian American undergraduates: two Vietnamese American males and females, one Cambodian American male and female, and one Chinese Cambodian female who self-identifies as Cambodian American. All participants are American citizens by birth. Table 1 provides a breakdown of demographic information, including relevant family characteristics. A thick horizontal line in Tables 1 and 2 distinguishes the Cambodian American participants from the Vietnamese American to highlight the diversity across the two groups. Aside from using pseudonyms, I changed identifying details from specific to general to further mask and protect participants' identities given the personal nature of

participant narratives (Seidman, 1991). Outside of the nuclear family of parents and their children, I elected to exclude extended family members such as aunts and uncles residing in participants' household and "err on the side of understatement rather than overstatement" (Seidman, 1991, p. 93) in this instance. Doing so does not jeopardize this study's findings.

Parental education backgrounds indicate wide-ranging education levels and locations that signal the degree of valued cultural capital they inherently brought to participants' college-going experience. Parental career trajectory or job information suggests participants represent a wide range of socio-economic levels as well, further representative of their social networks and the forms of valued cultural capital they are likely able to access as a result. The thematic analysis in chapter 6 and accompanying narratives unpack how parents' backgrounds instilled in them strong educational values now part of participants' worldview.

An important note is each participant's sibling status given the importance of family structure for Southeast Asian American students (Um, 2003). Two participants are the eldest sibling while four participants have older siblings; only one participant is an only child. This participant deserves particular mention. Her mother was an unpredictable presence in her life and her birth father is unknown. She maintains close ties to her extended family of origin, but her primary caretaker as a child and adolescent was her adoptive white father.

Participants enrolled in advanced courses in high school, yet only two took private SAT preparation courses. Two participants enrolled in college preparation programs their senior year that focused on college level courses and transferring credits. Only the one out-of-state participant conducted campus visits. All other participants had, for the most part, identified their first choice institution before submitting college applications. Four participants applied to two or fewer institution, one of which was their first choice institution and close to home. ECU accepted

two of the seven undergraduates with no conditions, so they enrolled the fall following high school graduation. Two participants received conditional acceptance, two received deferred acceptance, and one enrolled a year after high school graduation.

Participants also represent a range of majors: two participants are science majors, one is majoring in a business related field, and the others are social science or arts and humanities majors. Participant narratives later demonstrate tensions between parental and student career aspirations and strategies parents and families used to sway participants toward a hard science. Two of the male participants received Pell grants at some point during their postsecondary education, further evidence, coupled with parental career trajectory of job information, that participants' families represent a range of socio-economic levels. Refer to Table 2 for a breakdown of education attainment information.

Based on participant background and education attainment information, these seven participants represent diverse perspectives of the lived phenomenon of college-going. What follows is a description of the data collection and analysis procedures I undertook to capture rich descriptions of their experience.

3.1.7   Data collection

In a phenomenological approach, meaning and understanding typically are sought through in-depth, unstructured interviews. Interviews can range from one to multiple sessions and are characterized more as a conversation, using thematic questions that guide the conversation opposed to exact questions (Polkinghorne, 1989). Assuming information rich narratives, Morse

Table 1. Participant demographics

Participant pseudonym [artifact]	Interview # and total length [in hours]	Ethnicity	Mother's highest level of education	Mother's job/career trajectory	Father's highest level of education	Father's job/career trajectory	Sibling status
Art [music]	3 interviews [6 hours]	Vietnamese	some community college	cosmetologist	basic / secondary in Vietnam*	small business owner; artist	eldest sibling
Regalia [National Honor society stole]	3 interviews [6 hours]	Vietnamese	some college in Vietnam	technician	some community college	technician	younger sibling
Roman [resume]	2 interviews [3 hours]	Vietnamese	basic / secondary in Vietnam*	cosmetologist	basic / secondary in Vietnam*	former technician (laid off)	younger sibling
Rose [glitter jar]	3 interviews [5 hours]	Vietnamese	some community college	interpreter	PhD	scientist	eldest sibling
Alma-Lyn [university mug]	3 interviews [4.5 hours]	Cambodian	high school	odd jobs	adoptive father: bachelor's degree	adoptive father: business man	only child
Artha [bracelet]	3 interviews [5 hours]	Chinese-Cambodian	high school	office manager	professional degree	physician	younger sibling
NB [cross country running shoes]	3 interviews [5 hours]	Cambodian	finishing master's degree	accountant	2 non-U.S. master's degrees	engineer	younger sibling

*participant knew parent had some education in country of origin but highest level unknown

Table 2. Participant education attainment

Participant pseudonym	High school course taking behavior	GPA*	College prep courses**	College app submission*** [# admitted to]	Campus visits [#]	College choice factors	Terms of acceptance to ECU	Live on-campus / at home	Financing higher education	Major / Year
Art	public school: honors, AP, college prep program	3.5-3.0	private art lessons	in-state: 1 out-of-state: 1 [2]	0	• proximity to home • cost	conditional acceptance	home	4 years: Pell and state grants	art / senior
Regalia	STEM magnet school: honors, AP, internship	unknown		in-state: 4 *[1 private]* [2.5]	0	• proximity to home • size • reputation	spring acceptance	home	4 years: parents out-of-pocket; merit based scholarship	science / senior
Roman	public school: honors, AP, engineering track, college prep program	above 3.5		in-state: 2 [1]	0	• reputation	conditional acceptance	on campus	1st year: scholarships; Pell grants 2nd year: family loan	business / soph
Rose	public school: honors, AP, research program	above 3.5		in-state:2 out-of-state: 3 [3]	0	• proxy to home • reputation	acceptance into honors program	on campus	3 years: parents out-of-pocket	social science / junior
Alma-Lyn	private, public, reform schools: honors, AP	3.5-3.0	SAT course, SAT tutor	in-state: 2 out-of-state: 7 *[4 private]* [4]	5	• location • cost • reputation	acceptance into honors program (1 year after high school)	on campus	4 years: adoptive father; private loans	social science / senior
Artha	private school: honors, AP, IB	above 3.5	SAT course	in-state: 2 [2]	0	• proximity to home • size	spring acceptance	on campus	4 years: parents out-of-pocket	social science / senior
NB	public school: honors, AP	unknown		in-state: 1 *[transferred from 2-yr]* [1]	0	• cost • proximity to home	CC transfer student	home	2-yr: scholarship 4-yr: father out-of-pocket	science / junior

*self-reported

** paid college preparation courses or other private services

**unless stated otherwise, college applications were for 4-year public institutions

indicates that six participants would be adequate for a phenomenological study (as cited in Mertens, 2005), which fits with Dukes' (1984) recommendation of three to ten participants.

I interviewed seven participants in total. I conducted and audio recorded 20 individual, in-person, semi-structured interviews lasting 1.5-2 hours each from summer 2014 to winter 2015 (see Table 1 for details). All participants spoke English fluently, so I conducted interviews in English. With the exception of one interview, I conducted all interviews in a seminar room on campus; the other I conducted in a conference room at a participant's residence hall. I screened participants prior to the first interview to ensure they met the previously outlined criteria.

I collected data through in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews in addition to field notes, analytic memos, and an artifact analysis in order to increase the participatory aspect of this research (van Manen, 1990). An in-depth, semi-structured format allows for richer data compared to a structured format and greater flexibility for participants to describe their experience and respond to questions (Morse & Field, 1995). Such a format also provided enough structure for me to ask participants the same sets of questions yet different probes and follow up questions based on their response, facilitating an understanding of both the unique and universal aspects of lived experience (van Manen, 1990). Field notes on general observations during the interviews and high inference or analytic memos chronicling research events, emerging themes and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998) align with the importance of writing and reflection in hermeneutic phenomenology. Analytic memos provide a space for "responsive-reflective writing," which van Manen (1990) states, "is the very activity of doing phenomenology" (p. 132). I applied an integrated format to capture thoughts on preliminary interpretations that arose during and after interviews.

I drew from Seidman's (1991) phenomenological interview series for this study's

interview protocol. Seidman presents three foci for data collection: focused life history, details of experience, and reflection on the meaning. A focused life history allowed participants to put their college-going into context, reconstructing their early experiences in the various contexts they lived their lives. According to Seidman (2006), "people's behaviors become meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them" (p. 13). In the details of experience stage, participants focus on their present lived experience of the phenomenon. Given this study's retrospective exploration of college-going, this aspect of the interview followed up on participants' life history, asking them to detail previously mentioned experiences. The third phase allowed participants to share their understanding of their experience with college-going, either looking to the past or looking forward. It is important to reiterate that this approach emphasizes reconstruction of experience and not memory. By asking participants what happened, Seidman (1991) argues, researchers are able to "avoid many of the impediments to memory that abound" (p. 67). Reconstruction also implies that participants are able to distinguish more relevant past events from less relevant events (Seidman, 1991).

The first round of interviews focused on the first two phases of Seidman's (1991) interview series, life history and details of experience. It is not surprising then that the first interview was also the longest, at two hours for every participant. Interview questions served as prompts and provided structure across interviews. Collecting data on participants' life histories incorporated questions on their family composition, including parents' histories and education trajectory. During the details of experience stage, participants shared details of particularly impactful experiences to their college-going. In both stages, I asked participants follow up and clarifying questions in response to their responses to the primary questions to gain a better

understanding of issues or areas that seemed significant to participants in the context of this study. See Appendix D for the semi-structured interview protocol.

The second round of interviews focused on Seidman's (1991) third phase, reflection on meaning, and incorporated the use of artifacts. Description mediated by poetry, art, or action, van Manen (1990) suggests, incorporates an aesthetic dimension that allows for deeper interpretation. I conducted the second round of interviews approximately a week after the first interview. This interview typically lasted 1.5 hours for each participant. I requested participants bring with them an item of their choosing that represents their path to university. This allowed them to reflect on their experience, and, similar to photo-elicitation, encouraged participant involvement in data collection and analysis and elicited more multi-faceted details and understanding of their experience (Merriam, 2009; van Manen, 1990). I retained the semi-structured interview format used in the first round of interviews, but asked more questions specific to each participant (see Appendix D for interview protocol). The second interview began with participants talking about their artifact and its significance to them. After this discussion, I asked questions prompting participants to reflect further on their college-going experience. The use of artifacts invited participants into the research process. In this sense, they were co-researchers with a personal interest in making meaning of a phenomenon (Osborne, 1990). I describe the artifacts and their application to the analysis process in greater detail below and in the next chapter on participant pseudonyms and vignettes.

The third round of interviews is a departure from Seidman's interview series in that the first and second interviews encapsulated his three foci for data collection and the third and final interview involved member checks. A loosely structured format for the third interview also allowed space for any outstanding questions. I conducted member checks in-person to engage

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participants in a dialogue on my interpretation of select experiences as they relate to the research questions. Given the additional preparation needed for the third interviews, I conducted these two to three weeks after the second interview. Availability determined the timing of the third interview if participants were unable to meet two weeks after the second interview. This was particularly applicable for interviews initiated during the summer as participants had competing priorities with their summer schedule. Similar to the second interview, the third round lasted around 1.5 hours.

The member check process is an adaptation of what Kvale (1983) refers to as a "re-interview" (p. 182). Instead of a comprehensive analysis of the completed interviews, I created an analytic memo. According to Creswell (2009), partial transcripts containing relevant information are preferred over actual transcripts to respect participants' time and avoid potential awkwardness that some feel when they read a verbatim account of their interview. These analytic memos included a summary of emergent themes and issues as they related to the research questions; preliminary interpretations participants could respond to were embedded in the summary.

Participants read the memo and we discussed its accuracy in addition to any clarifying questions highlighted or noted in the margin. I incorporated the member check into the third and final interview not knowing participant receptivity to continued participation with no financial incentive. This worked well and respected participants' busy lives. One participant out of the seven was unable to meet three times so I collapsed the second and third interviews as described above into one, serving as the second and final interview (see 'Roman' in Table 1 on participant demographics). Time was a concern for him given his demanding academic and work schedules.

3.1.8 Data analysis

Each interview was transcribed verbatim so 1) inductive analysis, which moves from specific to general (Hatch, 2002), could be used to analyze the data and 2) the structures or essence of the experience could be identified through themes that constitute the experience of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenological data analysis, like other forms of qualitative research, involves coding, organizing, and analyzing. With phenomenology, however, researchers need to define for themselves what it means to be true to the data and determine how best to do so within a phenomenological framework (Hycner, 1985). Regardless of the approach, the researcher must be open, reflective, insightful, and sensitive to language (van Manen, 1990).

I conducted three primary levels of analysis of the data compiled during the data collection stage, all of which sought to explicate the understanding and meaning of participants' college-going experience. The first primary analysis involves participant vignettes. Given that understanding context facilitates exploration of the meaning of a given phenomenon (Seidman, 2006), it was crucial to invite readers into participants' lives. In doing so, I wanted to include enough detail to situate each participant within their college-going experience but not so much that it would jeopardize their anonymity. The compromise for me was creating participant vignettes from participants' descriptions of their artifact. Participant vignettes in this study are phenomenological text introducing the uniqueness of each participant (van Manen, 1997) through their artifact. In moving through the data reduction process, I pulled out participant artifact interview data and used participant descriptions and interpretations of their artifact as the foundation for the vignettes. I then edited vignettes by taking excerpts from across their interviews to expand on the initial description and interpretation. The vignettes are further designed to present each participant's interpretation of their college-going experience before any

thematic analysis in order to provide the reader with a more nuanced orientation to the thematic analyses in chapters 5 and 6. I describe the artifacts and their application to the analysis process in greater detail in the next chapter on participant vignettes and pseudonyms.

Thematic analyses comprise the second and third levels of analysis. The second analysis addresses the sub-questions guiding this study: 1) how is habitus shaped by socio-cultural and institutional contexts and 2) how do social, cultural, and aspirational capital promote or constrain students' capacity to negotiate institutional contexts? The third analysis, or the meta-themes, looks across the findings that emerged from the first thematic analysis and boils those down to their essence in relation to the primary research question of how Southeast Asian American undergraduates understand and experience their path to university. In this sense, the thematic analysis of the two sub-questions guiding this study lays the groundwork for the meta-themes. The meta-themes serve to highlight the essence of meaning of core influences that shaped participants' path to university.

I employed van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological reflection, which emphasizes reflective analysis of structural or thematic aspects of the experience through hermeneutic phenomenological writing that involves an ongoing recursive of writing and rewriting. Writing, in phenomenological research, is a complex, iterative process of re-writing, re-thinking, and re-reflecting on the parts and the whole of the text.

I identified codes—or "structures of experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 79)—as a data reduction strategy and a method for understanding context and highlighting interpretations of meaning. Codes were determined using van Manen's selective reading approach. While engaged in selective reading, I recorded analytic comments and questions in the margin to aid in identifying basic, or first order emergent, themes. It is important to note that data analysis does

not begin after the interviews but at the beginning of the data collection process through analytic memos so insights gained from interpretations or reflective comments inform subsequent interviews and identification of emergent themes.

After reading all interview transcripts for the whole of the text, I reread two contrasting sets of interview transcripts to reflect on the parts in relation to the whole and to create a coding framework based on the theoretical framework guiding the research questions and other potentially salient issues related to the research questions (Creswell, 2003). Focusing first on contrasting interviews I thought would provide a broader range of codes with potential to capture both similarities and differences across interviews. Coding, or "labels," helps assign "units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). Next, I created a codebook to define and provide examples of these codes before coding individual interviews. Using NVivo software, I then coded phrases, sentences or paragraphs for each interview transcript. I elected not to follow a strictly sentence-, paragraph- or other-level approach since my focus was on meaningful units. This was an iterative process as the creation of new codes was necessary as I engaged in the coding process with other interview transcripts. This required me to return to any interview transcript previously coded to reread and apply new codes if necessary.

NVivo's report function facilitated the organization of codes and sections of coded text into similar groupings. A list of issues or items discussed for each code kept me close to the data when considering possible themes. These groupings, or meaningful units comprised of actual statements from data and relevant to the research questions, became the basis for the basic themes. See Table 3 for a summary of the stages of analysis.

Table 3. Stages of thematic network analysis

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Stages of Thematic Network Analysis</td></tr>
<tr>
<td rowspan="8">Writing and (Re)Reading</td>
<td>

I. Create codebook
  a. read two contrasting interviews for code creation
  b. use research questions/theoretical framework as guide plus allow for other interesting, related findings

II. Code interviews
  a. identify issued discussed
        i. based on underlying patterns and structures within coded texts

III. Abstract basic themes from coded text segments
  a. group codes
        i. based on underlying patterns
  b. identify basic themes

IV. Arrange basic themes into organizing themes

V. Arrange organizing themes into overarching themes

VI. Verify and refine themes and networks

VII. Represent themes visually

VIII. Describe and explore the network

</td>
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Source: adapted from Attride-Stirling (2001)

After coding, I adapted Attride-Stirling's (2001) presentation of thematic networks to organize the first thematic analysis of the data as thematic networks aim to explore understanding of an issue. Attride-Stirling's (1998, 2001) thematic networks technique of claim, warrants, and backings is a reinterpretation of Toulmin's (1958) argumentation scheme that aims to identify "patterns of rationalization in the exploration" (p. 144) of a phenomenon. In Attride-Stirling's (2001) interpretation, claims, warrants, and backings all serve as themes in that each warrant or backing could undergo a further level of analysis as a claim to explore its own patterns of rationalization. This approach, Attride-Stirling (1998) cautions, is designed as a tool for organizing and analyzing "explicit rationalizations and implicit meanings" (p. 145) and not a

method for identifying "the beginning of arguments or the end of rationalizations" (p. 145). As such, Attride-Stirling (1998) defines claims, warrants, and backings as follows:

- Claim is a position to be elaborated. It is a statement of belief, an assertion about 'reality' that is understood in terms of the principles and assumptions which constitute it.

- Warrants contribute to the signification of the claim and are the principles upon which the claim is based. It mediates between a claim and its background logic.

- Backing is a statement of belief anchored around a warrant, which, with other backings and warrants, serve to signify a claim. (p. 144)

After identifying the basic themes, which eventually serve as backings in the thematic network, I further categorized them by commonality and ordered them under second order or organizing themes, which became warrants for the overarching theme. The degree of interpretation increases as the themes move from specific to general. Stating the basic themes as simply as possible allows for "meaning condensation" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 57); they are then woven together for "meaning interpretation" to "explain why something happened or what something means" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 41). The second and third order themes emerged from my interpretation of what the meaningful units reveal about the phenomenon. My understanding of participants' college-going experience coupled with theoretical knowledge, an ongoing review of the literature, and the research goals and questions all informed my interpretation.

Throughout the theme identification process, several scholars recommend creating a visual aid to assist with managing themes and mapping inter-relationships (Fesenmaier, O'Leary, & Uysal, 2002; Merriam, 2009). This fits with Attride-Stirling's (n.d.) thematic networks technique that organizes themes into a visual "web of rationalizations" (p. 146). Appendix A charts the thematic networks in this study, moving from backings organized by codes to warrants

to claims. This is not to suggest a linear process. A great deal of interpretive work occurred throughout as I moved between the coded text, warrants, backings, and claims and in some instances back to the raw data to check context.

To additionally facilitate the theming process and guarantee rich description, I employed van Manen's (1990) free imaginative variation approach. Rich hermeneutic phenomenological textural description is achieved through free imaginative variation, a process that differentiates incidental themes from essential themes. It requires me to ask:

- Is the phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon?

- Does the phenomenon without this theme lose its fundamental meaning? (p. 107).

Given how I organized the study's thematic analysis, I employ free imaginative variation at the second stage of thematic analysis. Doing so allowed me to reflect on the second order themes in relation to their meaningful units and consider whether a more descriptive theme would be more representative of the first order themes. Using the themes and their interrelationship, I reconstructed participants' journeys in their own words to illuminate their college-going experience and communicate findings.

3.2   TRUSTWORTHINESS

In the 1980s Guba and Lincoln proposed new criteria for ensuring rigor in qualitative research, arguing that reliability and validity, as applied in quantitative inquiry, are different in qualitative inquiry. Since hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry is ground within the lived experience of a phenomenon and is not intended to generalize based on an objective reality, I apply Guba's

(1981) construct for trustworthiness to this research as a means for ensuring rigor. The criteria for Guba's (1981) trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress that credibility for a qualitative researcher is one of the most important criteria in establishing trustworthiness. Credibility, which addresses the truth value of the work, ensures the findings are consistent with the intentions of the research. Guba (1981) identifies several strategies for ensuring researchers have accurately captured the phenomena under investigation. To establish credibility, I triangulated the data and conducted member checks; purposive sampling and rich, thick descriptive data addressed transferability; dependability was sought through audit trails; and confirmability is achieved through reflexivity. All these elements are core to this study's research design.

I pursued triangulation through utilizing various data sources and methods so I could cross-check data and involve participants in the data collection process. Incorporating artifacts and member checks as forms of triangulation resulted in a more sophisticated analysis. Comparing details of participants' college-going experience against their interpretation of their artifact allowed me to uncover inconsistencies, if any, and identify particularly salient experiences or influences. The artifact was a fitting supplement to the interviews as it situated participants in their respective context and highlighted the essence of their college-going experience, while the semi-structured interviews provided the details to support that experience.

Member checks are designed to check the accuracy of findings and interpretations against what participants intended. Given the iterative nature of phenomenological research, member checks were conducted informally throughout the three-stage interview process through revisiting previous narratives and also formally during the third interview. Conducting member checks during the interview process was a practical and methodological consideration. I felt

engaging with this process during the interviews respected participants time and busy schedules. An opportunity to provide feedback earlier on facilitated my understanding of their experience and kept them engaged in the data collection and analysis process. Through this process, there were moments my interpretation did not align with participants' interpretation. Integrating member checks into Seidman's (1991) interview series and conducting them during the third interview turned the process into a conversation that otherwise might not have happened. Participants read an analytic memo during the third interview and responded to my preliminary interpretations and questions. Not only was I able to communicate directly with participants about parallel or divergent interpretations in the text, but their body language provided me with another medium from which to draw upon in deciding how or when to follow up with them. All these aspects made the interpretive process richer.

Rich description is also inherent in hermeneutic phenomenology assuming the researcher is mindful in selecting participants with rich and varied experiences and is able to capture the essence of their experience through descriptive themes and examples. Snowball sampling facilitated recruitment of participants whose experience with college-going differs from that of other participants. Core to gathering rich data is attention to data collection. The structure of Seidman's (1991) phenomenological interview series enabled collection of rich data through establishing three phases that move from general to explicit to reflective. Implementing this structure over a series of interviews also creates a space for trust to build between the researcher and participant. Had I attempted one interview or tried to condense Seidman's series beyond my initial modifications, I think would have jeopardized the quality of the data. Perhaps the most significant source for rich description that aligns with Seidman's series and a hermeneutic phenomenological approach is the artifact. While participants provided rich descriptions of their

college-going experience, their artifact added depth of meaning to their experience that I think would have missing had I relied solely on the structure of Seidman's (1991) phenomenological interview series.

Finally, I maintained an audit trail through interview transcripts, field notes, and analytic and integrative memos. Inherent in hermeneutic phenomenology is reflexivity, which is facilitated through methods that comprise the audit trail in addition to the necessity of explicating research bias. This is done through a subjectivity statement and memoing. The former explicates how I am situated in the research, while the latter is an ongoing approach to dealing with bias and reactivity.

3.3   LIMITATIONS

The primary limitations to this study involve limitations inherent in the institution and participant selection process and data collection.

The institution for this study is a selective, public four-year institution. Research shows that student characteristics tend to differ across private and public institutions and two- and four-year institutions (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, & Tran, 2011). Given that ECU is a selective institution, which means its admissions standards are higher than those of less selective institutions, the college-going experiences of this study's participants could differ from those attending a different type of institution. While this exploratory study is ground within the lived experience of seven Southeast Asian American undergraduates at a public research institution, its strength in this regard is also a limitation in generalizability. Although hermeneutic phenomenology is not intended to generalize an objective reality, readers

need to keep in mind the parameters framing this study. With the exception of two participants, this study's participants identified ECU early on as their first choice institution. Armed with this awareness in their high school years likely facilitated their admission into ECU through their college preparation efforts. Students attending another type of institution might have college-going experiences contrary to the essence of those presented in this study.

Another limitation is participant involvement in student organizations with a strong focus on Asian interests. While snowball sampling facilitated recruitment of participants whose experience with college-going differs from that of other participants, recruitment efforts largely involved student organizations or campus centers that have a strong focus on Asian interests. Given the study's focus on participants' college-going experience, I did not ask questions germane to their career as an undergraduate student. Participants active in Asian-related clubs could have a different interpretation of their college-going experience had they not engaged with such organizations. Is it unclear the extent to which the needs, interests, and experiences of students with a stronger orientation to Asian American studies or clubs reflect those of their peers who do not participate in such programs or extracurricular groups.

The research site as a commuter or residential campus deserves attention when considering description mediated by poetry, art, or action (van Manen, 1990). Although the sample is comprised of only one out-of-state student, three in-state students lived on campus. Students lived on campus because either they wanted what they referred to as the college experience or commuting would have been burdensome for them and their families. Three students lived at home. Their on- or off-campus residential status could have influenced their artifact selection. Although no participant mentioned this during their interview, the possibility struck me when the only out-of-state participant brought a photograph of her artifact to the

second interview. Everyone else brought a tangible object to their second interview. Incorporating an artifact was partially designed to 1) triangulate the data so I could compare what participants shared of their college-going experience against their interpretation of the artifact as a representation of that experience and 2) involve participants in the data collation and analysis process. The first purpose could have been compromised if participants lacked access to a wider range of representative objects and selected one they might not have otherwise chosen.

3.4   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research study needed institutional review board (IRB) approval from the University of Pittsburgh only. The University of Pittsburgh's IRB office required two forms of communication from the research site: 1) communication from the site's IRB office indicating that IRB approval is unnecessary, and 2) written permission from a faculty member to conduct this study at the research site. The research site's IRB office did conduct a brief, informal review of the study to ensure it met its criteria for not needing to undergo IRB review. Communication with the research site's IRB office was handled via phone and email. See verbal consent form in Appendix B explaining the purpose of the study, its potential usefulness, and statement of confidentiality shared with interviewees.

3.5   INVESTIGATING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

I present researcher subjectivity through van Manen's (1990) lens of investigating the lived experience. This required me first to become familiar with the phenomenon through reflecting on and sharing my own experience before collecting the experiences of others. My research interest in institutional influences on access and equity for marginalized populations stems from my personal and professional backgrounds as a first generation college student and an English as a Second Language educator, respectively. These foundational experiences have not only shaped my research interests but color the lens through which I interpret higher education literature as well.

As the second youngest child out of five and the first to graduate from a postsecondary institution, my college-going experience was akin to throwing darts at a dartboard and hoping one of them would stick. The inner bulls eye for me was simply admission to the one college I applied to, a decision based on proximity to where I lived and worked and what I could reasonably afford to pay out-of-pocket. I was a non-traditional student in that I matriculated spring semester following high school graduation and worked full-time. I had little to no concept of the outer rings or scoring system because I lacked the cultural capital necessary to be a more competitive player. Moving to another state and attending a new high school in 10th grade, a pivotal point for many students in their academic trajectory, handicapped me in ways I began only to understand decades later. I was a solid 'B' student in high school who followed my classmates' lead in taking the SAT and simply fulfilled the course requirements to graduate. My parents expected above average grades from all five of their children, but, as the second youngest, these expectations swirled in a vacuum as conversations around their utility never

transpired. Lack of direction and concern over "what's next" explained my application to a state college.

Before learning of social and cultural capital, I believed diligence and perseverance were sufficient for turning aspirations into reality. Like me, many students at my postsecondary institution worked full-time and attended courses in the evening. Our collective goal was to graduate in less than five years. I graduated in six before realizing that an undergraduate degree in my major at my institution did not carry the weight I hoped it would. I decided a graduate degree would be the next logical step. Instead of majoring in an area of limited interest, as was the case with my undergraduate degree, I embraced education, notably teaching English to speakers of other languages and later comparative and international education. Since I continued to work full-time, I volunteered to teach during my few available evenings for the practical purpose of applying to practice the theory and methods learned through my coursework.

My awareness of marginalized populations advanced from my focus on praxis while tutoring male inmates for a few years at a county jail. This also marked the period when the notion of structural inequality was seeded. Tuesday and Thursday nights, I observed men who I believed genuinely aspired to do more with their lives—to earn their GED, to learn English, to belong to a community—but were literally and figuratively imprisoned in a system that restricted movement. I never learned the stories of those men, the circumstances behind their incarceration. I knew only the severity of their offense by the colors they wore. Jesus, Javier, Saul and others had been, I suspect, illegal immigrants for some time. Once deported, they would likely attempt as many journeys as necessary to the United States until they could reunite with their families. I often wondered what conditions converged to land them in jail and what one factor could have steered them away from wearing an orange or blue uniform.

Eventually I found myself in Asia for over six years, teaching students and training educators, and worked within education systems in stark contrast to the one I passed through yet similar in the class-based disparities they perpetuate (Ordonez & Maclean, 2000). My interest in the effect of structural inequalities on marginalized populations took root as I began anecdotally to compare education disparities across and within East, South, and Southeast Asian countries. Living and working in Asia, naturally, also exposed me to cultures and ways of being vastly different from my own, challenging my biases and worldview. In this sense, I possess multiple perspectives, the combination of which is an asset for this research. Given my professional experience and knowledge, I could further contextualize participants' family histories. Conversely, as an outsider, a white, middle-class female, participants understandably tried to make sense of my research and me. I believe my awareness of the ethnic and socio-cultural diversity within the pan-Asian population yet limited exposure to growing up in an Asian American household prompted me to ask more clarifying questions to ensure I understood references of a more personal or cultural nature.

At the onset of the first interview I briefly shared my background with participants and explained the nature of qualitative research to assuage participant concerns and increase their comfort level (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). To further establish trust, I assured participants that, in addition to anonymity, they could request to have information omitted from the final product. When necessary, participants and I negotiated the parameters of such information. They elected to disclose sensitive details so I could more fully understand and contextualize their college-going experience, but ultimately they determined which details I would exclude to ensure both privacy and an additional measure of anonymity. I am grateful for their trust and vulnerability in sharing intimate aspects of their lives. Despite navigating challenging or dissimilar socio-

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historical and socio-cultural circumstances that set them apart from some of their peers, participants elected to view their personal histories as a formative journey that brought them to their current position. Some participants seemed acutely aware of the effect institutional factors at home or school had on their college-going experience; others were reflecting on them for the first time.

The primary assumption I bring to this research is a belief that institutional factors, through accumulation of social and cultural capital, influence dispositions, opportunities, and decisions. Students can develop a college-going habitus through exposure to institutional influences that then serve to promote or constrain postsecondary matriculation. I find particularly fascinating the core aspects that influence or drive people toward matriculation and ultimately completion given diverse contexts.

In this chapter, I explicate my assumptions and subjective interest and investment in this study in order to maintain awareness and to offer insight into my own interpretive process. The subsequent chapters delve into the findings, starting with participant introductions through vignettes and following with thematic analyses. A discussion of the findings in relation to my interpretation, the theoretical framework, and the research literature is incorporated into this study's meta-themes. The paper concludes with recommendations for research and educational policy and practice.

4.0   PARTICIPANT VIGNETTES

In this chapter, I introduce the seven Southeast Asian American undergraduates who participated in this study through descriptions of their pseudonyms and their vignettes. I use participant selected artifacts to build vignettes that elucidate participants' individual essence of meaning and situate them within their own experience (Seidman, 2006). In chapters 5 and 6, I share findings on participants' path to university. I organize findings first by a preliminary thematic analysis in chapter 5 that considers institutional influences on their college-going; and second, in chapter 6, I organize findings by a presentation and discussion of meta-themes that represent the collective essence of how these students understand and experience their path to university. Offering essences of meaning in this chapter through vignettes provides a more nuanced orientation to the themes that facilitates, in chapters 5 and 6, a deeper understanding of how participants' interpretation of their being in the world influenced their path to university (Seidman, 2006). For this reason, this chapter does not have a summary or conclusion. I want participant narratives to stand on their own. I intend for readers to sit with participant vignettes, to invite them into the lives of these seven students when engaging with chapters 5 and 6.

Creating participant profiles is one approach to sharing interview data. A well-crafted profile provides a window into a participant's life. Similar to a story line, profiles typically have a beginning, middle, and end (Seidman, 1991). Constructing profiles for the participants in this study meant balancing the level of detail. I wanted to include enough detail to situate each

participant within their college-going experience but not so much that it would jeopardize their anonymity (Seidman, 1991). I sought to employ an approach that celebrated their uniqueness without making them vulnerable. The compromise for me was creating participant vignettes from participants' descriptions of their artifacts. This allowed me to present participants' rich and unique narratives of their college-going experience without sacrificing context or meaning (Seidman, 1991).

Like profiles, vignettes capture participant experiences but differ in that they are shorter narratives that encompass a certain event or time period that facilitates understanding (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Participant vignettes are phenomenological text introducing the uniqueness of each participant (van Manen, 1997) through their artifact; understanding context facilitates exploration of the meaning of a given phenomenon (Seidman, 2006) and the "irrevocable tension between particular and transcendent meaning" (van Manen, 1997, p. 345).

Artifacts were a mechanism for participants to reflect on and make meaning of their college-going experience (see Table 1 and participant pseudonym and vignettes for participant artifacts). As such, the vignettes, which I present in the first person, serve as powerful representations of participants' reflection on their path to postsecondary education (Seidman, 1991). The participants owned the process and set the parameters of their experience. This approach is valuable in phenomenology because the focus becomes the meaning participants attribute to college-going (Lopez & Willis, 2004) and directly and indirectly engages them in the data collection and analysis process (van Manen, 1997).

In using participant descriptions and interpretations of their artifacts as the foundation for the vignettes, which serve to both introduce and contextualize the essence of their college-going experience, I employ several interpretive moves. First, I claim participants' descriptions and

interpretations of their artifact as valuable. Second, I edit the vignettes to highlight my perception of participants' understanding of their college-going experience. I do this by taking excerpts from across their three interviews (two in Roman's case) to expand on their initial description and interpretation of their artifact. Given that participants set the parameters of their vignette through the breadth of their description, vignette lengths vary. The vignettes are italicized to set them off and reinforce that they are in participants' own words.

4.1   PSEUDONYMS

Before presenting vignettes, I explain the rationale behind each participant's pseudonym. This was an intentional analytic and interpretive process whereby I selected pseudonyms representative of meanings participants' attributed to their college-going experience in addition to the artifact itself (Seidman, 1991). This technique is designed both to remind and reinforce for readers throughout this paper how each participant has situated themselves in their own history and college-going experience. Pseudonyms are presented in alphabetical order.

Alma-Lyn is a combination of two words. Alma is short for alma mater, and Lyn is the phonetic representation of the third syllable in porcelain. This participant's artifact was a mug from her adopted father's alma mater, hence alma. Porcelain is a ceramic material known for its strength and symbolizes both what this participant yearned for as a child and later demonstrated as a young woman. The combination of two names is representative of the double name tradition in the Southern United States and is an appropriate pseudonym in this respect because these names tend to have a hypocorism form, meaning they are diminutive forms of a word or given names.

Art covers broad subjects of study including language, literature, painting, music, and dance. It is defined by Merriam-Webster as "something that is created with imagination and skill and that is beautiful or that expresses important ideas." In this sense, art is subjective and personal, as it is for this participant. This subjectivity allows his preferred art form of music, as his artifact, to take on whatever meaning or purpose he needs it to be at any given point in time.

Artha originates from Siddharta, the personal name for Buddha. 'Siddha' is the Sanskrit word for 'accomplished,' and 'Artha' is the Sanskrit work for 'goal' or, more appropriately, 'what was searched for.' This pseudonym represents both this participant's selection of a bracelet indicative of her Buddhist orientation and the various journeys she undertook throughout her path to university.

NB is an abbreviation for New Balance. This participant chose his high school running shoes to represent his college-going experience. I settled on New Balance as his pseudonym over other brands since movement is core to both NB's college-going experience and New Balance's mission (New Balance, 2012).

Regalia is distinctive clothing signaling status or recognition for achievement. In this case, this participant's National Honor Society stole as her artifact is recognition of academic achievement. It represents input and outcomes through hard work and resulting successes. It also characterizes the pride she felt in her academic accomplishments.

Roman is short for New Times Roman and was the font used for this participant's artifact, his resume. Roman is also symbolic of the Roman Empire, known for its contributions toward the development of the modern world. The focus here and its relevance as a pseudonym for this student is 'achievement.' Achievement is comprehensive, as illustrated through his

resume headings: education; work experience; academic achievements; activities; training, skills, and interests.

      Rose is short for Rosebud and symbolized the sled in Orson Welles' 1941 classic *Citizen Kane*. The main character, Charles Kane, was a wealthy newspaper publisher whose adult life was marked by fantastic success and upheaval. The sled, an object in his snow globe, represented for Kane his childhood and reminded him of happier, peaceful times. Its presence had a calming effect on Kane much like this participant's glitter jar as her artifact does for her. In the midst of chaos and stress, self-care becomes of paramount importance, a lesson she learned coming out of her college-going experience.

4.2   VIGNETTES

4.2.1 Alma-Lyn

This mug is what I thought of. I don't have the physical one. My adoptive father went to this British university like I mentioned, and I would make tea before I went to bed. I remember especially in middle school and stuff, I would have tea every night, and I would use that mug. I guess that was really...and I used it throughout high school when I was home and even junior year when things were getting bad. I still use that mug every night and I guess...I don't know...for me it represented college because I really wanted to follow in his footsteps for a long time. I just looked up to him 'cause he was like my dad. That was a lot of it.

I thought about applying [to his alma mater], but I didn't want to go to school in Britain. Even when I was going to boarding school and stuff, I thought about applying to the ones he went to in Britain. I really wanted to follow his footsteps. I guess he was the person who was pushing me to do all that college stuff every year. I hadn't really thought about it until we were speaking, but those conversations I had with him about me not going [to university] made me want to go more. I wasn't really proactive about it until I was at reform school. He didn't tell me until I was older that he almost dropped out his freshman year because he would party too hard and was drinking so much that he almost didn't pass finals. Then I guess...I might have mentioned before...he felt like he was a failure to his dad because his dad had gone to MIT and was an engineer and ended up being CEO so he was a big deal. [My father] barely got his degree and ended up getting his

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CPA then worked his way up from there. But he was always like, "my alma mater is the Harvard of Britain, but it isn't MIT."

I would like drink out of his mug and be like, 'what if I went to [your alma mater]' and he'd say, 'you can do better than that.' He'd be like, 'there are other options for you.' Now that I look back on it, it was a lot of...I just wanted to live up to his expectations. He was always disappointed in everyone around him and also himself because of his dad, which I think I must have known on some level because every time he was lecturing me, I'd be like, 'oh man, he's freaking out for no reason' But, I'd still drink out of that mug. It would make me feel...'cause it has the gold trim and is really fancy so I felt like, 'yeah, I'm going to go to university and be worthy of this mug' and that kind of stuff.

The first two years when I was at boarding school, he bought a second house for me to stay at during vacations. That mug was there, among other personal effects. But yeah, I used it throughout high school. I especially remember because I didn't really care what I'd drink tea out of. I'd just drink tea every night. But then when I was probably still in middle school, we had these big ceramic glass ones that are supposed to be heat proof and it shattered on my leg and I had welts and stuff. After that, I only used that mug because it never shattered on me.

4.2.1   Art

I said that I was looking at music, but I don't have...I wasn't able to find anything specifically. Sorry...it's hard for me being [an artist] because I am interested in a lot of things. ...[T]hings in music that I listen for...depend on the mood, whatever is going on in my social environment. The lyrics don't have to be in English. I listen to the melody and harmony if it resonates with me, not because someone told me, 'oh you should listen to the Beatles. They are the best band ever.' If I find something from a song that resonates with me, [it] doesn't have to be historical or musically intricate or complex, if that makes any sense.

For me, in my life, I always turn to music as...therapy in a sense. People call music therapy to relieve stress, anxiety, or any social problems that I have that could be within family or with friends or just school. So that's one of the things I really thought about. It is always there no matter what. Opposed to a friend or something, you kinda have to wait to see if they'll hear you out. Emotions that come with listening to music help me achieve a state of mind that's more calm, tranquil.

[I turn toward music] for relationships with others...[my] personal relationship with my girlfriend or something. That happens first. For me, family problems never really attracted or bothered me in a sense because I was always told from my mom and dad that, 'no matter what, really focus on your studies.' I really didn't pay attention to [family problems] and I was really busy in high school doing extracurricular activities that I had no time to really think about that.

[Now that I think about it, my family dynamic] might have been in the back of my mind, but it wasn't something that hindered me from education. And like I said, I've been having break down

points where it just hits me all of a sudden and I am just trying to figure out what I'm going to do with my life, what is going on, trying to figure out what to do really. Because my mom, when I graduated from high school, was pregnant with my stepsister, and my dad was living under the same roof. I know there are other people with problems, but it's just...that's my story, that's where I come from. It's been difficult, but I try to manage with it by turning to friends, turning to music. I keep going back to music. [Music] is always the thing that's there. My friends have their problems too, I understand that, so they can't always be there although that's the ideal thing.

I wasn't able to find a piece that represented all of that for [me]. Music isn't one thing. I don't know how to really describe it so you understand. I could tell you what I listen to at this period but it would be multiple subcategories within that because I had a lot of phases [on my path to college]. With the whole [classical music] thing, [for example], I didn't like it. It was like, 'man this is what old people listen to. I don't like this.' Then it became an acquired taste, after listening to more things and figuring out that this is what I like within this genre of music, not things people tell me to go and listen to because that's everyone's favorite.

4.2.2   Artha

I thought about a lot of things. I chose this bracelet because it's a piece of jewelry, and when I was in elementary school and middle school, they started implementing the rule that you couldn't wear anything that didn't have any Christian meaning to it. This was in my private school. They started it in middle school. I used to wear necklaces and bracelets. … It's kind of one of those things I wore jewelries for so long that when I didn't have it on me anywhere, it was a piece missing. I asked my mom if I could get a cross and she said, 'sure.' So she got me a small cross to wear. It was a necklace.

I was afraid to change out of my cross in high school because I was still going to a private school and it was that feeling of 'I don't want to be too different starting off.' In middle school I was way too different. I brought rice to lunch. I was proud of it, but I would bring rice to lunch and people would think that's weird.

My [high school] friends used to ask me if I was Christian. 'I never thought you were.' 'No, I'm just wearing it because it was part of my uniform before.' Then I decided to change it and I started wearing whatever I wanted. I realized that eventually I was still more Buddhist than anything. I related more to Buddhism as a religion. My mom started getting me bracelets and stuff that had small Buddhist themes. I like this simple string one because it has the knot around it.

The knot is like an eternal knot. It is a big representation of reincarnation. I always liked the idea of how we don't belong in this world so we try to be happy and try to stay in the middle of things even though it is hard. Then we just pass through. If we succeeded in living a fulfilling life, then we can move on from this one.

That's really what's kind of helped me through school. I had a lot of pressure from my family trying to match up to my sister yet at the same time my sister was telling me to try to find something that made me happy. And even though school was a lot harder for me at times, I related to that and that I need to find something that makes me happy. It doesn't' necessarily have to be the same thing as my sister. I don't have to think about being in my sister's shadow even though she's much better than me in a lot of things. I just found my middle path.

While I was thinking I was a failure, my sister was also thinking she was a failure because she couldn't find a job. She started becoming more supportive of me in a way, veering me in a different path. She realized, 'I'd been working for an A and studying for the SATs all my life and I don't have a job right now. I'm unemployed and stressed out.' She kind of said that to me, 'school is about measuring how hard you work vs the grades you get, and that's preparing you for the real world. How hard will you work for what you want?' She realized that no matter how hard she worked, no one wanted to hire her. She started saying 'Artha, do something for yourself and you'd be happy with, but will also make you a good amount of money.' As my sister was starting to fail with job searching, I took that as a sign that maybe her path isn't something that is always as secure as I thought it was. That's when I kind of branched out.

I still think of my past academic life. Starting from fifth grade my grades started dropping a little bit and stayed that way. I was a straight A student up 'till fifth grade. That confused me because I didn't think I was doing anything different. I didn't think anything around me was different. It wasn't, and I realized eventually through struggling all the way through high school that I am meant for college. I just am not meant for college in the same way my sister was meant for it. My sister was always driven by a grade while I was driven to learn more. That was our difference.

4.2.1   NB

So my artifact is on my feet. These are my cross county shoes that I had in ninth grade. So cross country...yeah, they're a little ripped up, a little intact, but the reason I brought these...it was actually a toss-up between this and another thing I can explain later. Cross country sort of had a big impact on the way I went through education and life really. I remember my coach he always would tell us at every practice, 'you look to where you want to go.' When we would run, he would say, 'don't look back because it slows your body down.' When he said that, it hit me that that's like the perfect way to keep going forward—don't pay attention to what has happened, just look for different options. That's sort of how I've approached every kind of hardship in life so far. No matter what it is, if it would be failure or problems at home, you just keep looking for the next option. You keep look forward, looking to where you can go. Even if you fail, you just look for the next option as long as it's forward. That's why I wanted to bring these. They're still intact.

[The other item I was thinking about] is a rock from Angkor Wat. The reason I was going to choose that...the idea is being able to withstand anything. To take a problem and deal with it and let it fly past you. ...when I first went there and saw how long the structure had been and will continue to stand and the fact that it's in Cambodia, it reminded me of my family. They always

seem positive, optimistic. It almost seems like everything that happened didn't have much of an effect. I guess it reminded me of the hardships I've faced (laughs)—nothing compared to them— but what I think are hardships and just trying to withstand it, keep going through it. The reason I didn't bring that artifact is because when I think of my academic career, I think of how I always kept looking forward for the next option. The rock was more representing withstanding things, not moving forward.

I've never...I was never particularly smart (laughs). Nothing ever really came to me easily. It was always kind of discouraging because I had a ton of genius friends. Maybe 70 percent of my friends are in Ivy League right now. It was always kind of depressing to be around these incredibly smart people, but then I'm sitting there having trouble trying to pick up Algebra or pre-Calculus. I always had to put in many, many more hours into what I was studying. So just kind of trying to ignore the fact that I wasn't that smart and ignore failure or bad grades and keep studying and moving forward. Especially leading up to college, that was hard...but even in college when you think you're such a hard worker. I get into this program, and I put in huge amounts of time...just passing is a huge accomplishment.

[When I say nothing came easily, I mean] academics. Athletics. Everything. There was always something. Some kind of problem. As tough as things have been, I guess I really wouldn't want to change it. All the bad things, all the really bad things, particularly at home. ...winters without heat. Sometimes there'd be no food. Somebody would forget to go shopping or we had ingredients [that] I or no one had any idea how to cook. A lot of times you would just go to the grocery store to buy some bread. Bread and ketchup is surprisingly delicious. And chili. Bread, ketchup, chili and soy sauce fills you up a lot. [My mother] was always at work or at school. During my high school career, that's what I remember. Late at night I remember she'd be there. Usually studying.

A lot of the winters my dad wanted to try to save money so he would turn off the heat. Or our pipes would burst so he'd have to turn off the water. Winters were pretty bad and actually they're still bad. Just dealing with...I don't' know if you've ever taken a shower in the dark with a bucket of water and you douse yourself. Maybe it's not that bad. I know there's a lot of people who have to do that, but I don't know them personally. I guess what was stressful was, 'why are we living this way?' (laughs) We were in a pretty well off community, so 'why are we doing this?' I think it was because [my father] didn't want to spend [money]. A lot of things he just wanted to do himself. That was really tough. Trying to sleep on my couch. I didn't have a bed until I was 16.... You're sitting in your house with pretty much all your winter clothes on and fall asleep with five blankets on. At least we had blankets, so I guess it wasn't really that bad. Just trying to deal with school and come home and also there was always every other day someone was fighting over something. You go to school. You go to your clubs. Then you go to work. Then you come home and it's freezing and people would be yelling at each other. Pretty much all through high school.

I guess as hard as I'd consider [my journey], I really think I have had the easiest path compared to my siblings... I think a lot of my success I based on watching them go through school and all the advice they gave me sort of prepared me for every step until now. I think if I didn't have [all the bad things], I wouldn't be as optimistic. If things came easy, I don't think I'd have the

attitude to always look for the next option. I guess as bad as it was, I'm definitely glad it happened.

4.2.2 Regalia

I brought my National Honor Society stole from graduation. It represents graduating from high school and signifies going to college. Not just graduating like bottom of my class. I worked really hard to get in to NHS so it's really important for me. It shows that I can do something like above and beyond, education wise, so that's why I brought it. I felt accomplished [wearing it] because I was able to work throughout high school and keep everything up to get to this point.

A lot of my friends were wearing it [too] so [wearing] it wasn't a huge deal or big thing. My parents asked me why some kids were wearing blue ones and why some kids didn't have them. I think my sister [wore] something different and maybe that's why they asked. I think it was like a drape. [Anyway] I told them it was for the National Honor Society and not everyone is in it. They already knew I was in it so they were just like 'ok.'

[Participating in the NHS was normal] for [my] school. Since the [STEM] program was very intensive and stuff, [the students] were pretty smart and a lot of kids were in it. Since I was [taking] classes for the program, a lot of my classmates were also in the Society, and barely any of my classes, especially senior year, were with students who weren't in the program. I'd say about a sixth— there were about 100 people and the class was about 600—of the graduating class was from the program.

I think [my experience was] pretty normal. I wouldn't say its anything extraordinary. I don't know other people's experiences, like I can't live other people's experiences. Going to university, I'm satisfied with my experiences going to university.

4.2.1 Roman

I brought my resume. I believe my resume represents me because it brought me here and through it I got all of my other jobs. I guess I've achieved what I want with this resume; I got in to this school, [which] is great.

It's an accomplishment… [In elementary school] I was in ESOL for two years. First and third grade, and I got held back in second grade…[when] they sent me back to first grade reading. In middle school I challenged myself and took honors courses and all that. Same with high school, I took all honors and APs and skipped my junior year to make up for [being held back in elementary school]. I don't remember why I got held back. I think it was for reading, just because when growing up I was in ESOL. For example, my parents came over here not knowing much English, so of course I'm going to be born not knowing much English either, so that's why I was held back. I'm more disadvantaged because I'm first generation.

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I know they wanted [me to have an] education... [My dad] put grades as a priority. He always would look at report cards and criticize like, 'what happened here?' or ' how could it get that low?' or something like that. He would [also] ask us, 'how are your grades? What did you do in school today. Do you have homework?' He didn't do it often, and he knew we would do it ourselves. I guess I was raised right. I didn't need anyone to tell me stuff. When he tells me, I tell him I know I need to study. [My mom] does the same, but not so much. She's not home as often, and he got home from work earlier. He pretty much got home from work around when we got home from school, and my mom got home from work later, so she didn't really see us as much. My mom worked both Saturday and Sunday. Now she works only on Saturdays, but back then she worked a lot more.

[Again], I know they wanted me to go to college. They said, 'you can go to community college first. It doesn't matter where you go your first two years.' What I personally think is going to a 4 year college is better than a community college, and that's what I told them, but I guess they didn't really know that.

I'd rather be here than a community college. It's more college life I guess. You can't really experience as much at community college. It's like high school. Like I was saying, I took a summer class at community college...while I was in high school. [My parents] wanted me to go to community college, so I don't think they really agree with [me being here]. They wanted me to go to 2-year first to save the money then come here... They made a big fuss about money. We borrowed money from my mom's brother.... [But] I wanted the college experience, so I told them I'm going to [ECU].... [When I was younger], I always dreamed of working at big firms like Google or Microsoft. That changed, I don't really need to work there... [but I also dreamed of] going to a nice university like [ECU].

4.2.2   Rose

It's something I made. It's called a glitter jar. I don't know if you've ever heard of it, but I made it with my boyfriend the summer before my college freshman year. I saw some of my friends had made one and then I looked it up. It's pretty much something a mom created for her children so they could play with. So me and my boyfriend wanted to make one and we looked up how to make it. We bought glitter and a baby food jar and throughout or ever since I made it, I use it just to keep myself calm. When I shake it up, I like to watch it all settle. It gives me a really nice feeling of calmness, so during times of high stress is when I really use it.

For me, [my path to university] was very stressful. I felt like I was stressed all the time, and I just don't really remember a time when I took a step back and evaluated my well-being and was not stressed. Just where... it doesn't relate to it directly, but I don't know how to explain it. My path was stressful and I made this and it was just something to keep my stress in check.

[I'd say my stress increased] my junior year of high school, when I started taking AP [courses].

I did not deal with my stress very well. I just remember a lot of crying and a lot of freaking out and a lot of just emotional instability for a lack of a better word.

Right around when a portion of the college apps were due, I felt that I wasn't doing enough and wasn't good enough to go to college and I would have to stay home and not really do anything with my life… It was not a good time. [I felt like] I wasn't studying enough for the classes I was taking, my essays weren't good enough, my SAT score wasn't good enough…

A lot of [the pressure] I feel like came from my dad. I know he meant well and I love him dearly and I know he loves me, but during that time he wasn't a source of comfort and support for me. I guess the way my dad is he wants me to do well, but he doesn't communicate that very well.

I remember [my senior] year … before I went to sleep, he would have long talks with me about school or my friends or my boyfriend and he would keep checking up on me and see how I'm doing. And it was strange because sometimes he would say to me [in Vietnamese], 'as long as you're on top of your work and you study and do this I'll support you,' but then other days he'd be like, 'your scores are crap and you're crap and you're trash' and stuff like that.

My dad is really smart, like book smart. He almost graduated with a PhD in science with a 4.0. The only thing that held him back was his English class, and in Vietnam he was the top student in his class…throughout his whole life pretty much. His family looked up to him, my mom looked up to him. He was just very well respected. And at that time I wanted to major in psychology but a lot of people didn't approve, so I felt I wasn't as smart as my dad was and I wouldn't be as successful. My family, outside of my immediate family I mean, would say stuff like , 'Your dad is so smart. He has a PhD. Are you going to be like him? You should get a PhD too or do something related to science.'

[If I could give my younger self advice about preparing for university], I would tell her not to put so much pressure on yourself and take care of yourself. It's also not all about pleasing your parents. There are times when you're going to have to take a break from studying or school work and do what you want for a couple of hours. Like step back and rejuvenate. And to not take my dad's words so hard. And it's ok not to be perfect.

5.0   THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The previous chapter introduced this study's participants through vignettes that situate them in their own experience while capturing the essence of meaning they attribute to their college-going experience. Presenting essences of meaning prior to the thematic analysis provides a nuanced orientation to the themes to facilitate a deeper understanding of how participants understand and experienced their path to university.

This chapter presents themes or statements of meaning that emerged from the coding and theming process of transcribed interview data. The five overarching themes are 1) meritocracy, 2) excellence, 3) intention, 4) selectivity, and 5) dissonance. See Figures 3-7 in their respective sections for the thematic web representing that overarching theme. The five overarching themes are interpretive themes informed by subthemes and participant stories. The subthemes and related narratives emerged from conversations with participants on how they understand and experienced their path to university and therefore serve as warrants and backings that provide the scaffolding for each of the five overarching, interpretive themes. Each overarching theme is its own section, comprised of subthemes and participant narratives. If pertinent, I highlight outliers at the end of subthemes. I use section summaries as an introduction to each section and close each section with a conclusion that presents particular tensions or unanswered questions and foretells details discussed in the succeeding chapter.

The first two overarching themes—meritocracy and excellence—explore how habitus is shaped by socio-cultural and institutional contexts, the first sub-question guiding this research. Doing this lays the groundwork for participants' worldview or values about education before shifting to the remaining three overarching themes—intention, selectivity, and dissonance—that represent the primary college-going phases participants underwent and consider how social, cultural, and aspirational capital promote or constrain participants' capacity to negotiate institutional contexts, the second sub-question guiding this research.

Given the complexity of participants' college-going experience, I further present and analyze two meta-themes that cut across the overarching themes and participant narratives, including participant vignettes. It follows that the thematic analysis lays the groundwork for the meta-themes. In the subsequent chapter, I present the meta-themes, which serve to highlight the essence of meaning of core influences that shaped participants' path to university and allow me to reflect on and discuss the meaning of these influences in relation to the literature. I present the implications for this research in the seventh and final chapter. Included is a summary of the research findings from chapters five and six and policy and practice recommendations.

5.1   MERITOCRACY

Meritocracy is the first overarching interpretive theme I explore (see Figure 3). I organize this section by the three subthemes that serve as warrants for meritocracy. They are 1) education is your future, 2) education facilitates economic stability, and 3) education facilitates personal development. Each subtheme is then comprised of related narratives that serve as backings or foundational support. The subthemes of education as a vehicle for a successful future, economic

stability, and personal development address the first sub-question guiding this research by illustrating institutional influences from home then, if applicable, school. With the exception of a few participants, the belief in a meritocracy stemmed largely from their immediate family, which school then reinforced.
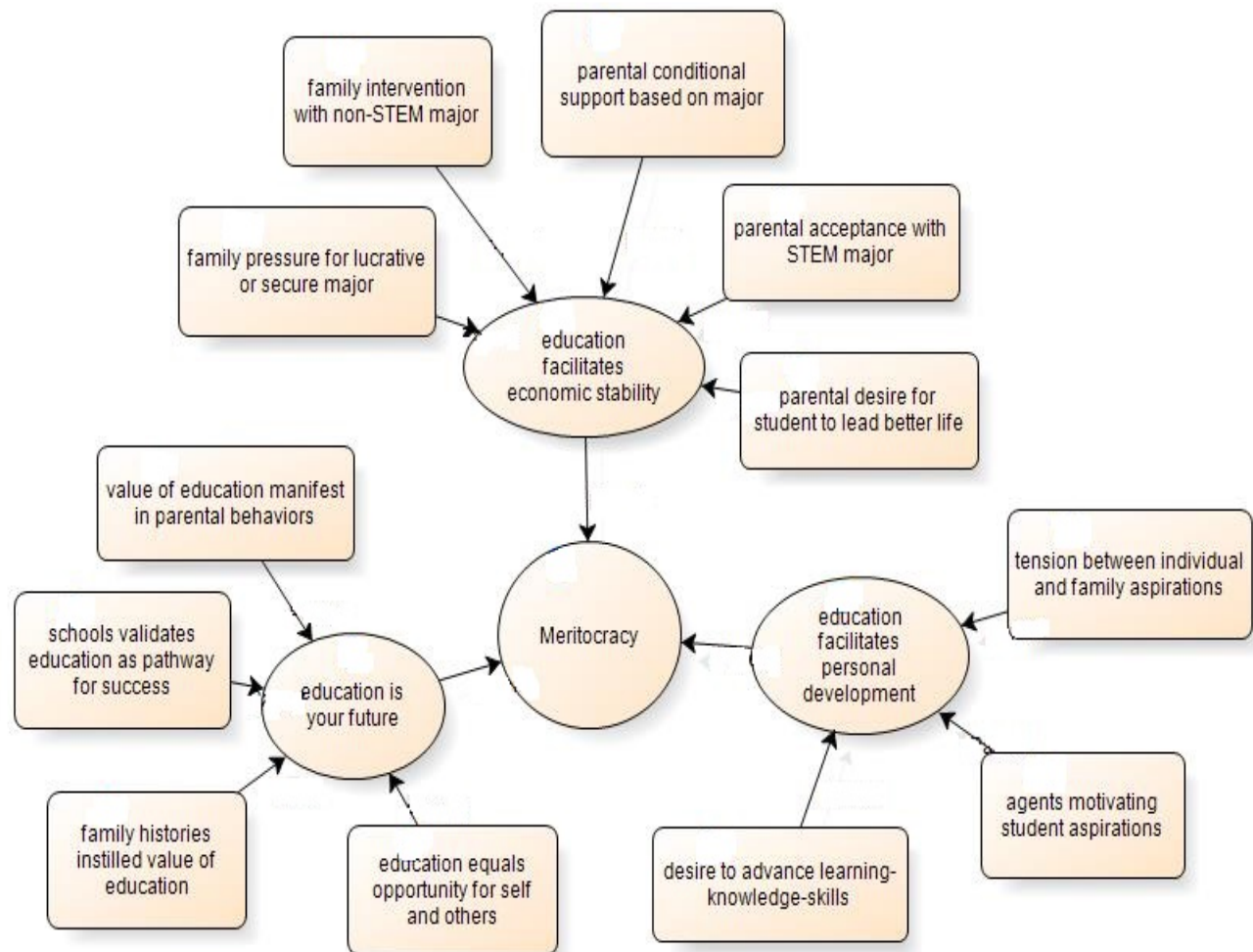
Figure 3. Meritocracy thematic web

Meritocracy is the belief in a merit-based system. If someone has the aptitude to move forward, the system supports them in doing so. Merit encompasses characteristics such as diligence, valued skills and attitude, and integrity (McNamee & Miller, 2004). Participants and

their families believed in higher education as a means for success generally, but to what end differs between participants and their parents. With fewer options of quality higher education in their native country, Southeast Asian parents saw the American educational system as one of opportunity, believing that diligence coupled with academic achievement would lead to a greater likelihood of socioeconomic mobility for their children. All parents, who come from various socioeconomic backgrounds, emphasized a college degree as a tool for securing a lucrative career. While participants placed the same high value on education as their parents and family, they favored career options that seemed to be a better fit with their disposition and aptitude. Schools both facilitated and validated the notion that higher education was the pathway for success.

5.1.1   Education is your future

All participants and their parents value education, a belief that seemed to be instilled in both at an early age. For parents, this value could be tied to aspects of the Cambodian and Vietnamese education systems.

Before French colonization (1863-1953), education in Cambodia was limited to boys learning Buddhist doctrine and therefore was handled by monks at local temples. Around 1920, the French government instituted a school system primarily for elites based on the French model; this existed alongside the traditional model until the French left in 1953. For approximately the next 20 years, Cambodia had a universal system of education, again built on the French model, with primary, secondary, higher, and specialized education the responsibility of temple- and state-run schools. Buddhist schools essentially served as feeder schools into secondary schools then university. Students completing three years of elementary education competed for entrance

into Buddhist lycées (i.e., public secondary school); after successful completion of their secondary education, they could sit for entrance exams to the Buddhist University.

While it is unclear if Buddhist schools charged tuition and fees, it is likely that these schools afforded the most access to education generally, but for poorer families specifically. It is understandable then that Artha's grandparents, who were poor farmers, changed her father's birth year in order to enroll him in school to secure as much education as possible.

> My dad grew up with farmers. And they were really poor, but when he was younger his mom changed his birth year so he was a few years older so she could enroll him in schools for…in like temples…Buddhist temples. My dad stayed in Cambodia for a really long time and he studied a lot in those Buddhist temples until he could be a doctor.

The simple act of Artha's grandparents changing her father's birth year so he could begin his education earlier speaks to their value of education. For other participants with knowledge of their grandparents' beliefs, education was a vehicle for opportunity. Alma-Lyn's grandmother, who was a teacher in Cambodia, taught her that education is your future. "My grandmother would always say that," Alma-Lyn said. "And being a teacher and everything, she would always say, 'Your education is so important.' I always knew that school was the way for me to have a life…a good life that [I] would want."

In Vietnam, Regalia's parents were raised under an education system that required successfully passing entrance exams to advance to the next tier. Entrance to university continues to be based on grades and the national university entrance exam. University entrance exam scores largely determined your career trajectory and in turn social standing.

> From my parents' education when they were back in Vietnam, they definitely stressed the importance of it. Since education wasn't guaranteed back then, if you failed a certain test a certain number of times, you had to either go to private school or do something else, so they definitely valued education a lot. It was definitely a priority for them.

Education was a priority because it is viewed as functioning within a decentralized system of equal opportunity in the United States. Everyone, as a result, has equal access to good fortune or success, however that is defined. In order to believe that society rewards aptitude and industriousness, education must be viewed in the same light. Those who work hard and demonstrate aptitude are rewarded by good grades that eventually translate to a deserving career or social position. Parents' reinforced this belief through past behaviors. NB portrays his father as being "education heavy" when he and his siblings were growing up. Instilled in his father at a young age was the notion that "the only way you're going to be successful in the world is through education." In turn, he attempted to impart this same belief in his own children. As evidence of this, NB shared,

> He was a little bit fanatical. Every summer for 7-9 hours a day, he'd have us reading different books. I would watch my siblings reading these Algebra books and all these textbooks. I couldn't even read yet, so I sat there and flipped though the same picture book. He would check. He started night jobs so was there during the day [and] could monitor what we were doing. Every day was study, study, study. We make fun of the way he'd say study now, but…yeah…(sigh).

Imparting the value of education at a young age affected not only the standard participants held themselves accountable to, but also the lens through which they interpreted others' decisions. No other example is as evident of this as when Artha reacts to her cousins' decisions not to continue their education beyond high school.

> When we saw [our cousins] for the first time for my sister's wedding few years ago, it was a little awkward. I envisioned [their situation] a lot different. I see it as 'you're managing a store and you're doing nails and I'm asking you if that's what you want to do and you're saying, 'no.' Then I asked what they really want to do and one says that they want to be a tattoo artist. I said 'well, if you want to be a tattoo artist, you could have gone to school and done an art major. There are schools for tattoos.' The other one said she wanted to manage her own store. 'Well, you could go to school to learn how to manage your own business. [Going to college] is a good experience. You would be taught by someone who knows how to manage a business rather than jumping into a business yourself because that's a lot of things you have to think about. The same for tattoos. I talked to a tattoo artist and

she said she went to art school. She hated it, but she said that she learned techniques that she wouldn't have learned on her own. She also learned how to go to a tattoo school so she could get a medical license and all these things. There are a lot of prerequisites for tattoos.

I kind of felt like they weren't living their dream because they didn't go to college. I know they're people who can, but I felt like they could have done what they were saying they wanted to do if they had stayed in college…. Our family doesn't hate them or anything, we just wish they could have gone to college.

Artha's narrative illustrates the notion of education as opportunity. Higher education is *the* vehicle for realizing one's dreams or turning aspirations into reality. A tension here is the assumption that higher education, as the path to success, is a system of equal opportunity. There are likely reasons why Artha's cousins elected either not to apply to college or university or drop out that are beyond Artha's comprehension. She is blinded by the notion of education as a means for opportunity that her perception of wasted potential wins out, implying that her cousins lack the ambition necessary to realize their dreams.

The pathway for success for all participants and their families, as Artha established, is a higher education. For participants, schools both facilitated and validated the notion that higher education was the pathway for success. For Alma-Lyn, one of two participants who attended private schools and the only one to speak at length of the impact that environment had on her, school messaging was poignant. She described the private, girls' college preparatory school she attended in her middle school years as

a really smart school. Everyone there is kind of…there's a lot of alumni who've done a lot of stuff, so I always kind of wanted to do stuff with my life, important things, change the world I guess. Not really, but that's like what you're told. I don't know how to phrase that, but we're just raised to kind of push ourselves so we can go out and do things in a marked way. They were like 'you guys are the future. You guys are so smart, but you can't do that without a college education.'

Alma-Lyn's college preparatory school reinforced the notion that the harder one works and the more learned one is, the greater one's success or contributions to society. The dispositions

imparted to these girls embolden them to believe they are entering into a social system where achievements are proportionate to aptitude and level of education. The next two subthemes unpack the question Alma-Lyn's comment nicely sets up—education to what end, which differs for participants and their parents.

5.1.2   Education facilitates economic stability

Parents' views that the purpose of an education to guarantee financial stability stemmed largely from concerns for their child's welfare. Parents were either explicit or implicit about their belief, its origin, and how that translated into preferred career options for their child.

Artha's mother was perhaps the most open about her family's transition to the United States and the hardships her and her brothers endured, which were likely complicated by not having a college education. Becoming small business owners was their approach to narrowing the education gap and afforded them some autonomy. Despite their success, they were clear in their desire for younger family members to lead a financially stable life and saw education as the means to do so.

> My mom didn't have a college education, her brothers didn't have a college education, and they are successful. They are all [small business owners]. Gas stations mainly. They're doing well. [My parents] could just as easily have said 'look at your aunts and uncles.' But even my aunts and uncles, they say, 'you have to study; you cannot be like us…. We don't want you to be in that situation where we were and had *nothing* [Artha emphasis].' They don't want us to experience that. That's why my mom tells me about her life in Cambodia, her moving here, and all these things. To say like, 'don't ever be in my situation. You don't want to have to be dumped here and have to marry someone because they were going to make more money than you ever could.' And that's where education starts. And that's why education is so important to my family.

Participants' ability to relate to such stories can be challenging when their upbringing has been protected from the tragedies that colored parents' and other family members' childhood and

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adolescence. What participants experience but do not always understand is their parents' incessant focus on the utility of their college major. It was not until NB and I discussed his family history and his mother's possible motivation for enrolling in a degree program after her children were school age that he could recognize her aspirations for him.

> [My mother] always said, 'you never want to live paycheck to paycheck.' I think you're right about her experiences. I guess it was really hard on her so she wants us to have the highest paying job. In her mind the highest paying job is a doctor. She doesn't say this anymore. From middle school through high school, it was pretty much every day until finals…. Even in college, when I told her I would stop taking biology classes, she was still trying to convince me [to become a doctor].

NB's father perhaps carried his aspirations for his children to an extreme. He made his preference for a technical field clear to his children through conditional support. Only if they majored in a field he supported would he pay for their education. According to NB,

> [My father] basically didn't want to support people who weren't doing what he wanted. That's actually why he's helping me pay for school...because I told him I was going to be a scientist. He responded 'I support that.' That's why I don't have to take out student loans. He's helping to pay for tuition now. My sister had to take out student loans. That was rough. My dad didn't want to help her because she is doing [social science] and he wanted her to [go into] accounting. He is still trying to convince her to go back to school for accounting and said he would help pay for that. I guess in his mind, and I have sort of come to terms with this, I've understood that his life has conditioned him to always do the thing that gets you the most money and to always be prepared. I can see why he's always trying to push us to do things that pay the most money. Every time he talks to me about my sister, he says, 'I'm so worried that she's not going to find a high enough paying job.'

For some participants, their college major or career trajectory is a family affair that typically involves unsolicited input from aunts and uncles. Similar to NB's father, extended family stress what they perceive to be secure, high paying fields. For Art, "All of my family encouraged me to go to college, but in terms of what to do, my mom and my mom's brother's, are not really supportive of the idea of doing a [liberal arts degree]. They wanted me to do something in a

STEM field." Rose's situation is comparable in that the most opposition she received to majoring in psychology came from extended family or friends who questioned the viability of a psychology degree. In Artha's case, her family took their concern a step further by pulling salary comparisons. In the end, Artha's family acquiesced to the lesser of two evils—economics over art—but still held out hope that she would somehow incorporate a business component into her education.

> I really liked economics and [realized after high school] that I was probably going to major in it in college. That caused a big problem with my family. They realized that I liked my art classes and I also like economics. My entire family, including my aunt, had wanted me to do something more than that. They wanted me to make more money. They were worried that I was going to be an artist at first. I was posting art online and taking pictures of stuff and talking about it with my family. I would get emails from my uncles, saying, 'this is how much an artist makes versus someone who is a doctor.' Then my mom and dad would kind of worry because they were thinking they didn't want me to be an artist. I talked to my mom and told her that I really like economics. My sister also started vouching to my mom too. She said, 'Artha is really good at economics and she is not going to be an artist. That's what she's talked to me about, so just trust in that.' My mom figured, 'ok, Artha, be an econ major, but also go to the business school.'

Artha's family prematurely drew the conclusion that Artha would turn her passion for art into a career and as a result attempted to preempt its momentum. Artha's sister intervened to placate their mother's concerns and focus on Artha's developing passion in economics, a more practical field than art in their eyes.

Parents who were less explicit about their preferred career trajectory for their child were no less concerned about their child's financial future. It could be that these parents had faith in their child's decision-making or confidence that in the long run their child would be successful. Roman and Regalia, the only two participants who alluded to their parents' behavior this way, are also the only STEM majors.

Education to them is "very important," Roman shared, but so is "major[ing] in something you like and [can] make a decent living out of. They are not like strict Asian parents saying that you have to be a doctor. They didn't really mind what I was doing as long as I make a decent living and I support myself." Roman, however, is driven, intentional, and tech savvy and perhaps his parents recognized that his STEM-focused skillset would serve his future well. This quiet recognition of trust and confidence in their child's skills and decisions is also illustrated in Regalia's banter with her mother about falling back on hourly work.

> When they were asking about me applying to schools, I'd be like 'oh, no, it's casual to do nails.' She used to do nails. She would freak out, but after a short amount of time she realized I was joking and she'd be like 'ok sure, go do that.' I guess after I grew up more and I realized what I wanted to do she became more lenient about things.

As parental units, Roman and Regalia's parents appeared to exert limited pressure on major selection. Their less intrusive behavior compared to other participants' parents could be a reflection of their degree of valued cultural capital in facilitating college-going for their child and resulting discomfort in exerting direct authority over their child's choice of major.

5.1.3 Education facilitates personal development

"I never understand why someone wouldn't go to college because I always knew…even if you don't graduate with a good degree—an art degree or something—having a college degree does make you more money. We have statistics. It is not a conspiracy. And you just learn more."

Artha articulates what all participants know—that any degree is better than no degree. What is in question is a degree or education to what end. For parents, a degree is a necessity in today's knowledge economy that facilitates a secure career; the major is a measure for earning potential and financial stability. Education, for participants, encompasses this, but is more so a mechanism

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for building problem solving and critical thinking skills and becoming a well-rounded, productive member of society. Regalia highlights that the purpose of an education is to "further knowledge about things you are interested in, and also so that you're more aware, not sitting in the dark about lots of issues." Rose, however, perhaps states it best when she says,

> Academically, for starters, there is a lot to learn about the world. … Even though taking classes sometimes the learning outcomes get jumbled up with getting good test scores and completing homework on time, but really the overall picture is obtaining skills that you can use after school, like time management skills, or even just be[ing] less ignorant, like understand[ing] what's going on around you.

Rose and Regalia's excerpts underscore the significance of education as a tool for developing intelligence and skills to facilitate success beyond university. This hints to perceptions that the social system they operate in rewards grades and certain skills over others, which participants grapple with in their own way. Family members play a key role in participants coming to terms with pursuing an interest or passion they hope will cultivate valued skills and increase their happiness quotient later in life. Art spoke at great length about how he came to terms with his decision to pursue art despite the tension it created at home.

> It's really sad to say, but I kind of hid [my major] from [my mom]. She thought that I was just taking general studies, but I was really pursuing [art]. My dad knew and he was supportive, but my mom… because I just know that she's totally against it. My dad's [an artist] and he has to work a day job. If I have to work a day job and I have to work at night, that's fine with me. But [my mother] is rather more about the money. My view is I'm going to be making money regardless. It's just about the amount that I'm going to make, and the more that I found out about my major, it's just 'ok, well, I need to find a day job.'

Artha had to come to terms with the dissonance she felt between what her sister was telling her and where her interests lie. This for Artha was a lengthy process. After she accepted that her aspirations could differ from those of her sister, for the first time she felt comfortable in her own skin.

> I believe my sister's incentive [for her degree] was to make more money. My sister and I, even though we are pretty similar, we have different goals. She knows she has a certain standard of living that she enjoys and in order to achieve that she

needs a certain amount of money. That's why my sister took finance. I wanted to pick something I enjoyed and that made me happy, which is why I chose econ even though that doesn't really make me qualify for a lot of high paying jobs starting off like my sister with finance. But I really enjoy economics. I've tried different fields [such as] business and [economics] is pretty much where I feel safest.

For Artha, Rose, Art, and Roman, inspirational high school teachers were instrumental in stimulating their appreciation for a given field of study. The more representative examples come from Artha and Rose, respectively, whose teachers instilled in them a passion for subjects they later decided to major in.

My first year economics teacher was great. He was kind of old and senile. We couldn't see him for the first two months of school for health reasons so he was making us read this textbook. I think I was the only person in the class who actually did the readings. When I read it, I thought it was interesting. I liked the way I had to think for economics. My sister started telling me to read news articles in *The Economist* and all these things because that's what economics is…learning about some politics and stuff. I started reading the *New York Times*. I started listening to the radio and the news more often. I really enjoyed it….

[H]e would always tell us great stories. For example, when we hit development, he was talking about his final thesis for his PhD on the important of reading, of being literate. He went to Thailand and met two sisters. Instead of talking to them, he told them that he would pay for them to take English classes, thinking that if they could read, they would have more options. … He went back a few years later, met one of the sisters and learned that she was at a university in the US. The sister still in Thailand didn't take the reading classes seriously. She was begging him for the classes again. The difference between reading [this story] in a textbook and having something to relate it with made me realize, 'wow, development is really important in third world countries.' That's what made me really like econ.

That's the type of thing I want to be able to do. Help other people and help them realize, through me at least, how important this [field] is. I know not many people were interested in his story, but I was impacted by it. … I realized through my teacher and him telling me of his experiences of being an economist and all these things and showing us the articles, that I really liked economics and that I was probably going to major in it in college.

Artha's "life plan" called for her to study business but an influential teacher altered that trajectory and instilled in her passion for a subject that spoke to her humanity. Similarly,

throughout high school, Rose thought she would major in science or math because "those would be what get you good careers." However, when filling out college applications, she changed her major of choice to psychology, a decision that surprised both herself and her parents. Unbeknownst to her at the time, she pivoted her decision based on her experience in her AP Psychology class.

> My senior year I took AP Psychology, which is what made me want to take psychology in college. My professor wasn't like the other professors I had experienced up to that point. He made the class very straightforward, and his teaching style was very different. He was very animated and he used props in class to explain things. Up to that point I just took notes with pen and paper, but that year he made it a requirement to take colorful notes and do chapter outlines. He really pushed [us] to get creative with our notes and not just copy but put [them] in our own words and really interpret [them] ourselves. That really shaped not only what but how I study now.

Exposure to school-based agents altered participants' academic and likely career trajectories and provided cultural capital from which they could build upon throughout their college-going experience and into university. Rose's teacher made clear attempts to prepare his students for college level learning by developing their note taking and study skills while Artha's teacher strived to highlight the relevance of economics to daily living.

5.1.4 Conclusion

For participants and their parents, education equals opportunity. Higher education is perceived as the vehicle for realizing one's dreams or turning aspirations into reality. Participants' belief in a meritocracy stemmed from their parents' value of education and belief in higher education as a tool for social mobility and securing a financially stable future. What stands out for participants is, despite having a similar value of education as their parents, participants' interpretation of success created space for career options that seemed to be a better fit with their disposition and

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aptitude. Their interpretations were influenced by observing family-based agents and exposure to impactful teachers. Several tensions emerge from this theme around parental and participant visions of success. One tension is the assumption that higher education, as the path to success, is a system of equal opportunity. Secondly, while both appear to accept that they function in a meritocratic society, how do students make sense of their desire for an economically secure future while following a passion at odds with this desire? We see hints of participants confiding in or being drawn to individuals seen to have their best interest at heart in explicitly or implicitly helping them navigate these waters.

5.2   EXCELLENCE

Excellence is the second overarching interpretive theme I explore (see Figure 4). I organize this section by the four subthemes that serve as warrants for excellence and address the first sub-question guiding this study that considers how habitus is shaped by socio-cultural and institutional contexts for the seven Southeast Asian American undergraduates in this study. The four subthemes are 1) average is unacceptable, 2) academics reign, 3) disregard for aptitude, and 4) façade maintenance. Each subtheme is comprised of related narratives that serve as backings or foundational support. Home emerged from the data as the primary reference for participants. As a result, the subthemes exclusively addresses institutional influences from home and the impact family dynamics had on participants' college-going experience.

Excellence refers to high expectations around academic standards primarily throughout high school. Participants and their families expected excellence, but, similar to meritocracy, the manifestation of this belief differs between participants and their parents. Expectations originated

largely from home. While school might have reinforced high expectations, the home environment emerged as the dominate authority.
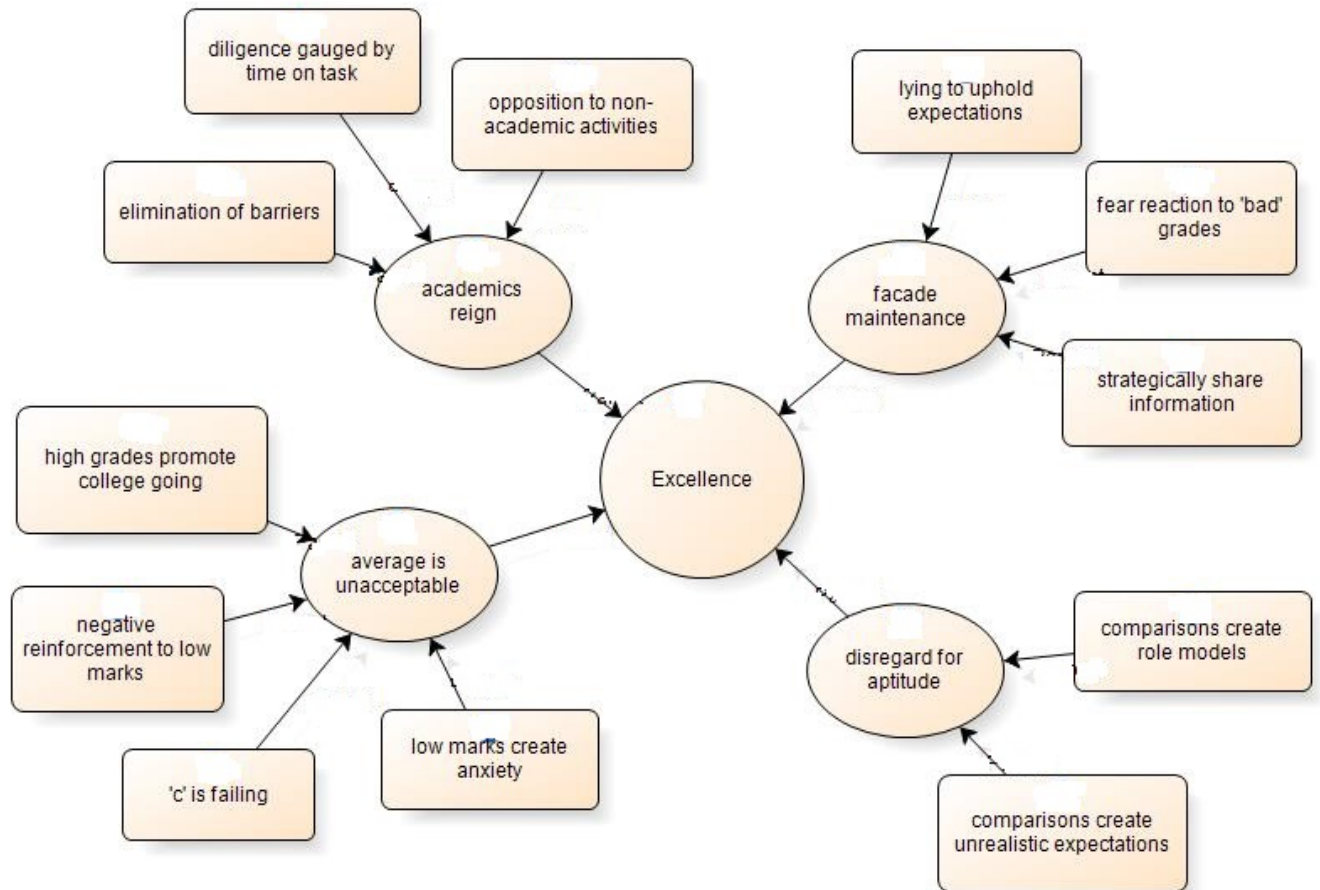
Figure 4. Excellence thematic web

Parents expected participants to maintain above average grades and focus on academics at the expense of other activities such as work and extracurriculars. While direct parental support was minimal, parents provided indirect support through excusing participants from household responsibilities lest they disrupt participants' commitment to their studies. Excellence was further reinforced through comparisons parents and participants themselves made between participants' aptitude and that of others. The high academic expectations parents had for their

children created tension within participants that drove them to censor their communication in order to maintain a façade of excellence. A picture emerges of Southeast Asian American parents perhaps interpreting academic achievement as the most significant if not only measure for colleges and universities while participants struggle to navigate these expectations amidst their own goals.

5.2.1   Average is unacceptable

For all participants' parents, a 'B' grade was the dividing line between acceptable and unacceptable. As NB says, "A 'B' was fine. A 'C' was basically failing." Art expands this sentiment a bit further when he shares, "the expectation [was] to get a 4.0 GPA and make all the honor rolls." Parents reacted to low performance differently, but not one participant mentioned parents using positive reinforcement to instill the importance of receiving high marks. NB and Rose spoke at length about the impact parental reactions to grades had on them. For NB, his father resorted to violence when he was younger to teach his older siblings the importance of good grades.

> I guess what really kind of drove me from elementary school to middle school, what drove me to work really hard, was seeing how hard [my dad] was on my brother and sisters. When they'd get a 'C,' it was like…every time it was report card time, it was like, 'oh man, you didn't get good grades…here it comes.' You're probably aware of this, but Asian style parenting (chuckles), you get the beat down if things don't go right. You could sort of tell. My brother or sisters didn't have to tell you their grades. You just saw it on their faces, and I felt bad for them. I didn't even start school when I saw all this stuff. When I started school, I knew, 'work hard, or else.' From kindergarten 'till about 6th grade, every day was like, 'if I don't do good in this class, I'm not going to get into college.' That's how I was thinking. My two driving forces were do good in school to get into college then also don't get beat.

Implicit in NB's father's expectation for high marks was his interpretation of grades as symbolic capital for promoting college-going. While NB's father's use of force to instill high academic expectations in his children appeared to be an exception, all participants experienced pressure from their parents and spoke of the impact it had on them. Rose's description of the impact her parent's expectations toward grades had on her touches on anxiety all participants expressed at one point or another during their college-going years.

> Definitely my parents thought grades had to be almost perfect to get in to college. And I struggled with that my senior year because my senior year I took harder classes and I wasn't doing as well as I did up to that point, so I just felt like if my grades weren't the greatest, which means anything under a 'B' pretty much then I was failing at life and school. I was mostly a straight A student and then in my senior year my grades were dropping so I felt like I was slipping, like I wasn't doing my parents… I was disappointing my parents pretty much in doing so. And I felt like I wouldn't get in to college and I wouldn't be successful.

Rose's narrative signals a potential gap in her parent's knowledge about the level of difficult of some of Rose's AP courses, but perhaps also Rose's understanding of how to balance a rigorous course load. Unlike others, Regalia was the only participant who seemed to correlate her parents' attitude that "grades are everything" to their unfamiliarity with the education system and the college-going process in the United States. She assumed the role of parent in a sense when she explained the process to her parents, something other participants intentionally elected to do or not to do at various points along their path to university, which is described in more detail under 'façade maintenance.'

5.2.2   Academics reign

Given parents' focus on grades, it is no surprise that academics took precedence above extracurricular activities and work. Parents used 'time on task' as one strategy for measuring

participants' attention to academics. For example, "if they notice I haven't been working that hard or I've been watching TV a lot," Regalia shared, "they say like 'you need to focus on your grades.'" Rose agrees with this interpretation. During her senior year she dedicated more time to her extracurriculars than what her father was comfortable with. For him, this was a frivolous activity and an indicator that she was neglecting her studies.

> I was involved in [extracurricular activities] my senior year and it took up a lot of time. I would stay after school a lot, so I think that to [my father] it looked like me not really doing my homework or studying enough. [I]t seemed to him that I was putting my schoolwork on hold, and for him that wasn't ok. It would make him really mad when I told him that I wouldn't be home until like 8pm because I was going to stay at school. [H]e didn't understand why I was a part of that because it wasn't anything that was helping me in terms of my GPA.

Extracurriculars were significant to participants for their personal development or college application. According to participants, however, parents seemed to lack this appreciation. Roman shares that he participated in sports for enjoyment but also "to buff up [my] resume" and seemed slightly bothered that his father did not recognize this. "My dad was like 'why are you doing this?' because he didn't know anything about it, but I knew what to do. He thought [sport] was just wasting time." Parents were less expressive about their child working, but generally did not encourage it either as they did not want them "to lose focus on school," as Regalia indicated.

Some parents even went so far as to eliminate barriers that could prevent their children from concentrating on their academics. Regalia acknowledged that during the summer she would help her mom around the house, but during the academic year, "she tells me to just finish my homework instead and study and stuff. If I start helping, she'll kind of just look at me." While Regalia understood her mother's motivation, Art, the eldest male child in his household, seemed perplexed about the inequitable division of household chores.

> I wasn't really encouraged to work at all. My parents kind of babied me a little in a sense. I'm not sure why; I don't really understand why. I didn't even have to cut the

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grass or mow the lawn because my dad would do that. He would take care of most of the house and yard work… I think [the expectation to focus on grades] played a role. They just wanted me to focus on my school and education so that no matter what happened—that's what they told me—that no matter what happened, even if it was conflicts between my parents, 'I want you to focus on school, and I want you to succeed' because that's their problem and that's what they have to sort out.

Art's parents prohibited him from contributing to household chores while he was in high school, a sentiment that changed shortly after graduation. His parents seemed focused on his getting into university and eliminated as many home-based distractions as possible. Unlike other parents, they appeared to accept his participation in extracurriculars, as evidenced by his "they wanted me to focus on my school and education" comment. Art's extracurriculars also served as training directly tied to his education.

In contrast, Alma-Lyn's adoptive white father was the only parent in favor of his child working while enrolled in school. He strongly encouraged her to work once she turned 16 because he wanted her to learn the value of money and shed her entitled attitude, a perspective she has only recently begun to embrace.

When I was younger, he wanted me to get a job at like 16 or so… I wouldn't do it. I didn't get a job until I turned 18, after I graduated. … Before I was super ungrateful and didn't understand that I didn't….the stuff…it shouldn't be handed to me.

Despite her adoptive father's high expectations around academics, he recognized that her entitled attitude was impinging on her studies and feared it would negatively alter her life. Learning a strong work ethic and developing gratitude was equally important to him. Alma-Lyn believes his fear was exacerbated by his own struggles as a young university student who almost dropped out his freshman year because he was disengaged from his studies.

5.2.3   Disregard for aptitude

On the rare occasion participants received average or below average marks, adverse parental reactions were compounded by comparisons parents made between participants' performance and that of others. For participants, this implied that parents expected them to excel regardless of their aptitude for a given subject. Regalia shares her frustration with such assumptions after receiving a 'C' in a class she struggled with despite having studied hard for it.

> I wasn't really that good at [history], and I never really was interested in it. I got a C one semester and they definitely got disappointed, especially because my sister was really good at it. She was good at memorization and stuff. They definitely were very confused as to why I wasn't doing well. It was just a lot of pressure because they didn't understand why I wasn't doing very well, and it was hard for me to focus on a subject I wasn't interested in. … They said that if you know you're not good at a subject, you have to study hard at it, even though I did and it was hard for me anyway. Even though I knew I had to do it, it was a burden. They expected me to do a lot better than I could.

Regalia's example suggests her parents high expectations stemmed from confidence in their daughter's ability. Every participant, however, spoke to the phenomenon of parents and/or other family members comparing them to someone else, typically another family member or a person from their ethnic community. Consequently, Regalia's parents might have thought sibling comparisons would motivate her to apply herself more given the strong bond she shares with her sibling. Artha's story was similar, but she was quick to add that she, too, aspired to do as well as her high achieving sister.

> My sister was a valedictorian type person. I think she even was asked to do it, but she hates public speaking. She was 7th in her class. She was at the very top, but she was there. She was always hardworking and trying to get As in all her classes. If she was having problems in a class, she'd make friends and work well and beyond to get that A. My parents never said, 'be like your sister,' they'd say, 'your sister did this, you can do it too….try to do this like her…' She was my role model, so of course I'd try to do that too.

A tension exists in participants wanting to be accepted as individuals with inherent talents and weaknesses on one hand and wanting to be accountable to the standard their sibling(s) sets on the other. Similar to Artha, Regalia later clarifies that she had to work as hard as her sister, not just for her parents but for herself as well.

> Yes and no [I had to work as hard as my sister]…kind of. I definitely look up to what she's' doing because I want to follow in her footsteps, but I have to do as well as her as well. If she can do it, then I have to do as well as her, too. It's like a little bit of both. Like I want to do as well as her, but our parents also compare us so the two things come in as one.

For participants without older siblings, the success of other family members colored academic expectations parents and others had for them. Art, the eldest child in his family, was keenly aware that the expectation to do well academically was high. If his mother could maintain a 4.0 GPA during her short-lived community college experience, he could do the same. "That's what they expected," he shared, "no less."

5.2.4   Façade maintenance

The preceding subthemes establish the high academic expectations parents have for their children. This final subtheme will touch on participants' coping strategies. The first excerpt illustrates the seed of participants' withholding or manipulating information in order to avoid the consequences of not meeting parental expectations. In as early as elementary school, when Artha received her first 'C,' her initial reaction was to delay sharing the news with her mother.

> In 6th grade I got a 'C' in reading. My mom was infuriated with me because I had decided to go to my friend's house so I could postpone showing my mom my grades. My mom saw my report card and the whole car ride home was her yelling at me, me sobbing. Every single year, it'd be the same thing. Her yelling at me, me sobbing. Her yelling at me, me sobbing. And the next day, 'do better Artha.' 'Ok, mom, I will.' Then I'd do better in that subject and get a 'C' somewhere else.

As participants matured, tactics shifted from delayed communication to vague communication. Rose hid her grades from her parents to avoid what she perceived would be disappointment.

> I mostly tried to hide [grades] from them. When they asked me, I would tell them, 'Oh I'm doing fine. I'm studying a lot.' My senior year I was taking AP Calculus and up to that point I was pretty good at math. I liked it, but after that I did not like it and I didn't want to do anything related to math. I was struggling with that class and it was hard for me because I wasn't used to struggling with my classes. That was when I got my first 'C' on my report card, which was devastating at the time. I never told my parents about it. I don't think they know even now that I got a 'C' on my report card.

Theoretically, had parents known their child was struggling in school, they could have offered assistance. Rose was the only participant who mentioned elsewhere turning to her father for assistance with math. Her narrative, however, suggests that seeking input from her father for AP Calculus was not an option, the reason for which is unclear. From these excerpts, I sense that participants learned at a young age to seek out other strategies for overcoming academic hurdles.

NB, likewise, learned to navigate the murky water of failed expectations by selective sharing. For participants, this seemed to be a necessity so they could finish out their high school years in relative peace.

> I never gave them details. I always gave generals. My dad was like, 'how is school going?' I was like, 'Oh it's going really well.' I sort of learned how to play the game of how to better phrase. I would tell them the good news and leave out the bad details. Like I had 100 percent on this test, but that was months ago. And if I had a bad grade, I wouldn't tell them that. Yeah. I would put in the really good achievements and leave out the bad ones.

The high academic expectations parents had for their children created tension within participants that drove some to censor their communication in order to maintain a façade of excellence. The threat either of disappointing their parents or being reprimanded was so high that participants willingly compromised communication and relationships. There was a sense of participants telling parents what they perceived their parents wanted to hear, of maintaining the perception of

their child as a high achiever. In some instances, however, participants simply lied to avoid consequences that would infringe on their freedom. The concentrated focus on grades could be attributed to parents' experience with highly competitive educational systems. These Southeast Asian American parents perhaps interpreted academic achievement as the most significant if not only measure for colleges and universities, and it was easier for participants to maintain the façade of excellence than deal with anticipated parental disappointment.

5.2.5   Conclusion

The significance of home in molding participants habitus cannot be understated. Evidence of this exists under the meritocracy theme that considers participants' worldview and aspirations and is repeated in this theme exploring parental expectations around academics. A picture emerges of Southeast Asian American parents perhaps interpreting academic achievement as the most significant if not only measure for colleges and universities while participants struggle to navigate these expectations amidst their own goals and inclinations. Tensions emerge around participants wanting to be accepted as individuals with inherent talents and weaknesses on one hand and either being judged against, or wanting to achieve, the standard their sibling(s) and others set on the other. Parents clearly recognize grades as symbolic capital. How does this translate for participants? Is participant understanding of what eases the transition to postsecondary education on par with what colleges and universities consider? In addition, do participants understand how institutions weigh these factors? This raises the question of how participants prepare for college, which I consider in the following two themes.

5.3   INTENTION

The two preceding overarching themes explore the first sub-question guiding this research and in so doing lay the groundwork for participants' worldview or values about education. This foundation orients the reader toward the remaining three overarching themes that represent the primary college-going phases participants underwent.

Intention is the third overarching interpretive theme I explore (see Figure 5). I organize this section by the two subthemes that serve as warrants for intention. They are 1) aspirations drove school choice and program participation and 2) aspirations drove course selection. Each subtheme is comprised of related narratives that serve as backings or foundational support. The subthemes of aspirations driving school, program, and course selection address the second sub-question guiding this research by illustrating how institutional influences from home and school promote or constrain students' capacity to negotiate their secondary school context. This theme focuses almost exclusively on participants' as they presented themselves as the ultimate authority in making decisions around college preparation related to school and course selection.
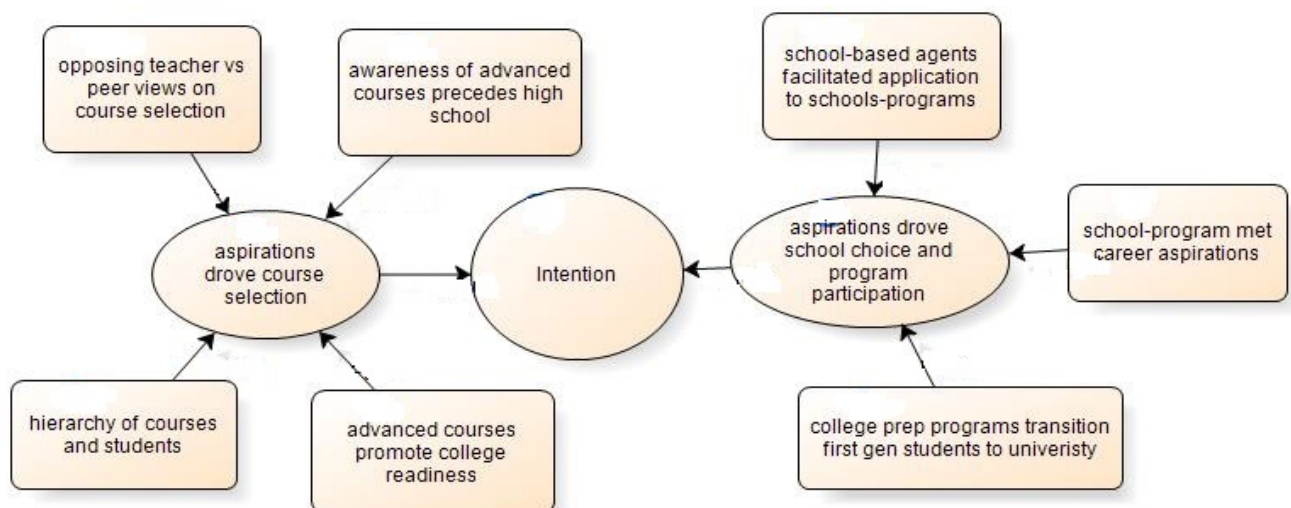
Figure 5. Intention thematic web

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Intention marks the college preparation stage and the meaning I attribute to it based on what emerged from the data. It is having clarity of purpose toward a particular end. Immersion in an academic environment that facilitated college-going helped prepare participants for university. College or career aspirations drove the desire for such immersion. Participants made conscious decisions to immerse themselves in an academically challenging environment with likeminded peers through enrolling in competitive programs and/or advanced courses. Roman and Art initiated enrollment in college preparation programs designed to develop the cultural capital necessary for success in a postsecondary institution. Participants' internalization of cultural, social, and aspirational capital that promote college-going seemed to increase when they were intentional in engaging with programs and/or courses designed to facilitate college preparation.

5.3.1 Aspirations drove school choice and program participation

Roman, Rose, Regalia, and Art applied to high schools or high school programs that peripherally focused on potential major and career choices, encouraged student-initiated research, or allowed students to earn transferrable college credit (outside of their AP or IB coursework). Roman entered into an engineering track because he "was thinking about engineering or something with technology." Rose applied to a four-year research program because the STEM and business pathways did not interest her. Regalia applied to a STEM magnet school because it was the best school in the area and met her academic needs and career aspirations.

> [T]he high school near my house wasn't as great as it could have been. There were a lot of violent crimes around there so I didn't want to be around that kind of surrounding. Also I had an interest in science but I didn't know to what extent, so I just went for it and saw what I liked. …I have a secure plan. I feel like for a lot of people who are unsure what they're doing after [college], doing music or something

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that doesn't have much potential for employment, that's not something I would lean towards because you're not guaranteed to find a position long term. In the sciences there's more; there's a variety of things you can do.

Despite the competitive application process, she never considered attending another school. "I kind of knew," she said. "It's a good school so everyone in the community is kind of like fighting for a position there. [Attending was] never really a question." Although she knew of the school through her sister's time there, middle school teachers encouraged Regalia and other students to apply. "[T]he homeroom teacher," Regalia shared, "keeps [students] updated on the application process. They also have practice exams that they give out to students that are interested. I know it's open to all students but they target the honors classes a lot more." Similarly, Rose learned of her research program in eighth grade when a high school counselor visited her middle school honors English class to talk about academic programs available in high school.

One component of the STEM magnet school that appealed to Regalia was the option to do an internship for her research practicum. She wanted, she said, "to challenge myself, to see if I was up to the level to do it. I also wanted to do the half day and get more hands-on experience than be sitting in the classroom." Exposure to experiential learning to some extent drove participants decision making as they desired applied knowledge to inform future decisions around major or career trajectory. Rose realized these advantages in retrospect. Although she participated in a research program, she believes participating in an internship or taking college courses could have provided additional insight and been a more effective use of her time.

> My friends who took community college classes said it was nice because they got college credit. A lot of them took one or two classes, so that's less stuff you have to worry about after getting in. And the classes sounded really interesting, like one was taking sociology, another one anthropology. Two of my closest friends had internships and one of them liked it because she was working with kids. She liked kids and was thinking about pursuing a career in education, and she really loved it. Then my other friend started at [a research institute] and hated it, so she transferred to something else for spring semester. They liked it, but what I like is

that it gave them experience to help decide what to pursue in college. My friend said she decided she wasn't sure if education was really what she wants to pursue, and my other friend was like, maybe a STEM major wasn't really for her.

Like Regalia and Rose's friends, Art and Roman recognized the significance of capitalizing on programs that facilitated their transition to university. Both Art and Roman applied to a college preparation program that allowed them to transfer credits to ECU for courses taught by community college professors who traveled to the high school to teach. The program is also designed to promote students' self-confidence in preparation for their transition to university, which Art spoke at length on.

I thought that I needed college prep I guess in a sense because I am first of the second to go to college or university in my family. I felt that I needed that preparation. I felt that getting college credits was a pretty smart idea because I don't think I was too confident about being able to go to college after finding out and understanding that my mom went to [a community] college but never got a degree in anything. For me, it was a need or a must to do so because one of the goals that I had in high school was not to go to [a community] college. I had this expectation that I wanted to get in to a university.

Art and Roman understood they might need additional cultural capital for a smooth transition to university and took initiative to apply for and participate in a program designed to facilitate this transition. Aspirations for a university degree drove their desire to gain exposure to college level courses and earn college credit, something they thought could benefit them despite enrolling in advanced placement courses.

5.3.2 Aspirations drove course selection

College and career aspirations coupled with an understanding that colleges place more value on advanced coursework largely drove participants' honors, AP, or IB course selection. Most participants spoke of creating a 4-year plan in eighth grade to ensure they would earn the

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requisite credits to graduate from high school on time. Eight grade typically marked their introduction to advanced course offerings in high school. Rose, the eldest sibling in her family, recalls a teacher or counselor telling the class, "AP classes were courses that were supposed to give you exposure to the college experience and you could get credit if you pass the big test in the spring."

This information was reiterated in high school when Rose's US History teacher told students about the AP government course and how they could take "regular, honors or we could go on to the AP course." Later at a lunch meeting, "[the] AP government and politics teacher talked about what the course entails and what college credit means. That was really when I learned more details about AP courses." According to NB, in ninth grade "[counselors] tell you that you want to be taking a lot of APs because you get college credit." In a similar vein, Roman said he took AP and honors courses "because colleges look at that to see if you're competitive."

Most participants could choose between comprehensive, honors and AP courses. Only a few schools offered both IB and AP courses, which was the case for Artha. Artha was largely guided by her sister who paved the way before her.

> My sister told me to take IB. I was tempted to take AP…. My sister was telling me, 'In AP, you're guaranteed credits. It's easier. You'll take classes that will prepare you for the exam. Or, you can take IB that will give you a harder workload, but it will prepare you for the college workload that you need. The classes are a lot more interesting.' I always thought I was going to be an AP student. When my sister was telling me these things, she said, 'I think you like learning. It's a lot of work, but I think you will enjoy it.' She was right. I ended up enjoying it. She also said that IB Econ is really nice and I should take that. That's what helped me.

Parents held high expectations around grades whereas participants seemed to place more weight on the type of courses they took and their rationale behind doing so. Rose further lays the

foundation for participants' interpretation of coursework when she correlates academic achievement with advanced coursework.

> I felt like I had to [take advanced courses] because there was some kind of internal expectation to do well, and honestly, in high school, doing well academically was taking harder classes. I just felt like [to] kind of reach that high academic standard that I had to take AP classes. The AP classes I took were mostly classes that I was required to take. When I say that, for instance, in my sophomore year, I took my first AP class, AP government and politics. Sophomores are required to take a government class. There was regular government, there was honors, and then they had AP government and politics. So that was already a requirement that I had to fulfil. And the hardest class to take was the AP one. Following this kind of internalized standard, I just decided to take AP classes. It was important.

Rose stresses, however, that teachers seemed more realistic in their guidance, cautioning students to weigh the benefits of more challenging AP classes against their interest or ability and encouraging honors or regular classes if those were a better fit. Peer influence and observation of peers seemed to override such advice and strongly influence course selection. Rose shares

> My peers were like, 'AP is what you should take.' Regulars [classes] are something that the dumb students take, or it was too easy… [T]hat was how people viewed the different levels of classes. Regular was for low achieving students and honors were high achieving students, and then AP was like the really, really smart, definitely gonna be successful students.

Artha, Roman, Alma-Lyn, and Regalia reiterated the sentiments expressed in Rose's narrative around the class hierarchy while providing background that helped illuminate their perspective. Roman talked extensively of his high school being "ghetto" and only the AP classes being worthwhile.

> I didn't like the people I was around because they were ghetto. They would start fights and they were there just to be there, not to put in work. They would be late, just copy each other. Students would disrespect the teachers. For AP I did [respect the students], [but] not much for honors. A little bit for honors, but mainly for AP. The kids in AP took stuff seriously. They knew what they wanted to do and to go to college and stuff. They wanted to get college credit because that's why you take AP's. I only took one regular class, English. The teacher said I was really good and midway through the quarter he moved me up to honors… I guess I knew the

difference then. The kids wouldn't take their work ethic seriously. They would turn in stuff late. There wasn't really a difference [between regular and honors classes]. I think honors was a joke, but AP was serious.

Throughout the narratives thus far under 'intention,' participants privilege more challenging courses over others and in so doing condemn students whose perceived aptitude, aspirations, and behaviors do not align with theirs. Likewise, Artha shares her experience taking regular classes and how that influenced her course taking behavior.

> I took regular class because I had this inferiority that maybe I wasn't very smart. I wanted to test it out. Freshman year I mixed honors and regular classes. My mom didn't care. She just wanted me to get good grades. I took regular Spanish. I took regular Physics because I wasn't good at languages and I definitely wasn't good at sciences. I hated Physics. I was in classes with kind of like the same people too. There were some who overlapped with my Spanish and Physics class. They didn't care about learning… They were disrespectful to the teachers, and I loved the teachers…. People would speak over the teacher. They'd make some sly comments. Or people would pull out their phones and make weird sounds while the teacher was lecturing…. That really peeved me…. The teachers were *really* [emphasis] good; they were probably better than my honors teachers. They tried really hard to get us interested. They tried really hard to explain things very carefully because regular classes you don't need to be as hard driven as honors classes. I didn't want to be in that situation anymore after freshman year. I decided I was good not taking another class with these people ever again.

Underlying participants college and career aspirations is a college-going habitus imbued with high academic expectations. Artha's narrative illustrates tension between her expectations and self-efficacy. Her intention behind taking regular classes stemmed from wanting a more accessible teaching and learning environment for two particularly difficult subjects. She walked away from those experiences with an attitude toward the course and student hierarchy that mirrored that of Rose and Roman. When participants compared their aspirations against the perceived aspirations of their peers, they identified more with their peers taking advanced courses. Observations of those with different and similar aspirations led them to consciously

surround themselves with peers who possessed a college-going habitus and appeared to have what they considered the cultural capital for academic success.

5.3.3 Conclusion

College and career aspirations coupled with an understanding that colleges place more value on advanced coursework largely drove participants' honors, AP, or IB course selection. Comparisons and/or experiences with non-honors or non-AP/IB students and courses increased participants' awareness of capital that promotes college-going in addition to creating divisive attitudes between regular and advanced courses and students. Participants were intentional in both surrounding themselves with like-minded peers and immersing themselves in a college-going environment. Parental influence on program participation and course taking behavior was unclear. Participants instead explicitly mentioned the influence of friends and siblings. Perhaps the most contradictory finding is that despite high expectations, above average grades, and college aspirations, all of which informed program participation and course selection, participants routinely expressed anxiety around their academic ability. Furthermore, even with intentional agency in enrolling in programs and/or courses that promote college-going, it is questionable to what extent this agency carried over to the college application stage of their college-going experience, which I consider in the next theme.

5.4   SELECTIVITY

Selectivity is the fourth overarching interpretive theme I explore (see Figure 6). I organize this section by the three subthemes that serve as warrants for selectivity. They are 1) capital deficit, 2) quality connection, and 3) first choice institution. Each subtheme is comprised of related narratives that serve as backings or foundational support. Capital deficit, quality connections, and first choice institution as the subthemes underpinning selectivity address the second sub-question guiding this research by explicating the forms of capital participants activated and how they were utilized.

Selectivity marks the college application stage and the meaning I attribute to it based on what emerged from the data. Selectivity in this context means exercising judgment and implies a degree of choosiness, however defined by participants. Participants were selective with assistance with the application process and their college applications, which translated to targeted assistance or advice and thought to which institutions they wanted to attend and why.

Participants who reported their parents as not having the cultural capital to assist their transition to higher education sought assistance from other sources. Generally, participants sought guidance from high school or other familial agents perceived to hold the cultural capital needed to facilitate their college application process. All participants had college counselors at their high school, but only Alma-Lyn, Art, and Rose, who are either only children or the eldest sibling, commented on utilizing high school agents; Art and Alma-Lyn, whose parent(s) has some or no college, utilized high school agents regularly. Driven primarily by cost and location, Roman, Art, NB, and Artha applied to two institutions, one of which they established early on as their first choice institution. Roman, Art, and Artha experienced conflicted feelings when acceptance letters arrived because of limited options and unforeseen circumstances.

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Figure 6. Selectivity thematic web

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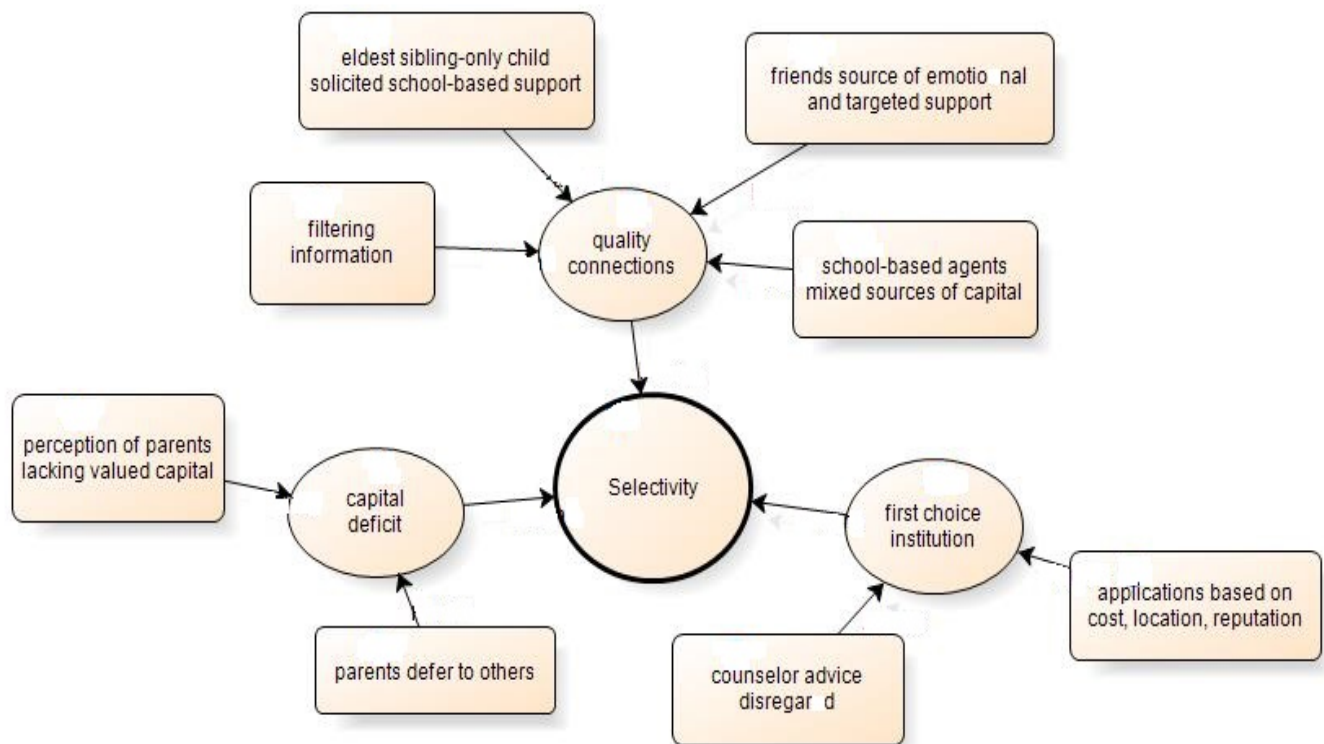
5.4.1 Capital deficit

Across all participants, parents appeared to have a low level of involvement in the college application process. This was due in part to participants' perception that their parents lacked the cultural capital necessary to help them navigate the process. Roman sums up his decision not to seek advice from his parents when he plainly says, "If I did, they probably wouldn't even know."

Not surprisingly, participants who felt the most alone throughout this process were the eldest sibling or only child. When asked what role family played in researching universities to apply to, Alma-Lyn, an only child, shared, "They didn't do any of it with me…. They didn't really have any input that was helpful to me. I did it on my own." Similarly, Art indicated that the process "was more with myself the most, with my counselor second, and then my mom third, being not very impacted much. She knows, but I made decisions of what I wanted to do." Rose, the only eldest sibling with college-educated parents, describes a similar process.

> I felt like I kind of just went through my college apps by myself. My parents didn't really help me out. I kind of just did my own research about the schools and the applications and the deadlines myself. My parents weren't really involved in me applying for colleges. The only thing I really came to them for was when I needed to pay for the college application and also when I needed them to fill out the FAFSA, but yeah, aside from that they weren't really involved in it.

There was no apparent bitterness in these sentiments but rather resignation that parental input was limited due to their perceived unfamiliarity with the process. Alma-Lyn continued to share that family input

> wasn't there really. More for them, if anything, would be like me talking about it with my aunt, but it wasn't like she was making suggestions or [providing] input. She is one of those people that's like super supportive and whatever I want to do is what she'll help me with. She doesn't necessarily, first of all, know the college process.

Art reaffirmed Alma-Lyn's comment when he talked of his father being able to provide indirect support only because "I think he didn't really [understand] what that degree would enable me to do." Rose's reason for not reaching out to her father, who had received his college education in the United States, was no less different.

> It was a long time ago when my dad went to college. Now it is all online. All my apps that I did were online, but when my dad did it, it was pen and paper. I had this notion that they didn't really know much about the process and asking them about it would lead to me first explaining to them about the process and then asking them about it. I just felt like it was too much effort.

Parents of participants with older siblings seemed to reinforce the perception of their own limited valued cultural capital by deferring to other family members with more recent experience. Artha's parents deferred to her older sister. NB's parents told him to "get advice from [your older sister]. 'She knows what to do. Ask her questions, and just go through the motions.'" Regalia's parents told both her and her older sister to "ask [your] cousin's about stuff."

However, Rose was the only participant who recognized that parents might have intentionally maintained distance in order to provide a safe space for their child to assert their independence. "I felt like they kind of just thought that if I could do it then I would be... it was kind of just me taking charge of my future, you know," she shared.

5.4.2 Quality connection

With the exception of Alma-Lyn, all participants spoke to varying degrees of school announcements or bulletin boards as basic dissemination strategies schools used to inform students about the college application process. Both mediums covered deadlines for college applications, due dates for recommendation letters, forms to be filled out, and information on the Common App. Generally, participants did not look to these mediums as resources. Participants

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who do not have siblings turned primarily to high school agents and friends as resources during the college application process.

5.4.2.1 High school agents Aside from obtaining recommendation letters from high school agents, participants who are the eldest sibling or only child utilized high school agents or resources the most. Art, the eldest child, spoke at length of assistance he received from the school counselor and his English teachers.

> I actually visited [the high school counselor] quite often during senior year. Just figuring out what to do after high school, which college to apply for, the application process for those schools. [I] need[ed] to find out what the application process is and then we would talk about it. I also met with my English teachers and did whatever they required. English because it's required to write an essay… I met with her to write the essay and she told me to pretty much just write about what I was passionate about, and I wrote something about [art] and why I think I am a good candidate for this school. She helped me to proofread my paper. And [the counselor and I] also talked about FAFSA. We talked about that process a lot. [The counselor] guided me through the steps, and there were some conferences or meetings where he would call my mom and we would talk to her over the phone, whatever was comfortable for her, or she would actually come in and we would just sit down and figure that out. It was really just figuring out which colleges that I wanted to go for and apply to.

Similarly, Rose, whose school mandated incoming seniors meet with a counselor, stressed that assistance from her counselor "was more of the logistics of applying to college and what that entails… She was looking at my grades and asked for my SAT score and then she told me to apply for a backup school, a reach school, and then a school where I just like fit in in terms of GPA and SAT. I followed her guidelines and advice." If the guidance counselor session had been voluntary, it is hard to predict what impact that would have had on Rose's already stressful college application process, especially considering that her direct contact with high school agents about the application process stopped there. She confided that she did not ask teachers to review her essay "because I was too intimidated to."

Alma-Lyn, who might have been more knowledgeable about the college preparation and application process and universities given her background attending preparatory schools, was more critical of the guidance she needed and received. She appreciated access to a college counselor but shared that the guidance he provided was not as individualized as it could have been.

> I guess I was smart but a lot of the kids I went to [reform] school with weren't as much…their parents were just sending them to these [alternative] programs and hoping they'd end up at college. I think [the college advisor] just used the same guidelines for me…. It's easier for him to say, 'apply to [PLAUni]' because he already knows admissions there and had already gotten students admitted there than 'let's look into out-of-state residency and how to get you in there.' …. He didn't base [his recommendations] off of what we wanted to do. He wasn't really interested in us as students or anything. He came in and did what he needed to do. If we wanted help with our essay and stuff, there was an English teacher who would help with all that stuff and was more involved with the students. He was from the outside and had a relationship with the school and everyone had used him for so long…. [The college advisor] didn't really answer emails once I graduated, so [at that point] it was me and my aunt mostly.

A tension exists for Alma-Lyn between the quality of the guidance she received and the quality of guidance she wanted. Underpinning this tension is the preference for participants to work with individuals they believe have their best interest in mind. For Alma-Lyn, the guidance she received was perfunctory and therefore limiting in the valued cultural capital it provided her. Another tension her narrative illustrates is the reality that sometimes ineffectual agents are the only options for students. As inadequate as these agents as resources might be, they may well be the best or only option for students at that time.

5.4.2.2 Friends Friends provided primarily emotional support or targeted support. Rose in particular, who does not have an older sibling, seemed to rely on friends the most for emotional support.

I think it was more just support like we are all in the same boat right now, we are all stressing about getting into college and writing my thesis. Those [moments] were when I went to my friends. And we all kind of just expressed the same anxiety, or we supported each other too. But logistically, like keeping up with my deadlines, editing my essays, stuff like that, that was just me.

For others, support from friends was targeted. Roman consulted two close friends "because we're all applying to college. [T]hey might know something I missed [since] we're all using the same systems to apply." Regalia had older classmates read her essays. Even Rose, who relied on friends for emotional support tapped into friends' older siblings for more targeted support.

Some of my friends had siblings who had already been to college or were in college gave me advice on like where I could find college applications. I remember 3 of the schools I applied to went through this website called Common App and I just had no idea what that was so they just helped me out with that.

Networks or agents on their did not facilitate the application process, but rather the quality of the connections and the extent they are able to develop students' cultural capital or offer indirect forms of assistance. This is not to say participants blindly accepted input from friends and others. When receiving advice from friends, for example, participants were discriminating in what they followed. Rose sums it up best when she talks about weighing a friend's input.

I think a lot of the information about the process I got from my friends, as terrible as that may be…. [Terrible] because your friends might know certain parts of the process. Well my friends knew certain parts of the process, but you can't really be sure [of] the accuracy [of the information]. It's kind of like doing your homework with your friends, or copying your friends' answers. Like it may not be right. Like if I didn't bother to research about a school, maybe I would ask my friends about it, and they had a certain interpretation of what that school offered or entailed that I wouldn't agree with if I did the research.

Although friends were a valuable resource to participants during the college application process, participants differentiated what worked for them and what did not. They are activating selectivity through agents they chose to access and the information they elect to utilize.

5.4.3 First choice institution

Participants were selective with their college applications, which means they considered in advance which institutions they wanted to attend and why. Roman, Art, NB, and Artha applied to only two institutions given their predefined parameters; one of the two institutions was established early on as their first choice institution. Tuition and location determined the institutions to which participants applied. With the exception of Alma-Lyn, all participants focused exclusively or largely on in-state institutions. Even if they applied to an out-of-state institution, in-state institutions were first choice institutions in the application stage. College cost appeared to be the primary reason. As NB shares, "Tuition is probably one reason we applied in-state. And even with student loans you kind of want to reduce that price as much as possible." Art drills this point home when he talks about not applying to more selective out-of-state institutions that might have been a better fit with his aspirations.

> I guess finance was an issue and maybe it's just too good to be true because even if I get in how can I afford this multi-million dollar school because there's a lot of expenses. Just like culinary school, it's not like you just get in and you can get the education.

Art's narrative raises an important consideration about the cost of tuition. Art's comment about affording a "multi-million dollar school" is exaggerated but for him and his family, tuition and fees for an out-of-state or private institution are prohibitive and confine university selection to local institutions. College cost was such a determining factor for NB that he chose to apply to a community college with potential for a full ride for two years before transferring to ECU to finish his bachelor's degree. Cost, however, was closely linked to his desire to stay close to home.

> Tuition was one thing, but also I knew what I could and couldn't do. I guess in my mind I knew I couldn't live alone. I knew when I was going into college that I wasn't as responsible as I should be. I'm still working on it actually, just getting up when I need to, doing chores when I have to do them. I just knew I wasn't ready to

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live on my own yet so wanted to stay close to home. I still sort of manage to take care of myself but every so often there'd be a time when my car would get towed or I'd need gas. I'd call mom for help.

With the exception of Alma-Lyn and Rose, participants were clear that ECU was their preferred institution, either immediately out of high school or as a transfer student, as was the case for NB. This decisiveness stemmed largely from concerns around cost and location. This decision was further justified for Artha and Regalia after they weighed the pros and cons of what more distant institutions offered. Artha said that she applied only to two colleges, the reasons for which were clear in her mind.

> I followed my plan. I said two schools, [LocalUni] and ECU. I didn't care for any other schools. I didn't care for out-of-state. I once said I wanted to do [StateUni] then I started looking around. We have a college prep course and one assignment was to look at colleges around the US or anywhere. You got the statistics, average GPA, average tuition, the majors they're known for. The first two I looked at were ECU and [LocalUni]. I also looked at [StateUni], UCLA, Berkeley, all these other schools. I just figured I really liked [my state]. Definitely tuition was cheaper, and I was aware of that. Average GPA was higher in the east coast than the west coast. I figured, 'why wouldn't I pick a school in the east coast if the statistics are really good.' The majors they excelled at I really liked too.

Regalia's resolve was no different.

> I knew the four schools I wanted by application time…. I was only familiar with this campus and that was already my first choice. [It was my first choice because] it's close to home and they definitely have a good foundation. And I was already working in a lab here, so if I continued to go here then I would continue to work there.

Regalia followed her college counselor's advice in applying to a range of schools. The institutions she applied to consisted of one reach school, one target school, and two back up schools. Despite similar advice from college counselors Roman, Art, NB, and Artha applied only to two institutions, one of which was their first choice institution partly because, Art reiterates, "it was closest to home." Selectivity for participants does not imply that their judgment is wholly informed or

necessarily in their best long term career interest, but rather based on parameters or rationale informed by their cultural capital at that time.

5.4.4   Conclusion

Across all participants, parents appeared to have a low level of involvement in participants' college application process. Participants who reported their parents as not having the valued cultural capital to directly help them transition to higher education sought assistance from other sources. Existence of an older sibling seemed to be the first sorting mechanism for whom participants solicited guidance from. Participants without an older sibling solicited feedback from friends and school-based agents. These participants also expressed feeling isolated during this process. Despite perceptions of limited direct parental assistance, every participant but Alma-Lyn desired to remain close to home and use this and cost as the primary and secondary filters for their college applications. If cost had not been a primary consideration, it is not clear if participants would have expanded their geographic parameters and applied to a more diverse or competitive institution set. Conversely, the desire to stay close to home might be a key determinant in college applications and therefore college choice for Southeast Asian American students.

5.5   DISSONANCE

With the exception of Alma-Lyn, participants ranked institutions of choice during the college application stage. Participants' viewed cost as one of the most logical and significant factors

informing this decision, which NB sums up when he says that his family likely is happy with his path because "it is the cheapest one. I guess they're happy I can make rational decisions," he shares, "[because] we don't have all the money in the world to go to any school I wanted to."

NB's comment suggests that if money were not a factor, he would have applied to and attended a different institution. In looking back, the only participant who openly regretted their decision, which was largely based on finances, was Art. Not once in NB's interview did he indicate a desire to have taken another path. In reviewing the data, I get a sense that if participants had applied to and been accepted to a reach institution, eliminating tuition and fees from the equation, ECU would remain their first choice institution. To some extent, this is reflected in the cognitive dissonance Roman, Art, Regalia, and Artha experienced when acceptance to their first choice institution was conditional or deferred.

Dissonance is the fifth and final overarching interpretive theme I explore (see Figure 7). I organize the rest of this section by two subthemes, one of which provides the warrants for dissonance; it is bittersweet acceptance. The second subtheme of unrestricted acceptance captures exceptions to what others experienced under the bittersweet subtheme. Each subtheme is comprised of related narratives that serve as its backings or foundational support. This theme addresses the second sub-question guiding this research by explicating how the forms of capital participants activated during the college choice process influenced their attitude and college choice decision.
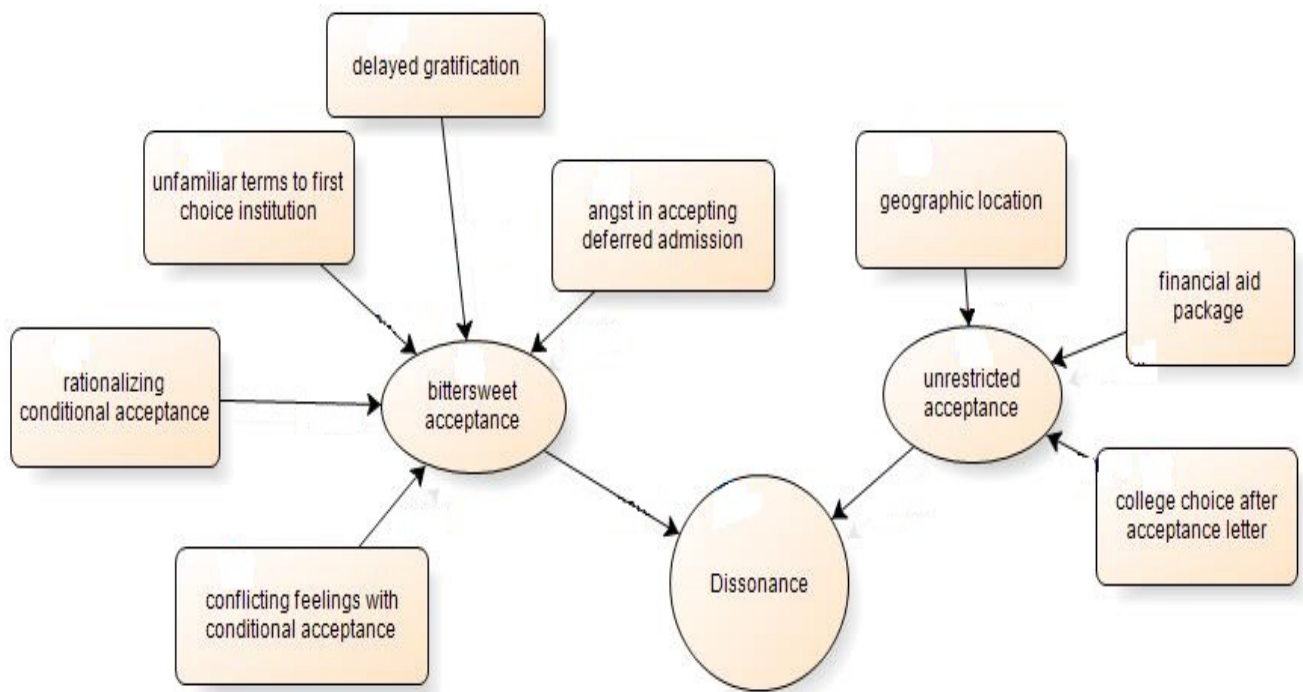
Figure 7. Dissonance thematic web

Dissonance represents the college choice stage and the meaning I attribute to it based on what emerged from participant narratives. In communicating with participants, I heard stories of conflicting attitudes that created internal tension. Participants had to address this tension in order to return to equilibrium and move forward with their college choice decision comfortably and confidently. This theme, as a result, focuses exclusively on participants' internal dialogue when deciding whether or not to accept the terms of their acceptance letter to their first choice institution. Confronted with unexpected conditions, this was a bittersweet experience for Roman, Art, Regalia, and Artha. The bittersweet acceptance subtheme captures their dissonance while the second subtheme of unrestricted acceptance briefly depicts Rose and Alma-Lyn's decision making as exceptions to what others experienced. Since NB was a transfer student, any shared sentiments are confined to college choice factors generally.

Everyone except NB experienced a continuum of emotions during the college choice process. Participants with conditional or deferred acceptance to their first choice institution experienced the most angst. Roman and Art, with conditional acceptance, were anxious then relieved, while Regalia and Artha, with deferred acceptance, were relieved then insulted. Anxiety for Rose and Alma-Lyn, the only two participants who applied to five or more institutions and were accepted to three or more with no (pre)conditions attached to their acceptance, stemmed from deciding which institution to attend. Siblings, parents, or friends influenced the decision making process indirectly and directly. Siblings and friends provided guidance or emotional support. Parental influence came in the form of preferences for geographic proximity or the amount of monetary support they would contribute toward tuition, fees and living expenses.

5.5.1 Bittersweet acceptance

Despite having decided on their first choice institution during the application stage, Roman, Art, Regalia, and Artha faced another level of decision-making they were unaware even existed. They had to decide whether or not to accept the terms of their conditional or deferred acceptance to their first choice university. According to Roman,

> I was kind of confused because [the letter] said conditional admission. I had to go through the [summer program]. …I was really excited and confused because I didn't know what that program was and I didn't know how that works. I had to email them to say [that I'd] go to this program, and then we had to go through three meetings and more tests, kind of like the SAT, to determine if I could get in the program. It's actually competitive too. They only took like 100-something kids. We had to do a test and an information meeting where they said what we had to go through to be admitted. They went over the summer program and passing our classes and the criteria.

Roman assumed his invitation to the summer program was due in large part to his college admissions essay on "how I had an English barrier and how it was difficult growing up because I

was a first generation college kid and my parents didn't know about [college] so they couldn't help me as much." Art, on the other hand, acknowledged that he was not accepted because of his grades. Both experienced discomfort with the uncertainty inherent in a conditional acceptance for different reasons. For Art, who was admitted into another institution yet less confident in his academic ability, the summer program was a calculated risk.

> [T]he first time I had received a letter saying 'sorry, we can't accept you because of your grades.' I didn't get accepted into ECU, so that was a disappointment. Then I received a second letter from ECU about the [summer program] and I thought 'maybe I should take this chance' … I took a gamble, and I took a big risk in taking the summer program not knowing if I would get in or not because it's not decided until the end of the program.

In some sense, Roman and Art were deprived of the opportunity to savor their acceptance since admittance to the university was contingent on their successful completion of the summer program. As Roman shared,

> After we finished the program, we had to wait a few weeks to hear if we were admitted, so that's when I guess I felt happy. [I received] an email and another personal letter after the email saying [that] I was admitted. It was a good feeling because I had been through a lot that summer to be admitted.

Despite feelings of relief, the process "was rough," Roman shared. "If I didn't go through [the summer program] I wouldn't be accepted." Since Roman had not been admitted into the other institution he applied to, his options were severely limited. In the end he was successful, but feeling like he had no suitable options weighed heavily on him until he had finally been accepted.

Likewise, Artha and Regalia had to come to terms with their deferred acceptance and make a decision they had not anticipated having to make. Both had conflicting feelings about their spring start, but Artha captures their shared sentiment best when she talks about her interpretation of her deferred acceptance.

I didn't get accepted into the fall semester. Actually, that was new to me…. I didn't realize that there could be spring semester students. When I got that letter, that's what I realized. It said, 'you are accepted to ECU, but for the spring semester 'cause of the buildup of the fall semester.' I was second choice for them. They wanted me, but they didn't want me for fall semester; I wasn't top priority.

Heightened anxiety arose from limited information in their communication from ECU on spring semester students. Artha and Regalia spoke of consulting family members for support and more information. Regalia initially reduced her anxiety by reaching out to an external family member who experienced the same terms of acceptance a few years prior. Both talked through the decision with their sisters, whose counsel assuaged negative emotions and enabled them to view the situation more objectively and move forward with little to no bitterness.

5.5.2 Unrestricted acceptance

Rose and Alma-Lyn, the only two participants to apply to five or more institutions and not outwardly identify a first choice institution during the application stage, appeared to experience the least angst in making a college choice decision. Geographic location and cost were primary factors, as they were for the others, but their weight was only fully assessed after they received acceptance letters.

According to Rose, "I kind of just went here because I made it and it was kind of close… [A]nd at that time I was really lost on what I wanted to study so I didn't want to go too far when I wasn't sure what I wanted to do…. I didn't do a lot of research about it." She was relieved to get her acceptance letter, especially knowing that ECU was her father's first choice. "[H]e mostly just wanted me to come to ECU," Rose shared. "When we talked about me being in college, he always framed it around me being at ECU," despite having applied and been accepted to his alma mater.

Similarly, Alma-Lyn "didn't consider [ECU] seriously" until she was accepted. "It was just kind of a throwaway when I was applying…. [My college advisor] was like 'just do it,' and then when I got accepted, I started looking into the school," she shared. After talking to friends and doing research, she learned it was a good school with more favorable conditions in terms of financial aid and location. Although cost and geographic location were major factors for Alma-Lyn as well, her preference was to attend an institution farther away from home opposed to closer to home, a move her family supported. "Everyone in my family, and [my adoptive father] agreed, that it would be better for me to get out of [state]. I needed to get out. ECU was the best option. They were the nicest in terms of financial aid and talking with [me] before I came here." Alma-Lyn expressed confusion over the financial aid packages and the need to reach out to the institutions for additional information. Aside from offering the most competitive financial aid package, ECU staff walked her through the paperwork until she understood its conditions.

5.5.3   Conclusion

Dissonance represents the college choice stage for participants due to their initial confusion and shock over their conditional or deferred acceptance. This momentarily turned their world upside down until they convinced themselves of the long-term benefits their first choice institution could afford in spite of their anxiety-ridden acceptance. Participants did not recognize during the college application process that limiting college applications to two or fewer might put them in a vulnerable position. With the exception of Art and Alma-Lyn, participants social capital during the college application and choice stages were largely confined to their personal contexts. Participants experienced at times an anxiety ridden path to university as evidenced by tensions

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experienced in the college choice stage between their college aspirations and terms of their acceptance.

The next chapter presents an additional level of analysis through two meta-themes that cut across this chapter's overarching themes and participant narratives. The aforementioned thematic analysis lays the groundwork for the meta-themes. The meta-themes serve to highlight the essence of meaning of core influences that shaped participants' path to university and allow me to reflect on and discuss the meaning of these influences in relation to the literature. In the final chapter, I present a summary of the research findings from chapters 5 and 6 in addition to implications for this research and policy and practice recommendations.

6.0   META-ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The previous chapter presented five overarching themes foundational to the presentation and discussion of this chapter's two meta-themes. As this study's key findings, the two meta-themes are 1) intimate familial relations are paramount to college-going and 2) bounded college-going habitus thwarts smooth path to university. The meta-themes serve several purposes. One, they bring to the forefront the essence of meaning of core influences that shaped participants' path to university, thereby addressing the primary research question guiding this study. Two, they allow me to reflect on the meaning of these influences in relation to the literature.

Each meta-theme is its own section and further divided into organizing categories and participant narratives. The related narratives emerged from conversations with participants on how they understand and experienced their path to university. The data excerpts presented have yet to be shared and are therefore designed to further illustrate the weight of the meta-themes. The chapter concludes with a section summary of both meta-themes. I present the implications for this research in the seventh and final chapter, which includes a summary of the research findings from chapters five and six and policy and practice recommendations.

The first meta-theme, intimate familial relations are paramount to college-going, is organized by sibling and parental agents as essential for Southeast Asian American undergraduates' college-going experience. For the participants in this study, familial relationships emerged as core relationships in their college-going experience, both as developing

requisite cultural capital and shaping their college-going habitus. The second meta-theme, bounded college-going habitus thwarts smooth path to university, is organized by academic preparation as understood in hindsight and while in high school. Every participant in this study possessed a college-going habitus developed from a young age by high educational values coupled with aspirations and expectations to attend college. While participants expected to attend university, they exhibited behavior or made decisions, based on their cultural and social capital at that time, that could have impaired turning those expectations into reality.

6.1   INTIMATE FAMILIAL RELATIONS ARE PARAMONT TO COLELGE-GOING

Intimate familial relations are paramount to college-going is the first meta-theme I explore. I organize this section by the two primary influential agents of sibling and parents; woven throughout is a discussion of the related literature and my interpretations. This meta-theme addresses the primary research question guiding this study, focusing on essential agents to Southeast Asian American undergraduates' college-going experience. For the participants in this study, intimate familial relationships emerged as significant relationships in their college-going experience, both as developing requisite cultural capital and shaping their college-going habitus.

Rich research exists on how social and cultural capital promote or constrain college-going, with a focus on the influence of parents, peers and school-based agents such as teachers and college counselors (McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006; Perna & Titus, 2005). Although educational attainment for some students is impaired when parents have little or no formal education, limited English proficiency and/or inadequate or no understanding of the American educational system (Tang, Kim, & Haviland; Um, 2003), schools presumably could work with

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students and families in providing support and access to resources that would facilitate educational attainment. In fact, research suggests that Cambodian American parents and students look to high schools to bridge gaps in cultural capital that would facilitate the college-going process for students (Chhuon et al., 2010). Um (2003), however, found that Southeast Asian American college students felt ill-informed about and ill-prepared for college.

For the Southeast Asian American undergraduates in this study, intimate familial relationships emerged as core relationships in their college-going experience. This is not to say friends and school-based agents were not important, for in the absence of an older sibling, the significance of school-based agents did increase for participants, but authentic, trusted individuals in the form of intimate familial relationships appear to be the cornerstone of shaping college-going habitus and the primary sources for accessing cultural capital needed at various points throughout their college-going process. By authentic, trusted individuals, I am drawing parallels to what Palmer and Maramba (2015) refer to as 'caring agents.' Rose's comment that she did not seek assistance from teachers on her college admission essays because she "was too intimidated to," further supports the idea of students engaging with individuals perceived to have the capital they need in addition to concern for their overall wellbeing and academic success.

In the case of participants with older siblings, the older sibling relationship seemed to provide participants with the social and cultural capital necessary to more successfully navigate the college-going process and inform their decision making generally. Across all participants, parents instilled a college-going habitus and provided indirect support during their child's high school years. Artha best captures this distinction when she declares, "My mom helped me gain independence while my sister helped me prepare for college." The following two subsections discuss the sibling and parent influence on participants' college-going experience.

6.1.1   Sibling influence

While research exists on the role parents play in their children's education (Chhuon et al., 2010; Elkins et al., 2000; Fuligni & Witkow, 2004; Gloria & Ho, 2003; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006; Perna & Titus, 2005), sibling relationships and the role older siblings play in their younger siblings' college-going experience is an understudied area not only in education attainment or college-going literature (Goodman, et al., 2015) but also within the sibling literature (Collins & Laursen, 2004).

This study is consistent with previous research that suggests that sibling relationships for Southeast Asian American students are complex relationships, not bound to one interpretation or function (Chhuon, et al., 2010; Palmer & Maramba, 2015). Older siblings attending or as recent college graduates facilitate college-going for younger siblings through the various roles they play, namely that of surrogate parent, advisor, tutor, and role model (Chhuon, et al., 2010; Palmer & Maramba, 2015). Given the amount of time siblings are likely to spend together compared to other influential figures such as friends and teachers (Whiteman, McHale, & Soli, 2011), these vital roles cannot be underestimated. NB referred to his older sister as "the guide of my life." Artha called her sister her "go to" person when she was worried about school or thinking about college or a career. "When I was planning everything out…my sister gave me advice," Artha shared, "and for me that was my code of conduct, my Golden Rule." For Regalia, her sister was also "the first person I go to if I have a question regarding school or anything."

Similarly, research on sibling relationships highlights sibling support generally throughout childhood and adolescence, particularly the advisory capacity older siblings serve for their younger siblings (Tucker et al., 1997; Whiteman et al., 2011). Older siblings as a source of direct and indirect support is the most widely referenced role participants spoke to. Their older

siblings provided advice on teachers; course selection; college entrance exams, applications, and selection. Such advice, as NB implies in the following passage, was an asset that eased the college application process for him.

> The [college application] essay questions were kind of abstract…. [My sister] told me that they wanted an answer that was as creative as you could possibly be. She knew the recruiting professor. She knew how the teachers sort of think, what they'd like to see and what they didn't want to see. I guess that gave me a huge edge over everyone else. She knew what sort of people they liked in the classroom…creative, imaginative, thinking differently, so I tried to mold my answers to that.

NB drew from his sister's knowledge and network of informed agents to guide him through his college application. He tapped into her cultural capital because she was a trusted source who had recently engaged with the process. This notion of a trusted source is of paramount significance to participants in determining avenues for seeking out valued cultural capital. Roman further captures this sentiment in deferring to his brother's opinion over that of a school-based agent who, technically, should have been a more knowledgeable resource for him.

> Everything was on my own, asking friends or asking my brother. I tried getting my brother to help me because he'd been through it already. [Friends and my brother] showed me how to use Common App and how to send in stuff. …. This lady, the college coordinator, she didn't really help much. I didn't speak to her much because my brother didn't like her…. [S]he would say like, 'oh you aren't getting in to this college,' but I got in. I don't really trust what she says, so I didn't rely on her much.

Roman's experience is complicated by what he perceived as the college counselor's lack of support or deficit language. His acceptance to ECU, as difficult as that process was for him, as illustrated in the dissonance theme, validated his and his brother's opinion about the college counselor as an unreliable, imprudent source.

Lijana (2015) highlights the significance of "authentic, trustworthy sources of information" (p. 174) for African American students during the college application and decision-

making process. This, too, appears to influence the social capital Roman continually activated in his quest for assistance with his college application. As Roman's narrative further demonstrates, peers also significantly influence minority students at various points along their path to university through information sharing (Lijana, 2015) or indirectly through their own plans for attending university (Sokatch, 2006). While every participant turned to friends for advice and as a means for gauging their academic ability, older siblings, for participants who had them, played a more comprehensive role in participants' college-going experience.

Older siblings as authentic, trusted sources for participants preceded the college application stage with direct support for academics. All participants with older siblings received assistance with coursework and college entrance exams. Artha illustrates how and why her older sister prepared her for her second attempt at her college entrance exam.

> When submitting to colleges, my parents were super worried because I had taken my SATs the first time and I didn't do so well…. I took it a second time and this time my sister drilled me throughout the entire summer. She was making me sit down and was helping me improve my scores. I think she helped me improve them by about 600 points, which is kind of amazing. We still didn't hit the goal that we had wanted. I was 50 points away from a 1900, which is what we really wanted. So my sister said, 'these scores are going to haunt you for the rest of your life, but you did improve a lot so it is okay.'

Artha's narrative captures her sister's commitment not only to Artha's education but to her future as well, reaffirming the notion of excellence and high expectations around academics. One less explicit piece until this point has been the idea of education as a family affair. By referring to her experience through the lens of 'we,' Artha is signaling the importance of her education for her family. The entire family worried about Artha's score impacting her admission to college. Artha's parents and her sister activated their aspirational capital through sharing their concerns, but her sister provided the only direct support through intensive tutoring sessions with Artha. While she raised her score considerably, it still failed to meet her sister's high expectations.

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Older siblings as role models deserve mention as well. In some education attainment literature, siblings are identified as role models (Chhuon, et al., 2010). They marked the college-going path for younger siblings who either followed in their footsteps or learned from their mistakes. The latter was the case for every participant with an older sibling. According to NB, "My whole life I watched what they did, followed their lead, watched what worked and what didn't. The benefits of being the youngest I guess." A tension exists in that participants emulate older siblings on one hand, but on the other they recognized perceived limiting behaviors or decisions they did not want to replicate.

Research that disaggregates roles older siblings play further sheds light on sibling relationships in minority families by considering how the conceptualization of 'sibling' influences sibling relationships (Sanders & Campling, 2004). Sanders and Campling's (2004) meta-analysis of research on sibling caretaking across cultures offers insight into varied interpretations of this concept. Sibling caretaking in non-Western cultures tends to promote interdependence and place greater emphasis on sibling caretaking (Sanders & Campling, 2004). Also, in more collectivist cultures, sibling roles could be a function of age and gender (McHale, et al., 2005), thus contributing to broader interpretations of roles and responsibilities for siblings according to where they fall in the sibling hierarchy. This could account for the various roles older siblings have played thus far in addition to my interpretation of participants' acceptance of older siblings serving as surrogate parents for participants. Participants' described older siblings in this research as assuming what I call the role of surrogate parent either throughout their college-going experience or at some point in their high school years. NB describes his older sister as being "a huge part of my life." He shares,

> I can't explain what she did for me. The majority of my success through school
> can be attributed to [my sister]. When my mom was going back to school and

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everything, she was the one making sure I got up on time, making me lunch, making me dinner…not all the time, but when my mom wasn't around or when my dad was asleep. [My sister] was making me food, making me lunch, and just always giving me advice about classes and everything.

For Artha, the bond with her older sister began when she was a baby. She paints a vivid metaphor through a story she says her mother often recounts.

My mom likes to tell a story of how she ran out of diapers and had to go to the store. She left me and my sister with my dad and rushed to the store to get more diapers. My dad was just looking at me and was confused about how to put on my diaper. My sister, who was 7, was like, 'I got this,' so since then she has been changing my diapers.

These interpretations of sibling, sibling caretaking or sibling as surrogate parent not prominent in the dominate Anglo culture of the United States could also be more characteristic of immigrant families given their stronger sense of family obligation than their peers from American-born families (Fuligni & Witkow, 2004; Tseng, 2004). Asian Pacific American students, in particular, reported more family demands and a stronger emphasis on family interdependence than the three other panethnic groups of university students in Tseng's (2004) research on factors contributing to college enrollment and persistence for selected panethnic groups.

Interestingly, the significance of older siblings is also shared across participants who are the eldest sibling in their family. Regalia, who has an older sister, points out that college information sessions conducted by her high school guidance counselor were likely "more useful for the people who don't have siblings or know someone else who has applied, but since my sister went through the process I kind of learned from her." Rose, who is the oldest, shared a similar sentiment when she compared her college-going experience to that of her friends who have older siblings.

[M]ost of them had older siblings that had gone or were going to college so they had that guidance, but for me since I was the oldest one I was the first child to go to college in my family so I didn't really know what I was doing.

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These views, again, could stem from cultural interpretations of family obligation. Family obligation, defined as "maintenance of family face, serving as a role model to younger family members, and contributing to their family's economic well-being" (Chhuon, et al., 2010, p. 38) was found to contribute to college enrollment for Cambodian American undergraduate students. Art, the only first generation college student and eldest sibling, is the only participant with siblings who did not zero in on the significance of sibling relationships. However, even he sought out the type of support older siblings provided to participants who had them.

> I feel very fortunate to have met and known people that are ahead of the game, that are older than me to have gone through this similar experiences to kinda give me advice and words of wisdom on their education path and not to make the same mistake or kinda follow in their footsteps.

In the absence of an older sibling, Art sought advice from respected individuals senior to him. His experience reinforces the significance of the Southeast Asian American students in this study soliciting support from trusted individuals.

6.1.2   Parent influence

Parental support through involvement and encouragement influences students' academic trajectory (McDonough, 1997). Given that support differs across and within minority groups (Chhuon et al., 2010; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Strange, 2000), it is useful to unpack its meaning. Support exists through encouragement, which can impact students' academic trajectory through aspirations and high educational expectations. Involvement is another form of support whereby parents directly assist their children in school- or college-related matters (e.g., assisting with course selection, entrance exam preparation, or college applications) (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). In a review of the literature on the impact school, family, and community connections have on

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educational achievement, Henderson and Mapp (2002) found that, across class and race, parental involvement is linked to increased student performance and engagement.

Participants in this study, however, infrequently spoke of parents directly assisting them on their path to university. For high achieving, predominately low-income Cambodian American undergraduate students in Chhuon et al.'s study (2010), parental support, similarly, seldom involved direct assistance with schoolwork or guidance with navigating their path to college. Instead, support took the form of "moral" supports or encouragement often driven by the utility of education for both parents and students (p. 42). Parents tried to create a home environment free of distractions so their children could concentrate on their studies. Artha, Art, and Regalia experienced comparable support from their parents, as illustrated primarily under the overarching theme of excellence in the previous chapter.

This is not to suggest participants lacked direct assistance from parents entirely. It seems parents directly assisted participants when their cultural capital benefitted participants and provided encouragement as requisite cultural capital diminished, thus shifting reliance from parent to sibling for participants with older siblings. Regalia spoke of her parent's assistance with schoolwork in elementary school and how they "would sit down with us every night after we got home to do homework…. Most of the time [my mom was able to help with homework], at least early on. Later on I was more dependent on my sister."

Participants' inclination to seek support from siblings was similar to the Southeast Asian American college students in Palmer and Maramba's (2015) research on the impact of social capital on college access. One explanation is that participants with parents who had not graduated from an American high school or a postsecondary institution sought assistance from college educated family and family friends (Palmer & Maramba, 2015). Participants in this study

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articulated the same point as well. Parents appeared to have a low level of involvement in the college application process, for example, due in part to participants' perception that their parents lacked the cultural capital necessary to help them navigate the process. Students and parents both were conscious of parents' limitations with being able to provide certain academic support, which stemmed primarily from low-levels of education, limited English proficiency, and unfamiliarity with the American educational system.

Evident and previously mentioned in this study but not considered in others (Palmer & Maramba, 2015) is how parents themselves encouraged sibling support. Artha indicated that her parents did not know what to do with her. "They realized that college is a lot different now," Artha said, "My mom pretty much…told my sister to guide me academically. 'You have the best experiences; you went to the same schools as her; you know everything,' she told my sister." Likewise, after an information session for a prospective high school Regalia attended with her father, "he said that if I had any question about the [entrance] exam then I should ask my sister because at that point she was already starting her years there." The rationale behind this could go back to the conceptualization 'sibling' might hold for Cambodian and Vietnamese families. Education, in other words, is a family affair and members assist others if and when the perceived need arises.

Parents who lack the cultural capital their children need to tap into throughout their college-going years, might not only request younger children rely on older siblings for direct assistance, but focus as well on developing and maintaining college-going aspirations and high expectations for their children as a form of aspirational capital. Imparting a strong orientation toward education and high educational expectations aligns with research on immigrant parents' high expectations and value of education (Fuligni & Witkow, 2004; Glick & White, 2004). With

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fewer options of quality higher education in their native country, some Asian American parents see the American educational system as one of opportunity where those who apply themselves and excel academically are better positioned to move up the socioeconomic ladder (Louie, 2001). This attitude would naturally engender the desire to impart a college-going habitus to their children through aspirations and expectations.

One finding that emerged from the data is the role of participants' mothers and fathers. Each participant focused more on one parent than the other in talking about their college-going experience. Much research addresses the significance of parental involvement and expectations in influencing students' academic trajectory (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008), but limited research considers gender differences in parental support for students generally and for Southeast Asian American students specifically. Existing research on minority students suggests that mothers are more influential than fathers in college preparation, planning, and choice (Noeth & Wimberly, n.d.; Horn & Nuñez, 2000). Possible explanations are steeped in culture and family structure (Louie, 2001). A strong mother presence could be attributed to a higher percentage of single-mother households for African Americans (Noeth & Wimberly, n.d.), for example, or cultural dispositions toward education (Louie, 2001) as the Tiger Mom phenomenon in Asian American families illustrates. Aside from reinforcing the model minority stereotype, it suggests that mothers are the most influential family-based agent in their child's education.

This study's findings deviate from the research and popular media on gender differences in parental support in that every participant except Artha spoke more of the role their father played over that of their mother in imparting the value of education throughout their college-going years. This was particularly significant for Alma-Lyn, Art, and Rose who did not have an

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older sibling as a role model. Both Alma-Lyn and Art aspired to be like their fathers in some way and recognized the significant role they played on their path to university. Art, for example, solicited input from his father about the practicality of obtaining a liberal arts degree because "he would be more supportive." Furthermore, he shares,

> I wanted to hear from my dad just to see what he thought. And he pretty much told me to follow my dreams. If I think I can do it, go for it; if not, then don't. Don't do it and then not study it professionally [was his advice] because he is very strict with [his practice] in terms of…well, with anything really…. I think it is common sense. Just do it, you know; don't do it half. It's just a moral that he taught me. This is a moral I grew up with, one of the things that my dad taught me.

Art needed validation from a trusted source to pursue a liberal arts degree. This likely stemmed from his mother's and other family member's expectations for him to major in business or another field historically shown to yield a high income. As illustrated in the overarching theme of excellence, participants believed their parents demanded success at the expense of their own self-interest. Art, as the oldest male child, might have internalized these expectations more than others as he was the only participant who outwardly wrestled with his future commitment to his family.

Instead of embracing her father as a role model as did Art throughout his college-going years, Rose seemed to quietly acquiesce to her family's expectations. Her father' influence, however, has been no less impactful.

> My dad is pretty successful and he is the oldest in his immediate family, and my parents kind of expected me to follow that kind of academic success and my extended family viewed me that way too. Like I am the daughter of my father who came here on a boat and made it and is now really successful. So I just feel like I have to live up to that.

Research has shown that the structure of the family needs to be considered to understand how various complex influences interact to impact attainment for students from immigrant families.

Educational attainment for Southeast Asian American students can be hindered by parental pressure and cultural and economic constraints (Tang, Kim, & Haviland, 2013; Um, 2003). In looking at family structure and parental pressure, one tension that arises for Art and Rose is the cultural value of filial piety, which aligns with other research on Southeast Asian American students (Chhuon et al., 2010; Um, 2003). Both experienced internal conflict during their college-going years as they desired to explore their own paths yet felt the pull of respecting and obeying parental and familial expectations.

Nuñez (2009) introduced the notion that racial/ethnic minority students such as Southeast Asian Americans operate from a habitus that "enables them to advance their educational attainment in the face of marginalizing social conditions … and orients them toward employing complex, seemingly inconsistent strategies of improvisation" (p. 42). I would argue that for participants, it is possible for marginalizing social conditions to originate in the home as they grapple with conflicting cultural values in attempting to balance their autonomy with filial piety. Art's strategy for dealing with this tension was to maintain a façade of adhering to his mother's wishes while engaging in conversations with his father, a trusted source, to validate his desired career trajectory. Rose, on the other hand, accepted her family's high expectations and did what she could to live up to them. In reflecting on her experience, however, she acknowledged that she neglected herself in doing so and should have been more self-compassionate instead of self-critical throughout her college-going experience.

6.1.3   Section summary

For the three male and four female Southeast Asian American undergraduates in this study, relationships with authentic, trusted family members emerged as core relationships in their

college-going experience. This study is consistent with previous research that suggests that sibling relationships for Southeast Asian American students are complex relationships, not bound to one interpretation or function (Chhuon, et al., 2010; Palmer & Maramba, 2015). In the case of participants with older siblings, the older sibling relationship served as the primary source for accessing valued cultural capital to navigate the college-going process and inform decision making generally. Older siblings attending or as recent college graduates facilitated college-going for younger siblings thru the various roles they play, namely that of advisor, tutor, and role model, and surrogate parent. Furthermore, parents and older siblings, particularly, shaped participants' college-going habitus. Although educational attainment for some students is impaired when parents have little or no formal education and/or limited understanding of the American educational system (Tang, Kim, & Haviland; Um, 2003), participants' parents played a key role in developing participants' college-going habitus and serving as role models, the latter of which was particularly applicable for participants with no older sibling. Across all participants, parents instilled a college-going habitus by tapping into their cultural capital to activate their aspirational capital through college and career expectations.

6.2   BOUNDED COLLEGE-GOING HABITUS THWARTS SMOOTH PATH TO UNIVERSITY

Bounded college-going habitus thwarts smooth path to university is the second meta-theme I explore. I organize this section by the two distinct periods participants recognized their bounded college-going habitus, as understood in hindsight or in high school; woven throughout is a discussion of the related literature and my interpretations. This meta-theme addresses the

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primary research question guiding this study, focusing on the role of habitus in shaping Southeast Asian American undergraduates' college-going experience.

Every participant in this study possessed a college-going habitus, developed from a young age by high educational values coupled with aspirations and expectations to attend college. Assuming college as a foregone conclusion, however, does not necessarily translate to being prepared for college. These students had what I am calling 'bounded college-going habitus.' While they expected to attend university, they exhibited behavior or made decisions, based on their cultural and social capital while in high school, that could have impaired turning those expectations into reality. As a result, bounded college-going habitus represents limitations with assumptions students make about preparing for college. This notion of 'bounded college-going habitus thwarts smooth path to university' is explored through a discussion of participants' experiences and attitudes around their academic preparation as understood in hindsight and while in high school.

Research on the decision to attend college draws largely from economic approaches to college-going (Grodsky & Riegle-Crumb, n.d.). This translates to students weighing the expected benefits against the expected costs of a postsecondary education. While every participant in this study factored in college cost in their decision making process, their decision centered around which college to attend and not whether or not to attend college.

This is contrary to one assumption I had going into this research. Based on the college choice and educational attainment literature (Heller, 1997; Perna, 2000; Teranishi et al., 2013), I thought the decision to attend a postsecondary institution would have been a consideration for participants. My assumption proved unfounded and supports Grodsky and Riegle-Crumb's (n.d.) argument that research on the decision to attend college needs first to consider assumptions

students and families make about college-going. They claim that some students do not consciously weigh the costs and benefits of higher education in deciding whether or not to attend college. Instead, students have a college-going habitus whereby they assume college is a foregone conclusion. *The Condition of Education 2014* suggests that the majority of high school students expect to continue to postsecondary education (Kena et al., 2014), a finding consistent in McAllister's (2012) dissertation on Mexican American undergraduates who considered college attendance normative behavior. Both Rose and Artha explicitly supported this notion. According to Artha, "It's always been expected that my generation would go to college." For parents with high expectations for their child, emphasizing the fact that she is in college is secondary to what she is doing in college. Artha shared that parental pride "is not even that 'my child is in college.' It's more like, 'my child is majoring in this and she's gotten these internships.' Just saying that their child is in college is not very impressive to the family."

This view aligns with Grodsky and Riegle-Crumb's (n.d.) research that college-going conversations and decisions are pivoting from whether or not to attend college to what postsecondary institutions to apply to then attend. This was evident across all participants, as Regalia illustrated when she said, "I always knew in the back of my mind that I would go to college. I just wasn't sure where." The Southeast Asian American undergraduates in this study embodied a college-going habitus whereby college was the next, natural step after high school.

Habitus, or one's worldview and understanding about their place in the world (Mickelson, 2003), embodies students' background characteristics and social and cultural capital through aspirations, attitudes, expectations, knowledge, and resources (Dumais, 2002; McDonough, 1997; Mickelson, 2003). It also shapes decision making. A college-going habitus,

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therefore, is the set of assumptions students make at a young age that they will attend college (Grodsky & Riegle-Crumb, n.d.).

However, as participants in this study demonstrated, a college-going habitus does not guarantee students receive the preparation they need for a smooth transition to college or university or to be college ready. Despite having a college-going habitus, participants experienced an interruption that could have derailed college or university matriculation at their first choice institution. The nature of what I call interruption varied across participants and, from their perspective, partly stemmed from their assumptions around college-going. Alma-Lyn's admission that "I took [college] for granted" was an undercurrent that cut across participants' narratives. As Alma-Lyn continued, "I just wish I had gotten serious sooner…. The opportunities I had I took for granted and assumed that college was something that would happen no matter what." Alma-Lyn sheds light on the tension between college-going habitus and academic preparedness. Assuming college as a foregone conclusion does not necessarily translate to being prepared for college.

At the heart of the interruption in participants' college-going habitus was a contradiction between their college-going habitus, as illustrated through the overarching themes of meritocracy and excellence presented in the preceding chapter, and behaviors or attitudes in high school not aligned with college-going. Participants realized this tension after they recognized that their behaviors and decisions ran counter to their college and/or career aspirations.

Regalia, Roman, Alma-Lyn, NB, and Artha explicitly mentioned not applying themselves in high school in a manner commensurate with their ability. This entailed discounting the weight of grades, the SAT, or both. Roman perhaps illustrates this best when he talked of having the ability to do well but not fully applying himself. "I coasted through high school," he shared. "I

didn't really worry about [my grades] much. I wanted to get the best grades, but I didn't really take [them] seriously. I crammed for exams. I did study, but I didn't do my best."

While participants expected to attend university, they exhibited behavior or made decisions, based on their cultural and social capital at that time, that could have impaired turning those expectations into reality. For those who realized this in high school, a life or school event prompted agency whereas those who realized this after graduation reflected on the missed opportunity to "course correct." Regardless of where along their path to postsecondary education they recognized this tension, participants underestimated the academic preparation needed for their first choice institution, thus hindering a smooth path to university.

6.2.1 Academic preparation understood in hindsight

Roman's perception that he coasted through high school and did not take his grades as seriously as he could or should have was interpreted as such in hindsight. It was not until Roman recalled his high school experience through the lens of an undergraduate that he understood the implications of his path to university. When asked about parental support, he said, "I'm more disadvantaged compared to other kids because they have more knowledge than me. Their parents were educated so they could be helped with homework or something." He also mentioned wishing he had known earlier the criteria for admission into his first choice institution, which he learned of when "I checked the website … and did more research when I was worrying [about college] senior year." While research suggests that peer networks and school-based resources contribute to students' college-going (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008) and increase in significance for first-generation college students (Watt, Huerta, & Lozano, 2007), Roman and Regalia's engagement with school-based resources seemed limited.

Regalia, who also demonstrated confidence in her academic ability while in high school, shared Roman's high school attitude toward preparation for her SAT. Confident with her high GPA and extracurriculars, Regalia describes her preparation for the SAT.

> I had the book open at work and would look through the questions. I didn't really take any practice exams. I never sat aside three hours to take the practice exam…. I mostly used the book. There was also an SAT question of the day online and I tried to do that when I could, but you would just forget about it sometimes and just not go on the website.

Participants whose high schools mediated access to college-going resources through SAT preparation classes elected not to take them. Roman said he only learned of the SAT class his senior year, whereas Regalia decided the class was irrelevant for her.

> [The school] had a class available but since I had my structured schedule all planned out I never took it. I never really thought about taking it, to be honest. I like to challenge myself and I didn't think the SAT class would be really challenging. I either took classes I felt would challenge myself or that I was interested in, and the SAT class I felt wasn't either of them. [T]he SAT class I felt was more designed for the comprehensive students, and not a lot of my friends were taking it, unless it was to get an easy A, but I wanted to do better than that.

In retrospect, Regalia regretted not studying more for the SAT as she believed her score played a large role in her deferred acceptance. While enrolling in her school's SAT class might not have challenged her to the extent she sought, it likely would have better prepared her for the SAT (Domingue & Briggs, 2009). Unfortunately, higher achieving peers at her school stigmatized the comprehensive courses. What is missing from Regalia's narrative is how these peers prepared for their SAT exams. Regalia's socialization in high school through her peers and perhaps the school itself affected her behavior not to seek school-based support in preparation for her SAT exam. These peers, unbeknownst to Regalia, could have been operating from a habitus that perceived private SAT preparation as normative behavior, thus affecting their opinion of school-based support (McDonough, 1997).

Both Roman's and Regalia's experiences show assumptions students can make in light of gaps in their knowledge about the college-going process (McDonough, 1997). Although both had high expectations, there seemed to be an expectations gap in terms of criteria for admittance into their first choice institution. Complicating this was perhaps a false sense of security in their performance or anticipated performance.

Chhuon et al. (2010) suggest that Cambodian American parents and students look to high schools to bridge gaps in valued cultural capital on the college-going process. Participants' enrollment in advanced placement courses, however, could have led school-based agents to their own erroneous assumption that their Asian American students had the resources necessary for informed decision making and optimal performance (Suzuki, 2002). Instead, both Regalia and Roman, after recalling their path to university through the eyes of an undergraduate with more accumulated cultural capital on college preparation and application, believed more could have been done to improve what they interpreted as their lackluster GPA or SAT score.

In this sense, Roman and Regalia were underprepared for university. I argue that for participants in this study, underpreparedness means they failed to meet the admissions requirements for their target postsecondary institution so they could either matriculate the semester following high school completion or do so without additional coursework beyond high school completion. In light of this, they persisted to university, perhaps due in part to their college-going habitus and beliefs about education that served as forms of aspirational capital and motivated them to navigate the education system the best they could (Tang et al., 2013).

6.2.2 Academic preparation understood in high school

College-going habitus shaped by families, communities, and schools drive the social capital students activate to access resources (McDonough, 1997). McDonough (1997) found that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds had access to resources that converged to contribute to a seamless path to university. Although socio-economic status was not an explicit focus in this study, findings suggest that regardless of socioeconomic background, the Southeast Asian American participants in this study experienced a contradiction between their college-going habitus and behaviors or attitudes in high school not aligned with college-going. Social networks contributed to their college-going habitus but also influenced the disruption with their behavior or disposition.

Art, Alma-Lyn, Artha, and NB experienced an interruption in their path to university that either fed into their self-doubt or conversely reinforced their college aspirations and focus on academics. Art describes his rupture when he recalls his thoughts confronted with an ambiguous future.

> I realized that I did go through a period where I wasn't… [Y]ou know how people have a midlife crisis. A crisis in their life. [A] friend recently told me that he had a quarter life crisis, which is similar to [what I went through]. I was like, 'oh no, I am gonna be working at McDonald's. I am not gonna graduate with a high school degree. What am I gonna do?' I didn't know at a point in high school what to do or how things were gonna turn out.

Although Art's college-going habitus signaled college matriculation, uncertainty about college major or next steps after progressing to college instilled anxiety to the extent he feared whether or not he would even complete high school. Art's anxiety was shared by others, but there were sociocultural elements unique to Art's experience that set him apart.

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Art's path to university is consistent with previous research on Southeast Asian American students that claims educational attainment can be thwarted by parental pressure and cultural constraints (Tang et al., 2013; Um, 2003). Across participants, he was the only eldest male sibling. In this role, he was increasingly conflicted by Vietnamese cultural norms of caring for the family and his desire for self-actualization through a career following his passion, a choice every adult family member except his father criticized, thus fueling his anxiety. Similar to the research on education attainment for immigrant families, all participants' experiences speak to the significance of considering family structure as a complex influence on student attainment (Um, 2003). Art's narrative in particular demonstrates how family structure and other complex influences interact to impact students' path to university.

Art's anxiety was a departure from his college-going habitus or previously held assumptions about attending college. Art's experience further demonstrates the notion of a bounded college-going habitus. Without awareness around college major, concrete information that would have provided a sense of purpose, he experienced a temporary rupture that, had he not worked through his fear, could have derailed college enrollment.

Aspirational capital, defined as "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77), propelled Art to push through his fear. In talking about advice he would give his younger self, he spoke at length of tensions in his life and how a purposeful attitude helps in handling life's hardships.

> I have all these other conflicting issues, but it's not letting those affect me would be the best advice I could give to my younger self. There is gonna be a lot of hurdles and hardships that are coming, but at the end of the road or one day there is always a silver lining, some light somewhere, so don't lose hope and don't lose your way. Because a lot of those things that happen in your life can kinda detour you from taking the path that you were originally on, which is fine, but remember to come back to that path and just pursue…. I feel like having a sense of purpose is essential.

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In high school Art toyed with the idea of pursuing his passion, but embraced it only after his second year at university. He spent his first two years trying more profitable majors on for size in an attempt to balance his mother's aspirations against his own. These two narratives from Art illustrate the internal tensions he experienced in trying to balance family obligations against his own aspirations (Chhuon et al., 2010; Um, 2003). Like Art, participants in Chhuon et al.'s (2010) research on Cambodian American undergraduates indicated selecting majors based on family preferences of professions that historically yield high incomes. It was not until Art embraced his preferred choice of major later in his university career that he experienced a sense of purpose or direction. My concern, however, is the length of this process and the toll it's taken on Art emotionally and, more recently, financially. Art's experience further contributes to a nuanced idea that not all college-going habituses result in a smooth college trajectory beyond college choice and university matriculation.

Similarly, Alma-Lyn, Artha and NB, experienced a break in their path to college. For them, however, college was reinforced through a life or school event that highlighted behaviors or dispositions that could have adversely impacted their intended educational trajectory. Armed with this awareness in high school, instead of retrospectively, marked a turning point for these three who took active measures to increase their GPA or SAT scores.

Alma-Lyn's turning point happened junior year after she was forced to attend reform school. She compared her GPA from a few years prior to where she was junior year and realized that she was not as competitive as she once was. She focused on academics and retook the SAT multiple times until she received a higher score.

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NB described his turning point as "the most significant event in my academic career." Exposure to the minimum wage world while working in high school ignited a focus on academics intended to facilitate college-going.

> In the 10th grade, I got a job at [Fast Foods R Us]. I was there for three years or something through high school. I went to school then after school I played sports. After sports I would go to work then I would come home and try to do homework. [T]here was this one night after a busy day. It was hot and I was tired. I was sitting on the counter and I remember telling [my sister], 'there's no way I'm going to be doing this for the rest of my life.' That's when it was like, 'alright, time to step it up at school 'cause colleges do look at high school.' If I didn't sort of bump my grades up or put more effort into my work…I was like, 'I'm going to be working here at [Fast Foods R Us]' and I didn't want to be there. 'How else am I going to get out of here?' That's when sort of everything turned around and I went from a B student to an A student.

NB's narrative reinforces the importance of considering habitus in relation to field. NB implies that education was not valued in his minimum wage world in high school. He further infers that maintaining a high GPA will facilitate better working conditions and higher income through college admission and completion, a belief highlighted in the presentation of 'meritocracy' in the previous chapter. These assumptions, as forms of embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), 'revitalized' NB's college-going habitus and, in conjunction with his aspirational capital, propelled him to raise his GPA.

In the same way, an underwhelming SAT score marked Artha's turning point, which she responded to by rigorous preparation for another exam with her sister coaching her.

> I think I was pretty ignorant about how important the SATs were. Unlike my sister who was totally at a very young age talking about the SATs, I was not given that same attitude. My sister would ask if I was worried about the SATs, and I wasn't…. I knew it was important, but didn't know how important until I got my first scores and looked at them and said, 'I don't think I did well at all.' I was in the car and my mom was sobbing as we were going to school. She said, 'Artha, you're going to fail in life 'cause of these scores. I don't know what happened. I think I raised you wrong.' I look back and laugh because I think it is funny, but at

the time I thought, 'Oh no, I really messed up' and so I was really upset with myself. I think my mom had to say that for me to realize how important the SATs were. If she hadn't, I probably would have thought, 'oh, my mom is just upset again.'

For Artha's mother, a high SAT score as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), was one mechanism for securing admission to a university, which presumably would lead to a degree and successful career and life. Artha's narrative illustrates the activation of cultural capital through parental involvement and parental expectations (Bourdieu, 1986; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Research signals that the impact of parental expectations coupled with immigrant generation status seems to be more significant for Asians (Glick & White, 2004; Louie, 2001). In Artha's family, her mother activated cultural capital through indirect support through high expectations (Tang et al., 2013). Artha implicitly discusses this when she talks about her understanding of the SAT differing from that of her sister's. "I was not given the same attitude," she says, implying that her parents instilled different dispositions and in turn orientations toward the SAT. If she had been socialized with a similar understanding of the weight of the SAT, Artha believes she might have studied differently and theoretically performed better on her first attempt.

Artha's narratives throughout this study illustrate that it was largely Artha's sister's responsibility to activate cultural capital through direct support. Artha's gap in understanding the significance of the SAT could have resulted in assumptions being made at home that her sister would be more directive about the weight of the test. Alternatively, Artha's sister could have been operating on the premise that Artha's school was reinforcing expectations from home through preparing students for the test and highlighting its significance (Chhuon et al., 2010).

For Alma-Lyn, NB, and Artha, a life or school event shed light on their bounded college-going habitus, which prompted them to tap into valued cultural capital and modify as necessary their strategies for facilitating their postsecondary trajectory. Strategies consisted primarily of

adjusting attitudes and modifying study habits through engagement with agents or self-directed processes. Regardless of the strategy, participants called upon their aspirational capital as motivation to realize their college and career expectations.

6.2.3   Section summary

Findings signal that college-going is largely promoted through home and school and presupposes postsecondary education at an early age. The Southeast Asian American participants in this study, regardless of their socioeconomic background, experienced in high school a contradiction between their college-going habitus and behaviors or attitudes not aligned with college-going. Without access to valued cultural capital or activating social capital participants had access to, they made assumptions about the college-going process that created a gap in their expectations of the criteria for admittance into their first choice institution.

Participants who realized this after graduation reflected on the missed opportunity to "course correct." It was not until after recalling their path to university through the eyes of an undergraduate who had accumulated more valued cultural capital on college preparation and application, participants could identify gaps in their cultural capital while in high school. Complicating this tension was participants' enrollment in advanced placement courses. Participation in these courses could have led school-based agents to their own erroneous assumption that their Asian American students had the resources necessary for informed decision making and optimal performance (Suzuki, 2002). These gaps contributed to participants being underprepared for university in that they failed to meet the admissions requirements for their target postsecondary institution so they could either matriculate the semester following high school completion or do so without additional coursework beyond high school completion.

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Despite such gaps, college-going habitus and beliefs about education that served as forms of aspirational capital motivated them to navigate the education system the best they could and persist to university with their existing cultural capital.

On the other hand, for participants who realized a gap in their expectations of the criteria for admittance into their first choice institution while in high school, a life or school event shed light on their bounded college-going habitus; this life or school event triggered them to tap into their own valued cultural capital and modify as necessary their strategies for facilitating their postsecondary trajectory. Strategies consisted primarily of adjusting attitudes and modifying study habits through engagement with agents or self-directed processes. Regardless of the strategy, these participants also called upon their aspirational capital as motivation to realize their college and career expectations.

7.0　DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

While the previous chapter presented a discussion of this study's core findings in relation to the educational attainment literature, this final chapter presents the more salient implications for this research and recommendations for educational policy and practice in facilitating a smooth path to university for Southeast Asian American students. The chapter begins with a summary of this study in relation to the primary research question and two sub-questions guiding the research. Next, I present a discussion of this research through its implications for theory and future research; this study's limitations are embedded in the latter. The chapter concludes with recommendations for educational policy and practice aimed positively to affect Southeast Asian American undergraduates' path to university.

7.1　OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY AND FINDINGS

To understand better the pipeline to higher education for Southeast Asian Americans as a marginalized and vulnerable population, this study qualitatively explored the path to university for seven Southeast Asian American undergraduates. It is in response to the call to deconstruct the notion of Asian American students as a monolith by understanding their dispositions and how they navigate their social and institutional contexts to secure resources that facilitate their college-going (Hune, 2002; Teranishi et al., 2013). Knowing their personal journey is an

opportunity to understand their needs and challenges, which is particularly salient as research, schools, and institutions of higher education tend to treat Asian Americans as a monolithic group and focus instead on African American and Latino populations (Ngo & Lee, 2007). I operate under the premise that participants' description and understanding of their own experience can provide valuable insight into the complex set of social realities for Southeast Asian Americans and strategies they use to navigate their multiple worlds in their quest for a higher education.

7.1.1   How do Southeast Asian American undergraduates understand and experience their path to university?

I begin with summarizing the essence of meaning of core influences that shaped participants' college-going and address the primary research question of how Southeast Asian American undergraduates understand and experience their path to university. For participants in this study, intimate familial relations were paramount and bounded college-going habitus inhibited a smooth path to university.

Every participant in this study possessed a college-going habitus, developed from a young age in part through high educational values coupled with aspirations and expectations to attend college. Participants demonstrated that a college-going habitus does not guarantee students receive the preparation they need for a smooth transition to college or university or to be college ready. This notion of a 'bounded college-going habitus' represents limitations with assumptions students make about going to college. Without access to valued cultural capital or activating such capital through existing networks, participants underestimated the academic preparation required for their first choice institution. These knowledge or expectation gaps contributed to participants being underprepared for university in that they failed to meet the

requirements for matriculation into their target postsecondary institution either the semester following high school completion or without the need for additional coursework. In the end, college-going habitus and beliefs about education that served as forms of aspirational capital motivated them to navigate the education system the best they could and persist to university.

Further, it is important to consider the familial context as familial relationships emerged as core to participants' college-going experience and represent a primary strategy for accessing valued cultural capital. This is not to say friends and school-based agents were not important, for in the absence of an older sibling, the significance of school-based agents did increase for participants, but intimate familial relationships appear to be the cornerstone of shaping college-going habitus and as entry points for accessing valued cultural capital. Despite parents with little or no formal education and/or limited understanding of the American educational system, participants' parents played a key role in developing participants' college-going habitus and serving as role models. Across all participants, parents instilled a college-going habitus in part by activating their aspirational capital through maintaining high academic, college, and career expectations during their child's school years. In the case of participants with older siblings, the older sibling relationship provided participants with the social and cultural capital necessary to more smoothly navigate the college-going process and inform their decision making generally. Participants' college-going experiences suggest that authentic, trusted individuals are primary sources for accessing valued cultural capital at various points throughout the college-going process, as these are individuals perceived to have the cultural capital students need in addition to concern for their overall wellbeing and academic success.

7.1.2 How is habitus shaped by socio-cultural and institutional contexts?

The belief that education promotes economic stability or social mobility shaped participants habitus. Intricately tied to participants' Vietnamese or Cambodian ethnicity, family history largely informed this belief. With fewer options of quality higher education in their native country, Southeast Asian parents saw the American educational system as one of opportunity, believing that diligence coupled with academic achievement would lead to a greater likelihood of socioeconomic mobility for their children. All parents, representative of various socioeconomic backgrounds, emphasized a college degree as a tool for securing a lucrative and/or stable career. Schools both facilitated and validated the notion that higher education is the pathway for such "success."

Parents activated their cultural capital thru high academic expectations at the expense of other activities such as work and extracurriculars. While participants placed the same high value on education as their parents and family, they favored career options that seemed to be a better fit with their disposition and aptitude. A picture emerged of Southeast Asian American parents perhaps interpreting academic achievement as the most significant if not only criteria for colleges and universities while participants struggled to navigate these expectations amidst their own goals and inclinations. Tensions emerged around participants wanting to be accepted as individuals with inherent talents and weaknesses on one hand and either being judged against, or wanting to achieve, the standard their sibling(s) and others set on the other.

7.1.3 How do social, cultural, and aspirational capital promote or constrain students' capacity to negotiate institutional contexts?

Immersion in an academic environment with like-minded peers further validated participants' college-going habitus while preparing them for university. College and career aspirations coupled with the perception that colleges place more value on advanced coursework largely drove participants' honors, AP, or IB course selection. Participants' internalization of valued cultural capital seemed to increase when they were intentional in engaging with programs and/or courses designed to facilitate college preparation. However, despite high expectations, above average grades, and college aspirations, all of which informed program participation and course selection, participants expressed anxiety around their academic ability. Parental influence on program participation and course taking behavior was unclear. Participants instead explicitly mentioned the influence of friends and siblings.

Across all participants, parents appeared to have a low level of involvement with participants' college applications. Participants who reported their parents as not having the cultural capital to directly help them transition to higher education sought assistance from other sources. Existence of an older sibling seemed to be the first sorting mechanism for whom participants solicited guidance from. Participants without an older sibling appeared to solicit feedback from friends and school-based agents. These participants also expressed feeling isolated during the college application process. Despite perceptions of limited direct parental support, participants generally desired to remain close to home and used location and cost as the primary and secondary filters for their college applications.

Participants failed to recognize during their application process that limiting college applications to two or fewer might put them in a vulnerable position. Their default plan, had they

not been accepted into their first choice institution was to apply later to the local community college and transfer to university. Participants with conditional or deferred acceptance to their first choice 4-year institution experienced the most angst until older siblings or another trusted agent talked them through the long-term benefits their first choice institution could offer in spite of their anxiety-ridden acceptance. Siblings, parents, or friends influenced the decision making process indirectly or directly. Siblings and friends provided guidance or emotional support. Parental influence came in the form of preferences for geographic proximity or the amount of monetary support they would contribute toward tuition, fees and living expenses.

7.2   DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of this research, the following discussion outlines considerations for theory, research, and policy and practice. This exploratory study's strength of grounding the findings in the lived experience of seven Southeast Asian American undergraduates at a public research university serves also as a limitation in generalizability. Despite this limitation inherent in the study's methods, the findings inform our understanding of shared micro-level educational experiences of Southeast Asian Americans and therefore have implications for theory, research, and policy and practice. The theoretical implications consider this study's conceptual framework in light of the findings followed by implications for future research and policy and practice.

7.2.1　Implications for theory

The frameworks of habitus (Bourdieu, 1986), social (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988), cultural (Bourdieu, 1986), and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) informed this study's exploration of Southeast Asian American undergraduates college-going experiences. Given the exploratory nature of this study, these broad frameworks proved valuable in identifying the extent to which families and students invest in education through the dispositions they acquire, the resources available to them, and the choices they make as a result. This study supports research that college-going experiences are shaped by an individual's background characteristics and institutional influences (Black et al., 2014; McDonough, 1997), including the historical and sociopolitical contexts framing their lives. Cultural, social, and aspirational capital interact to promote a college-going habitus and can further facilitate or hinder a smooth path to university for students. Findings suggest considerations for how these frameworks interact when utilized for immigrant and/or refugee populations. Understanding this dynamic interplay at a micro-level for Southeast Asian American undergraduates contributes to understanding why and how immigrant and refugee students and families activate capital along students' path to university.

Figure 8 illustrates the interaction of social, cultural, and aspirational capital in varied contexts. The pentagon represents the different contexts within which students function and therefore are influenced by (e.g., home, school, work, church). Its outline symbolizes a building or house and is a reminder of the significance of the family for students from immigrant and/or refugee families. Findings demonstrate that while schools both facilitate and validate the notion of higher education as the pathway for success, familial context has critical implications for Southeast Asian American students' social, cultural, and aspirational capital and therefore must be considered in order to comprehensively understand how institutional contexts interact to

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influence their path to university through their acquired dispositions, available resources, activation of resources, and application of resulting information.

In terms of familial influences, this research points to an interdependent approach to education that challenges previous literature on social and cultural capital. Research typically considers parent and sibling interactions and influences as separate. The experiences of participants in this study suggest that familial roles and responsibilities are blurred, thus creating the argument for an interdependent conceptualization of family as an institutional context that influences the educational experiences and outcomes of Southeast Asian American students.
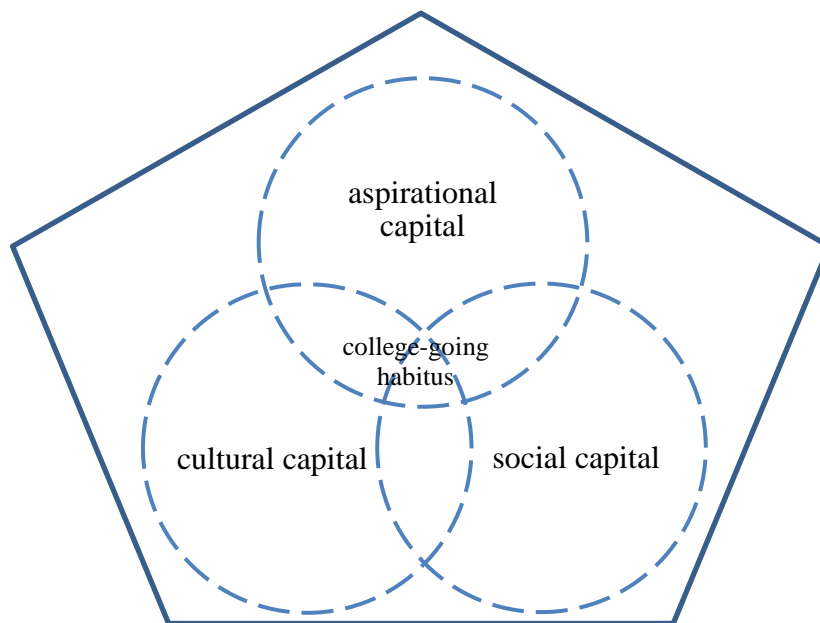
Figure 8. Interplay of capital on college-going for Southeast Asian American undergraduates

The three circles represent the forms of capital explored in this research, all of which work together, for better or worse, to influence students' path to university. They converge to form participants' college-going habitus, which participants developed at a young age, informed largely by their parents' habitus. Parents had high educational values coupled with aspirations and expectations that their child would graduate from a university with a degree that would

enable them to secure a stable position or career. Parents instilled in participants the belief that education equals opportunity; it is the vehicle for realizing aspirations. Participants internalized this belief in a meritocracy, which formed the foundation of their path to university and drove behaviors and decisions along the way.

Dotted lines surrounding each form of capital represent a dynamic interplay and suggest that variability and tension are integral to the college-going experience for participants. Findings signal that the forms of capital comprising this study's conceptual framework are variable due to tensions participants experienced through engaging with their respective environments. In this regard, one form of capital could compensate for shortcomings in another, for example, the interplay of which changes over time in accordance with a student's lived experience.

One primary finding shows that while participants and their families expected university matriculation, participants experienced in high school a contradiction between their college-going habitus and behaviors or attitudes not aligned with college-going. Without access to valued cultural capital or activating such capital through existing networks, they and perhaps others made assumptions about the college-going process that created a gap in their expectations of the criteria for admittance into their first choice institution. Despite a knowledge gap, participants persisted to university, perhaps due in part to their college-going habitus and beliefs about education that served as forms of aspirational capital and motivated them to navigate the education system the best they could. This is not to suggest that students intentionally or unintentionally compensating for shortcomings in one or more forms of capital have the same advantages as students with access to more valued forms of capital, but rather highlights the dynamic interaction of these forms of capital.

Likewise, parents unfamiliar with the U.S. education system and/or perceived by their child as unable to provide valued cultural capital activated their aspirational capital through sharing family histories and struggles experienced as refugees, imparting high aspirations and expectations, comparing their child's academics to that of other family members or Southeast Asian American acquaintances, and directing their child toward resources, namely older siblings or cousins, thought to be knowledgeable and reliable sources of information. Parents utilized these strategies by drawing from their existing cultural capital and activating their aspirational capital. Recognizing that immigrant and/or refugee parents tap into their cultural capital in ways that facilitate their child's education is significant in light of deficit assumptions that either these parents lack valued cultural capital or these families lack access to networks with valued cultural capital.

While such parental strategies encouraged college-going and ultimately university matriculation, they also created pressure and anxiety for participants around their academic ability and trajectory, which likely had a ripple effect on their college-going decisions and behaviors. Another primary finding demonstrates that participants accessed valued cultural capital through authentic, trusted individuals perceived both to possess valued capital in addition to concern for their well-being and academic success. These characteristics suggest that participants tapped into a trusted individual who could assuage their anxiety while providing needed information, which could speak to the role of older sibling as a preferred and primary source of information and support.

In light of findings that point to the paramount importance of sibling influence for Southeast Asian American students with older siblings, sibling relationships and the role older siblings play in their younger siblings' college-going experience need to be coupled with

parental influences. Immigrant and/or refugee families might operate from cultural conceptualizations of family and family obligation that are qualitatively different from that found in the dominant culture. Unpacking such conceptualizations could illuminate the role of cultural norms that dictate roles, responsibilities, and expectations and provide additional evidence of an interdependent approach to education within immigrant and/or refugee families as this research suggests.

7.2.2 Implications for future research

The primary recommendations for future research are: 1) collect data across student background characteristics; 2) collect data across institution type and control; 3) conduct multi-level analysis; 4) utilize college-going and choice models relevant for immigrant and/or refugee populations; and 5) disaggregate data. Limitations to this research are embedded in the following recommendations and warrant consideration when interpreting this study's findings.

7.2.2.1 Collect data across student background characteristics   Although I identified limitations around participant and site selection in chapter 3, further attention to research implications and recommendations for participant and site selection are essential to situating findings in the background literature framing this study. One premise of this study is how the model minority stereotype marginalizes Southeast Asian American students and complicates access to resources designed to facilitate college-going. While this study was designed to explore strategies Southeast Asian American students employ to navigate their path to university, I would be remiss not to highlight key elements that privilege participants and could therefore differentiate them from their Southeast Asian American peers.

First, only one participant is a first generation college student if first generation status is defined as students whose parents never enrolled in a postsecondary institution (Nuñez, Cuccaro-Alamin, & Carroll, 1998). Moreover, not one participant can be defined as a first generation college student if defined as students first in their family to attend a postsecondary institution. Since first generation status as a college student was not a criterion for this research, its definition was limited to participants' interpretation and self-identification as a first generation college student; only Art and Roman, the first in their family to attend a four-year postsecondary institution, identified themselves as first generation college students. However, every participant in this study has a sibling and/or parents who have some college or university experience in the United States. This is particularly salient in light of research identifying parental education as a significant influence on students' educational attainment (Nuñez et al., 1998) coupled with this study's findings on the influence of older siblings. Evident then is the consideration of sibling status for Southeast Asian American students. All participants with an older sibling learned from and/or followed the postsecondary education trajectory of older siblings, which begs the question of how participants' experiences differ from those of Southeast Asian American students who are first in their family to attend college or university.

This study suggests that sibling status informs social and cultural capital generally, but that gender also deserves consideration alongside sibling status for Southeast Asian American students. Traditionally in Asian cultures, the family is structured by age and gender, which can translate to the eldest male as the primary caregiver for aging parents. This study had one male participant as the eldest sibling whose path to university was qualitatively different from that of other participants. His path to university is consistent with previous research on tensions Southeast Asian American students experience between Vietnamese cultural norms of filial

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piety, or respect and care for elders, and American cultural norms of seeking independence (Tang et al., 2013; Um, 2003). Findings signal that not all college-going habituses contribute to a smooth entry into and throughout university. Of all study participants, Art grappled the most with balancing family obligations against his own aspirations, which could ultimately have a detrimental impact on his college completion. Since it is problematic to speculate if Art's experience is unique to him or indicative of the eldest college-going Southeast Asian American male experience, additional research is needed on the intersection of gender and sibling status for Southeast Asian American students.

7.2.2.2 Collect data across institution type and control Using the *2009 Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, the Center on Education and the Workforce places ECU as one of the top 468 most selective colleges. Although participants' exhibited behaviors along their path to university that could have derailed admittance into ECU as their first choice institution, applying to and attending ECU was part of their college-going habitus, perhaps privileging participants in their university preparation efforts. Such caveats do not minimize the significance of this study's findings, but rather underscore the call for additional research on ethnic subgroups within the Asian American student population across private and public institutions and two- and four-year institutions (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, & Tran, 2011) to better understand divergent experiences and strategies that get lost in generalizations about Asian Americans. This is an area needing further study in light of changing demographics and rhetoric supporting racial/ethnic diversity on college and university campuses. This study explores the path to university for seven Southeast Asian American students attending a selective public university, accordingly future qualitative research should consider paths of Southeast Asian

American students attending 2-year and 4-year postsecondary institutions that differ by selectivity and control.

7.2.2.3 Conduct multi-level analysis Research suggests that social and cultural capital in the forms of parent and student expectations, obligations, and social networks within the family, school, college, and community impact students' educational experiences (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; McDonough, 1997; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Wells, 2008); differences in the significance of such forms of capital seem to differ across and within racial/ethnic groups (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Perna & Titus, 2005; Strange, 2000). This study's two primary findings support this research and suggest the need for multi-level analysis. This includes research that incorporates families and other contexts students function in to provide a more nuanced contextualized understanding of the multiple factors influencing students' college-going.

Given the potential impact of institutional influences, the study would have benefitted from interview data from school- and home-based agents. Although the study focused on how Southeast Asian American undergraduates understand and experience their path to university, research points to the need to understand the context of influential agents (Lijana, 2015; McDonough, 1997; Seidman, 2006). One strength of this study is rich narratives that capture family histories and participants' perceptions of their college-going experience. Triangulating participant interpretations with those of influential school- and home-based agents would strengthen this study's findings both by highlighting collective understandings and identifying and situating divergent perspectives.

Throughout this research, I found myself asking if participants recognize strategic decisions their parents might have made regarding their child's education, especially immigrant

or refugee parents with a limited understanding of how to navigate the American education system. How do they compensate for their lack of experience with the American education system? What strategies do they employ to facilitate access to resources designed to advance their child's education? Research that disaggregates influences across and within racial and ethnic groups finds that ethnic communities, for example, can be vital sources for cultural and social capital for parents, either leading up to or while their child is enrolled in university (Louie, 2001; Zhou & Xiong, 2005). Although these findings run counter to my findings as participants seldom mentioned ethnic communities, it is possible participants were unaware of parental engagement with Vietnamese or Cambodian communities as sources of information and support. Alternatively, the role and significance of such communities could vary by region or socio-economic status (Louie, 2001), issues not directly considered in this study but warrant investigation.

Furthermore, student data coupled with data from school- and home-based agents would provide a multi-faceted examination of structural inequalities or systematic issues Southeast Asian American students face in their pursuit of a postsecondary education. Structural inequality occurs when biases advantage some groups or individuals over others, thus limiting access to opportunities available to others. In education, structural inequality manifests through practices such as tracking and employing educators and counselors, for example, unrepresentative of or unresponsive to an institution's student demographics. Similar to family, schools acculturate students and inform their habitus. Roman and Artha expressly spoke to such biases at school. Roman in particular encountered a barrier, as mentioned earlier, by means of his college counselor's deficit language discouraging his application to ECU. This mircoaggression caused him to turn to his sibling and friends, trusted agents who presumably had his best interest in

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mind, but might not have been the most informed sources. Artha mentioned being pulled from her 5th grade math class to take remedial reading classes. The administration encouraged this despite the teacher's confusion over her participation and her record of being a good reader and speaker. The school discontinued Artha's participation only after her mother intervened and requested evidence supporting the school's decision to place Artha in a remedial class. Although I elected not to focus on such inequalities due to insufficient data across participant narratives, Roman's and Artha's experiences speak to possible biases future research should explore.

Additionally complicating the educational experiences of Southeast Asian American students and feeding into both structural advantages and disadvantages is the model minority stereotype. The bounded college-going habitus meta-theme suggests Roman and Regalia might have been disadvantaged given the detrimental impact their understanding about the college preparation process had on how they approached their grades and/or SAT exam. A gap existed between what their first choice institution required and what they believed was necessary to meet its admissions criteria. School-based agents could have provided valued cultural capital, but perhaps such agents assumed Roman and Regalia had the information they needed because they were Asian American students enrolled in upper-level courses. Conversely, participants in this study could have benefitted from teacher expectations—unbeknownst to participants—stemming from the model minority stereotype. Intricately connected to social structures, the model minority stereotype is a complicated myth requiring multi-level analysis to unpack and debunk. Data from home- and school-based agents would help ascertain how the model minority stereotype (dis)advantages students.

7.2.2.4 Utilize models relevant for immigrant and/or refugee populations In light of this study's finding on the impact intimate, familial-based relations can have on Southeast Asian

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American students' college-going, college-going or choice models need to incorporate student background characteristics alongside personal and institutional agents and resources within the various contexts students function and are influenced by. Doing so will provide a more nuanced, contextualized understanding of the factors influencing students' path to higher education (Chhuon et al., 2010; Perna, 2006; Weidman, 1989). Rendon, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) argue for culturally sensitive based models that account for influences beyond those traditionally recognized by and for the dominant population. Perna's (2006) widely used college choice model outlines four contextual influences: student's habitus; school and community; higher education; and the macro social, economic, and policy contexts.

Research suggests, however, that the family context is another primary influence for minority students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; McAllister, 2012; Yosso, 2005) and should be explicitly investigated as such (Lijana, 2015; McAllister, 2012; Yosso, 2005). Weidman's (1989) model of undergraduate socialization has long recognized this by signaling that parental influence on a student's orientation to college begins before postsecondary matriculation. Parental socialization—loosely interpreted in Weidman's (1989) model as socioeconomic status, lifestyle, parent/child relationship—and resulting pressures and expectations appear to be particularly significant for Southeast Asian American students, as evidenced by existing research (Conchas & Perez, 2003; Suzuki, 2002; Tang et al., 2013) and this study's findings. Similarly, Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model, which this study's conceptual framework draws from, asserts that communities of color possess valued capital through cultural assets that serve as rich resources for individuals. One asset in this model is familial capital, which this research corroborates. The conceptualization of family in a culturally sensitive college-going model for Southeast Asian American students should explicitly include siblings and extended

family members. As this study illustrates, familial structures are complex; models need to account for cultural norms that shape relationships and contribute to multiple complex and at times competing influences that interact to impact college-going.

In addition to models that incorporate habitus in relation to field, this study illuminates the need for research to consider the notion that habitus development is an ongoing process shaped by socio-cultural and institutional contexts prior to and during higher education (Weidman, 1989). As participants reflected on their college-going experience, shifts in their habitus became apparent when they were able to identify past behaviors or choices made because of acquired cultural capital at a given point in time. Their interpretation of these earlier behaviors or decisions as having a positive or negative influence on their transition to or persistence in college reflect a more developed habitus than what they had throughout their college-going experience. This recognition speaks to the formation of habitus students bring to college and how it continues to be shaped through exposure to various agents and accumulated experiences after matriculation into higher education. Furthermore, they will take with them to their career or next role the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they acquire, or not, through the interaction of social, cultural, and aspirational capital.

7.2.2.5 Disaggregate data Finally, working with ethnic subgroups within the pan-Asian population requires the disaggregation of data. Although calling for the disaggregation of data falls outside a qualitative mode of inquiry, I believe it warrants mention given the hurdle aggregate data pose for researchers investigating sub-groups within a racial group. Institutions typically do not disaggregate data by ethnic groups, making it difficult to ascertain the size of sub-populations within a racial group and in relation to other sub-populations. There are ways around this, for example, looking at Census data for a given region to determine the general size,

age, and socio-economic status of sub-populations, but still accuracy remains an issue for determining demographics of sub-populations within a racial group at a given institution, especially in a state with a high concentration of postsecondary institutions as is the case with this research. Disaggregating racial data at the federal and institutional levels facilitates access to representative demographic data that can shed light on the convergence of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and gender in shaping students' college-going experiences and ultimately decision making. Terenishi et al. (2013) argue that disaggregating data by ethnicity, especially for Asian Americans, allows for more nuanced understandings of sub-populations and therefore more responsive programming to improve educational outcomes for Asian American students.

7.2.3 Implications for policy and practice

As demographics shift, issues of diversity increase in importance and institutional policies and practices need to address the complexity of populations that fall under pan-ethnic categorizations such as Asian Americans (Chaudhari et al., 2013). This study provides at least three contributions to secondary and higher education policy and practice. Recommendations are based on this study's two primary findings or the essence of meaning of core influences that shaped participants' college-going experience, expressly the significance of intimate familial relations and unbounded college-going habitus. These recommendations are presented with the aim of addressing educational equity through policies and programs designed to support Southeast Asian American students' college-going. They are 1) invest in relevant mentoring programs, 2) establish relevance early on, and 3) focus on academic behaviors.

- **Invest in relevant mentoring programs.** College is more accessible than it has ever been, with an increase of 46 percent in undergraduate enrollment from fall 1990 to fall 2013 (Kena et al., 2015). However, students and institutions need to be cautious of assumptions about college bound students. Students with a college-going habitus also need supports to successfully transition to college or university. Furthermore, access to resources should be long-term, throughout high school, especially for first-generation, low-income, minority students (ACT, 2014; Dyce, Albold, & Long, 2013; The Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, n.d.). This study's findings show that caring agents are core influences on Southeast Asian American students' college-going. Perhaps another reason participants' solicited support from older siblings over others is the long-term nature of those relationships (Kluger et al., 2006). Implementing community- or institutional-based mentoring programs focused on the relational aspect of the mentoring process could work well with this population. One example of an existing program that could be adapted for this population is Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. Core to this program is caring agents who are matched with an individual and commit to providing ongoing support; this would go beyond the academic mentoring provided in programs such as College Bound. Programs built on caring connections could be better suited to building cultural capital for Southeast Asian American students generally, but particularly those who are only children or the eldest sibling.

- **Establish relevance early on.** In teaching any student, not just Southeast Asian American students, practitioners should make material relevant and meaningful. Explicit connections should be made between the material and its relevance to college and their future (Nagaoka, Roderick, & Coca, 2009). Participants indicated that they did not work to their full potential in high school. While reasons for this vary, effective teaching guides students in making

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connections between their present and future. Tied to relevance is accountability. Students need to know what is expected of them, why, and how they will be held accountable. High- and low-performing students are vulnerable to being underprepared for college, but simple structures in place in the classroom can facilitate students' self-efficacy and degree of preparedness (Nagaoka et al., 2009).

Relevance extends beyond material and encompasses building on student's college-going habitus so they understand the significance of college generally and for them individually. While no student in this study questioned the utility of a college degree, several struggled either with identifying a major or the looming reality of, "Ok, I'm in college. What's next?" Policy makers and practitioners need to look beyond college readiness and consider developing practices designed to engage students in a larger conversation of the purpose of a postsecondary education. It is important for students to explore relevant options given that students are more likely to remain in their major and persist in college if their interests align with their major (Allen & Robbins, 2008). Additionally, having some direction prior to college likely contributes to persistence and graduation (ACT, 2014).

- **Focus on academic behaviors.** Academic behaviors coupled with academic achievement facilitate college and career readiness (ACT, 2013). Focusing exclusively on academic achievement either through GPA or scores on college preparation exams can disadvantage students who lack personal characteristics that bolster their academic success and can facilitate their college-going experience. The behavioral habits, or non-cognitive skills, shown to contribute to student's academic success include motivation, social engagement, and self-regulation (ACT, 2013). Policymakers need to recognize the dual importance of standards and building capacity of schools to raise academic standards alongside non-

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cognitive skills that promote success in college and career (Nagaoka et al., 2009). Policy

should encourage school-based strategies that pair teaching content knowledge with

behavioral skills.

Table 4. Organization of themes

Basic themes [backings]	Organizing themes [warrants]	Overarching themes [claims]
• personal histories instilled value of education in family members • value of education manifest in parental behaviors • education equals opportunity for self and others • schools validated education as pathway for success • parental desire for student to lead better life • family pressure for student to select major based on lucrative or secure profession • parental conditional support based on major • parental/familial intervention with non-STEM major • parental acceptance with STEM major • student desire to advance learning/knowledge/skills • tensions between student aspirations and family aspirations for student • positive influences on student aspirations	education is your future education facilitates economic stability education facilitates personal development	Meritocracy
• 'C' is failing • negative reinforcement to low marks • high grades promote college-going • low marks create anxiety • diligence gauged by time-on-task • opposition to non-academic activities • elimination of barriers • comparisons create unrealistic expectations • comparisons establish role models • fear reaction to "bad" grades • lying to uphold expectations • strategically share information	average is unacceptable academics reign disregard for aptitude façade maintenance	Excellence
• school/program met career aspirations • school-based agents facilitated application to schools/programs • college preparation program transitions first generation students to university	aspirations drove school choice and program participation	Intention

Table 5 (continued).

Basic themes [backings]	Organizing themes [warrants]	Overarching themes [claims]
awareness of advanced courses precedes high school advanced courses promote college readiness teacher vs. peer views on course selection hierarchy of courses and students	aspirations drove course selection	
perception of parents lacking valued cultural capital parents defer to others eldest sibling/only child solicited school-based support high school agents as mixed sources of cultural capital friends as source of emotional and targeted support filtering information applications based on cost, proximity to home, reputation disregard counselor advice to apply to reach, choice, and backup	capital deficit quality connections first choice institutions	Selectivity
unfamiliar terms to first choice institution conflicting feelings re: conditional acceptance rationalizing conditional acceptance delayed gratification accepting deferred admission college selection made after acceptance letter geographic location financial aid package	bittersweet acceptance unrestricted acceptance	Dissonance

VERBAL CONSENT TO ACT AS A SUBJECT IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Research Study: The Road Less Traveled: Southeast Asian American Undergraduates'
                      College-going Experiences

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Crandall, Doctoral Candidate
                              University Of Pittsburgh
                              Email: jrc62@pitt.edu

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Thank you for your interest in my research on how Southeast Asian American undergraduates interpret their educational experiences.

The purpose of this study is to focus on the experiences of Southeast Asian American undergraduate students to account for the divergent experiences that get lost in the generalizations about Asian Americans by understanding how they navigate their sociocultural and institutional contexts along their path to university. Twenty or fewer undergraduate students, at least 18 years of age or older, will participate in this research study. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in one to three 1.5-2 hour interviews.

I will be interviewing Southeast Asian American undergraduates and asking them a series of questions about their background as well as their educational experiences as they relate to home, community and school environments. Interviews will be recorded with a digital voice recorder.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study, nor are there any direct benefits to you. A possible risk from participating in the study is the minimal risk of a breach of confidentiality. Given the time commitment involved for participating in this study, remuneration will be offered at $10 per interview.

All records pertaining to your involvement in this study are kept strictly confidential and any data that includes your identity will be stored in locked files, and will be retained by me, the sole researcher, for a minimum of seven years. Your identity will not be revealed in any description or publications of this research. Results will not be shared with your instructors or University administrators, and will have no effect on your standing at this University.

In unusual cases, your research records may be released in response to an order from a court of law. It is also possible that authorized representatives from the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office may review your data for the purpose of monitoring the conduct of this study. Also, if the investigators learn that you or someone with whom you are involved is in serious danger or potential harm, they will need to inform the appropriate agencies, as required by Pennsylvania law.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in it, or you may stop participating at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with your institution.

There will be an opportunity after the first interview for you to confirm and/or clarify information you provide during the interview(s). If you have questions about this research study, you may contact me, the principal investigator, at any time.

Do you consent to participate in this research study?

SAMPLE RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Research Study: The Road Less Traveled: Southeast Asian American Undergraduates'
                    College-going Experiences

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Crandall, Doctoral Candidate
                            University of Pittsburgh
                            Email: Jrc62@pitt.edu

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Are you interested in contributing to research on Southeast Asian American undergraduates?

Jennifer Crandall, a doctoral candidate at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Education, is looking for Cambodian, Vietnamese, Laotian, and Hmong *undergraduate* students interested in participating in a study exploring paths to higher education for Southeast Asian Americans. The purpose of her research study is to look at how Southeast Asian American undergraduates interpret their educational experiences and what has supported or hindered them throughout their education.

Interested participants will be interviewed about their background as well as their educational experiences as they relate to home, community and school environments.

This is a series of up to 3 interviews lasting 1.5-2 hours each. Participants will receive $10 per interview.

Please contact Jennifer at jrc62@pitt.edu if you are interested in participating in this study or know of someone who might be.

Thank you for your consideration and potential contribution to advancing the interests of Southeast Asian American university students**!**

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Study: The Road Less Traveled: Southeast Asian American Undergraduates'
                    College-going Experiences

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Crandall Doctoral Candidate
                        University of Pittsburgh

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The purpose of these interviews is to develop an understanding of the ways in which participants experience college-going. The questions are intended as prompts and to provide some structure across interviews. Follow-up and clarifying questions may be asked based on participant responses to the primary questions.

Research Questions

How do Southeast Asian American undergraduates understand and experience their path to university?

- How is habitus shaped by socio-cultural and institutional contexts?
- How do social, cultural, and aspirational capital promote or constrain students' capacity to negotiate institutional contexts?

Interview I – Life History and Details of Experience

This interview will be divided into two parts: collecting information about yourself and your history followed by concrete details of particular experiences. First, think of your life history. Go back as far as necessary to describe significant events in your life.

Tell me about yourself.

Tell me about your family.

Can you describe your parents' histories (e.g., education, employment, immigration, SES)?

Tell me about your community growing up?

How would you describe yourself as a son/daughter?

Tell me about your schooling.

Can you talk about extracurricular activities you participated in throughout high school?

How would you describe yourself as a student?

Can you describe the values you were taught about education growing up?

Can you describe when you started thinking about university?

Can you describe how you prepared for university? Who helped you? (course, counselor, book?)

Can you describe how your family supported you with your schooling? on your path to college?

[Refer back to earlier experiences and ask participant to describe those in more detail.]

Tell me about a negative schooling experience.

Tell me about a positive schooling experience.

Are there other experiences that stand out to you? Can you describe that experience?

Interview II – Reflection on Meaning

This interview is time to reflect on the meaning of your college-going experience. Let's start with talking about the artifact you brought that represents for you your path to university.

Tell me about your artifact and its significance to you.

What does it mean for you to have experienced the journey you did to get to university?

What does it mean to you to be attending university?

What does it mean to your family that you are attending university?

If you could give your younger self advice about preparing for university, what would you say?

If you could go back, what would you change about your college-going experience?

Where do you see yourself in five years? Tell me about a time you thought about the future?

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Interview III – Follow Up and Member Check

This third interview will be used for follow up, including clarification of previous statements, and will give us an opportunity to talk about my interpretation of your experience.

Refer back to earlier experiences and ask participant to describe those in more detail if necessary.

Ask participant to read integrative memo and respond to it.

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