Experiences of Southeast Asians at a Community College in The Midwest

Emmanuel Canlas Esperanza Jr.
emmanuel_esperanza@hotmail.com

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EXPERIENCES OF SOUTHEAST ASIANS AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN THE MIDWEST

Emmanuel C. Esperanza, Jr., EdD
Department of Counseling and Higher Education
Northern Illinois University, 2020
Dr. Katy Jaekel, Director

This dissertation explored what contributed to Southeast Asian students’ persistence in an urban community college in the Midwest. A qualitative case study was used to reveal how Southeast Asian students perceived personal and educational experiences and how those experiences created an impact on their persistence. This project addressed the lack of research on Southeast Asians and their challenges attaining academic success in higher education. This study is critical, as there is a lack of research on Southeast Asian students’ experiences within higher education institutions, particularly within community college settings. The majority of research has focused on Asian American or international students, with minimal knowledge about any particular subgroup. This project uses the Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical lens. Because of the “model minority” myth, Asian Americans perceived that they do not need support that negatively affects Southeast Asian students since they are overlooked. They are left alone to persist on their own. Through a qualitative study, ten participants completed semi-structured interviews and artifacts were collected and analyzed. Participants indicated that pressure not to fail, family sacrifices and support, lack of campus engagement, and lack of student support affected their persistence.
EXPERIENCES OF SOUTHEAST ASIANS AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN THE MIDWEST

BY

EMMANUEL C. ESPERANZA, JR.
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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Doctoral Director:
Dr. Katy Jaekel
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife Arabelle and my children, Emma, AJ, and Henry
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

The United States has been described as a melting pot of many nationalities and the land of opportunities. Many individuals migrate to the United States and leave their home countries to seek better lives, either by choice or as refugees. This new journey will lead to uncertainties and many are willing to take this risk. As they settle and assimilate to their new country, many individuals seek educational opportunities to improve their livelihood and achieve the “American Dream.” This “American Dream” is described as a dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement (Adams, 1931, p. 198). This belief epitomizes that success is attainable by all: regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. Due to the influx of people, with the “American Dream” in mind, the demographics are shifting and people of color are becoming the majority within the United States. According to United States Census, over the last two censuses of 2000 and 2010, the Asian population in the United States has presented the largest increase than any other major race group (Humes, Jones & Ramirez, 2011).

Due to this growth, more Asian Americans are attending the United States education systems. This influx of students will attend postsecondary institutions, specifically community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities. The growth in enrollment of Asian Americans,
however, does not indicate automatic success for college completion. In fact, according to Wang and Teranishi (2012), a 2007 report from the Higher Education Research Institute stated that more Asian American students are experiencing difficulties obtaining academic success in college and universities than in the past. This report discredits the “model minority” myth, the moniker coined for Asian Americans (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2008).

The “model minority” myth is the notion that Asian Americans are and have always been self-sufficient and “take care of their own.” This racist term, which serves to lump together all Asian Americans because they seemingly share similar traits, unfairly positions Asian Americans as high performers and, as such, does not cause any problems to society (CARE, 2008). This myth implies that Asian Americans are good at science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, have easily assimilated to white culture and norms, and thus, do not face discrimination in the same ways as other people of color. Yet, in reality, many continue to face numerous forms of discrimination and structural barriers (Suzuki, 2002). According to Suzuki (2002), studies have shown that white individuals continue to be paid more than Asian Americans, despite having the same level of education. In fact, Asian Americans received a lower return on their investment in education (Wu, 2002). Moreover, the poverty level for Asian Americans is higher compared to that of whites, and additionally, Asian American men born in the United States are less likely to be in management positions than white men. In addition, Asian American women are perceived as hypersexual and submissive sex objects (Cho, 2003 & Prasso 2005, as cited Museus, 2014). They are viewed as not equal to Asian American men. These experiences and racist viewpoints continue to present barriers for Asian Americans.
The experiences of Asian American men and women are not positive in American society, and this viewpoint mediates their post-secondary experiences. In fact, according to Museus (2014), Asian American men and women who enrolled in post-secondary institutions are likely to encounter racial stereotypes on a regular basis and experience negative consequences as a result. Asian American men are easy targets for bullying, and Asian American women are vulnerable to sexual harassment and violence (Museus, 2014). These experiences may deter them from attending post-secondary institutions and/or requesting help.

In addition, the notion of “model minority” gives the perception that Asian Americans do not attend community colleges and, instead, choose to attend more highly selective institutions. Importantly, however, most Asian American students attend public institutions, and in some states like California and Nevada, over half of all Asian Americans college students attend public community colleges (CARE, 2008). Nearly half of Asian American students attend community colleges rather than Ivy League schools (Wang & Teranishi, 2012). With this high concentration of Asian Americans attending community colleges, these institutions may not have adequate support services to provide low performing Asian Americans, especially Southeast Asian students.

The changes to immigration policy in 1965 and refugee policy in 1975 and 1980 were two waves that affected the Southeast Asian growth in the United States (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2011). With the moniker, “model minority”, it gave a positive notion of Southeast Asians. In reality, this notion excluded their horrific experiences as refugees who migrated from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam in 1975 (Pendakur & Pendakur, 2012). The impact of immigration and refugee policies increased the
growth of Southeast Asians, but prosperity did not entrench in their livelihood. In fact, Cambodians, Laotians, Vietnamese, Thai, and Filipinos have the highest poverty rate in 1999 than other Asian Americans (CARE, 2011). As these new immigrants assimilated to their new homes, barriers to education began and continued to enroll in higher education (CARE, 2008). They often struggled because they experienced school on their own, and institutions did not always provide the necessary support. This lack of support may be caused by older and more established Asian American groups. Chinese and Japanese are often privileged, and Southeast Asians are marginalized (Agbayani & Ching, 2012). In fact, this is why and how data disaggregation is important, as it will close the academic gap through the advancement of educational practices for Southeast Asian students. Family is traditionally the primary social unit, and individuals are interdependent on each other (Huang, 2012). The lack of knowledge and background of their family members create another barrier when Southeast Asian attend schools. Consider that only 34 percent of Laotian, 38 percent of Cambodian, and 40 percent of Hmong adults do not possess a high school diploma (CARE, 2011).

The high cost of education is an issue in today’s society and many students are opting for the community college route to save money. Community colleges offer affordable programs that can be completed in short periods. The increase of enrollment at community colleges are tied to older students, financial aid, and part-time attendance (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Their persistence is a focus of community college administrators since many of these students do not complete their degrees or the time-frame to complete their degree is more than what is prescribed by institutions. Asian American students at community college are different from Asian American students enrolled at four-year institutions. Asian American students from community
colleges do not resemble traditional students, attending college full time, enrolling after high school completion, not working, and living on campus, who primarily attends four-year institutions (Teranishi, 2016).

**Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what contributes to college persistence of Southeast Asian students in an urban community college in the Midwest. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore how Southeast Asians perceived how their community college supports them. The category of Southeast Asian individuals are understood here to mean individuals who originated from geographical areas in Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (formerly Burma), Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam (SarDesai, 2010). Thus, this study examined a community college and interviewed individuals who self-identified as Southeast Asian and explored how Southeast Asian students perceived and experienced success and/or barriers while enrolled in community college. As such, this project sought to identify and explore the practices employed by community colleges to support students and examine student needs.

For this project, I explored how Southeast Asian community college students perceived personal and educational experiences and how those experiences created an impact on their persistence. As such, the overarching research question this project sought to explore was, how do race and racism mediate Southeast Asian students’ experiences in community college? Students, who are involved and feel valued, have demonstrated the likelihood to complete their educational goal. It is important to find out the best practices for these strategies since this information will provide ways to avoid early departures of students.
Statement of Problem

This project addresses the lack of research on Southeast Asians and their challenges attaining academic success in higher education. According to Teranishi (2010), educational attainment is a common measure of socioeconomic status. This group has been marginalized since they have low college participation rates (Teranishi, 2016). The enrollment of Asian American individuals at community colleges will continue to increase, and community colleges need to be readily and equipped to support them. As the Asian American population continues to increase in the Midwest, higher education, specifically community colleges, need to attract faculty and administrators in heavily populated areas that have the competencies to support this group of learners.

As Asian Americans enroll at postsecondary institutions, the underrepresentation of faculty and administration is a major concern. According to Teranishi (2010), there is a lack of faculty and administration of color in higher education despite the fact that the number of doctoral degrees awarded to people of color have increased. This issue is prevalent in community colleges. The lack of high-level administrators of Asian Americans means fewer opportunities for bringing attention to the needs of Asian Americans students, especially among networks of high-level administrators who discuss institutional priorities and how to respond to emerging trends in higher education overall (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2010).
Research Questions

The primary research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do Southeast Asian students perceive how their support systems influence their persistence in community college?
2. What barriers do Southeast Asians identify in regard to their persistence in community college?
3. What resources do Southeast Asian students identify as helpful in supporting their persistence in community college?
4. How does the “model minority” myth influence students’ experiences in community college?

Findings from this study illustrated how participants exposed their experiences at a community college were a direct impact of pressure not to fail, family sacrifices and support, lack of campus engagement and the lack of student support.

Significance of Study

This study is critical, as currently there is a lack of research on Southeast Asian students’ experiences within higher education institutions, particularly within community college settings. The majority of research has focused on Asian American or international students, with minimal known about any particular subgroup. Because of the “model minority” myth, Asian Americans perceived that they do not need support that negatively affects Southeast Asian students since they are overlooked. They are left alone to persist on their own. Further, this study is significant as college degree attainment in the United States has remained stagnant over the last four decades (CARE, 2011). While the degree attainment is low, enrollment of Asian Americans has
increased (CARE, 2011). As Asian Americans attend higher education, Southeast Asians are overlooked in schools and are often misunderstood because of the “model minority” myth moniker. This group is important because they exhibit issues many Asian Americans do not encounter, such as many of whom struggle with long-term poverty, language and literacy issues, and post-traumatic stress disorders associated with their forced migration (CARE, 2008). As people perceived that all Asians are good in school; studies have shown that Southeast Asians exceeds the national average high school dropout rates by two and a half to three times more (Teranishi, 2010).

In addition, Southeast Asians, specifically Filipinos (26.6 percent), Indonesians (28.6 percent), Vietnamese (33.7 percent), Cambodian (42.9 percent), Laotian (46.5 percent), and Hmong (47.5 percent), have identified to have the largest subgroup to attended college with no degrees (CARE, 2011). This is troublesome since many employers are looking for employees who have earned more than a high school diploma (Long, 2016). Having a high school diploma is not appealing anymore. This puts Southeast Asians at a disadvantage since it will be difficult to find employment with no high school diploma or college degree. Southeast Asians will encounter a problem when they pursue post-secondary education since many Southeast Asians are below the poverty level (CARE, 2008). They will need to find ways to finance their education even at a community college level.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore what contributes college persistence to Southeast Asian students in an urban community college in the Midwest. The arrival of Asian Americans has made a major impact on United States history. As they continue
to assimilate to the American culture, it becomes more important for post-secondary institutions to expand their programs and services and determine what factors Southeast Asians continue to persist. In addition, this proposal will explore what support programs are provided to Southeast Asians.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the review of literatures about persistence and how it affects Southeast Asians at community college. This literature review will provide a brief overview of migration of Asian Americans and the arrival of Southeast Asians in the United States, their higher education enrollment, persistence, and finally, an overview of the theoretical framework for this research.

Asian Americans in the United States

Asian Americans have been arriving to the United States through different motives, but most came with one purpose in mind: to make a living (Chan, 1991). They came to provide a better future for their families since opportunities at home were scarce or their families were in danger. The initial wave of Asian Americans migrated under three different sets of circumstances; Chinese arrived because of the gold rush in California and Japanese, Filipinos, and Koreans arrived in Hawaii as sugar cultivation expanded (Chan, 1991). They responded to the needs of the American economy and contributed as regular citizens similar to other ethnicities. Unfortunately, history shows that Asian Americans were not welcomed. They were viewed as a threat and deemed lower than regular citizens. Even the United States government implemented regulations to mistreat and exclude them. For instances, during the early 1900s, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, made Chinese Americans illegal aliens, the 1924 Immigration
Act banned Asians from entering the United States, and the Japanese Americans were imprisoned during World War II (CARE, 2008). These actions led to the hostility against Asian immigrants by prejudice, economic discrimination, political disenfranchisement, physical violence, immigration exclusion, social segregation, and incarceration (Chan, 1991). These experiences are similar to many people of color experiences endured throughout the American history.

According to Wu, (2002) another barrier to the Asian American experience was when the United States Supreme Court ruled in 1927 that African Americans and Asian Americans were equivalent and interchangeable. This ruling permitted to racially segregated Asian Americans in school (Wu, 2002). Regardless of the racial history of the United States, many Asian Americans elected to move to the United States to provide a better education for their children even though their parents knew they would suffer from downward occupationally mobility (Chan, 1991). These parents, regardless of their situation in their countries, decided to leave everything behind to move to a new country and start over. These parents recognized that educational attainment was the best way to increase their socioeconomic status (Teranishi, 2010).

Asian Americans were able to improve their situation on their own. They found economic niches to support their livelihood as they took advantage of American capitalism (Chan, 1991). In addition to improving their work statuses, Asian Americans used education to assimilate with their own communities. In comparison with African American experiences, Asian Americans used education to assimilate as a means of reshaping their group out of a culture that celebrated communal knowledge and consensus and into Anglo-Protestant cultural norms that honor individualism and competition (Johnson-Bailey, 2006). They sent their children to school since
this is what the current society was doing. They also felt that acquiring an education was one of the means to further their livelihood.

The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s created a profound change in America’s opportunity structure, with access to higher education being among the primary catalyst for the integration of people of color into mainstream America (Teranishi, 2010; Wu, 2002; Chan, 1991). This movement was not just for African Americans, it was also geared towards other people of color. The 1965 Immigration Act and its amendments, the 1975 Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act, the 1980 Refugee Act, and the 1987 Amerasian Homecoming Act have provided the legal framework within which the Asians influx occurred (Chan, 1991). These regulations allowed a new wave of Asian Americans to arrive in the United States. Implementation of the immigration act of 1965; brought in educated and skilled workers to fill labor needs in certain sectors of the economy and allowed Asian Americans to petition for their siblings (Chan, 1991). This was another way for the United States government to unify family of immigrants’ statuses.

In addition to the new Asian immigrants admitted under employment and family categories, a surge of new immigrants from Southeast Asia occurred in 1975 under refugee and asylum status (Teranishi, 2010; CARE 2008). Those individuals from Laos, Vietnam, Hmong, and Cambodia were affected because of military involvement by the United States in Vietnam (Chan, 1991; CARE 2008). These new immigrants brought a new side of the Asian American history unlike no other has experienced.

The fall of Saigon in 1975 led to the United States sponsored evacuation of refugees and asylum (Alperin & Batalova, 2018). They were Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian war refugees,
from the rural regions of Southeast Asia, many of whom struggle with long-term poverty, language and literacy issues, and post-traumatic stress disorders associated with their forced migration (CARE, 2008). This group of Asian Americans were forced to move and leave their countries. They were afraid to be prosecuted, and some moved because they wanted to find new economic opportunities. They arrived in two phases: a large number of Southeast Asian refugees arrived prior to 1980 who assisted the United States during the Vietnam War and the second phase, arrived after 1980, refugees that fled their countries in large numbers by any means available to them (Teranishi, 2010).

Another category of people from Asia that were often most marginalized were undocumented immigrants; the majority of this population derived from China, Philippines, and India (Teranishi, 2010). The United States Immigration and Naturalization Services identified undocumented residents as "foreign born persons who entered without inspection or who violated the terms of a temporary admission and who have not acquired permanent resident status or gained temporary protection against removal” (Teranishi, 2010, p. 33). These groups migrated to the United States to pursue the “American Dream” as well. While many of them were living concealed from authorities, new opportunities were becoming available to them.

The most recent was when President Barack Obama signed an executive order on June 2012 to implement Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival, also known as DACA (Venegas, Cadena, Galan, Park, Astudillo, Avilez, Ward, Lanford, Tierney, University of Southern California (USC), & Pullias Center for Higher Education, 2017). DACA allowed individuals who came to this country as children temporary legal status in the United States. This allowed them to attend post-secondary institutions and the right to work. This is a group of students that
many post-secondary institutions not yet ready or familiar with in order to provide assistance during their enrollment. Illinois is one of the traditional immigrant destination states that is home to the largest number of potential DACA beneficiaries and Philippines is among the top 10 countries (Batalova, Hooker, Capps, & Migration Policy Institute, 2014). Importantly, given the current United States political administration, DACA recipients are in limbo and President Donald Trump has been trying to end the program (Stavely, 2018). Supporters for the DACA program are working with government officials that would give permanent protection and a path to citizenship.

As the history of their arrivals perpetuated throughout the United States’ history, misconception exist that Asian Americans are taking over the United States. In fact, Asian Americans are concentrated in five states, with 65 percent of them are living in California, New York, Hawaii, Texas, and Illinois (CARE, 2008). According to the United States Census (2010), Illinois is ranked as the sixth most populated state by Asian Americans. It is important to note that colleges in Illinois have services and programs available to Asian Americans.

**Model Minority Myth**

“Model minority” myth first used in the mid-1960s during the heights of the civil rights movement and when journalists began publicizing the high educational attainment levels, high median family incomes, low crime rates, and absence of juvenile delinquency and mental health problems among Asian Americans (Chan, 1991; CARE, 2008). As the term “model minority” casted a blanket to all Asian Americans, they all benefited from receiving white privileges; these white privileges allowed Asian Americans to assimilate to Americans culture and beliefs. According to Manglitz (2003), having white privileges refers to the resulting benefits that accrue
to those who have been constructed as possessing whiteness or who are seen as white. In education, whiteness viewed as the norm against all other races and people of color evaluated based on performances of whites (Manglitz, 2003). Asian Americans are described as the closest ethnicity that assimilated closest to white Americans, by absorbing the values of education and work. This experience does not negate that they did not go through the discrimination like Hispanics and African Americans endured during the early years (Gardner, 1989). In fact, many Asian Americans endured similar issues other ethnicities experienced from the early years of the United States.

White privileges impacted affirmative action, a concept that was formulated in 1941 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt encouraged people of color to seek employment by ordering defense contractors to cease discriminatory hiring (Noel, 1997). The term affirmative action originated from vice president Lyndon B. Johnson. During John F. Kennedy’s presidency, he issued Executive Order 10925 where he mandated affirmative action for the equal opportunity employment and fair treatment of employees regardless of race, color, or national origin that extended equal opportunity in education (Sky Lark, 2012). In 1964, Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act that made it illegal to be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or to be subjected to discrimination under a federally funded program on the basis of race, color, or national origin (Sax & Arredondo, 1996). Despite the long political battles and legal challenges, affirmative action has survived since it was first ratified. It has helped sustain and expand African American middle class, something that none other public policy has provided, and it continues to perform the acts of corrective justice that many envisioned (Katznelson, 2005). It was argued that affirmative action did not benefit Asian Americans but according to Ancheta,
affirmative action is a form of government entitlement (2003). They were viewed as immigrants and it was believed that affirmative action is only limited to United States citizens. It was also believed that since Asian Americans were recent arrivals compared to African Americans, they did not deserve to benefit from it (Ancheta, 2003). Affirmative action was originally introduced to create equal employment opportunities. Throughout the years, it has expanded to provide new opportunities to people of color, including Asian Americans (Katzenelson, 2005).

While many Asian Americans support affirmative action, not all Asian Americans support affirmative action. According to Inkelas (2013), some Chinese Americans are opposed to it since they feel it is discriminating against Asian Americans. Asian Americans students enrolled at community colleges would not benefit from affirmative actions since they do not fit the mold of Asian Americans who typically apply at selective institutions. According to Jump (2017), Asian Americans cannot be intentionally discriminated but described the selective admission as a source of the problem. Holistic admission, part of the selective admission, reviews all student’s credentials and backgrounds for consideration. According to Kang (1996), negative action takes place when Asian American applicants would have been admitted had the individual been a white applicant, in comparison to another a white applicant and not any other applicant of color (as cited in Garces & Poon, 2018).

When Asian Americans are labeled “model minority,” this hides the disparity that all groups are doing well. In fact, President Ronald Reagan referred to Asian Americans as “our example of hope” (Wu, 2002). In fact, many Asian Americans hid their negative experiences, for example when going on welfare, they felt it was not a situation they should be in, they would rather hold a low pay, part-time, or seasonal job, than receive public assistance (Chan, 1991).
Asian Americans often excluded as “problem demographics” or excluded in discourse that served to discuss oppression and that they have to overcome challenges on their own.

In 2007, the federal government established the Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) that brought the needs of Asian Americans students (Lambert, 2016). With this distinction, institutions were able to receive federal funding to help support the needs of Asian Americans. This movement allowed Asian Americans to be self-sufficient in education and increase their chances for employment.

**Southeast Asians**

Southeast Asian became popular during World War II. This occurred when Lord Louis Mountbatten command took over the territories south of the Tropic of Cancer (SarDeSai, 2010). When a majority of the Southeast Asians began arriving in the United States in 1975, they arrived when Asian immigration was rising. Filipinos have a unique history of migration to the United States compared to other Southeast Asians since Philippines was a former United States territory. The Philippines government and educational systems are both modeled after the United States systems (Chan, 1991), which was an advantage when Filipinos arrived in the United States. Due to similar systems, many Filipinos were English speakers. This also provided an advantage since other immigrants are from non-English speaking countries.

While other Asians were known to many Americans, Hmong’s role with the United States were unknown to many Americans (Wu, 2002). Because of the experiences during the war, they were allowed to migrate to the United States. Minnesota is home to the largest population of Hmong outside of Southeast Asia (Chan, 1991; Teranishi, 2010). More than half of the escapees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia have ended up in the United States because of
American military involvement in the wars that ravaged those countries (Chan, 1991). They arrived in the United States ready to live a new life but as Teranishi (2010) explained, many Southeast Asians’, settlement in the United States, and in particular specific communities, is arguably less by choice and more attributable to force settlement designated by the United States government (as cited in Portes & Rumbart, 1996; Zhou, 1992).

The initial presence of Southeast Asians in the United States allowed them to experience excellent reputations since other Asian Americans were viewed as reputable members of society (Wu, 2002). From the early years, Asian Americans learned to assimilate within their own communities and contributed to the society. Unfortunately, there experiences were opposite of these perceptions. Vietnam, Cambodia, and Lao residents were poorer, less educated, less urbanized, and more ethnically diverse (Chan, 1991). These experiences prevented Southeast Asians from succeeding. As a result, many Southeast Asians exhibited low level of education attainment (Teranishi, 2010).

**Education Enrollment**

Asian Americans represent one of the fastest growing population groups in the United States. Its population represents 3.3 percent of the nation and 10 percent of California. The total United States population more than doubled between 1950 and 2010, from 151 to 309 million, a faster rate of growth than any other industrialized nation in the world (CARE, 2011). Asian Americans are quickly becoming an influential presence socially, politically, and economically (Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics [LEAP], 1996). According to the Pew Research Center (2013), they have the highest-income, are highly educated and the fastest-growing racial group in the United States. In addition, they are more satisfied than the general public with their lives,
finances, and the direction of the country, and they place more value than other Americans do on marriage, parenthood, hard work and career success.

Asian Americans have always been associated with education. While public schools are represented a diverse student body, according to Wang and Teranishi, diversity among teachers continue to lack (2012). In the academic year of 2007-2009, 6.3 million students enrolled in California public schools but only had 5-7 percent were K-12 personnel and 4.8 percent were school administrators (Wang & Teranishi, 2012). This lack of representation in secondary institutions puts Asian Americans at a disadvantage. When selecting post-secondary options, since guidance counselors are often the sole individuals who possess the knowledge and information necessary for students to make the right decision when choosing a college, Asian American are misguided since counselors may not have the right information or background to properly assist them (Teranishi, 2010).

In regard to higher education enrollment, perceptions of many are that Asian Americans are taking over postsecondary enrollment throughout the United States; but data has shown that the increase parallels that same trend as for African Americans and Hispanics (CARE, 2008). According to The Condition of Education (2018), undergraduate enrollment increased for Hispanics (134 percent), African Americans (73 percent) and Asian Americans (29 percent) during the period 2000 to 2016 (McFarland, Hussar, Wang, Zhang, Wang, Rathbun, Barmer, Forrest Cataldi, & Bullock Mann, 2018). With the “model minority” myth prevalent in the 1960s, it has obscured the differences among Asian American ethnic groups. While many Asian American students perceived coming from affluent upbringings, others come from lower income families struggling with poverty, public assistance, survival in an underground economy, and
limited English language ability, they have neither the economic nor the cultural capital to help them get into selective universities (CARE, 2008).

The recent trends in Asian Americans enrollment in higher education, especially on the west coast of the United States, has been increasing and according to Inkelas (2004), there are numerous ethnic clubs for students with interests in specific Asian national origins, such as groups for Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, Hmong, Taiwanese, Indian, and many other ethnicities. Many institutions have an Asian American Student Union (AASU) or an Asian American Student Association (AASA), which among other aspects; these organizations serve as the umbrella organization for the various Asian ethnic clubs. Because of the limited research on the subgroups, many Asian Americans youth have been experiencing issues with their educational needs, many are being placed in the wrong grade level, placed in the wrong bilingual classroom or wrongly placed in special education, so their schools are failing them (CARE, 2008). Studies conducted by educators and policymakers shows that they have good intention of addressing the needs of students but when there is not enough accurate data available, they are often overlooked. According to Jashik (2017), institutions are capable of collecting and analyzing data. As one of the institutions that have a large population of Asian Americans, the University of California system changed its classification system after a student led campaign requested this change. This campaign began after an article was published in the school newspaper stating that Asian Americans did not have any educational obstacles.

Most Asian Americans students attend public institutions and in some states like California and Nevada, over half of all Asian American college students are attending public community colleges. According to the CARE report (2008), in 2000 there were 363,798 Asian
Americans enrolled in public two-year colleges in the United States compared to 101,751 enrolled in private four-year colleges. While most of the Asian American population is concentrated in the west coast of the United States, there is now a large proportion of Asian Americans in Texas and Illinois that are attending community colleges (Teranishi, 2010). In fact, the largest growth in Asian American two-year college enrollment is occurring in the Midwest and South (CARE, 2008).

Nearly half of Asian American students attend community colleges rather than Ivy League schools (Wang & Teranishi, 2012). This invalidates the notion that all Asian Americans attend selective institutions or four-year colleges and universities. In fact, between 1990 and 2000, Asian American enrollment in public two-year colleges increased 73.3 percent compared to a 42.2 percent increase in public four-year colleges, and a 53.4 percent increase in private four-year colleges (CARE, 2008). In today’s society, the cost of higher education is one of the biggest issues many face, students including Asian Americans, which is why many skipping going to the four-year institutions and are flocking to community colleges to minimize the cost. Another misconception is that Asian Americans are pursuing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) programs. According to Wang and Teranishi (2012), Asian American students are not necessarily selecting majors in math and science; among degrees the awarded 28.8 percent were in business/management, 26.1 percent in social sciences/humanities, 14.2 percent were in education/library science, 21.8 percent were in engineering/math/computer science, 7.3 percent were in health science, and 6.3 percent were in biological/life/physical science.
Asian American community college students are more likely to enter college with lower levels of academic preparation in English and mathematics (CARE, 2011). The perception that this population always does well in school is contradictory. Often, they carry many “risk factors” that are correlated with lower rates of persistence and completion. According to CARE (2011), these risk factors include delayed enrollment, lack of a high school diploma (including high school equivalency certificate recipients), part-time enrollment, having dependents other than a spouse, single parent status, and working full-time while enrolled (35 hours or more). In addition, less than one-third of students who entered community colleges with the intention of earning a degree accomplish this goal within a six-year period. Significantly underfunded compared to their public four-year college counterparts, community colleges often lack the resources needed to support their student population (CARE, 2011).

The increase of enrollment by Asian Americans at community colleges has identified students that are not ready for a rigorous, curriculum and the “model minority” myth may wrongfully influence community college administrators to not provide adequate resources and services to help these students. Being lumped into one single ethnic category does provide advantages and disadvantages. With all the different ethnic categories; there is no simple description that characterizes the Asian American population into a whole community (CARE, 2008). This is the reason many are calling to disaggregate the Asian American category. According to Inkelas (1998), many Asian Americans believe they do not need affirmative action since they are admitted through their own merits. Under the “model minority” myth, Asian Americans are lumped together because they share are high performers that do not cause any problems to society (CARE, 2008). These beliefs are untrue, and it obscures their real
experiences and differences related to ethnicity, social class, language, generation, history, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, immigration status, and region (Lee & Kumashiro, 2005). Asian Americans and Pacific Islander population is ethnically diverse, composed of at least 48 ethnic categories, plus multiethnic and multiracial combinations, with more than 200 spoken languages and dialects (Wang & Teranishi, 2012). These unique traits demonstrate how wide and massive these groups are.

Aggregate statistics contribute to the misnomer that Asian Americans are “model minorities” because collective differences and individual heterogeneity are masked. When data and analyses are disaggregated by Asian American subpopulations, intergroup differences become visible (Hartlep & Lowinger, 2015). When the differences are exposed, educators and policymakers are able to make decisive decisions that will benefit the group that really needs it. As explained by Trimble and Dickson (2005), desegregating data can fight against “ethnic gloss,” which is defined as the homogenizing of Asian Americans into one monolithic successful group. When groups are lumped into one, successful and unsuccessful groups, the difference between the two becomes wider and wider and it becomes hidden to the public. The successful groups continue to benefit from their merits while the unsuccessful groups are left in their current situation and are in a poor position to turn their situation around. According to Pendakur and Pendakur (2012), institutions are only offering programs like mentoring, community building, and comprehensive study programs for many Blacks and Latino students. Asian Americans are excluded because of that perception.

According to Lee and Kumashiro (2005), data also revealed that when Asian Americans are disaggregated, some of Asian Americans show they have the lowest rates of high school
graduation and college attainment in the United States. In fact, they even exceeded the United States average. The most economically disadvantaged are Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian war refugees from the rural regions of Southeast Asia, many of whom struggle with long-term poverty, language and literacy issues, and post-traumatic stress disorders associated with their forced migration (CARE, 2008). In addition, the United States Census in 2000 reported that Hmong, Cambodians, Laotian, and Vietnamese represent the ethnicities that have the highest rate of poverty (CARE, 2008).

When educational attainment is delayed, program and services are more vital to ensure that adult students are provided the opportunity to complete their educational goal. Adult students, including Asian Americans are more motivated to pursue a college degree but because of the trepidation and uncertainty, they are more cautious when enrolling (Osborne, Marks, & Turner, 2004). These students face numerous responsibilities, family, work and personal matters that traditional students do not have. In comparison with other students of color, Asian Americans enrolled at community colleges are more likely to have recently migrated and have attended a foreign school (CARE, 2010). These experiences will put them at a disadvantage and will prolong them from obtaining their educational goals.

Ignoring that Asian Americans do not need assistance proves the fact that racism still exists. The United States government has provided additional funding and programs to help Asian Americans. According to Wang and Teranishi, (2012), the United States Department of Education provided funding in 2007 for new students of color categories; which includes Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPIISIs). These are institutions of higher education with student enrollment of at least 10 percent Asian
Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) and at least 50 percent students are eligible to receive Pell grants. In 2009, United States President Barack Obama re-established the President’s Advisory Commission and White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (Wang & Teranishi, 2012). With all the funding coming in to serve these groups, community colleges had the necessary resources to provide the services and programs these students needed to be successful.

Education is synonymous with Asian Americans but they are underrepresented in the field of higher education beyond being students and having entry-level teaching positions (Wu, 2002). While Asian Americans are attending community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities, they are not being represented well. This creates a concern since their needs are not being addressed. They do not have any advocates on their side and the “model minority” myth is treated as factual. Educational attainment is important for parents of Asian American students because without it, it becomes a hindrance to their own educational attainment since this will cause little guidance and support to their college journey (Teranishi, 2010).

According to National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education (CARE, 2015), a recent study on first generation Asian American community college students showed that many were financially vulnerable, more at risk of attritions, and more likely to have lower degree of attainment rates. In this study, many of the students were Southeast Asians. While these students were not in selective institutions, they were viewed by community colleges institutions as “model minorities” and as students who do not need any assistance. They do not have the same opportunities as other institutions that may have specific programs that will assist and guide them through their college experience. Many community colleges do not have
specific clubs and organizations that can accommodate Asian Americans when many studies have shown participation to co-curricular activities that promote high retention.

**Southeast Asian Experiences**

Educational attainment is high for East Asian and South Asian groups, whereas for Pacific Islanders and Southeast Asian groups it is relatively low: 51.1 percent of Vietnamese, 63.2 percent of Hmong, 65.5 percent of Laotian, and 65.8 percent of Cambodian adults (25 years or older) have not enrolled in or completed any postsecondary education (CARE, 2011). The percentage of Southeast Asian Americans who have earned a bachelor’s degree is lower than the percentages for Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native adults (Lee & Kumashiro, 2005). This proves even though Asian Americans are associated with education, it is not prevalent to all Asian Americans since Southeast Asians are impacted negatively. When parents do not go to school, it affects their children. According to Wu (2002), the educational success of Asian Americans is the educational success of any set of people who have well educated parents.

The English Language Learners (ELL) rate among children and youth is quite significant; Hmong (52 percent), Vietnamese (39 percent), and Cambodians (33 percent) have particularly high rates of ELL children and youth (Teranishi, 2010). While it may be viewed as a benefit, this is troublesome, as this will cause problems as they reach post-secondary schools and the workforce. The language barrier will add English Language Learner courses as they enter post-secondary institutions and this will limit their employment search. In addition, when students lack the English language proficiency, it affects their performance during standardized testing especially when enrolling at institutions that require placement testing (Teranishi, 2010). They
are given an ESL version of the test that may route them to take additional courses before they take remedial and college level courses.

The proportion of Southeast Asian adults who have not completed high school is two and a half to three times greater than the national average (Teranishi, 2010). Due to these deficiencies, many are starting their education at a disadvantage. In addition, the likelihood of them attending selective or prestigious institutions is minimal (Teranishi, 2010). For them, the route for a degree will be extensive. As enrollment in community colleges by Asian Americans continue to increase, the need to better support them is vital. Unlike in the past, Asian Americans are now attaining a post-secondary education since there was a lack of career opportunities available to them in the United States (Teranishi, 2010). Often, they were passed for employment opportunities since they did not have the right credentials.

In addition, they do not have the luxury to just attend school. Many community college students have to work while attending college compared to their counterparts attending four-year institutions (CARE, 2015). As they juggle different responsibilities of work, school, and family, many Southeast Asian students have discussed additional responsibilities as cultural brokers and being interpreters between their immigrant parents or grandparents and English-speaking institutions and society (CARE, 2015). Also, programs and services may be geared towards traditional students. While a traditional family is consists of parents and siblings, for many Southeast Asian communities, it is extended to more family members. According to Chan (1991), many refugees made determined efforts to reunite with scattered family members and friends through secondary migration. They migrate to another location and live under the same households.
According to Teranishi (2010), Southeast Asian Americans and Filipino Americans, from the lowest income brackets, were most likely to indicate that they had financial concerns about college. They would often select colleges based on the amount of financial aid that was offered to them. They would find the nearest college instead of relocating or having to stay at a residence hall or dormitory. Since cost is a factor, many will select a community college because of its affordability and accessibility. These experiences are not unique to Southeast Asians; in fact, they are inclusive to other people of color too (CARE, 2010).

Another reason why many Southeast Asian Americans stay at a local college, and preferably a community college is to stay closer with their family. According to Wu (2002), Asian Americans on average live in larger households than do white Americans and they may have two spouses, children, grandchildren, and even cousins living under a single roof and share their earnings. The value of family life is important to the Asian culture (Chan, 1991). Families migrated to the United States to give their children better opportunities. Asian immigrants put family first and not themselves and they are willing to sacrifice their own socioeconomic status in exchange for giving the next generation a better chance to make it in the world (Chan, 1991). According to Teranishi (2010), the abundance of storytelling by parents about their immigrant experiences and sacrifices, encourage their children to work hard and pursue a better life for themselves. This puts a lot of pressure for their children to do well. This pressure sometimes contributes to students’ failure to complete the degree.

Persistence

Student engagement has been tied to persistence. Persistence as defined by Astin (1975) as a student, who completed their degree, still enrolled full-time, and is pursuing a bachelor’s
degree. In later years, Astin (1977) redefined persistence as completing a degree program within a specified timeframe. When discussing persistence, dropout is also mentioned. Dropout is defined by Astin (1975) as students who had originally planned to earn a bachelor degree and did not complete it. The term stopouts was added because a dropout can return to college and complete their degree anytime. Astin (1977) defined stopouts as students who leave college but intend to return to complete their degrees. Tinto (1993) defined persistence, as “individuals are required to adjust, both socially and intellectually, to the world of college” (p.45). As Tinto designated that education is both actualization and potential (1993). As enrollment continue to increase, students will leave and are unable to complete their degrees. It is important for institutions to know why students are leaving colleges early. This information can be used by institutions to create programs and services that will help keep students enrolled. While institutions want to avoid dropouts in the first place, institutions need to be ready when they return so that they can complete their educational goals. They will return since there is always pressure from society to get a higher education.

For many institutions, when persistence is discussed, retention is also involved. Many use persistence and retention interchangeably (Hagedorn, 2005). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, persistence is defined as a measure of a student’s progress toward a credential. The persistence is measured after the initial post-secondary enrollment. Post-secondary institutions are always working to improve their retention rates since its persistence depends on students’ conditions. Early research done in retention and persistence were done with four-year colleges and universities in mind since tracking persistence was more difficult for community colleges due to their higher turnover rates and more diverse student enrollments.
including many who attend more than one institution at a time (as cited in Hagedorn & Castro, 1999).

Persistence and retention are now prominent as many state funded colleges and universities are moving to performance-based funding instead of the norm of enrollment based-funding. Performance based-funding is defined as institutions that are shifting how they are funded by looking at how many students graduate, transfer, or place into quality jobs (Bailey, Smith Jaggars & Jenkins, 2015). Instead of just focusing on enrollment, institutions must also ensure that students are completing their degrees/certificates to obtain funding. This is a challenge for community colleges because of their open-enrollment process since students enroll with different background and abilities.

**Theoretical Framework**

This project uses Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical lens. In the following section, CRT is defined. Broadly, CRT recognizes and acknowledges that racial oppression is grounded in systematical forms of power within the larger social world (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

**Critical Race Theory**

The CRT movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The six primary tenets of CRT include: recognition that racism exists daily, white dominance over people of color, race
that is socially constructed, conveniently people of color that are differentially racialized, understanding the intersectionality and anti-essentialism of identity, and recognizing voices of color (Liu, 2009). CRT exhibits how being coined “model minority” affects the view of Asian Americans to others since they are perceived to benefit from white privileges. Asian Americans are the closest group that are treated similar to white Americans.

In addition, Hartlep and Lowinger (2014) explained that the “model minority” myth influences white college students to have racial attitudes toward Asian Americans and promote anti-Asian American attitudes. This perception may influence white Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics to dislike Asian Americans. White Americans may feel that Asian Americans are taking away their benefits. For African Americans, it may feel that Asian Americans do not deserve what they have received since they did not have the same historical experiences they had during slavery. Hispanics may feel threatened that Asian Americans are taking their jobs or that they are advancing quicker than they are. Faculty and administrators at community colleges, who are non-Asian American backgrounds, may possess the same feelings, which can result in animosity. Asian American students lack support from administrator since they are not well-represented in student personnel administrators (Wang & Teranishi, 2012). In fact, according to Wang and Teranishi, Asian American student personnel administrators are found, commonly, in large research institutions (2012).

Racial microaggressions are subtle insults directed toward people of color that are often acted out subconsciously (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). These could be verbal, non-verbal and/or visual. Being coined as a “model minority” and the study of Asian Americans in the United States has showed widespread prejudice and discrimination leveled to this group: they
have been denied the rights to citizenship, forbidden to own land, and incarcerated in internment camps. This group has been the target of large-scale governmental actions to deny them basic civil and human rights (Sue, Bucerri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007). Non-Asian American students may clamor for partnerships with Asian American students since the perception is that they are good academically especially in Math and Science courses. When they realized the perception is untrue, they may treat them differently.

As such, this conceptual framework for this project provides the opportunity to examine ways in which race, racial oppression, power, and privilege serve to mediate Southeast Asian student’s experiences. Specifically, this framework provides the ability to determine how racism legally, culturally, and psychologically has limited opportunities for people of color (Pendakur & Pendakur, 2012). Being coined a “model minority” has whitewashed racial discrimination to Asian Americans (Wu, 2002). In result, higher education institutions are either incapable or unwilling to address their needs, whether through student support services, programs, or theory development and application (Pendakur & Pendakur, 2012).

**Implications of Literature**

This literature review presented Asian Americans as a population that will continue to make an impact socially and educationally in the United States. Their population will continue to grow and will cause researchers and educational policy to increase the interest in research. While the notion of “model minority” and that all Asian Americans are attending Ivy League or highly selective institutions has been debunked and research has shown that many Asian Americans are attending community colleges not as the alternative option but the first option for college. Asian American students are attending college in masses and they are not prepared to take rigorous
college work. To better assist Southeast Asians; researchers and policy makers should investigate what factors contribute to their decision to attend community college, family involvement, and involvement and interaction with college personnel and programs. When this data is learned, community college administrators can provide programs and services that will help students persist in attaining their education goal.

The literature review attested that not all Asian Americans do well. In fact, it also stated that not all Asian American students attend selective schools. The interesting aspect is if the limited research continues, Southeast Asians will continue to struggle academically and socioeconomically.

**Summary**

It is widely described how Asian Americans rose from a gloomy past and turn opportunities to become a “model minority”. While this myth is not inclusive to all Asian Americans, it is important to remember that Southeast Asians require further exploration. Through historical information, Southeast Asians are enrolling at community colleges in the Midwest. This chapter has set a foundation to understand Southeast Asians students and what challenges they may face while attending a community college.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative case study aims to explore further the persistence of Southeast Asian students enrolled at community college by investigating the participants. Specifically, this study is guided by the following questions:

1. How do Southeast Asian students perceive how their support systems influence their persistence in community college?
2. What barriers do Southeast Asians identify in regard to their persistence in community college?
3. What resources do Southeast Asian students identify as helpful in supporting their persistence in community college?
4. How does the “model minority” myth influence students’ experiences in community college?

Description of Qualitative Research

The qualitative method is appropriate for this research study since the interest of the research focuses on an exploration of a certain population and from a specific region of the United States. Understanding the experiences of participants is important as it will reveal specific information regarding their educational careers and provide insight into specific strategies they employed. This way, a qualitative case study allows for a richer, more nuanced information
regarding participants’ educational experiences. A qualitative method is “do it yourself” rather than quantitative method, which is an “off the shelf process” (Maxwell, 2013, p 3). This method facilitates the exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources that ensure the issue is explored through a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). According to Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2005), qualitative research “provides information about the human side of an issue that is, often has contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals” (p. 1). This method is appropriate for the participants of this study because it can disprove society’s belief about the participants that are not true or damaging to their reputations. In addition, the findings for qualitative research can be extended to people with the same characteristics of the participants.

**Research Design**

The following section outlines the methodological approach this study utilized, in addition to discussing the methods of data collection, analysis, as well as the site of the research study. Next, a detailed description of research participants is offered followed by a limitations section.

**Methodology**

For this research proposal, a qualitative case study research approach was utilized. The study benefited from using the case study approach because it concentrated on a particular organization over time, which traces the institution’s development and how the institution mediates students’ experiences (Bogdan & Knopp Biklen, 2007). The case study consisted of a specific location, specific group of people, and activities of the institution. In order to have a
successful research, Wolcott (1992) claims that it is important for the researcher to have an end product of field of research rather than a strategy or method (as cited in Merriam, 1998). This allows the researcher to develop an in-depth analysis. The case study also allows the researcher to use any method of data gathering (Merriam, 1998).

**Methods of Data Collection**

The method of data collection conducted for this qualitative case study was interviews and artifact collection. Ten participants were interviewed as well as conducted analysis of institutional documents and websites. Participants completed semi-structured interviews. During the initial interview, four participants’ interview occurred in person and six occurred during via phone call. The five phone call interviews occurred as the campus closed during a worldwide pandemic. The interviews were between 45 to 85 minutes. Participants were asked pre-prepared questions ranging from themes such as students’ motivation, values, and belief in education, family involvement, involvement in high school and college extracurricular activities, faculty interactions, and overall experiences.

Interviews were collected via voice recording and a translator was not used even though two participants gave the impression they were not comfortable speaking in English. During the interview sessions, field notes were taken as part of data collections. For the interview sessions, the researcher recorded thoughts and feelings obtained from each session. Each interview was transcribed via an online transcription service. After transcription of the initial interview, participants had an opportunity to review the data and made changes as part of member checks. Participants reviewed the interview transcription for accuracy and corrections. Independent of the interviews, data collection was used for additional analysis to determine if support is
provided to the students. Examples of artifacts collected were department handouts, fliers, and brochures of programs and services. The following departments were visited to collect artifacts: student development and academic affairs departments.

**Methods of Data Analysis**

Coding was used for the data analysis after the interview. A coding is an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas to follow (Saldana, 2009). The interviews were transcribed to identify commonalities and shared the experiences among the participants. Boyatzis explained a coding moment when pre-coding was used initially by circling, highlighting, bolding, underlining, or coloring significant quotes that stood out during the interviews (as cited in Saldana, 2009). With working with several participants and artifacts, descriptive coding was utilized since it is a common tool by novice qualitative researchers.

I coded each participant’s data first and once it was completed, I coded the next participant until I finished with all the participants. The data from the first participant influenced me on how I coded the subsequent participants. Codes were created based on interesting facts and relevance as Richard and Moore (2007) explained, codes will link data to the idea and from the idea to all pertaining to that idea (as cited in Saldana, 2009). During the process, items were coded multiple times. Once coding was completed, patterns were identified and sorted. Finding were developed. The analysis revealed what I learned during the interview sessions. It portrayed the perspectives I saw and heard during the sessions.

**Research Site**

The research setting for this study was Riverdale Community College, a public community college in an urban setting located in the Midwest. Riverdale Community College
(RCC) (pseudonym) was founded in 1945 and is located within 25 miles to a major Midwestern city. RCC is known for providing accessible, affordable, and diverse learning opportunities and environment by offering more than 130 degrees and certificates, robust student life activities and a safe, beautiful campus that offers a university atmosphere with its large campus size. It is recognized as one of the largest community colleges statewide. The student life activities offer students activities that facilitate intellectual, recreational, service and social activities. Many students attend RCC because of the small class size, up-to-date curriculum, equipment, and facilities. It serves 30 communities covering 139 squares miles with a total population of nearly 400,000. The campus size is over 400 acres. The total enrollment for fall 2017 was 14,620. Thirty eight percent of students were students of color. The ethnicity breakdown of student populations were 50 percent White, 23 percent Hispanic, 10 percent Black, 10 percent Unknown, 3 percent Asian, 2 percent Multi-race, and 2 percent categorized as foreign. RCC is a progressive institution that recently added inclusion as part of their core values to better reflect the community it serves.

For biological sex breakdown, 51 percent of students were female and 49 percent were male. For enrollment patterns, 59 percent of students were enrolled part-time and 41 percent enrolled full time. The average age of credit students was 24-years-old while the median age of the district population is 39.6 years old. Forty-two percent of students enrolled were age 22 years or older. Regarding residency, 79 percent of students enrolled lived within the institution’s district, 19 percent lived out of district, and 2 percent were out of state/foreign. The percent of total population by race included Caucasian (59.0 percent), Hispanic (26.8 percent), African American (21.6 percent), Asian/Pacific Islander (4.1 percent), and Native American (1.2
percent). The median household income of the district is $61,544 in 2014 and the district poverty rate is 11.8 in 2015.

Participants

This study interviewed 10 participants who identify as Southeast Asian and who enrolled in the site of inquiry. This study focused on United States residents and did not include international students. International students were excluded from this study because their experiences, identities, and cultural and social backgrounds differ from those sought for this study. Many international students complete higher degrees than Asian Americans who reside in the United States. In fact, according to the Eighth Annual Status Report for Minorities in Higher Education, 32 percent of doctorate degrees awarded in the United States were completed by international students (as cited in CARE, 2010).

Participation Recruitment

For the participation selection, the researcher obtained a list of students from the Office of Institutional Research and Planning of students currently enrolled for Spring 2020 and identified students that selected “Asian” on their college application. During the request, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning chose two additional demographic categories existed that could be included on the list. The two categories were Asian/Pacific Islander and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. The initial list of individuals that selected Asian produced 442 students. With the two additional categories, it resulted in 49 more students with a total of 491 students. The initial recruitment email went out on February 4, 2020 and it was sent three times since the beginning of the Spring semester. The recruitment email was also sent on February 26, 2020, and March 31, 2020. The criteria for the participants was:
- Age 18 or older
- Have origins from one of the following regions: Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam
- Not enrolled as an international student

For additional participants, the researcher reached out to the club advisor to attend the institution’s Asian Club. The club advisor, who is a staff member for the institution, explained that future meetings had not been scheduled for the current semester because of the lack of participation. The club advisor was responsible for notifying the researcher when the first meeting of the semester is scheduled. The club advisor shared that this spring term was a bad timing since the previous terms had active participants especially for students that met the Southeast Asian qualifications. She explained that they had all graduated.

**Research Participants**

Ten participants responded to the recruitment email by responding via email and phone call. A faculty member recommended the ninth participant. Four interviews occurred in person and completed it on campus and six participants completed their interviews via telephone. In the initial interview, participants answered a number of demographic questions and open-ended questions regarding their support system, barriers, and resources. Recordings of the interview were performed through a voice recorder and notes were taken as field notes. Transcription of recorded interviews were done via a transcription vendor. Once the transcriptions were completed, second interviews were scheduled within a few days of occurrence in which participants were able to review, change, and/or clarify their comments. All interviews were completed in February, March, April and May during the Spring 2020 term. Five participants
completed their interviews before the COVID-19 pandemic forced the college to close its campus.

Table 1 presents an overview of participants’ demographics. Pseudonyms names were used to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

Table 1

*Participants’ Demographics*

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<td>Filipino</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>US Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melchora</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Filipina</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
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Participant Overview

Benigno was a 50-year-old man whose program of study at the community college was undecided. He was pursuing his first degree and was enrolled in his fourth semester at the time of his interview. He migrated to the United States and has been living in Illinois for 20 months. He shared that both his parents had earned a high school diploma. He is currently employed full-time and worked 40 hours per week.

Hyunh, an 18-year-old woman, was studying Biology at the community college. She was pursuing her first degree and enrolled in her second semester. She shared that both her parents have earned a high school diploma. She is currently employed and worked 20-25 hours per week. While she never attended school in Vietnam, she knew of the rigorous academic workloads that existed in Vietnam. She indicated that compared to her cousins who went to school in Vietnam, she felt behind and this caused her cousins to look down on her.

Lourdes, a 19-year-old design and applied art student shared that she was pursuing her first degree and was enrolled in her fifth semester at the community college. She shared that her mother completed a bachelor’s degree and her father completed an associate’s degree. She is currently employed and worked two part time jobs and shared that she worked a total of 40-50 hours per week.

Ngoc was a 21-year-old man studying Computer Science at the community college. Pursuing his first degree, he was enrolled in his fourth semester. His mother migrated from Vietnam in the 1960’s and she instilled in him that he had to go to school. He could not do anything else but go to school first. He shared that his mother completed a high school diploma
and his father never graduated high school. He is currently employed and works 20-25 hours per week.

Erwin, a 21-year-old man, was studying nursing. He is currently enrolled in his ninth semester. Since he grew up with his grandparents, he shared that his grandparents were stricter than his parents. They have higher expectations than his parents do. He shared that his mother completed high school and father completed middle school. He shared that he was not employed.

Maribeth, who was studying Biology, was a 21-year-old woman. She was pursuing her first degree. She was enrolled in her sixth semester. After graduating high school at the age of 16, she moved to the Philippines to work as a scuba instructor. Working in the Philippines made her realize how lucky she was to be living in the United States. She explained how she took it for granted compared to living in a third world country. She explained that professions here in the United States, like airline pilots, are well paid, compared to airlines pilots from the Philippines. Their salary is not enough to support a family. She shared that her mother completed a bachelor’s degree and her father completed a doctorate degree. She was not currently employed.

Roel was a 22-year-old man whose program of study at the community college is nursing. He was pursuing his first degree and was currently enrolled in his eighth semester. He described his college experience here in the United States as a “culture shock”. He described it as being more straightforward because the classes were assigned to him and he did not have the options to switch or change it. He shared that his mother completed a doctorate degree and his father completed a bachelor’s degree. He was not currently employed.
Imelda was a 39-year-old woman who did not have a program of study at the college, but rather, she enrolled to take various classes in order to advance her work skills while not pursuing a degree or certificate. She completed a bachelor’s degree from her initial college in the United States, which she obtained bachelor’s degree in computer engineering technology. She was currently enrolled in her first semester. She shared that both of her parents completed bachelor degrees. She was currently employed in her field and worked 40-50 hours per week.

Efren was a 21-year-old man in business/marketing at the college. He shared that he was pursuing his first degree and at the time of the interview he was enrolled in his sixth semester. He shared that both his parents have earned a high school diploma and that his mother is from South Korea and his father is from the Philippines. He explained that his father did not put pressure on him to pursue a medical degree. He is not currently employed.

Melchora was a 37-year-old woman whose program of study at the community college was cyber security and network administrator. She is pursuing her first degree in the United States as she completed an associate’s degree in computer science in the Philippines. She was currently enrolled in her third semester. She shared that her mother completed a high school diploma and her father completed elementary school. She was not currently employed.

**Goodness**

Member checking was utilized to uphold the goodness. This process allows the removal of possible misinterpretation of what the participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on (Maxwell, 2013). Participants reviewed the transcripts of their specific interview and confirmed for accuracy. Participants were invited to add further thoughts and provide them the opportunity for further clarification regarding their transcribed interviews.
According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), member checking allows participants to review parts of the polished or semi polish product, such as major findings and themes and provides opportunities for participants to provide further clarity and information to ensure researcher accuracy.

**Limitations**

There were a few limitations to the study. Participants had difficulties expressing themselves since English was their second language. For interviews via telephone, it was difficult to connect and build a rapport in a meaningful way. In addition, during telephone interviews, I was not be able to read the participant’s body languages and see their facial expressions. The final limitation is the background of the researcher. As the researcher, I shared the same background as the participants. I had a bias since I expected the participants to answer in a way I would want them to answer based on my own personal and college experiences. While listening to the participants, I recollected many of their experiences during my own college experience. After listening to the participant’s experiences and based on what I experienced when I was in college almost 20 years ago, it showed that no changes or improvement has occurred for Southeast Asians students during that period. We continue to be marginalized by our own institutions while they continue to benefit from our enrollment.

A limitation that was unforeseen occurred during recruitment of participants when a pandemic spread and affected the institution during data collection. During the Spring 2020, a pandemic was declared due to COVID-19 caused by the coronavirus. RCC extended spring break to prepare for campus closure, administrative and support staff were told to work at home
remotely and all classes moved online. Due to the pandemic and because everything was switched online, students were not easily accessible and this delayed data collection.

**Researcher Positionality**

This study will help to support my goals, values, and beliefs. As the researcher, I am an insider to the setting and my experiences provide two-folds; an employee of an urban community college in the Midwest and belong to one of the populations identified in this study. I was born and raised in the Philippines and I migrated to the United States as a teenager. As an Asian American, my college experience, was not unique and may emulate many of the experiences of my participants. My parents received their college degrees from the Philippines, so they demonstrated the importance of higher education and the awareness of college processes. Since they earned their degrees in their home country, they are not familiar with higher education in the United States. This may apply to the parents of my participants as well.

In addition to my background, my collegiate experience has contributed to the interest of this subject. Being an Asian American at a large university, I felt left out. I had no interaction with my college and faculty. I was not involved in any co-curricular activities. During my first semester of college, I dropped out after attending a month without notifying my parents or properly seeking student services. I believe this study is important because Asian Americans carry the moniker of being a “model minority”. This notion of being a “model minority” produced positive perceptions that Asian American students are highly educated, work hard, and are high achieving. This moniker lessened the view of many policymakers and administrators that create and provide services and programs. When I started my doctoral program, I was unaware of the need in disaggregating data of Asian Americans as I approached the end of the
program, and guidance from my professors, I understood that there was a value to disaggregation. Suzuki (2002) found that “many studies have shown that when the socioeconomic data on Asian Americans were disaggregated and more sophisticated analyses conducted, a very different picture emerged” (p. 22). By focusing on the Southeast Asian students, I am creating an interest in a group where there is a lack of research.

In my professional experience, I have been in the higher education field for 19 years, 13 years in an urban community college setting. Working at a community college, allowed me to realize the importance of community colleges in our society. During this time, I have been employed in the student affairs/development division working in the testing, registrar’s office and enrollment services’ departments. In addition to my professional experiences, I also have experience as an instructor. I have taught college success and business courses. The college success course was identified as a high impact practice course used by many institutions as a retention tool. This opportunity allowed me to share my college experiences as a Southeast Asian student so that students would not make the same mistakes I made and promote lifelong learning through my teaching. This teaching experience allowed me to interact more with students on a faculty level and I learned different ways to contribute to the institution and to increase student success by motivating students to persist and attain their educational goals.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, the data collections of the study were presented. This chapter outlined the recruitment and data collected from the participants. Throughout the chapter, it consisted of a review of artifacts such as various brochures, flyers, catalog, and institution websites. The following research questions were used to guide the study and provide detailed descriptions of participants’ responses and review of artifacts:

1. How do Southeast Asian students perceive how their support systems influence their persistence in community college?
2. What barriers do Southeast Asians identify in regard to their persistence in community college?
3. What resources do Southeast Asian students identify as helpful in supporting their persistence in community college?
4. How does the “model minority” myth influence students’ experiences in community college?

From the data collected, four themes emerged in the data analysis from participant interviews. Through one-on-one interviews with community college students, participant discussions of their
experiences revealed from their stories. These descriptions provide an understanding of Southeast Asian students’ community college experience in the Midwest.

**Findings**

From this study, four primary findings emerged. Participants discussed their experiences with the broader societal pressures and ways they felt they were supposed to be “better” than everyone else. Participants also discussed how they experienced family support and how their family members and spouses affected their persistence. These family members included their parents, as well as their grandparents. Participants also discussed how significant campus engagement was important to their persistence when making social connections with other students. Finally, participants discussed their experiences as first-year students, faculty/mentoring relationships and student services interactions. The information below includes discussions and excerpts from participants’ interviews that supported each finding.

**Pressure Not To Fail**

The first finding that emerged from this study was the notion of the pressure not to fail. During their interviews, the participants described the pressure they faced during their community college educational experiences. They consistently worked their hardest and discussed that they felt pressure not to let anyone in their families down. Sometimes due to this pressure, they were asked to do something they did not want to do. For example, Hyunh explained:

Well, I am an immigrant. I think being an immigrant, there were a lot of pressures from my family because it is like we are in this new place, you have so many opportunities, you have to go for it. It is just these pressures and it was gearing me towards things that I did not want to do. I continued that throughout high school. Every time a teacher asked
me, “what do you want to do?” I'm like, I have no idea. I'm just doing it because my family told me to. They pressured me into pharmacy or just really different medical fields that I had no interest in. But I think as senior year of high school rolled by, me going into community college and me getting to pick classes that I want, it's helped me develop as a person.

Ngoc explained why he strove to be his best when he shared what his parents had done. He described how his parents removed any barriers and excuses. Ngoc’s experience came to the point where it became pressure for him to get good grades:

Both of my parents again worked hard to get to where they are now so that I have all of the opportunities given to me in order to succeed in life. So the only factors that really drove me was just my parents coming into my room every day asking me for the report card and checking my grades every day and making sure I'm getting straight A's.

Erwin shared his experience with his parent’s demands and expectations to be perfect. This pressure came to a point where he felt that failure is not an option. He did not want to be the “disappointment” in the family. Erwin explained,

I would say just culture wise ... I do not want to assume anything, but culture wise, Asian parents tend to have higher expectations of you. Something you do, it pretty much has to be near perfect otherwise they can get disappointed, especially the older people like my grandparents. They expect so much out of newer generation. It kind of puts pressure on you a little bit, but at the same time it helps motivate you as well.

For Lourdes, this pressure came from friends who attended prominent or reputable institutions.

Lourdes shared:

I do not want to be... because generally speaking, especially the friends who I had from my high school, a lot of them pursued higher education in really nice institutions with what we would consider reputable degrees. And so I would feel, even though I live my own life, it just, oh I don't want to be, I am friends with a bum. No one likes to be friends with someone who does not have ambitions in their life, a passion for life in the sense. In a sense, yeah. Even though we are in different fields, what is it called? I do have friends who are not currently enrolled in college and just seeing how their life differentiates from those who are in college. It is definitely, I would say, put a strain on the friendship in terms of, oh, what are we going to talk about? When you are working while I am at school and I will be... situations very different and whatnot. I could feel the pressure of, oh, you don't want to be that person even though that's ill to perceive people who aren't in college. Just to do that if that makes sense.
Maribeth has had a positive experience academically; she does not pull away with the societal pressure:

I think I mentioned earlier, I took trigonometry three times, and that one really hurt my ego. One, because of the stereotype that Asians are supposed to be good at math. I am not good at math, by any means. So, that was already kind of painful. Persistence wise, community college is so awesome in that it is so very inexpensive per credit hour that I was able to take it the three times I needed to in order to pass. I do not think I would have been able to do that at a bigger school, and I might have... not to sound dramatic, but I might have needed to honestly switch my major if I could not pass it. So that persistence, combined with the cheapness of the credit hours, that's got to be good deal.

Efren did not feel any pressure from his parents, but sensed pressure from comparisons by the parents of his friends: “I feel like even though they do push me, I do not really have a high expectation unlike my other friends, they have a high bar, and their parents set a high bar for them.” Efren’s experience with his parents is uncommon. Many Asian families set high expectations for their children. Since his parents did not push him, his motivation to succeed is to fit with his friends and be accepted by his parents.

While participants shared that family and friends were sources of pressure, participants also shared they felt the pressure to perform well because of fears of a lack of opportunity and discrimination. For example, Maribeth shared the need to pursue her degree because of the fear of becoming a low-income earner and avoiding workplace discrimination. She offered,

I experienced a lot of discrimination in the workplace. After high school, I went to the Philippines and I got certified as a scuba instructor. I originally was going to just do that for full-time, so I did for a little bit, until I experienced a lot of discrimination in the workplace. What I mean by that is the American bosses here... I won't disclose where they're located, but they were pretty discriminatory. They did not validate my experience in the Philippines, despite where I got my certificate. It was run by the same organization. That's like someone saying, "Oh, well, you took your ACT in Kentucky. We're not going to take it." That's basically what they said to me, and they were also underpaying me.
Imelda described the lack of opportunity at her home country provided considerable pressure to succeed here and the desire to add stackable credentials. She explained:

Knowing what it is like in the Philippines where even if you get a college degree, you still do not know if you will be able to get a job. I have a lot of former classmates or relatives in the Philippines that finished college but ended up getting a job that is not in their field. Some of them just ended up being housewives and are dependent on their husband’s job. So knowing that at least here, there are a lot more opportunities, motivates me.

Imelda faced her new challenge with a different approach. After completing her degree for more than 18 years, she described her unique experience juggling several responsibilities:

It is harder than high school because they go through the material so fast and also having to juggle school, work and family. The fact that the material is harder to learn and there is not as much time compared to high school to learn it makes college harder. It is hard to manage work and school but at the same time, the things I am learning at school also help to make my job easier like learning new Excel skills. Nothing specific to being a Southeast Asian student, just time management issues since it is hard to juggle work, school, and family. The classes tend to cover more material in a smaller amount of time so it definitely requires a lot of work and dedication to get a good grade in class.

Maribeth reiterated the pressure to succeed, especially when she graduated at an early age and the weight of success against her high school classmates:

… I graduated high school at 16 and I am glad that I got a little world experience. I would like to stay in college because I am seeing a lot of my classmates with whom I graduated with, they're not doing so well. Not to say that is not because they are not in school, but because of some of the life choices, they have made, they are now coming out of rehab. They might be in jail or doing some very unsavory things. I think that staying in college, it gives you structure, and if you are focused, it is a stepping-stone to get to where you want to be. And now some of those classmates are stuck doing dead-end work that they don't particularly like, and not to invalidate blue collar jobs or anything, but some of those people really squandered opportunities that they had, with their intelligence, with scholarships, because they wanted to party and whatever.

Maribeth voiced her choice of attending her community college:

Honestly, it is been pretty funny and ironic, because I have friends and family that are freshman at other universities, and we are doing the same exact coursework, except I am not paying $1,000 per credit.
Another societal pressure a few participants shared is the identity of being an Asian American. With the myth of “model minority,” a racist term, all Asian Americans are and have always been self-sufficient and “take care of their own,” Hyunh shared:

I think it is also societal pressure, especially being an Asian American. I feel like most people think, oh, because you're Asian, you must be so good at everything like you must be an A+ student. Sometimes it really gets to you because you will get names like, wow, you are really a try hard, are not you? But it is like, no; I am just doing whatever I need to do.

As a second-generation immigrant, Ngoc explained how it is important for him to continue receiving good grades. His parents relay how important grades are not just completing his educational goal. They want him to graduate with honors:

With my experience, my parents were always the type of stereotypical Asian parents where you have to go to school; you cannot do anything else but go to school. You have to get good grades. You have to get straight A’s because both of my parents came from low-income communities. They were very poor. My mom came straight from Vietnam. She was a Vietnamese citizen and then she got her visa when she moved over here at a very young age. She moved here in the US during the Vietnam War, so she was about, I believe three or four years old, when my grandparents left Vietnam after the war and they moved here.

The message from Ngoc’s parents boosted his fear of failing. He wanted to make them proud and not make them disappointed. With this pressure, he focused on studying while forgoing the student experience of college.

As seen here, participants struggled with family pressures, the pressure to be “perfect,” the pressure to ensure they honored the hard work that came from their families, and the pressure to return after being away from school. As they continue to pursue their educational goals, instead of helping them persist, it became a self-defeating aspiration, especially when failure was not an option and frowned upon. These pressures can put a toll on an individual. As Erwin explains:
Asian parents tend to have higher expectations of you. Something you do, it pretty much has to be near perfect otherwise they can get disappointed, especially the older people like my grandparents. They expect so much out of newer generation. It kind of puts pressure on you a little bit, but at the same time it helps motivate you as well … older people tend to have higher expectations for future generations because they think to themselves we weren't able to do this in our time, but we hope to pass on our dreams and aspirations onto the next generation. Basically, they're saying, "We hope to live through you and see you succeed.

In addition, Asians Americans used education to improve their livelihood. They know obtaining a degree from the United States would assist them economically and socially. They also assimilated to what society expected. They put their children through the process even though the majority of the parents do not know the process. The difference between American families and Asian families is that the child obtains the degree and job, they stay with their family to help as providers.

**Family Sacrifices and Support**

The second finding centered on family sacrifices and how participants experienced guilt and different forms of family support. During the interviews, family sacrifices played an important role on why the participants attended RCC and their continuous enrollment. With the family assisting with their educational experiences, the fear of not being successful and letting their family down were significant obstacles for them. As they described their experiences, it revealed how their parent's value system was important with their own value system as their value systems originated from their parents. As they got older, they created their own value system based on their new experiences, and when they veered away from it, they may return to their parent’s value system since they felt guilty. They are more loyal to their parent’s value system because of their parents’ sacrifices to provide a better opportunity for them. Eight out of the 10 participants indicated that their family continued to motivate them. Interestingly, this
support included both moral support as well as financial. Hyunh explained how she had to overcome family expectation and sacrifices:

    I do get support from my family like, you are doing a really good job. I think because I finally told them, this is why I want to do, I do not care what you want me to do, I think now they are just on the sidelines supporting, whereas, before they're the coaches or something, to compare. I think it was finally me confronting them about it. I think that was probably like the hardest thing, especially going against your family's wishes.

Lourdes appreciated the honesty from her parents:

    Frankly, they just tell me as it is. Life is tough and it is hard to make money. So education is the best way to help with that so that you could... even though money is not everything, it is definitely having the security of it to live life happily.

For Ngoc, while his family supported him, his desire to not let his family down and never want to hear that he had disappointed his family was, in part, what motivated him. He explained:

    My drive to just prove my parents is what it is. It is just, to me it is mostly a mental game because the day that I say, "I give up," and the day where I say, "I do not want to do this anymore," is the day where I will finally hear the words, "I'm disappointed," and I never want to hear that. I never want to hear from either of my parents that they were disappointed in me because my entire life I always wanted to hear the words, "I am proud of you," but I never want to hear, "I am disappointed." So that's what motivates me every day to keep going and continue with my education.

For Erwin, he described his mother as a hard-working person. She made her sacrifices not for herself but to provide a better future for him. He identified her as a person that motivated him.

    Definitely my mother. She is a hard working ... probably the hardest working person I know. She can be a bit pushy at times, but she only wants what is best for us, obviously. The only reason why she works so hard is to get us a better future. Yeah, definitely one of my biggest motivations in life

Roel explained who motivated him and how his mother has influenced his life. He explained:

    I am motivated by my mom, she is my primary motivator. Everything that I do in life, every activity that I do in life, she supports me in every step of the way. And of course, there is my family and there is my friends as well, who cheers on me every day, every time I do something different and something new.
Two of the women participants, whose ages ranged from 37-39, identified their husbands and children as their main supporters and provided continuous encouragement. Imelda explained:

I think knowing that there are opportunities here that would not have been available to me if I was still in the Philippines. My husband and kids are also supportive and encouraging. I want to set a good example to my children especially having a daughter as the eldest child. I want her to set a good example to her younger siblings.

Melchora shared, “First of all, I am well motivated that I would like to go to school and then not only my husband inspired me that I can do well.” Melchora shared how inspiring her college experience was since she was able to handle her college experience while she juggled her other responsibilities:

Well, first of all, as a mother, it is very inspiring that I can manage my time and do all my tasks as a student, a mother. So it's inspiring me to go on and go on to be part of this higher level of college like I have now. And I believe this is like an open opportunity as a, we will call it a foreign student…and then I need to balance my schedule with my family and schools and it's a lot more way to go for me to aim.

Participants shared the support they gained, both financially and emotionally, which greatly affected their educational opportunities. The participants have used their family sacrifices as a motivational tool to persist with their education. While many other students received family support, the participants have demonstrated how their families sacrificed and acted as a support group behind the scene compared to other families, where they must be involved with their children’s college education. These participants depicted their families’ engagement while they are disengaged through their educational journey. Asian children are aware of their parent’s sacrifices as they are reminded often, especially when parents encourage their children to complete their degrees. Their parent’s sacrifices originated from their own parent’s experiences. When they migrated to the United States, their journey becomes a journey they tell their children to convince them not to waste this opportunity they have created for them. They want them to
have a better future, and because of this, they do not want their children to let them down or be the “family disappointment.” The parents gave them their support, but in return there are high expectations for their children to succeed. The children want to be successful in return because their parents went through the challenges of migrating to a new country and made sacrifices to be here in the United States. They do not want to see their own sacrifices wasted. In addition, the parents put a lot of pressure on their children to succeed because they are living their dream through their children’s lives.

**Lack of Campus Engagement**

The third finding that emerged from this study was about the lack of campus engagement. Participants discussed that they did not think it was important to engage in campus events or struggle to find venues for social connections at RCC, which presented as a huge barrier.

RCC’s artifacts provided less attraction to its students, especially the Asian population, including Southeast Asians. These documents, event flyers, brochures and campus websites could not connect with these students. When flyers and brochures were collected, only events and programs for African American and Latinx students were put on by the institution. There were no events for Asian students. When you view the campus calendar, the college hosted two events called Black Expo and Latinx Expo. No events focused on Southeast Asians or even Asians. This lack of programming and events illustrate a lack of commitment to these students and further creates the notion that this group is invisible and did not need events or programs. They ignored this group and got away with it. Since students were not interested, then they felt there was no need to focus on them.
Participants in this study explained that they had reservations with forming social connections. They shared that they did not seem to care to connect since they were not aware of the advantages they would receive from connecting with their peers. For example, Imelda did not make social connections. She described her interaction with her peers as cordial, rather than social. Since she did not spend time on campus, her interaction with her classmates/peers was minimal. She presented her school experience as a get in/get out perspective. The faster she got her school done, the quicker she could pursue new opportunities. She explained, “Not really, I talk to some people in my class, but I do not eat lunch with them or hang out with them after school or anything.”

On the other hand, some participants shared that they desired social connections but struggled to figure out how to form them. As a new student, Benigno experienced many new college student experiences. He also shared how difficult it was commuting to school:

I am just new here and of course I have really having hard time traveling especially in the snow, but since I find the school very awesome school and warm people, that is why it keeps me going. Well, at first, I was actually struggling about managing work and school, and then especially that I do not know much people. I do not know a lot of people here. What I did at that time is that I was actually trying to manage my studies and my work here. So if I have something to do in school, I have to read in advance and then I will make sure that my work schedule or my school will not really fight.

Lourdes explained:

I was talking to my high school friends or just my coworkers who go to the campus and generally speaking, it is quite hard to make friends at RCC in the sense that a lot of the mentality there is, I am here to get a degree and go home. I mean, there are some opportunities but in classrooms, especially lecture-based ones, there is not a lot of opportunities to engage in dialogue with other students and get to know them better.

Ngoc explained his philosophy when connecting with his peers:

That is very dependent on my classes and the people around me. If it is a class that I have difficulty in, then I will not focus on socializing because my entire focus will be
attempting to pass the class with an A and if I try to have a social interaction, I will get
distracted. But if it is a class that I have ease in, for example, if it is speech I am very
good with speech class and English class then I would start interacting with other people
because I can start to relax. I can just say to myself, I do not have to worry about this. I
can work on it later, because it is easy to me. So I don't have to solely put all my work
into getting the A because I already know that I'm already going to get the A anyway, so I
have more time to really interact with my classmates and really have friendships and all
of that.

Maribeth explained the challenge of making social connections, too. She shared her perception
of what a typical student is at a community college, especially at RCC. Maribeth described:

Riverdale is a bit of a commuter school. So the attitude of people at Riverdale is
generally, okay, I am here and I am going to leave as soon as class is over and I am going
back to my house. And a lot of students, I would say a majority of them, actually work
full-time too, or part-time, so as soon as class is over, they need to be somewhere. Which
makes it a bit hard to develop friendships, unless you join a club, a group, or an
organization. Which I think has been pretty hard, actually, to make friends at Riverdale.

For Roel, in addition to social connection, he joined a student club to enhance his student
experience. He shared:

I do, yes. I did join a club at school. It was an Asian Diversity club. I just wanted to build
a lot more communication, build a lot of connections with different ethnicities, with
different groups of people. And it was fun, I learned a lot from them. And yeah, it was a
lot of fun.

While Roel received a positive experience from the club, its presence at RCC was troublesome.
In fact, in my own research for this project, I found the lack of presence troublesome. I tried
reaching out to the club advisor to recruit Southeast Asians for an interview and when I reached
out, the advisor shared that meetings were temporarily canceled since they lacked participation.
The advisor shared that the current term, Spring 2020, was bad for students’ participation. Most
of the participants from the previous term had graduated. Because the only recruitment that
occurred was at the beginning of the semester, there were fewer students participating. The
advisor then advised to reach out during the midterm to see if they could recruit for participants.
Unfortunately, as the midterm approached, a global pandemic down the campus and moved the college into remote learning.

For Efren, even though he has friends that go to the same community college and has made friends in his classes, he viewed it as: “…where it's just we are in the same class, let’s help each other out.” Yet, his views were just that: about “helping” versus actually connecting on a more social level. Participants shared their attitudes towards social connections. They shared the lack of importance and the lack of value of connecting with their peers. They deemed that there are no benefits to their educational process. They have a different mindset when approaching social connections. They felt that if it happens, then it happens, if it does not happen, they are not missing out any benefits from it. The lack of interest by the community college to inform them of the benefits of social connection maybe why the participants have a negative attitude towards social connections. In addition, Asian students have a mindset to not to enjoy and have fun at school but to do well in school. If their parents find out that this is what they are doing in school, it may cause an issue with their parents. Parents need to be informed of the value of social connections and encourage them to join.

**Lack of Student Support**

The fourth finding was the lack of student support the participants’ experienced at RCC. This finding stood out, especially when the participants shared their experiences about their first-year experiences, from being misadvised to their lack of awareness of the enrollment process. Part of the enrollment process was that students take a college orientation, and during the first term of the semester, students are required to take a College 1101 course. This course assessed
student’s goals for college and study strategies, set college and career goals, examined their values and decision-making skills, and developed an appreciation for diversity.

The experiences that participants shared would be improved if they were able to reach the appropriate departments. While Benigno is new to RCC, his reasons for attending mirrored why many students attend community colleges:

To be here, of course, this is the news, I mean, this is the nearest school, the nearest school in my place…and still affordable. Aside from that, as I said, time and again that I find this community very warm.

Yet, he struggled with finding support during his first semester, when he encountered an obstacle:

The first semester I came here, I was lost. I feel that way. Later on I find ... because before I do not know where to go, I do not know where to enroll, who the person I am going to talk to. So this time, the second semester, I find it a little bit easy in my part because I know already which way to go.

Hyunh shared her college experience on how relaxed college faculty were about deadlines compared to her previous experiences.

Well, there is no established deadlines so it is up to you to create your own schedule like how many times a day am I going to study for this, of your own time to study. But there is no professor telling you like, hey, let's do this today.

Lourdes shared how appreciative she was with her college education and professors but shared her bad experience during the enrollment process:

I would say it is bittersweet in the sense. I am grateful to have the opportunity to pursue higher education. I definitely had some great professors at the institution and have learned a fair amount. There were certain shakeups during the process and it is taking longer for me to achieve my degree than I initially thought. Because information was not as available or as known. So, for example, the programs that I wanted to transfer into, design programs at Central Illinois University, they will only accept transfers. They make false transfers and what's it called? I would say I am a bit more precautious and understanding my academic journey. With transferring over, I have spoken to a couple of students who are in my intensive program. And I have just asked them thoroughly
through emails and whatnot how their experiences and have just been asking so many questions with different offices so that I have a better idea of my academic appeal so that I'm not taken off guard like I was in the last few months. Just to because I want to remain on track.

Ngoc was surprised to experience how diverse RCC was, compared to his high school experience and coming from a small town. RCC did not prepare him with how different college was compared to high school. With a lack of preparedness, he may have handled the college experience differently. He may have utilized the different programs and services that embrace diversity.

Well as a student, most of the teachers here and a lot of the other students, they are very diverse and that kind of threw me off because I did grow up in a community filled with Caucasians. My high school was mostly filled with Caucasians and maybe three or four other Asian students. When I came here I was very surprised by the different minorities and different backgrounds that everyone came to. But it is not uncomfortable, nor is it off-putting. It is more of just, I have never been in this situation before and so I just go with whatever my class has taken me. It is been interesting is the best way I can describe it. It was definitely an eye opener for me because I never really expected so many people from so many different backgrounds to be attending a college or community college or university or anything like that. I always had this perception that there is only certain people that can go to college, for example, mostly just people that have high GPAs or are very intelligent because again, I grew up in a neighborhood where most of our students that came from my high school were all 4.0 GPAs and the lowest GPA was a 3.8. So when I came here, I never expected so many people that said that oh, they only had a GED or students that said that they never finished high school, but they still continued on with their education. I never expected that.

A surprising revelation from him was his perception of how a community college was and the type of students who attend:

I always expected community college especially or in university to be people filled with high educated people, people that drove themselves to the farthest of education that are amazing at school or anything like that. I never expected different courses for other people. I never expected a course for just mechanics or simple engineers or anything like that. I never expected that. I always assumed community college and regular college or university to be physics or engineering.

Ngoc also revealed, similar to other participants, and the newfound freedom has experienced.
There is a lot more freedom and I enjoy that. There is definitely a lot more freedom to where I can study and the amount of places where I can seek help here because in high school I could get help directly from the teacher, but I never really had any tutoring help. Here I do have that ability where there is the tutoring center, there is always people here on staff that are willing to help you and everything. I never really had that opportunity when I was in high school because there was not a lot of tutors in our town. So if you wanted help, you have to go directly to the teacher.

As a community college student, Ngoc’s newfound freedom gave him insight into how much freedom he was experiencing. This newfound freedom not just helped but also hindered his experience as a college student:

It is definitely, if I am being honest, it has hindered me because of the amount of freedom that I have. This huge amount of freedom to me is almost unheard of from my household and from high school because if I got a homework on Wednesday, it would not be due until next Wednesday. Unlike high school where homework would be given on a Wednesday and it would be due the next day so you only got a certain amount of time to study and do your homework. If I am being honest, that amount of freedom has definitely hindered me because I definitely noticed that I have procrastinated more than I ever have ever attempted to in high school. In high school, I barely procrastinated. I have procrastinated on certain items, but it was never to a point where I would have six assignments due two days later where it is going to be due in like two days. I never had that problem. I never had a problem where my assignments would basically be overflowing to a point where I'm begging for help or begging for an extension from my professor. I never had that problem in high school. That amount of freedom that I received has definitely hindered me in studying, but it definitely has given me an eye-opener and definitely has given me a more bigger drive to try to reorganize what I do with my time.

Erwin indicated that he has a positive experience, but shared RCC’s lack of inclusivity. RCC does offer a variety of clubs, but it was still limited, and it was not a good representation of the student body.

I think this college has been pretty good when it comes to that. I think one thing they can improve on is just better knowledge of different cultures, different ethnicities. If we can teach people here about the different cultures, different ethnicities or whatnot, I think it would be helpful.
Maribeth and Roel compared her college experience with her high school experience. She relayed how RCC does not have robust student life as the college focuses more on academic activities.

I would describe it as being chaotic and fun, I guess. It was chaotic in terms of how to pick classes and pass through the time between classes. It is a very different environment, as opposed to high school, where it is very structured. You have to become very good at time management when you get to college. It has been fun. People want to go to Big Thirteen universities to get that typical college experience, which I think is not present at Riverdale, simply because it is a commuter school, but I think that makes it more focused on the educational aspects of learning. You know, we are not a party school. People are not here to dorm and people are not necessarily here to... I mean, not to say we can not have a good time, but I think the students at Riverdale, Lakeside, and other junior colleges are more focused, because they already know where they're going to transfer to next, or are in the process of researching where they will go.

Roel shared his academic experience in comparison to his experience in his home country. His RCC experience proves that he cannot rely on any services and it is expected of him to figure out the enrollment process, which could be frustrating especially when you are coming from another country with a school system that assists students throughout the process:

So my academic experience, I would say ... I mean, I cannot really compare it to a university, but during my classes, my nursing and my prerequisites, I had a lot of knowledgeable teachers, and I did think I gained a lot of I guess, academic advantage to a lot of the students just because of that. I would say it is a little bit different as well too. I think in the Philippines, it is more straightforward, this is the classes that you have to take, and this is the hours that you need to be at school. At my college, it is a little bit different. You really have to manage what classes you are going to take. You have to manage what classes you are going to take that semester, and which days they are going to be in. So all of that aspect was overwhelming for me, because when I was in the Philippines, some teachers are just going to give you a schedule, Okay, that is it, and then you're on your way. Here, I am all on my own, and I had to pick every schedule, every classes, every time that I have. So it was a little bit of a learning curve for me.

Efren pointed out the difference between student life from high school. He emphasized what RCC lacked:
I am sure other schools are, but like I said when I talk to my friends; it's very... so in high school, we had a club like that, with different cultures. I was in the Filipino group. And then when we all transitioned into college, they still stuck. Not the same people, but just the same group of people.

Efren saw his experience at RCC as an extension of his high school experience.

So my first year, how I said I kind of hated it. I wake up, go to class, come home, and then that was every day. But for my friends, they're in the city. They met new people, they hang out with them, and they go out at night. There is obviously parties. Like I said the big Filipino group. So it is more, I guess, their experience is more interactive.

Lourdes shared her experience with RCC’s mentorship program. While RCC provides a mentoring program, Lourdes shared how difficult it was for her to work with the mentor since the resources were not compatible with her needs. In her experience, they catered towards the majority while lacking the resources for what she needed.

They have this one program called the Dream Program where hypothetically some students...I don't know anyone personally who has benefited from it but based on how the program's advertises itself, having access to... it's four key PLCs and managing the college process. Helping them find mentors for their specific field. Having someone to guide them through picking academics classes. And I tried to utilize that resource before and as much as they were trying to be helpful, it wasn't up to expectation as I thought it was as they advertise. Just because one of the advisors I have who's helping me with the transfer process in there too, she was fairly young and new too. So she didn't know certain information and when I tried to just design mentors to see if there was possibility of getting experience from this field, they said, because of their limited resources it could be quite difficult and they just didn't find anyone. But I think it's open to more business and nursing and more general two, three students

The final part of the theme showed how student services lack of contribution to students’ involvement with RCC, especially when getting Southeast Asians involved. Benigno offered how his community college can recruit and be inclusive to Asians, not just Southeast Asian.

They can offer a course that, let see, language of particular students because for me, they are Asian, Chinese, Filipino, Koreans, Japanese. So maybe they can just to entice, I mean, to attract people, to attract Asian students to come here. Perhaps they can also offer languages, so language just to be offered to be studied for sure. Other races will love those to study that, to take that rather.
Hyunh also shared how the RCC reached out to her to engage in student life activities, which is inclusive but not target to Southeast Asians. They are not recruited heavily and when the perception is geared towards African Americans and Latinx, she is discouraged from participating.

I do get emails often by a club, I forgot what name it was, but it does target towards the minority group not just Southeast Asians but also African Americans or Hispanic. I get emails all the time from them like, go to this meeting so we could tell you about how to budget or something like that.

Roel’s had a positive experience but shared his concerns about not having opportunities for Southeast Asians.

I would say the college that I am in right now have a lot of clubs for Asians, but not specifically for Southeast Asians. So they are in the right direction, but I guess we can be a little bit more specific.

Roel’s persistence was a challenge.

Well to be honest, outside of campus I had a little bit of a hard time with my persistence because coming here, I had no friends, didn't really have a lot of family, and I felt lonely, I felt alone. And I had a feeling of going back to square one of meeting new people, learning a new language, learning how to adapt to a new country. So it decreased my persistence, or it decreased my motivation to actually just go to school just because of that. So I guess during my first year, yeah, that was I felt. It decreased my persistence.

With the participants’ lack of experience, RCC did not improve the student experiences.

Colleges and universities issue a college catalog since this is a valuable document for any students but RCC’s catalog is readily available to students on the main college’s website. The catalog provides comprehensive information about the college’s academic programs and policies and procedures. While the catalog may seem to have comprehensive information, RCC’s catalog does not include information on student activities offered to students.

In addition, RCC’s websites were not student-friendly. In this research, the main site is identified as Site one and the student portal is identified as Site two. For the student portal,
students are required to have an account, to log in, in which students would need to complete an application and a $15 application fee. With the analysis of the websites, both sites have superficial and have inconsistent information. In researching student services information, both sites did not have quick access to its student services. Site one did not contain any links or tabs about “Student Services.” Under “Your Experience,” it presented the following links: Adult Learners, Athletics, Democracy Commitment, Honors Program, International Education, Student Life, Sustainability, and Where to Eat. The Student Life link provided links to Student Clubs and Organization and Student newspaper. The Student Clubs and Organization showed a list of clubs and organizations. It has a statement that instructs current students to log in to the student portal, which is Site two, to get more information about the clubs and organizations. In Site two, students would need to log in and student services was under Resources. Under the Student Services, the following links are presented: Athletics, Center for Disability Services, Code of Conduct, Counseling, Financial Aid, Job Resource Center, Multicultural Student Affairs, New Student Orientation, Registration and Records, Student Life, TRIO Student Support Services, and Veterans and Dependents. Under Student Life: Clubs and Organizations, Phi Theta Kappa, Recognition, Document and Forms, Resources, Staff, Videos, and LGBTQ+ Resources. Under the Clubs and Organizations, it contained a list of clubs and organization with the club advisor’s name, contact information, meeting times, and locations. When comparing the lists from sites one and two, it did not contain the exact names of the clubs and organizations. Under Student Success on Site one, the following links are presented: Orientation, Academic Help, Support Services, Child Care, Technology, Counseling, Disability Services, Job Resource Center, and Graduation. A few of the services above are presented on Site two under Student Services. These
inconsistencies were not helpful to the participants when looking for activities or services. These inconsistencies create confusion for students when locating for services.

Regarding academic services, it mirrored the same issue similar to student services between Site one and two. For Site one, under Academics, the following links are presented: Programs, Online Learning, Catalog, Early College, Testing Services, Transfer, Advising, Transcripts, Search for Classes, and Academic Calendar. In comparison, Site two provides the following links: Academic Advising, Academic Outreach, Admission, Departments, Extension Centers, Online Learning, Study Abroad, Testing Services, Transfer Information, and Tutoring Center. In addition, some services under the Academic link may fall under Student Services. This confusion may discourage students from utilizing the services.

Summary

In this chapter, the findings were presented from the ten participants. The first part of the chapter provided information on participants’ demographics. The rest of the chapter provides information on the themes that emerged from the interview. There were four major themes identified from this study, societal pressure, family support, campus engagement, and lack of student support.

A review of the artifacts was also completed. The artifacts collected were flyers, brochures, college catalog, and intranet and internet websites. The information is not easily accessible, especially when the websites are broken down into two sections, internet for prospective students and intranet for current students and students with active accounts. Once students view the websites, the information does not focus on students’ activities.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study aimed to explore what contributed to college persistence to Southeast Asian students in an urban community college in the Midwest. In this chapter, recommendations for practice and future research were presented. In addition, the theoretical framework was analyzed with the participants’ responses during their interviews and summary from the artifacts.

Ten students from RCC were interviewed during this study. Participants were recruited through email, and interviews were conducted face-to-face and via the telephone. All interview sessions were audiotaped and transcribed. Member checking was used to increase the reliability and validity of the results.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do Southeast Asian students perceive how their support systems influence their persistence in community college?

2. What barriers do Southeast Asians identify in regards to their persistence in community college?

3. What resources do Southeast Asian students identify as helpful in supporting their persistence in community college?
4. How does the “model minority” myth influence students’ experiences in community college?

Discussion

The first finding that emerged was participants felt pressure to be good enough and to not disappoint or fail. Hearing these stories, the pressure that each participant encountered was remarkable. From migration stories about their families, or how their parents migrated to the United States to provide a better future for their families since opportunities at home were scarce or their family situations were in danger. These illustrated the experience of their parents; only two of the participants migrated to the United States on their own. This narrative of their families’ migration meant a great deal to them. Due to the pressure, educational attainment had been ingrained in their lives even though there is a lack of guidance and support of their college journey. This value of education allowed them to assimilate to white Americans. One participant’s case of asking her parent to speak English when out in public showed assimilation to avoid hardship. The participants have been indirectly lumped into the “model minority” myth, and the pressures that accompany it. As the term “model minority” casts a blanket on all Asian Americans, they all benefited from receiving white privileges; these white privileges allowed Asian Americans to mimic having white American beliefs. According to Manglitz (2003), white privileges refer to the resulting benefits that accrue to those who have been constructed as possessing whiteness or seen as white. Because of this, many of them were asked to help in schoolwork because they assumed they were smart, since that is stereotypical of Asians, but at the same time, they were not aware that they are racially discriminated against. Moreover, these pressures went unmediated.
Benigno shared his experience as a new immigrant; his community was helpful to his adjustments here in the United States. This adjustment progressed when he enrolled at RCC. He did not have a bad experience that will deterred him from enrolling but indicated the lack of courses offered in Asian languages. While RCC does not have to offer foreign language courses for Asians, it would have been beneficial for them to have it. Hyunh and Erwin shared their experiences as immigrants. They both explained that being an immigrant presented huge pressures as Asians. They explained that people think since they are Asians, they are good at everything. This pressure also translated into being “whitewashed” for Hyunh. She explained that since she attended a predominantly Caucasian neighborhood, she tried to fit in a while not lose her own heritage. She confirmed white dominance over people of color. Instead of celebrating her own heritage, she was forced to embrace white culture. Lourdes shared her college experience at RCC and explained her ambitions and societal pressure made her pursue higher education. While she did not want to minimize her enrollment at a community college, she indicated how her friends went to prestigious institutions and pursued reputable degrees. This experience confirms that not all Asian Americans attend a highly selective institution; in fact this reaffirms their attendance at community colleges. She also explained how RCC provided student support to students of color, but does not feel that the program is beneficial because the mentor did not have proper training.

The cost of higher education is one of the top issues facing higher education. Due to this, the participants seemed pressured to select RCC because of its affordability as a community college. It seems that for participants, their attendance at a community college is socially constructed. They were restricted from attending a four-year university or college because of
high tuition costs. In addition, the participants epitomize the literature, where the majority of the participants are pursuing STEM programs. This is ingrained in many participants to pursue medical careers (four participants are pursuing biology and nursing) because this is where the “easy money” is. As a community college student, they do not have the luxury of just going to school compared to their counterparts attending four-year institutions. In fact, half of the participants are employed: three work full-time and two works part-time. In addition, one of the employed participants works and takes care of her children, and one of the participants who is not working manages her time with work and taking care of her children. As they juggle different work, school, and family responsibilities, many Southeast Asian students have additional responsibilities as cultural brokers and interpreters between their immigrant parents or grandparents and English-speaking institutions and society. In fact, they are now asking their parents to assimilate instead of them being interpreters or serve as their agents. It is an underlying fact that many immigrant children would have to do. These students face numerous responsibilities, family, work, and personal matters that traditional students do not have. They do not have the luxury to just go to school and use their spare time to join student activities, which students from universities do.

The first finding aligned with the literature on how the parents of the participants made huge sacrifices for their children to have a better future. Their parents risked their lives and put their future in uncertainty to provide a better future for their children. Their parents believe how valuable it is to obtain a degree and this confirms how Asians assimilated with their community, as they value work and education.
The second finding that emerged was family support. The participants shared how supportive their family was. Regardless of their situation in their home countries, they decided to leave everything behind to move to a new country and start over. The value of family life is important to Asian culture (Chan, 1991). Families migrated to the United States to give their children better opportunities. For some, families do not get the opportunity to move to the United States together. Their parents tell them the hardship they experienced in their home country and their journey when they arrived in the United States. They make sure to share their experience of how they started from nothing. According to Teranishi (2010), parents’ abundance of storytelling about their immigrant experiences and sacrifices, encourages their children to work hard and pursue a better life for themselves. It puts a lot of pressure on their children to do well. To assimilate with their own communities, their parents used education. After reviewing the parents’ educational background, which consisted of 20 individuals, three completed elementary education, nine earned high school diplomas, one earned an associate degree, five earned bachelor’s degrees, and two earned doctoral degrees. The educational success of Asian Americans is the educational success of any set of people who have well-educated parents (Wu 2002). Southeast Asians are classified as poorer, less educated, less urbanized, and more ethnically diverse (Chan, 1991). While a few of the parents of these students earned a college degree, 12 of them have only completed a high school diploma or less. Having this educational background puts each family at a disadvantage moving forward in the United States. When parents have less educational experiences, the income source for them is less. The participants perceived coming from affluent upbringings, lower-income families struggling with poverty, public assistance, survival in an underground economy, and limited English language ability,
they do not have the economic nor the cultural capital to help them get into selective universities. They chose to attend a community college because it is the most affordable option for them.

Participants felt the pressure and support to navigate the college experience because their parents did not have the same opportunities and because they knew that getting a better education would enhance their lives significantly. They felt supported because they were able to navigate the college experience on their own. They felt supported because they were able to navigate the college experience on their own, but felt pressure to navigate the college experience on their own and provide positive outcomes. The participants described as having parents that are attentive to their education but not to the extent of helicopter parents. This lack of engagement caused the parents to not aware of policies and procedures. Parents just wanted to know how much tuition cost, grades and completion of their degree. Even with the higher education lingo, the parents were not interested in learning jargon like FAFSA, MAP, PELL, credits, and majors to name a few. Universities and community colleges are both post-secondary institutions, but there is a need to explain their differences, especially the student services and enrollment process.

The second finding aligned with the literature on how the parents of these participants made huge sacrifices to move their family and started new lives. As the participants’ enrolled at RCC, this affirmed that Asians do not attend selective institutions, and the cost is a factor when attending college since all of the participants are enrolled at a community college, and eight of the participants were employed either full or part-time. This is a significant comparison to their counterparts, who enrolled at universities where they reside on campus and do not work. Some participants have indicated that their parents are paying for their tuition.
The third finding that emerged was the lack of campus engagement. This finding correlates as the engagement dictated how RCC offered their programs and services. Student persists successfully when they actively engage on campus. As Tinto (1993) defined, persistence as individuals that are required to adjust, both socially and intellectually, to the world of college. Asian Americans are more motivated to pursue a college degree, but they are more cautious with enrolling because of trepidation and uncertainty. In addition, community college students do not have the luxury to become just college students because of personal obligations. These obligations limit their campus engagement, thus becoming a hindrance to obtaining a degree. The “model minority” myth has hindered to the participants as this racist term has allowed Southeast Asian students to be ignored when they are a group that needs assistance. The participants shared how robust their student activities during high school, and when they transitioned to RCC, had a different experience. The participants shared how representative their student clubs were in high school, and when they moved to RCC, they only had one Asian club to join where they would be comfortable. Unlike many institutions that have many, the Asian community only has the Asian American Student Union (AASU) or an Asian American Student Association (AASA), which among other aspects, serves as the umbrella organization for the various Asian ethnic clubs. Because of the limited research on subgroups, many Asian American youth have been experiencing issues with their educational needs, many are being placed in the wrong grade level, placed in wrong bilingual classroom or misplaced in special education and that their schools are failing them (CARE, 2008). Funding is always an issue for institutions and one of the reasons, compared to their public four-year college counterparts, community colleges often lack the resources needed to support their student population. RCC only provided programs
and services that focused on Black and Latinx students, lumped all Asian students into one club, and did not offer specific services and programs. For Ngoc, he revealed that growing up in an area with predominantly Caucasians, different people of color and different backgrounds at RCC surprised him. He envisioned a community college to be filled with only highly educated people. Upon his arrival, he learned that community colleges offer wide range of programs. He also perceived that community colleges and universities are not prevalent for Southeast Asians. Erwin does not feel RCC lacks resources to improve his experience as a Southeast Asian but shared that it is important for the college to teach students about the different cultures and ethnicities. Maribeth suffered discrimination at work, which is what motivated her to pursue her education. She also emphasized how important education is to her since moving to the Philippines after graduating from high school in the United States. She explained the lack of opportunities in the Philippines compared to the United States.

Roel shared his experience of how communication was a barrier for him as he ventured into RCC. Since he is not fluent in English, he saw this as a barrier, which resulted in people having a hard time communicating with him. He did point out that RCC lacks the resources for Southeast Asians. There are clubs to join, but nothing specific that to his ethnicity. His initial experience at RCC was a culture shock because it differed from his previous college experience in the Philippines. At RCC, he needed to manage what classes he is was going to take and which days he needed to attend. He felt that he was alone and on his own. In addition, Roel struggled as a first-year student when he felt he was alone. He did not have friends, and this affected his persistence. He had to start from the beginning and meet new people, learn a new language, and learn to adapt to a new country. There was no support for him as a new immigrant student. Efren
shared his experience at RCC as an uneventful. He noticed the lack of representation of Southeast Asians, especially Filipinos at RCC, in comparison to the universities that his friends were currently attending. There is a huge Filipino community. There are groups, clubs that connect from across the country. Melchora shared her excitement about being a college student at RCC since she did not have the same opportunity in the Philippines. Now, she is venturing RCC not just as a new student but also as an immigrant student learning how to navigate post-secondary education in the United States, using this experience as a stepping-stone for a better life.

The third finding had minimal alignment with the literature, as persistence correlated to having high success when students engaged with campus activities. The participants shared how they did not participate on campus since they do not see the value of campus engagement. In addition, the participants did not share how they were pushed by their parents to engage in campus activities. They were explicitly pushed to pursue their degree. The culture of campus activities does not resonate with the participants and their parents. The participants were more focused on juggling responsibilities of school, family, and work.

The fourth finding that emerged was the lack of student support. When students are engaged on campus, involvement can be through campus activities or faculty/staff relationships, and because of this, students have a higher chance of completing their degree. With all the participants enrolled at RCC, it validated that most Asian American students attended public institutions. Over half of all Asian American college students are attending public community colleges. Many Southeast Asian Americans stay at a local college, and preferably select a community college to stay closer to their family. Asian Americans, on average, live in larger
households and share their earnings with family members (Wu, 2002). According to Chan (1991), the value of family life is important to Asian culture. Since the participants attended a community college in Illinois, it reaffirmed the increase of Asian Americans in Illinois attending community colleges. The participants found the nearest college instead of relocating and stayed at a residence hall or dormitory since the cost was a factor. While their income status is unknown, participants expressed their concerns about the cost of college. They selected the institution based on the amount of financial aid offered to them. Many of the participants revealed how their family provides financial support through tuition and housing.

While cost is important, this finding revealed how important it is for students to interact with the institution. This lack of student support may have been originated from not having a diverse staff and faculty that share the same interests and commonality. Because of this discrepancy, institutions are incapable or unwilling to address Southeast Asian needs, whether through student support, programs, or theory development and application (Pendakur & Pendakur, 2012).

Due to the lack of knowledge and background of family members with higher education in the United States, this created a barrier for students to participate in school activities or even reach out to services. For many, Asian families do not emphasize the need to interact or participate as this is not part of the learning process.

The fourth finding had minimal alignment with the literature; similar to the third finding, persistence correlated to high success when students engaged with campus activities. Since the participants had minimal campus engagement and were coined as "model minority," which hide their struggles, the institution did not focus on their needs nor provided minimal services. The
institution resources were not used to provide programming and services or dedicated staff to provide better recruitment and advisement. This discrepancy hides the need to recruit staff and faculty that will advocate for the needs of Southeast Asian students.

Critical Race Theory was used as a theoretical framework for this study. CRT was used to critically analyze race and racial oppression to understand the experiences of Southeast Asian students better. The participants in this study highlight that their experiences have been marginalized. They fell into the stereotype that Asians are successful and do not need assistance. However, their experiences demonstrated how minimal services and programs were offered to students. As the participants shared the lack of campus engagement, research showed the institution’s minimal effort to provide a dedicated staff to support and advise the Asian club. In addition, staff members waited for students to participate instead of recruiting them.

Another assumption was that Asian Americans attend selective universities and pursue majors in math and science. The attendance of the participants at RCC discredited the selective universities assumption. With six students majoring in business, art, or undecided programs, it also discredited the assumption that Asians pursue only math and science degrees. Some participants mentioned that math is not their favorite subject, and English and Speech were favored.

**Recommendations for Practice**

This research may be valuable to community college administrators to assist a growing population of Southeast Asian students in the Midwest. This information may be used to create or improve student persistence strategies. Before implementing recommendations, it is important to develop a timeline, identify the stakeholders, and create an evaluation tool.
**First-Year Student Experiences**

First-year programs, like orientation and College 1101 at community colleges, provide benefits to students. Community colleges can modify the curriculum to avoid redundancy between orientation and College 1101 to increase their effectiveness and value of orientation and course. Incorporating learning communities in the College 1101 would allow students to spend more time together as a group and outside of the classroom. With community college students, they have several commitments they juggle while they are in school. It is important to create opportunities for students to engage, especially forming student groups, campus involvement, and positive interaction with faculty and staff, especially mentorship programs. Academic and Student affairs need to collaborate with academic departments in developing programs and services that will encourage students to learn outside of the classroom.

**Faculty/Staff Recruitment**

This recommendation is to recruit people of color for faculty, staff, and administrator positions in order for them to advocate for Southeast Asian students. Although participants in this study had minimal interactions with faculty and staff members, it is encouraged to have a diverse workplace to promote students and employees of the institution to feel accepted and valued. When students feel accepted and valued, they are also happier with the institution, this results in higher persistence. When staff and faculty feel accepted and valued, they are happy and comfortable in their workplace and will treat students and co-workers in a positive manner.

To ensure success with this recommendation, institutions must expand their pool of applicants and be flexible with requirements since Asian Americans usually pursue STEM careers. They do not take the college administrator position as ideal positions. To attract Asian
Americans, it is important for institutions to provide competitive salaries and benefits since studies have shown that white individuals continue to be paid more than Asian Americans, despite having the same level of education (Suzuki (2002)).

**Campus Engagement/Services**

This recommendation arose from the students’ subpar experiences when locating information on the college website, minimal interaction with staff members, and the lack of programs and services geared towards Southeast Asians. Understanding the institution’s audience to ensure the website’s information is accurate and would reduce the need to have two sources for students to find information. Information should be easy to find, and institutions need to ensure that information posted on their websites are accurate. Continuous feedback should be implemented to ensure information is always updated and update it regularly. In addition, the expansion of promoting student services, including counseling services. This department is important because it focuses on mental health, which is important for Southeast Asian students with the societal and family pressure they may experience. It is uncommon in Asian culture to utilize counseling services. As this is a growing concern in colleges and universities, the counseling department needs to increase awareness and reach out to these students. Recruitment is critical for Southeast Asian students since they may not be willing to visit on their own. On the contrary, they may not be familiar with the services they need. The lack of programs and services towards Southeast Asians is an issue when the institution offers specific programming to Black and Latinx students.
**Language Proficiency Program**

This recommendation is to increase student engagement in social events. During the interviews that were conducted, some participants revealed difficulties expressing themselves since English was not their first language. By offering language proficiency programs, this will encourage students to participate in social events. The program will help students who are not completely fluent in English increase their conversation skills. This program can also cover English slang, which is part of American culture.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

With the last two censuses of 2000 and 2010, the Asian population in the United States has presented the most significant increase than any other major race group (Humes, Jones & Ramirez, 2011). Due to this increase, the projected enrollment of Asian American individuals at community colleges will continue to increase, and community colleges should be equipped with providing services that will ensure success. Community colleges should formalize retention programs. As they arrived, community colleges in the Midwest should offer programs and services that focus on Southeast Asians. Southeast Asian students should be exposed to the importance of diversity and inclusion. This way, they can advocate their needs while they are in college and when they move to the workforce. The lack of high-level administrators of Asian American means fewer opportunities for bringing attention to the needs of Asian American students (CARE, 2010). This gap puts Southeast Asians at a disadvantage since they are left with the assumption that they will be successful on their own.

The Asian community is very diverse and it is almost impossible to target the entire group, but there are small steps that can help change things for this group. While community
colleges may not be readily prepared to accommodate, especially since doing these changes require a cost, community colleges should implement initiatives to highlight, embrace, and celebrate the differences of Asians. Community colleges should also use this opportunity to educate students on the history of the United States in the lenses of Asian American struggles. Community colleges should increase their efforts in advocating for Asians, not just universities or selective institutions. In addition, evaluation of programs needs to be performed for effectiveness and to find out any weaknesses. This way, the programs can be expanded.

The participants demonstrated during the interviews their desire to complete their educational goals by breaking barriers they have encountered, even though they had minimal participation in their community college’s activities and services. While participants shared positive experiences with the institution, they did not take advantage of the entire services and activities. Community colleges need to promote their programs to Southeast Asians. Southeast Asians need to be identified and educated on the importance of participation, so they take advantage of everything that college has to offer but also when they leave. In addition, institutions should conduct research related to retention and analyze data prior to graduating. To accomplish this, community colleges need a staff researcher whose primary responsibility is to engage in ongoing research focused on continuous improvement of student retention.

**Summary**

This chapter discussed the four themes; pressure not to fail, family sacrifices and support, lack of campus engagement, lack of student support and how the participants’ results compared to the literature and how it influenced CRT in the participants experiences. This chapter also discussed recommendations for practice; first-year student experiences, faculty/staff hiring
process, and campus engagement/services. In addition, future recommendations were presented to tackle the growing Asian population at community colleges in the Midwest.
REFERENCES


