

ASIANS ON CAMPUS: UNDERSTANDING THE ASIAN AMERICANS' EXPERIENCE  
AND STRUGGLES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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## **Abstract**

The college environment is often made up of a variety of people, fulfilling various roles throughout the campus climate. There are students, staff members, faculty, and administration. In examining the roles, students of Asian ancestry make up a part of a sub-category of students. In a campus population where students of different ethnic backgrounds come together to receive an education, Asian students have remained one of the minorities on a college campus. Even with a growing presence on campus, Asian American students have often been faced with additional struggles that their non-minority student counterparts face. The report will include a wide range of literature review looking at the different theoretical models, foundations, and outlines of ethnic identity development in higher education. The purpose of the report is to provide an outline of the different experiences of Asian Americans during their time at a university. The report will also acknowledge the differences, while drawing on similarities, to discuss potential outcomes for minority students. The final section of the report will include a review of recommendations and best practices for student affairs to implement in their work with Asian American students.

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## **Dedication**

This report is dedicated to my mom, Nora, my brother, Roger, and my grandmother, Kam Ching. Without them in my life, I would not be where I am today. This report is a product of your words of hope in the success of my education. My extended family encouraged me to succeed despite all odds is also to be acknowledged. You know who you are.

This report is also dedicated to my best friend, Shane, who has been there supporting me all the way through.

For everyone who has made an impact on me, this one is for you:  
“Everyone has the power to see through people, but only a few can see people through.”  
-Author Unknown

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

The college environment is comprised of a variety of people, fulfilling various roles throughout the campus. There are students, staff members, faculty, and administration. In examining the student role, the minority student is a sub-group that exists within it. Specifically, students of Asian ancestry make up a part of a sub-category of minority students on campus. With this in mind, Asian students have become noteworthy members of higher education. Even with a growing presence on campus, Asian American students specifically have often been faced with additional struggles that their non-minority student counterparts experience. Indeed, the experience of Asian American college students in higher education is an important topic to consider as it provides a better understanding of the individual circumstances they face, their needs in order to achieve academic success, their place within the university and how student affairs can better provide resources to help this particular group of students.

For the purposes of this report, I will be considering the more broad definition of Asian Americans. Specifically, Domestic Asian Americans are individuals who were born in the United States or emigrated to the United States at a young age and as a result, identify more with the American culture than that of their country of origin. I am considered an Asian American because I was born and raised in the United States. I come from a single parent household in a low-income neighborhood of an urban area. My particular upbringing has made me pay attention to the importance of attending a university. It is through my personal experience of that encourages me to review literature on the unique struggles that Asian Americans encounter in higher education.

## **Statement of Purpose**

The importance of examining the experiences of Asian American students in higher education is relevant to understanding the environment of the campus climate and the role in which every person participates. Considering the conflicts and experiences of underrepresented students such as the Asian population can provide insight on program development and strategies for retention. In the field of student affairs, when interactions with Asian American students occur, there could be at times confusion and a lack of knowledge in understanding their experience and what they need in order to comprehend information presented to them. Exploring information on Asian American identity development contributes to the quality of education that provides academic success.

The report includes a wide range of literature looking at the different theoretical models, foundations, and outlines of Asian American psychosocial identity in higher education. The literature review will also provide information and insight on the many factors and external circumstances that occur during an Asian American student's time in college. Blumer's Group Position Theory, racial microaggression, and Chickering's Model of Student Development are among the theories that are used to provide a greater picture of the individual's experience within higher education. I will then discuss the characteristics of the theories as it pertains to the individual's experience in higher education and how they navigate through such an environment by providing information on resources and accommodations to meet them where their needs are. The purpose of the report is to provide an outline of the different experiences that minority students, specifically Asian American students face during their time at a university. The report acknowledges the differences, while drawing on similarities, to discuss potential outcomes for minority students. The final section of the report offers a review of recommendations and best

practices for student affairs to implement in their work with Asian American students and international students from Asia. Using my own identity as an Asian American, I will draw on my own experiences to illustrate specific examples of the role of Asian American students in higher education.

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

The college experience consists of unique challenges that must be overcome in order to ensure academic success. Amongst the academic struggles, students encounter social struggles, developmental experiences that allow opportunities for learning, and successful identity development that effect who they are. The individual student's struggles are especially unique among the Asian American population of ethnic minorities on campus. Specifically, Asian Americans experience transitional issues, adaptive issues, and adjustment problems to a culture of the university in which they become emerged in a melting pot of a busy environment.

### **Acculturative Stress**

Domestic Asian American students have unique acculturation issues during their time in higher education. According to Chae and Foley (2010), domestic Asian American students have faced similar acculturative stress in which they must learn to adjust to a different culture and lifestyle. However, the domestic Asian American students encountered acculturative stress that is often regional (Chae & Foley, 2010). This means that Asian American students in higher education have the communicative skills to make learning connections of experiencing a new culture, yet there are still challenges that remain apparent when trying to situate oneself in a new environment. Some of these challenges revolved around adapting to regional activities, getting accustomed to regional cultural norms, and finding a balance between one's own identity and the new culture. This observation is especially true when Asian American students attend universities in which cultural norms mirrored the regional location. This occurs when Asian American students attend universities that have specific values that may conflict with that of their own.

In my own experience as an Asian American, the acculturative stress that I encountered upon entering a land grant university in the Midwest was the heavy emphasis on agriculture and the lifestyle that accompanied it. As an Asian American growing up in an urban area with minimal exposure to the agricultural values of farming and small town communities, there was initial difficulty in understanding and emerging myself in a university in the mid west. Growing up in a busy metropolitan area meant that my daily interactions usually revolved around the business of city-life including public transportation that runs on a fixed schedule, electric billboards which illuminate at all hours of the day, and a place where thousands of people populate daily. The life of a metropolitan city accompanies with it a sense of “isolation” in which there is a heavy amount of independence where people are so focused and busy going about their busy day. As an Asian American whose culture revolves around success and independent action, I had a lifestyle that was consistently independent and, as a result, I did not belong to a sense of community based on common interests. This is not the case for the social interaction in the Midwest as there are many community-based events in which strangers are able to find common interests over the love of agriculture, sports events, or outdoor activities. As a student in a large university, I see how people automatically found common ground based on their interests for sports and the activities that accompany it. It would be rare to find such activities in an environment where there are too many people who are too busy to gather together to engage in community. This coupled with an Asian American culture where priorities may be over-shifted in individualistic action rather than community action has made my involvement in community-based activities in the Midwest unexpected.

## **Blumer's Group Position Theory**

In order to obtain a better understanding of the position in which Asian American students are situated within higher education, the examination of several theories and models related to group situations on racial segregation can reveal hidden factors of social interaction amongst out-group members and in-group members. Among some of the models and theories that provide information on acculturative stress and segregation, Blumer's group position theory in particular was based upon historically and collectively developed judgments about the positions in the social order that in-group members occupy relative to members of an out-group (Inkelas, 2003). Blumer's group position theory situated Asian students as being on the out-group and as a result of this position, they hold less power than those on the in-group (Inkelas, 2003). Because of Asian students' position, how they navigate through the environment of higher education compared to their in-group counterparts was defined as almost unobtainable. The specific criteria that Blumer's group position theory addresses shows that racial separation can lead to individuals becoming members of an in-group or an out-group.

As one of very few Asian American students on a campus that is predominately filled with Caucasian students, I see myself as often being on the out-group when it comes to privilege and acceptance. Blumer's group position theory shows that racial minority students are often on the out-group side of the spectrum (Inkelas, 2003). In my own experience, being on the out-group side occurred when I often presented myself with first impressions. A common misconception of me is that because at first glance, my skin and hair color reveal that I am of Asian ancestry, ignorant people often confuse me for being an international student with limited English speaking abilities. The preconceived judgment about my appearance labels me as a non-

native English speaker, which is completely false. The same perceptions would not occur for a Caucasian student whose skin and hair color matched those of typical native English speakers.

Blumer's group position theory is expanded upon four elements: (1) sense of group position is related to the belief of in-group superiority or in-group preference, (2) in-group members view members of out-groups as "alien" and "different," (3) sense of group position involves assumptions of proper or proprietary claim over certain rights, resources, statuses, and privileges, and (4) out-group members are perceived to desire a greater share of such rights, resources, statuses, and privileges (Blumer, 1958). In my current status of being an Asian American college student, I see my life experience embedded within the four elements. As a minority on campus, I see how (1) Asian Americans are seen as inferior compared to White students, (2) Asians are seen as "different" students that are classified as "aliens" or foreigners regardless of citizenship status, (3) an Asian American's group position is on the outside which shows lacking of resources and privileges, and (4) a constant desire to want to gain equal access just as the White counterparts have. Blumer's group position theory showed that Asian Americans are on the out group and as a result of being on the out group, are at a disadvantaged position compared to White students.

### **A Roommate's Impact**

As out-groups occurred as a result of an in-group not accepting others into their circle, conflict and apprehension can arise (Inkelas, 2003). Similar to the in-group and out-group theory as proposed by Blumer (1958), interpersonal connections that are established in an initial point of contact at the university are an important consideration into the ethnic development of Asian American students. A specific example of the importance of initial connections was addressed in Laar, Levin, Sinclair, and Sidanius' (2005) research on the impact of ethnic-specific roommates

in a student's first year at a university. Laar et al.'s (2005) review of university roommates as being crucial into one's own ethnic acceptance of their identity provided insight on the initial first impressions of university culture and acceptance. Specifically, Laar et al. (2005) argued that a roommate whose ethnic background was different than one's own posed unique challenges than that of a roommate whose ethnic background matches one's own background. The communicative challenges, lifestyle differences, and assumptions of each other can provide initial conflicts that shape one's self-acceptance of ethnic identity within higher education (Laar et al., 2005). This research has shown that interactions among similar or dissimilar ethnic groups during the initial transition to college can play a major role in an Asian student's fulfillment with their university.

In my own experience when I was a college freshman entering a living situation with a complete stranger, I was completely thrown into a situation where I experienced high levels of anxiety, communicative challenges, lifestyle differences, and incorrect assumptions by my roommate, who was Caucasian. Although he grew up an hour away from my own hometown, our worlds could not have been anymore different. He grew up in a suburban and safe environment, whereas I grew up in an urban area, often a scary place because of gang activity, poverty, and violence. My neighborhood was mixed with a clash of cultures, lifestyle differences, personality conflicts, and unforeseen privileges that caused problems for all of us. Growing up in a traditional household, I was taught to always be responsible and not rely on others outside of family. This posed quite a huge problem for me in that my roommate's lifestyle was completely different than that of my own. Some of the privileges that he had were very different than mine. He had parents who received college degrees, was a member of the water polo team, and was academically stable. At times, it felt as though I did not have the same

luxuries and often wondered if I would succeed. Despite these challenges, we maintained a sense of civility and we did not try to let lifestyle and ethnic background interfere with our living arrangement. How I navigated through a potentially off-putting situation was to maintain an open-mind for lifestyle and different backgrounds. In the end, our roommate situation worked out very well and we are still good friends today.

### **The Model Minority**

There is a myth that Asian Americans are successful in the areas of business, math, physical science, and work compared to the other racial minority groups according to Kohatsu, Victoria, Lau, Flores, and Salazar (2011). This misperception illustrates that racism and stereotypes exist among all cultural groups. The model minority myth adds to the unfair ideals that place a hierarchical scheme over specific ethnicities with Asians being viewed as more successful in education and income. Pang, Han, and Pang (2011) described the achievement gap of Asian American college students are high achieving because of individual motivation in which they continuously push themselves to succeed. Although not all Asian American college students succeed, some do. Those who have succeeded have a specific mindset that enables them to excel. Unfortunately, people may see Asian Americans' success a result of being the model minority and not necessarily due to individual learning outcomes.

According to Kohatsu, Victoria, Lau, Flores, & Salazar (2011), the model minority myth has added to the idea that racism and stereotypes are not as bad for Asian Americans which can be seen as an escape route towards understanding how social justice issues are related to Asian Americans by simply glossing over the fact that negative racism and stereotypes exists. Ultimately, the model minority places an unfair stereotypical view on Asians when in reality,

that is not the case. Asian Americans succeeding in the public sphere are far less compared to that of their White counterparts.

I have firsthand experience on what it is like to experience the model minority myth. In many instances, people have made judgments about my academic background, career path, and direction in life as a result of the model minority myth. When I was an undergraduate, students would ask me what my major is and automatically assume that it is heavy on the physical sciences. They become shocked when I told them that my major was a social science. It is noteworthy to say that the model minority myth expresses an overwhelming sense of confusion and shock when Asians do not fit the model minority myth. At times, it is used as a way to categorize a group of people without truly getting to know them for whom they really are. I have experienced moments where people looked at my skin color and to automatically paint my background for me without asking me about my actual background. With experiences like these, it is apparent that “Asian American students face racism and stereotypes that may influence the way they see themselves. Asian Americans often report having encounters that create a sense of otherness” (Kodama et al., 2002, p. 49). In my own life, there was a time where I was not sure where I fit in because my appearance showed that I am Asian but my personality was more American than anything else. I found myself living in a middle space where I am on the outside of both groups. This is a result of how stereotypes that prevents people from being included and thus creating a sense of otherness. Hidalgo and Bankston (2009) described the transformation of moving from an Asian identity to a White identity as being common among Asian Americans. Unfortunately, even if Asian Americans slowly move onto a more White identity, their White counterparts still see them as different and not fitting into the White label completely (Hidalgo & Bankston, 2009). This finding shows that there is a middle-place for Asian Americans in which

they are neither fully Asian nor American. Having experienced the middle place, I have seen that in the place one must make the most of one's identity with overlapping identities between two worlds of thought.

### **Racial Microaggression on Asian Americans**

As stereotypes and racism continue to be experienced by Asian Americans, a specific response occurs in the form of microaggression. Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, and Torino (2009) described racial microaggression as a “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group” (p. 88). Essentially, microaggression is everyday occurrences where messages or actions leave racial minority groups feeling dismissed and insulted through indirect racial slurs. Microaggression is experienced everywhere, but in the higher education setting, can be even more as the university is often a melting pot for many ethnic backgrounds to come together and clash.

Microaggression is a form of racism for which I am no stranger. Racial microaggression is apparent in my most recent experiences as a college student in the Midwest. Racial microaggression occurs on a daily basis for me, but in general, I have developed a strong skin and I am not phased by such comments. Some of these examples occurred when I was in line at the dining hall ordering food. I had asked the server what is mixed in the rice, and the person responded with a simple “You should know what that is” implying that I know what rice is simply because rice is associated with Asian people. Racial microaggressions can occur through nonverbal communication, also. There are many instances where I have been in an elevator and the people who later get in make weird eye contact with each other and snicker. Perhaps they

were laughing at something else; nonetheless, nonverbal interactions can reveal hidden racial microaggression. Racial microaggressions can simply take the form of downright racist remarks in which no derogatory words are used, but simple interactions that leave one feeling uncomfortable. This happened to me when I was at a tire shop in a small town community. There was another customer in the lobby area as well and this person came up to me, looked me in the eye, and asked, “How many Chinese men does it take to screw a light bulb?” and walked away without saying anything else. Those moments where racial microaggression occurs are reminders of the unique hostility that Asian Americans face.

### **External Domains of Influence**

Kodama et al. (2002) depicted Asian American students as being sandwiched between western values and racism from U.S. society and Asian values from family and community. Both of these areas provided a strong pull-factor that forces Asian American students to be stretched too thin. As a result, there is a great deal of conflict between the tension of the dominant societal western norms and familial and cultural values on the development of their identity (Kodama et al., 2002). Some of the qualities that are considered Western values include individualism, independence, and self-exploration. All of these qualities mixed with the presence of racism towards minority group can greatly influence an individual’s psychosocial development as suggested by Kodama et al. (2002). An added element of the discrepancy between Western culture and Asian Americans is that Asian Americans are often not exposed to the history of their ethnic struggles within their communities. This reality means that their history is viewed as invisible in education and their identity does not have the possibility of flourishing because of the absence of Asian American history (Kodama et al., 2002). This observation suggests that Asian American students in American higher education experience more exposure to Western

values and minimal Asian American history and values. As a result, Asian American students are essentially being programmed to learn more about a culture that is not necessarily their own. This experience creates a sense of identity brainwashing as students become immersed in the Western culture and thereby abandoning the continued learning of their own unique Asian American history. They are left to see themselves through a variety of stereotypes from society and the media as that can be the only immediate form of Asian American history and presence.

The presence of stereotypes perpetuates subconscious racism in which Asian American Students absorb and internalize racism to other Asian Americans. This type of racism is a result of providing a clear distinction between foreign and domestic Asians. Through the exposure of racism, Asian Americans “may begin to disdain their racial or ethnic background and even themselves. Essentially, ‘psychosocial dominance’ refers to how racial minorities internalize racism and accept the primacy of Euro-American cultural values and social institutions” (Espiritu, 1997, p. 46). This occurs when Asian American students develop a mentality in which they create a clear divide between accepting and rejecting their Asian American identity in order to feel accepted by the Western culture. An example of this occurred in my own life as an Asian American student in higher education, I completely rejected the possibility of being mistaken for a foreign student. I prided myself in demonstrating to others that I was a domestic Asian American born in the United States. I found it quite offensive if others mistook me anything else but an Asian American. I have internalized knowledge of racism and have accepted a desire to fit in with the American cultural values and social institutions according to Espiritu (1997). This conflict of internalized racism certainly appeared in a great deal of Asian American students when they make it known to not be considered as a foreigner. The internalized racism created a separation of Asian students that divide those who are domestic-born and those who are foreign-

born. Terms such as Fresh off the Boat (F.O.B.) and American-Born-Chinese (A.B.C.) have been used to label individuals who were born outside of the U.S. and Chinese people who were born in the U.S. Both terms are considered derogatory in my own experience, but as a domestic Asian American student, I prefer to be called an A.B.C. over F.O.B.

In addition to the influence of stereotypes and internalized racism, another domain of influence on Asian American college students is the clash between Asian familial and cultural values to that of the dominant Western culture. According to Kodama et al. (2002), “Asian cultural values often revolve around collectivism, interdependence, placing the needs of the family above the self, interpersonal harmony, and deference to authority” (p. 47). All of these qualities seem to contradict those of the Western culture. When Asian American college students experience dissonance between their familial and cultural values and the Western culture, Asian American students struggle to balance both and are often finding feelings of confusion as a result. It is interpretive of that of my own life as I struggled with approaching higher education from a cultural value that is supportive of collaborative group efforts, connections with each other, focus on family unity, feeling a sense of accomplishment, and acknowledging authority. In my experience in higher education, I have found that the approach of other peers may not be the same as mine. I have come across individuals who are very independent, over-involved in their own responsibilities, unwilling to participate in collaborative group projects, and have little respect for authority. Taking this into consideration, I have found myself feeling isolated, as I did not understand why some people had different values and qualities that did not work well with mine. Now, I understand that it is because of the different cultural values that contributed to the misunderstanding when different personalities come together.

## **Asian American Psychosocial Student Development via Chickering's Model**

There are many student development theories that define the growth and progress of students in higher education. Specifically, Chickering's theoretical model of student development includes seven vectors in which a typical college student experiences. These seven vectors include (1) developing competency, (2) managing emotions, (3) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, (4) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (5) developing identity, (6) developing purpose, and (7) developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). As students experience each of the seven vectors, they are exposed to specific obstacles that challenge them, yet provide a sense of accomplishments once they are able to complete each vector. Using Chickering's model of student development as a basis for understanding students in higher education, Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee, (2002) examined the model through the perspective of Asian American students as they navigate their way through the seven vectors.

### ***Identity***

Identity is very important as it considers the sense of self within one's family and community (Kodama et al., 2002). It further suggested that identity is a relation between one's view of self and how others view the individual. Another important element to a college student is the inclusion of academic goals, career aspirations, and progress. How one accomplishes these goals greatly leads to specific life events that determine identity. As Kodama et al. (2002) stated about students who "identity is defined primarily by personal career goals, family commitments, new experiences and points of view may have little influence in challenging the student's development around purpose or identity if they do not fit into this already established self-definition" (p. 48), it shows that a student's experience played a role in the development of their identity. For Asian Americans, any negative experiences such as stereotyping and racism may

contribute to a negative identity about one's Asian American ancestry. It is these negative experiences of racial microaggression, social displacement, and feelings of out grouping that revealed how identity is intermingled through experiences in relation to achievement and goal setting.

In my experience, my identity is based on my career goal of succeeding academically in order to pursue a career that will be able to support my family. As I anticipate pursuing a doctoral degree, I hope to become a faculty who is able to contribute to academic policies that make a true difference in program development. This position will allow me to feel as though I am contributing in a worthwhile way and I would then be able to earn a steady income to support my family. These goals of mine are what have compelled me to succeed academically. In doing so, I participated in various activities that guide me to accomplishing my goals. Some of those activities included being involved on campus as a leader and participating in unique opportunities that allow me to gain insight and knowledge over topics of interest, and networking with others who are able to help me. As a result of these activities, my identity included leader, international educator, and insightful.

### *Purpose*

Chickering and Reisser (1993) described purpose is established through specific goals and the presence of important factors that lead to one's goals. Reasons are what guide people to take action. Without reason, people will not have a constant goal to do something. Purpose is what drives many Asian Americans toward academic achievement. As Kodama et al. (2002) described the "Asian American community subscribe to an academic and economic-based definition of success" (p. 50), it shows that Asian Americans define success as the outcomes that come from getting good grades and being financially stable. There is pressure for Asian

American college students to pursue a college career that leads to a high-paying job, which in turn, will be respected within their family since great emphasis is placed onto success through academic and economical means (Leung, Ivey, & Suzuki, 1994). The importance of gaining respect is a recurring pattern of Asian American students pursuing academic disciplines that provide economic security such as the sciences, engineering, health care fields, and business. Kodama et al. (2002) described a population of Asian American college students who are not interested in any of the prestigious career fields. As a result of their disinterest in what is believed to be academically prestigious fields, these Asian American college students suffered from problems with family expectations. They became conflicted with what they truly want to major in versus the desire of their parents. This type of conflict with no resolution can lead Asian American students to feeling discontented with their academics and life.

The struggles of finding purpose with an academic major in college are areas that I also experienced, also. Originally, I entered college wanting to pursue a major in the physical sciences. I even considered engineering as a potential field as my parents encouraged it because it would show how determined I was and would have provided financial security. Once I completed my first set of coursework, I realized how much I dislike the physical sciences, and I knew then that I did not want to pursue a major in those areas. I excelled in the social sciences and eventually switched to a major in psychology, which was unheard of by my mother. She wanted me to graduate with an engineering degree, but that would mean I would suffer in an academic program that I did not want to complete. As I was finding my purpose in college, I knew what I liked and did not like. During the time while I was figuring out a college major, my mother insisted I majored in engineering or a field close to it, as long as it led to financial rewards. I felt much frustration and anxiety: I was afraid to go against my mother's words as she

was the one helping me pay for college. In my mind, I had a supportive system of academic advisors who encouraged me to pick a major that I enjoyed. For many other Asian American college students, a supportive system might not be in place for them. As Kodama et al. (2002) states, “many Asian Americans may come to college with a clearer sense of purpose in terms of majors and careers but may be less likely to change that original goal despite shifts in academic and personal interests” (p. 50), it shows that while Asian Americans have clear ideas about what they will gain from college, they have a tough time of participating in individual, independent thinking, where they make choices for themselves and not because of familial obligations.

Developing purpose is related to an awareness and understanding of career opportunities that are available. Stereotyping, lack of role models, and an economic-based definition of success can lead to Asian American college students not having the full range of options available for their future (Kodama et al., 2002). Often, stereotypes limit Asian American college students from gaining knowledge of career opportunities as they only know of popular careers as mentioned through media and stereotypes. Additionally, the lack of Asian American role models in education creates a missing picture in which Asian Americans do not seem to be successful because no one ever sees them in high authority positions. The absence of Asian Americans in high-achieving positions limits current Asian American college students from being exposed to opportunities for high-achieving positions for themselves. Furthermore, success as defined through economic means contributes to how Asian Americans see achievement. Leong and Gim-Chung (1995) found that “Asian Americans were the only ethnic group to rank parental pressure as one of the five most influential reasons in career choice” (p. 51). With parental pressure, parents still have the ultimate say on career choice and academic decisions. Such pressures can lead to specific careers for Asian American college students as the decision is not entirely up to

them. Leong and Gim-Chung (1995) also found that interdependence affects purpose and career choice since Asian Americans show higher levels of dependent decision-making. Taking into consideration of the high pressures of Asian Americans' parents as the ones giving "purpose" on academic decisions and career choice, purpose is no longer being developed as decisions are made for them.

### *Competency*

Chickering and Reisser (1993) described competency as an umbrella term that incorporates physical, interpersonal, and intellectual development. Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggested that developing intellectual competency is the main focus for Asian American college students as this is what affects their long-term success. The pressure of developing competency can result in added achievement stress as it seems that there are a high number of Asian American college students narrowly focused on a mindset in which they must prove to be academically successful to others. Asian American college students may have added challenges in interpersonal and physical competencies in the form of communication barriers, cultural adjustments, physical strength, athleticism, and feelings of alienation, all of which contributes to their views on being competent and capable in college (Kiang, 1992). Asian American college students need to develop the intellectual capacity to think for themselves and make life decisions without the influence of parents. Without the development of intellectual competency, Asian American college students will become disadvantaged as their counterparts with high levels of intellectual competency will have a better chance of survival.

Achieving intellectual competency is not easy to obtain for Asian American college students. This fact is particularly true in my experience. During my first few years in college, I was a completely lost individual because I lacked the experience to think for myself. Many of

my decisions included getting assistance from my mother who was very good at making decisions for me. She made financial decisions, balanced my checkbook, prepared specific meals for me to eat based on what she thought I should eat, and forced her opinions into every major decision of my life, including when to study abroad. The constant decision-making made by my mother led me to become lacking in intellectual competency, as I lacked the skills or experience to make important decisions on my own. In my experience, I thought my mother was simply maximizing her investment in me so that I can be financially successful to care of her when she is unable to care for herself. It was only when I decided to branch away from my mother's decisions and did the complete opposite of what she wanted me to do that I finally developed intellectual competency.

### *Emotions*

According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), emotions are an essential part to the human experience. With that in mind, Asian cultural values view emotions from a different perspective and place emphasis on emotional discipline, inhibition of strong feelings, and use of restraint in interactions with others as guilt and shame are often used to control emotions (Kodama et al., 2002). Kodama et al. (2002) further added that in many situations, Asian Americans parents, who are recent immigrants, perpetuated a cultural tendency to avoid discussing discrimination and racism and how to navigate such challenges. The absence of discussing discrimination leaves feelings of emotional neglect in children as their emotional needs for understanding and sorting through racism becomes untreated (Kodama et al., 2002). Furthermore, Chew and Ogi (1987) described Asian Americans that “withholding free expression of feelings is considered an important part of maintaining harmony” (p. 51) which resulted in a minimal experience of emotional awareness and expression. Because Asian cultural values place others' feelings and

respect above one's own, managing emotions can be an exceptionally difficult area for Asian American college students to find their way through (Wong & Mock, 1997). For students to live in a college environment with predominantly White students and expressiveness is the norm, Asian American college students are not at the same level of openness and expressiveness that others are (Chew & Ogi, 1987). Many Asian Americans find themselves only showing a certain range of emotions which may often be mistaken as being imbalanced and can eventually lead to moments of social awkwardness.

Managing emotions is an area that I definitely have improved when compared to my early college years. I recalled that the college environment was a completely strange place for me filled with different types of people with different interests. As an Asian American college student needing to manage my emotions better, I definitely exhibited what would be described as lacking in emotional awareness. I would often stay quiet and keep to myself, as I was afraid of saying the wrong thing to offend somebody. Unfortunately, in doing so, there were negative consequences to my silence. Many individuals mistook me as being rude or having doubts about my abilities because I did not express myself to the standards of the cultural norms in college. Managing emotions remains an area about which I struggled still, even today. Whenever I entered a new situation or environment, I found myself being reserved and disconnected as I managed my emotions by simply maintaining composure and to not overly speak as I was in fear I might say the wrong thing. Maintaining interpersonal harmony was my goal. Unfortunately, keeping quiet and only showing certain emotions caused interpersonal disharmony with my peers, as others viewed me as not being a valuable, contributing team member. I was taught how to manage emotions by always remembering the importance of maintaining composure and to not cause problems with peers. My mother believed that speaking out of place caused immediate

conflict. This ideal that was taught to me is the complete opposite to that of the college environment where one is encouraged to speak directly and openly. What I realized is that my lack of willingness to be talkative caused problems with peers. My ability to manage emotions had been developed through the negative encounters of stereotypes, feelings of being on the out group, and working through the discomfort of racial microaggression.

### *Interdependence Versus Dependence*

Interdependence is important in Asian cultures and families as obligation to the family is more important than individual identity, wants, and needs (Lee, 1997). Interdependence means decisions and choices are influenced by other individuals and not just one person. It is further noted that Western ideas of marriage often conflict with that of the Asian culture as the Western ideas revolve around unconditional love whereas Asian culture view marriages with limitations. “Physical separation from Asian American parents often occurs only after marriage, and emotional separation, if it ever occurs, usually happens well into one’s thirties rather than during the college years” (Wong & Mock, 1997, p. 52) which shows that family responsibility and support are important areas that make up interdependence for Asian Americans. Kodama et al. (2002) added that Asian American parents often exert strong parental guidance in terms of their children’s decisions to attend college, career issues, and academic pursuits. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), college students need to establish independence and autonomy from their families in order to successfully move forward. Establishing independence and autonomy contradicts with that of the Asian culture since the Asian culture is reflective of familial obligations and harmony within the family (Kodama et al., 2002). Using Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) view on independence, it is suggested that Asian Americans may need to learn how to see themselves outside of their family with a new identity that is free from their family’s

influence. When they are able to see themselves outside of their family, they are able to move forward to become full adults capable of independent thinking, freedom of choice, and the ability to live in a satisfying way. The over involvement of family creates a contradiction with Chickering and Reisser's (1993) model of college student development. With the over-involvement of Asian parents' influence on their children, it created a difficult time for growing to take place. Chickering and Reisser (1993) described the importance of finding one's own niche within college to provide opportunities for growth, which is often not the case for Asian American students. Kodama et al. (2002) found that Asian American students are more likely to live at home than their peers. They attended a college that is closer to home rather than moving across the country unless it is a prestigious school. When Asian American college students choose to live at home, they limit themselves from exploring opportunities to become involved in the social life of college and to develop meaningful friendships and relationships outside of their family that promote independence from the family.

Interdependence versus independence is an area that I found applicable to my own life when I first entered college. I remember during my first year of college, I was encouraged to visit home more often and to even move back home whenever there were school breaks. My mother's reason for wanting me to return home was for financial and personal obligations. Whenever I returned home, I would be doing chores or translating mail from English to Cantonese for my mother. I would help around the house as my mother was very dependent on me. The constant encouragement to move back home shows similarities to what Kodama et al. (2002) to find true as Asian Americans such as myself face pressures of returning home and not making oneself available to new opportunities and meaningful social relationships outside of one's family. Luckily, I was able to break-free from familial obligations. During my time in

college, I came across opportunities to explore through internships and a chance to study abroad. I decided to take the risk and sign up for those opportunities. As a result, I was able to explore a new identity independent than that of my own family's. My willingness to leave the home and to be on my own is further perpetuated in my decision to pursue graduate school halfway across the country. According to Chickering and Meisser (1993), I have successfully moved from interdependence to independence.

### ***Relationships***

As social creatures, human beings are at one of their best when there are interpersonal relationships that are meaningful. Kodama et al. (2002) found that maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships are very important in Asian cultures as it is often based on collectivism. Cooperation and accommodation, patience, humility, nonconfrontation, and respect of elders are among some of the traits to reflect Asian culture. Because of the complex dynamic of Asian culture in terms of the views about relationships, there can often be complications that arise. Kodama et al. (2002) stated that there are challenges for Asian American students to develop interpersonal relationships with authority figures and faculty because of the hierarchical nature of relationships. As a result, Asian American students may feel more comfortable with approaching things from an indirect way versus addressing the problem right away with a faculty member. These students may end up talking about problems through social media, blogs or personal diary, but would never approach the source directly. It is more likely for an Asian American to pose unique challenges that require more resources in higher education to assist. Asian Americans may be more formal with elders and concerned on the negative aspects of what they did wrong and are less likely to focus on a learning experience that challenges and critically analyzes an advisor's perspective because of the hierarchical structure within the advising

relationship (Kodama, et al., 2002). The absence of thinking critically shows that Asian American students handle the dynamics of relationships differently than that of non-Asian cultures. A significant developmental piece to consider is that Asian Americans who grew up in a predominantly Asian American neighborhood may need to change their views about relationships when entering a predominantly white college environment. The Western culture of handling problems may be more direct than that of the Asian American culture. Ultimately, many students experienced pressure to choose between Asian American and non-Asian American groups which led them to struggle with issues of integration versus segregation (Kodama et al., 2002). There is a discrepancy between how Asian Americans handle professional relationships and how Western culture normalizes such relationships. The disparity between both groups causes immediate conflict that can lead to confusion and chaos among professional student affairs relationships.

Working with authority figures in a large university setting can be very intimidating, especially to those who do not know much about the campus social structures and the appropriate social etiquette to follow. Lacking in social etiquette was true for me when I was a college freshman trying to figure out what courses to take. In my experience, I did not know what academic advisors did so I did not utilize their assistance that year. It was only when I was having difficulty in picking classes when I decided to take action and consult with an academic advisor. Even hearing advice from such a person made me feel intimidated as I was not sure if it would be okay to go against their word. Instead, I just sat in an advising session listening to what they had to say. There was no learning experience for me as I did not critically analyze the information given to me. Instead, I simply listened and did what I was told; all the while knowing that it was not necessarily a path I would like to follow.

How Asian American students handle relationships is shown through the dynamics of dating issues surrounding interracial relationships. Kodama et al. (2002) found that stereotypes of Asian American women and men may influence perceptions by the opposite sex, both within and outside their own ethnic or racial group. In particular, dating between white men and Asian American women is common and often causes tension between Asian American men and women about community and racial identity. Additionally, interracial relationships can give rise to family tension and conflicts related to identity, grandchildren, and carrying on the family name” (p. 54), which shows that not only are personal relationships affected by Asian culture, but personal dating relationships are impacted by the conflicts of Asian culture. The dating relationship demonstrated that Asian American college students struggle with added pressures of dating and approval from parents. Without such approval, Asian American college students are faced with guilt and shame as their parents are unlikely to support interracial relationships.

In my experience, there is a heavy emphasis on marrying within one’s race. My mother fits the description of a traditional Asian woman who is dead set on her children marrying someone who is Chinese. She would criticize others for not marrying within their own race and would refer to the person with a different ethnicity other than Chinese as a person of skin color. Growing up in an environment where my mother only focused on categorizing people by skin color was a way of reminding me how narrow-minded some traditional Asian families are. I understand the reason for such hostility towards non-Chinese persons for a spouse is centered on the fear of cultural conflicts. Ultimately, I understand that my mother always wants the best for me, but at times, her definition of what is best may only be that of her own and not by my own standards. After all, what parent would want to see their son be involved with someone of a

different ethnicity if it means they may be unable to relate and communicate with the person their son chooses to date? I do not blame her for her narrow-minded views, but rather see it as a result of a lack of education and diversity training. Unfortunately, for many other Asian Americans, relationships are a tough area of concern for them as they may not have the skills set to navigate their way through the tensions of interracial dating.

### *Integrity*

Integrity is an interesting vector in Chickering's model of college student development in that the experience of Asian Americans and their views of integrity differ than that of other college student populations. Kodama et al. (2002) found that "for Asian Americans, integrity is determined within the context of one's family and community by how individuals represent their families, respect their ancestors, and uphold the family name. Thus Asian Americans may be negotiating integrity for self versus integrity of family" (p. 54). Asian Americans often struggle because of the differences between Asian values and those of the dominant society. Chickering's framework for integrity may not be completely applicable to Asian Americans since it fails to account for those who have the added factor of family influence in developing integrity. Because family plays an important role in the choices that Asian American students make, a family's influence can impede the development of integrity.

Integrity is definitely an issue with which my family struggles. In my family, integrity is defined as tangible experiences that demonstrate one's success. Integrity is not based on internal action, but rather how well you achieve something over someone else. This patience is especially apparent at family gatherings whenever my mother openly talks about an accomplishment that I made. I am aware that she is proud of my accomplishments but sometimes it certainly feels as though she does it to place herself on a higher rank. There were other times where I made

mistakes and have failed at something. In those instances, my mother goes to the extreme and says how failure means that she cannot show her face to friends and relatives. In instances like this, there is no room for growth and learning, but instead an immediate judgment that brings about shame and guilt is made. As an Asian American, I see how integrity is defined through different means as a result of parents' response to conflicts that challenge integrity. What this shows is that integrity is not a universal term that can be applied to the Asian culture.

## Chapter 3 - Future Directions

Providing the best quality of education for any student is very important in higher education. With a clearer understanding of the unique experiences that Asian Americans face, resources on campus, staff, and faculty can become aware of how to help this group of students. Understanding the current student developmental models and how it needs to be changed in order to fit Asian American college students is important. Not always can a specific model be universal to all types of students.

With the unique acculturation issues during their time in higher education, Asian Americans face troubles with adapting to the academic culture that is known as higher education. As acculturation exists, students tend to get lost in the shuffle of college and become dismayed by all of the events occurring at once. Student resources on campus can acknowledge the individual Asian American college students and their need to acculturate into a climate where there are people of different ethnic backgrounds. University faculty can find ways such as presentations, workshops, and inclusive dialogue to educate members of the campus community about the presence of Asian American college students from a non-judgmental view by providing information on history, background, and appreciation for all cultural histories. Patience should be a key view that allows students to navigate their way through the busy environment of college. In order to obtain patience, everyone must practice working with specific student populations by understanding the steps needed to achieve their goals. It would mean to practice understanding the student's individual perspective and by acknowledging that it is acceptable to wait for understanding to occur. Faculty and staff should become aware of patience needed when

working with Asian American college students. My hope is for them to understand that there are unique struggles that may take some time to sort through.

Blumer's group position theory described the importance of social order as an in-group and out-group for people (Inkelas, 2003). It is important for universities to become aware of the campus climate and what spaces are considered in-group and out-group places for Asian American college students. By understanding the different in-group and out-group areas on campus, one can help create meaningful places where Asian American college students can feel part of the community. Eliminating out group spaces such as areas where specific ethnic groups congregate at the dining hall or the favorite table where specific ethnic groups always sit at the union can be a goal for a university. It would entail the student affairs professionals to encourage students to intermingle and not stay at the places they are comfortable with. Instead, providing opportunities and common space for dialogue and interactions such as brown bag lunches to occur can be a positive step towards eliminating out group spaces. Ultimately, becoming aware of these types of spaces can enable college students to be aware of places where they can belong and thus prevent any feelings of isolation.

Roommate situations can provide opportunities for growth when one has a positive relationship with their roommate. There can be opportunities for setbacks when one has a negative relationship with their roommate. Ultimately, Laar, Levin, Sinclair, and Sidanius (2005) discovered that ethnic-specific roommate assignments in a student's first year played a crucial role into the acceptance of ethnic identity development. Understanding the influence that a college roommate's ethnicity has for an Asian American is important to their positive experience as a roommate's presence can be the first time an Asian American college student ever interacts and lives with someone of a different background. Taking this into consideration, it is important

for the university to be mindful of pairings when students from different ethnic backgrounds are living in the same space. By being mindful, the university can provide training opportunities to better assist the resident assistants on addressing concerns of roommate issues related to different ethnic backgrounds and lifestyle preferences.

Kohatsu, Victoria, Lau, Flores, & Salazar (2011) mentioned the different stereotypes that label Asian Americans as being the model minority among people of color. Using this as a specific example for understanding stereotypes, the university can consider the different experiences and educational achievement of Asian American college students. This may entail seeing individuals for their individual grades and not categorizing them based on group accomplishments. It encourages the university to not dictate specific members of an ethnic group to serve as the spokesperson for that ethnic group. By being mindful of an institution's view on model minority, the university can place standards that evens the academic ground for all students regardless of ethnicity and stereotype. It would mean that an institution is aware of which ethnic group is seen as high achieving and will attempt to eliminate any cause for a model minority. Proposing overlaps and ethnic-related coursework where all students are viewed as equal can be a step towards getting rid of the model minority myth in Asian students.

Racial microaggression on Asian American college students will continue regardless of the university's control. With knowledge about racial microaggression, individuals working with Asian American college students can be reminded of the individual needs of these students to better provide a safe environment free of racial microaggression. Faculty and staff can work with students to educate themselves about how racial microaggression is present on college campuses. Providing counselor training and educational sessions to staff members who work directly with students that inform Asian American college students about microaggression and offer strategies

for overcoming racial microaggression can be a key to helping Asian American college students deal with this particular struggle.

Understanding the influences of Asian American college student backgrounds are important for providing them with the adequate resources once they enter college. Working with Asian American college students to help them navigate through the influences that are pushing them in life can be a great opportunity to creating positive growth. In doing so, the advising staff can create positive opportunities with parents and family to be better informed about the college environment and what resources are available to help their student. It would mean that the advising staff can extend their advising efforts to manage how Asian American parents are involved in their college students' lives. Instead of focusing the attention to parents, advising staff can share overall graduation requirements and expectations so that the parents are better informed without giving them the power to dictate the student's choices. Providing a great space to deter influences from being overwhelming can help Asian American college students in the long run.

Developing identity involves many factors that affect a person's overall growth. For Asian American college students, their identity is a relationship between one's view of themselves and how others view them. Identity as mentioned by Chickering and Reisser (1993) demonstrated how identity is comprised of key values, which college students consider important. As Asian American college students struggle with establishing their identity, university staff in student life can assist by providing opportunities for them to develop identity in a positive way. For an Asian American college student who has a family that insists on particular career paths, university faculty can suggest help from a counseling center or career center so that they can be better informed of the different career options available to them and

encourage them to make their own decisions based on their interests. In many cases, Asian Americans are misinformed about their career goals and thus are too devoted to a specific identity that they might not enjoy.

As Kodama et al. (2002) mentioned, Asian Americans are often guided by academic and economic-based definitions for success. A university can provide specific definitions of success that focuses on economic-based and academic-based in order to reach out to this student population. This action entails finding individual accomplishments and acknowledging them every step along the way whether it is through the form of a congratulatory e-mail, letter of accomplishment, or any other piece of physical praise. This shows that the purpose is able to be expanded to areas where Asian culture is able to comprehend.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) view competency that incorporates physical, interpersonal, and intellectual development. Taking this into consideration, Asian American college students can experience development in all of those areas when they are given the opportunity. As Asian American college students have added challenges in interpersonal and physical competencies in the form of communication barriers, cultural adjustments, and feelings of alienation, student affairs officers in student life can better address these challenges by providing workshops and open spaces for students to address these competency deficits. Having workshops to students to allow them to practice public speaking can be an example. Ultimately, developing competency should be increased across all levels and not just one.

Emotions are an essential aspect of the human experience, but for most Asian American college students, figuring out emotions may not be a priority for them especially when they must figure out everything else that is going on with them while in college. Kodama et al. (2002) described situations where Asian American college students neglected their emotional needs in

order to sort through other important areas of their life. This leaves an absence of closure for problems in life. The university can provide opportunities for Asian American college students to explore the depth of managing emotions through training exercises that better correspond to their individual cultural barriers. Some of these training exercises can be simulation of problem-solving strategies or dialogue practice. Engaging one-on-one through practice workshops can facilitate better exposure to managing emotions in Asian American students. Expressing emotions will have many benefits and conveying this to Asian American college students is necessary.

Responsibility is a key factor that affects an Asian American college student's role in either an interdependence or dependence perspective. At many times is it apparent that Asian American families become overly influencing on an individual's college choices. Staff and faculty working with students who are overly dependent with their parents can provide information for students to be encouraged to make decisions on their own. Ultimately, the goal is to allow Asian American college students to be critical thinkers for themselves without the influence of familial obligations. Understanding that interdependence and dependence is a real problem that Asian American college students struggle with can provide insight on better advising strategies for staff and faculty.

As a student moves through the integrity vector of Chickering's model of college student development, it is apparent that respect is different than that of other's. Kodama et al. (2002) mentioned that integrity is defined through how one represents their families and how they uphold the family name. Taking this into consideration, when working with students who failed at something, instead of getting them to understand the problem, it may be better to consider assisting the student on a critical-thinking level for them to understand that their parents may still

be proud of them even if they have a minor setback. By explaining to them that setbacks are small mistakes meant to guide them towards the right direction, an Asian American college student would be better equipped to handle the tough situation when they have to explain to their parents that they did not do as anticipated. According to Chickering (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), “increasing congruence between behavior and values and consistency in applying ethical principles are keys to developing integrity” (p. 54). This can be done when an advisor is able to show students that it is alright to fail in order to succeed later.

There is not much longitudinal research over the Asian American’s experience in higher education as it relates to their experiences revolving racial microaggression, Blumer’s group position theory and Chickering’s model of student development. Further research can include identifying key strengths that make Asian American students become resilient to the negative experiences in the university environment. Additional research can address the different experiences of Asian American college students during the college years across public and private institutions. An Asian American college student’s experience at a regional university and how that compares to larger institution needs further research.

Asian American college students are a unique group of individuals with its own set of issues that are in need of better attention. By understanding the unique Asian American college students’ background, student affairs can provide better resources to help them develop across all areas of college life.

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