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A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Racialized Experiences of Southeast Asian American Community College Students

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Southeast Asian American (SEAA) (e.g., Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese) students' educational realities are often masked by assumptions that all Asian Americans are model minorities. However, SEAA students have also been racialized as deviant minorities to explain disparities faced by the community. Relatively minimal scholarship has explored how race and racism shape their experiences. In this study, AsianCrit provides a framework for exploring the racial realities of SEAA students in community college. Qualitative research methods were employed to explore in-depth the ways they experience race and racialization. Specifically, this study is a phenomenological exploration of their lived racialized experiences and its impact on their educational experiences. Ten SEAA community college students participated in the study, providing detailed accounts of the challenges they faced as racialized beings. Findings indicate that participants experienced significant difficulties related to experiences of racial and ethnic isolation, which are exacerbated by Asianization, racially-ascribed deviance, institutional invisibility, and community college stigma. These experiences have significant psychological impacts for students. Despite these challenges, SEAA students showcased strength, resilience, and agency, and benefitted from critical sources of support that enable them to enact resistance to deficit ideologies. Implications for policy, practice, and research are also discussed.

A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Racialized Experiences

of Southeast Asian American Community College Students

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Implications for policy, practice, and research are also discussed.

iii

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Background, Purpose, and Overview

I also internalized the model minority myth, especially during high school. I ended up not doing my homework and stuff because I didn't want to be seen as a good Asian. I went to an exam high school. The Asians that were there were majority Chinese, Vietnamese because there weren't a lot of Cambodians. There's not a lot of Cambodians in this area. I remember feeling--I was actually the only Cambodian in the school for a while until my sister came in. And I remember saying I'm not the Chinese or the Vietnamese so don't put me in that category. I'm not good like them or whatever. And I really rejected the model minority myth, and I was actually good at math, but I ended up failing algebra and geometry because I didn't want to be seen as a model minority. And that also negatively impacted me too because I had to retake algebra, even though I understood it but I just purposefully failed. It doesn't really make sense, but at the same time, this was what I did because I didn't want to fit into this stereotype.

I would love to see educators getting trained in learning about the disaggregated data. I think that has a huge impact in understanding these different ethnic groups within the Asian racial group and understanding that you can't say that a Cambodian American or a Southeast Asian is a model minority or a deviant minority. Because that just takes away from the student's experience in higher education or education in general. For me, I was just so focused on trying to get

away from this model minority, and that was really bad for me…I know, I'm not the only student who did that. I'm pretty sure there are other Southeast Asian American students who are trying to push away these stereotypes and its detrimental on their mental health and their experiences in education. And I'd really like to see Southeast Asians being included in higher education because I think too many times, Southeast Asians are just lumped together with Asian Americans but our political identity, our experiences are so different. (Sotheara, female Cambodian American college graduate).

As a Cambodian American college graduate, Sotheara illustrates some of the broad challenges Southeast Asian American (SEAA) students face due to stereotyping and racialization within her school. These challenges include but are not limited to: feeling like the "only one" in classroom environments, being held to a level of achievement that does not necessarily reflect her real lived situation and background and feeling invisible as a result. Sotheara's choice to reject any association with the stereotype of the model minority, even if it meant modulating her intellectual abilities, held significant consequences for her as a student and learner. Such choices have far-reaching implications about how students navigate and survive U.S. systems of schooling. Implicit in her description of her attempts to reject being characterized as a "good Asian" are ideological beliefs about what "good" or "bad" entails, especially as it relates to racial categories within U.S. society. These deep-seated internalized understandings are vital components for understanding how she connects to her educational experience. She also pleads with educators to know that she, and other SEAA students, are more than the

2

stereotypes associated with their communities. It is an appeal to be fully seen, heard, and understood.

SEAA college students are an underrepresented and underserved population in postsecondary institutions. Relatively little is known about their experiences in higher education when compared to students of color in general (Museus, 2013a; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ngo & Lee, 2007). Given such limited understandings about these students, Sotheara's narrative highlights the impact that this lack of knowledge has on SEAA students' every day lived experiences. Despite these challenges, SEAA students possess the potential for and have achieved educational success (Chhuon, Hudley, Brenner, & Macias, 2010; Museus et al., 2013; Museus, Shiroma, & Dizon, 2016). In this study, I explore the ways that SEAA community college students describe their experiences of racialization.

Background

Education has long been considered an essential means of socioeconomic class mobility (Greenstone, Looney, Patashnik, & Yu, 2013). With many careers requiring more than a high school diploma, higher education has been and continues to be "the clearest pathway to the middle class" (The White House, n.d., para. 1). In response to the U.S. being outpaced internationally in the areas of postsecondary education, President Barack Obama introduced a college completion agenda in 2009 with a goal of having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020, something that has not been achieved since 1990 (The White House, n.d.). Since then, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and other national organizations collectively signed an

agreement that recognized community colleges' central role in educating global citizens while pledging to increase community college student completion by 50% over the next decade (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010, n.d.). The magnified focus on community colleges indicates these institutions will play a pivotal role in attaining the 2020 college completion goal. Thus, community colleges must consider the ways their policies and practices aid or hinder these goals.

Community colleges are critical pathways for education. Over 1100 community colleges exist across the nation with approximately 7.3 million undergraduates enrolled in credit-bearing community college courses (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016). Additionally, in fall of 2014, of all undergraduates across the nation, 42% attended community colleges (Ma & Baum, 2016). Furthermore, the open-access, low-tuition, and geographic proximity of community colleges attract a large variety of students, many of which are students of color from low socioeconomic backgrounds. According to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2011), 44% of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds attend community colleges as their first college. Additionally, approximately 43% of all community college students identified as Hispanic/Latino/a, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Native American (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016). With such large numbers of students attending, having attended, and continuing to attend community colleges, it is increasingly clear that more attention is warranted to ensure that community colleges equitably attend to the needs of all its students.

The spotlight on community colleges coincided with the renewed attention on Asian American populations in general. In 2007, the Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI) designation was enacted into law by Congress. It joined the ranks of other minority-serving institutions, such as Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU), among others. Accordingly, enrollment criteria of racially minoritized populations at these institutions increased their eligibility for federal funding under Title III of the Higher Education Act of 1965 ("Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving institutions," 2008). Currently, to be eligible for AANAPISI funding, institutions must enroll at least 10% Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander undergraduate students (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Awarded institutions receive a maximum grant award of $350,000 per year for five years for a total of $1,750,000, and these funds enable AANAPISIs to improve and expand their capacity to serve Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islanders and low-income individuals (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). As such, the funds are intended to help institutions to "improve their academic quality, increase their self-sufficiency, and strengthen their capacity to make a substantial contribution to the higher education resources of the nation" (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b, para. 1). Given the trends in enrollment at community colleges, many eligible AANAPISI institutions are community colleges. To date, 63 of the 133 (47.4%) eligible AANAPISI institutions are two-year community colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 2016c).

Given the focus on community colleges as well as AANAPISI designation and funding, the intersections of both trends highlight a population of students that require attention and support. Many AANAPISIs acknowledge the disparities that exist within the Asian American population and have initiated targeted support programs for specific students within that population. One such population is the SEAA community college student population which faces many educational and socioeconomic disparities. Due to the heightened attention on SEAA students and those attending community colleges, there is a need to further explore the experiences of these students within the community college learning environment. It is critical that we significantly increase the robustness of the literature surrounding community college experiences of SEAA students, who are some of the most marginalized groups within education.

Statement of the Problem

SEAA communities have been, and continue to be, an underrepresented and underserved population in higher education. While there is much diversity within the SEAA population regarding ethnicity (e.g., Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and Vietnamese), culture, practices, and experiences, the community is one of the most invisible and marginalized groups. Only recently has more interest and research been produced that highlights their unique and significant experiences and much of this research has been centered at the four-year institution. There is still a need for a more comprehensive yet nuanced understanding of this population overall and within the community college learning environment. Further exploration of the SEAA community in all aspects of higher education is warranted.

6

In the following sections, I briefly highlight the current problematic contexts of the experiences of SEAA populations in education and United States society, in general. I discuss how the specific discourses relative to how SEAA experiences are continually ignored, ways their educational attainment are discussed, and the assumptions and stereotypes that perpetuate essentialist narratives about these populations, present particularly limited understandings of who SEAAs are. Ultimately, these contexts limit access and opportunity for SEAA students in education.

Aggregation and Invisibility of Southeast Asian Americans.

The marginalization of SEAA students in higher education is due in part to the generalizations that all Asians are doing well (Lee, 2001; Suzuki, 1977). In a recent report, "Rise of Asian Americans," the Pew Research Center (2012) declared that Asian Americans are "the highest-income, best-educated, and fastest-growing racial group in the United States" (para. 1). However, the report failed to acknowledge the significant disparities experienced among ethnic groups within the broader Asian racial group. The diversity of the Asian racial group encompasses 23 ethnic communities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). While specific groups (e.g., Chinese, Japanese) do achieve at significantly high rates, the reality is that other ethnic groups, SEAAs specifically (e.g., Cambodian, Laos, Hmong, Vietnamese) face significant disparities. These communities face rarely acknowledged, significant challenges due to data aggregation and invisibility (Museus, 2013a). Consequently, this reproduces erroneous assumptions that all Asian Americans are doing well academically in this country when the reality is that not all

7

groups are provided with the same access and opportunities to achieve such parity with White students. Accordingly, these assumptions inordinately impact SEAA students.

Educational Attainment and Socioeconomic Status.

Currently, some disaggregated data reveal that SEAA college students attend college and earn degrees at rates lower than the U.S. national average of 24.4% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), 9.2% of Cambodian, 7.7% of Laotian, 7.5% of Hmong, and 19.4% of Vietnamese Americans possess a bachelor's degree or higher. The disaggregated data reveals significant disparities in educational attainment for SEAA populations. Furthermore, many SEAA communities experience high rates of poverty. While the average Asian American poverty level is 12.6%, poverty levels for Hmong (37.8 %), Cambodian (29%), Vietnamese (16.6%), and Laos (18.5%) populations are much higher (The White House, n.d.). High rates of poverty and low educational attainment rates significantly impact the community and negatively impact the ability of these populations to move out of poverty. Furthermore, high rates of poverty for these communities increase the likelihood that they will live in segregated racial and ethnic enclaves, attend underserved K-12 schools, and be deemed "at-risk" (National Commission on Asian American Pacific Islander Research in Education [CARE], 2008; Yeh, 2002). Such factors only perpetuate a cycle that limits their educational opportunities and prevents social and economic mobility.

Stereotypes and the Southeast Asian American Educational Experience.

SEAA students are also a unique population in that they are regularly associated with two overarching stereotypes and assumptions about their educational experiences.

The model minority myth is arguably the most pervasive stereotype that impacts the

Asian American experience (Museus, 2013a; Museus & Chang, 2009; Museus & Kiang,

2009; Suzuki, 2002). It suggests that all Asians achieve at unparalleled levels (Museus &

Kiang, 2009). On the other hand, educators have also come to consider SEAA

communities as culturally deficient or deviant (Gorski, 2011). In larger metropolitan

areas, such as Long Beach, California or Lowell, Massachusetts, both highly populated

by SEAA communities, these communities have been considered to be overly involved in

deviant behaviors, such as welfare dependence, gang membership, and high rates of

teenage pregnancy (Cowart & Cowart, 1993; Truong, 2007). As such, the deviant

minority myth has come to be associated with this community specifically, and the

stereotype has often been used as an explanation for why the SEAA community has not

achieved at the levels of their Asian American counterparts. Consequently, the stigma

that this population does not value education has been used to explain away the

community's perceived lack of success in school. Together, these two stereotypes

commonly produce the assertion that SEAA students neither require nor deserve

resources and support (Um, 2003). Such assumptions about students are problematic and

may have far-reaching consequences on their educational attainment.

Deficit Ideology.

The above context provides a useful understanding of the SEAA experience;

however, it is vital to realize that the above presentations can only offer a partial

depiction and understanding of that experience, especially when considering that SEAA

experiences are often understood and explored in terms of a deficit. It is in this location

that we can identify a major crux of the problem that impacts how we perceive the SEAA educational experience. The aggregation of data masks significant disparities within the Asian American community, attainment data highlights underachievement of SEAA students, and stereotypes essentialize SEAA experiences in ways that position them as problematic. Compounded, these issues perpetuate further invisibility and marginalization. Deficit ideology significantly influences the ways SEAA students are understood, engaged, and discussed in the classroom and college environment.

Gorski (2011) argued that deficit ideology is an institutionalized worldview based upon a set of assumed truths about the world woven into the fabric of U.S. society and its socializing institutions (e.g., education). Its function is to deflect attention away from the systems and structures that disenfranchise entire communities and instead redirect it towards the same disenfranchised communities as the problem (Gorski, 2011). Deficit perspectives seek to explain and justify inequalities based upon the assumed deficiencies within marginalized communities (Gorski, 2011). Such functions have typically perpetuated specific messages about communities of color that paint them as complicit or responsible for their problems.

Deficit ideology is pervasive and difficult to identify as it is reified in everyday practices and assumptions about entire communities and reproduced in educational settings. The very data that we use to identify and pinpoint a problem plaguing communities (e.g., attainment data and achievement gap) are also based on deficit ideology (Gorski, 2011). Attainment data does provide some context for those unfamiliar with SEAA communities to begin to understand specific outcomes experienced by the

group; however, the inherently problematic nature of such data cannot be ignored. Accordingly, the achievement gap has been critiqued as a decontextualized notion that implies some groups are more strongly predisposed to succeed than others and consequently works to reproduce and mask structural inequities in education (Harper, 2016). Specifically, the achievement gap centers White students' performance as the norm by which all other racial and ethnic groups are measured. Deficit ideology would then implicitly implicate SEAA communities as lacking in intellectual, moral, cultural, and behavioral tendencies critical for success and achievement (Gorski, 2011). These dangerous assertions place the responsibility for achievement solely on the student while ignoring the role of educators and institutions in facilitating equitable opportunities for students.

Deficit perspectives have characterized much of the discourse surrounding SEAA success and achievement. Indeed, assumptions and conscious or unconscious biases impact the ways educators view, interact with, and develop expectations about students. Often, SEAA students are associated with low levels of achievement and significant educational struggles. These notions have given rise to risky narratives, such as the deviant or inferior minority depictions (Museus, 2008a). Much of the narratives about SEAA students are established within deficit frameworks that seek to explain why they do not achieve at the same levels as their Asian American peers—as if it is something inherent within the community or culture that prevents them from succeeding. These assumptions limit productive discourse about, with, and regarding these students and

deflect attention from the roles and responsibilities of education systems and structures from adequately addressing the issues.

This dissertation's exploration of the impacts of deficit ideology on the experiences of SEAA students is necessary because it will guide the ways that I seek to discuss and present information about SEAA students that move beyond overly simplistic or one-dimensional explanations. Related to deficit ideology, Bonilla-Silva (2006) concluded that scholars could become complicit in propagating racist interpretations of racial inequality and thus help to reinforce the racial order. Consequently, it is crucial for scholars to highlight the social realities and dynamics that produce inequitable outcomes of achievement for specific racial groups. These outcomes are representative of the symptoms of larger structures and systems impacting many communities of color, such as unequal educational opportunity, few housing and employment opportunities, and limited access to other resources and assistance (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Recently, scholars have begun to shift conversations regarding the achievement gap to the opportunity gap, which moves the locus of the problem from individual students and their achievement to institutions of higher education and institutional agents, who have the power, resources, and ability to change outcomes in the achievement of underrepresented and underserved students (e.g., Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012; Milner, 2012; Pendakur, 2016). There is an opportunity gap that exists for SEAA students whose histories, cultures, and experiences are continually depicted in ahistorical and decontextualized ways.

Key Terminology

I define key terms to provide background and context for this study. *Southeast Asian American (SEAA)* refers to individuals who identify as having original roots from the Southeast region of Asia, from the countries of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, and who currently are U.S.-born or naturalized citizens. Many, though not all, come from refugee backgrounds due to war and genocide in the 1970s, causing a mass exodus into resettlement countries, such as the U.S. While aggregated under the SEAA label, it is important to note that there is much diversity within this group based on ethnicity, culture, language, socioeconomic status, educational experience, and more. For this study, and due to the small populations of Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese students relative to other communities of color in higher education, I use the SEAA designation to refer to the group based on their shared historical, social, and political contexts of post-Vietnam War. While this study seeks the shared experiences within the group, the uniqueness of their experiences cannot be overstated.

The terms race, racism, and racialization are inherently complex concepts and constructs that can be difficult to separate. *Race* is a social phenomenon that results from the processes of categorization, in which persons are sorted into manageable groups, and signification, in which specific connotations or race-based meanings are associated within these groups (Loury, 2003). As such, these racial classifications have an "embodied social signification," which can be acted upon by influential social actors and allows for the reproduction of racism. *Racism* is an "organized system of privilege and bias that disadvantages a set of people on the basis of their group membership" (Gaertner,

13

Dovidio, Levine, & Hogg, 2010). *Racialization,* also referred to as ethnicization, refers to a set of processes in which groups are defined by their race or ethnicity based upon socially-constructed racial assumptions, such as those found on the context of class, gender, citizenship, and ethnicity (Yee, 2008). Such processes are historically rooted in capitalism and consequently play an essential role in the social stratification of society (Yee, 2008). Similarly, Kim (1999) identifies racialization as the creation and characterization of racial categories. Accordingly, every individual is socialized into a U.S. racialized society, where divisions between racial groups are a given, and privileged and non-privileged dynamics, defined by racial identity (e.g., racism) exist (Clark, 2012).

Culture is widely conceptualized as a collection of information, or meanings, that is non-genetically transmitted and shared within a population of individuals and maintained across generations over a period (Kashima, 2010). Similarly, Chiu and Hong (2007) utilize a knowledge perspective to define culture as a loosely organized network of distributed knowledge that is continuously being created, maintained, produced, reproduced, and transformed among a collection of interconnected individuals. In this study, I depend upon the same knowledge perspective that considers a dynamic constructivist approach that views cultures as continuously changing and evolving rather than static entities (Hong & Chiu, 2001).

Accordingly, previous research has attempted to explore and define how culture has influenced the educational behaviors of SEAA students. While valuable, it is important to note that culture can change over time and in relation to other cultural systems that individuals encounter. It is essential to recognize the dynamic nature of how

14

culture changes and is transformed (Chiu & Hong, 2007; Hong & Chiu, 2001). Inherent in this understanding is the recognition of the danger of distilling behaviors down to the cultural backgrounds of individuals, running the risk of essentialization and reification of cultures (Keesing, 1994). Furthermore, it is significant to realize that culture, which has been compared to other concepts of contemporary American thought, "unlike gravity and disease, is itself a cultural creation" (Rothstein, 1999, p. 9). Culture is imbued with and accumulates power (Rothstein, 1999). Culture has been given tremendous explanatory power and authority over people's acts and thoughts (Chiu & Hong, 2007; Rothstein, 1999). Consequently, that has been an inordinate focus on using culture to explain the circumstances of different populations.

Purpose of the Study

SEAA community college students can provide valuable insights as to race and racialization shape the SEAA student experience in community colleges. The premise of this study is based on the notion that SEAA community college students are worthy of further exploration as they have insights not sufficiently understood. Accordingly, a phenomenological investigation of their experiences as racialized beings in community colleges can offer critical insights into the intersections of race and education for this population. The purpose of this research study is to explore and understand the experiences of SEAA students in community colleges through Asian critical theory (AsianCrit).

Research Questions

Two overarching questions guided this inquiry: What are the racialization experiences of SEAA community college students? And, how do SEAA community college students describe their experiences of being racialized and of experiencing racism?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for a variety of reasons. First, despite growing interest, there is a lack of literature regarding the educational experiences of SEAA students, which perpetuates incomplete depictions of who these students are and what they experience in different college environments. What stems from the incomplete representation of the SEAA college experience are educational policies, practices, and discourses that are limited in both scope and impact due to constant misperceptions about these students in dominant discourse. One dominating assumption about Asian American students is that they are overwhelmingly overrepresented in elite, private, four-year colleges and are "taking over" in higher education. Teranishi and Tchen (2008) have debunked such myths concluding that in fact, in 2000, most Asian American students attended public institutions, with 101,751 attending private four-year colleges while 354,564 attending public four-year colleges, and 363,798 attending public two-year colleges. Furthermore, between 1990 and 2000, Asian American enrollment at two-year community colleges (73.3%) increased at a faster rate than enrollment at four-year colleges (42.2%) (Teranishi & Tchen, 2008). The data depict an overall mismatch with

assumptions regarding Asian American students, indicating the enduring nature of persistent beliefs about Asian American success.

Overall, Asian American students are attending community colleges at higher rates than previously considered. However, very few studies have focused on Asian Americans, and specifically SEAAs, in community colleges. Consequently, there is a significant gap in the knowledge of and about SEAA students within the community college setting. Given the heterogeneity within the population regarding ethnicity, culture, social class, among other factors, it is increasingly more important to recognize that we can no longer distill the Asian American educational experience down to one unified story of success that fits convenient perceptions about and for these communities. Instead, it is imperative that educators seek to question and elucidate the diversity of experiences within the population to produce solutions that target the issues they face.

Second, this is the first study to explore racialization experiences of SEAA community college students. The focus on the community college environment has increased in recent times, and rightfully so; however, the application of critical, racial lenses has been mostly absent in the scholarship. To most effectively understand what SEAA community college students experience regarding the impacts of race and racialization, it is necessary to explore how race and racialization manifest in their community college experiences. Also, it is critical that such research is conducted to uncover hidden facets of the system of racism that perpetuate and promote deficit understandings of SEAA students. Previous inquiries into the experiences of students of color in general and general SEAA student experiences have provided a strong

17

foundation for understanding how culture and structures have impacted their educational success; however, an explicit exploration of how race shapes the experiences of SEAA students is necessary.

Third, since AsianCrit is a relatively new framework, it has yet to be employed to explore the experiences of SEAA community college students specifically. Much of the literature on Asian American students focuses on the larger racial aggregate while proportionally limited studies have focused on SEAA community college students. The critical race lens must be turned towards SEAA students because their experiences highlight a unique experience of racialization. AsianCrit furthers the conversation specifically about, with, and in the name of SEAA populations. AsianCrit is a perspective that seeks inclusion, empowerment, and authentic understandings of the Asian American community. As such, it is an appropriate lens for an inquiry that seeks to explore SEAA perspectives in higher education.

Finally, this research study provides educators with insights to identify and critique programs, policies, and practices that either provide or limit access and opportunity for SEAA community college students, especially in relation to issues of racial oppression. Ultimately, this knowledge can be utilized to improve policies and practices within the community college environment that can better support SEAA student success. Given the changing demographics of students entering colleges across the nation, institutions must recognize that traditional perspectives regarding student success, that masks, ignores, and excludes the lived realities of its students, and that does

not consider how race and racial oppression shape these experiences are no longer acceptable

Conceptual Framework

According to Creswell (2013), interpretive frameworks are used to frame conceptual lenses in studies. In this study, I employ AsianCrit as the interpretive framework in this study. Tracing the roots of AsianCrit is important. Critical theory focuses on the empowerment of individuals to transcend race, class, and gender constraints (Fay, 1987). Critical race theory (CRT) as a conceptual lens centralizes race and racism as embedded into the social fabric of society. CRT was borne out of critical legal studies (CLS), which sought to expose and challenge the concept of neutrality in legal reasoning (Brown & Jackson, 2013). CLS asserted that law enforces, reflects, constitutes, and legitimizes dominant social and power relations (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Indeed, neutrality as a construct has shaped the nature of U.S. society in ways that reinforce White supremacy within and beyond the law. Whereas CLS has exposed and challenged views of neutrality in the legal system, it has been critiqued as inadequate for illuminating the ways that race shapes the everyday lives of people of color (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Consequently, CRT employs the use of storytelling as a means for illuminating the deeply embedded racial biases in American law and culture (Brown & Jackson, 2013).

CRT in education focuses on race as a significant factor in educational inequity in the U.S. (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The six significant CRT tenets are:

1. CRT recognizes racism is endemic to American life;

19

2. CRT challenges dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy;

3. CRT presumes that racism has contributed to group advantage and disadvantage;

4. CRT recognizes the experiential knowledge of people of color;

5. CRT is interdisciplinary; and,

6. CRT seeks to eliminate racial oppression as a broader goal of ending all forms of oppression (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Matsuda, Lawrence III, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993).

As a tool, CRT can illuminate the significant ways that inequities are perpetuated by educational systems, policies, and practices.

As CRT scholarship has evolved, many scholars have noted the need for additional critical perspectives that incorporate the voices and concerns of different groups of color (Buenavista, Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante, 2009; Museus & Iftikar, 2013). Accordingly, Asian critical theory (AsianCrit) can provide a conceptual lens for understanding how race and racism shape the lives of Asian Americans (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). Founded upon the original tenets of CRT, AsianCrit, like other branches of CRT (e.g., LatCrit, TribalCrit), acknowledges the oppression of populations of color in society; however, different racial and ethnic groups experience racial oppression in both similar and disparate ways. Specifically, AsianCrit incorporates the following seven tenets:

1. *Asianization* – considers the ways in which society lumps all AAPIs into a monolithic group of overachievers, perpetual foreigners, and yellow perils;

20

2. *Transnational contexts* – highlights the ways in which historical, economic, political, and social processes shape the conditions of Asian Americans (e.g., imperialism, migration);

3. *(Re)constructive history* – emphasizes re-analyzing history to expose racism toward and racial exclusion of Asian Americans;

4. *Strategic (anti)essentialism* – while oppressive economic, political, and social forces impact Asian American racial categories and racialization, opportunities to (re)define these processes can be attained;

5. *Intersectionality* – the ways in which systems of oppression intersect to shape conditions for Asian Americans;

6. *Story, theory, and praxis* – stories can inform theory and practice and centering marginalized voices are essential; and,

7. *Commitment to social justice* – advocate for the elimination of racism and all forms of oppression (Museus & Iftikar, 2013; Museus, Ledesma, & Parker, 2015).

For this specific study, I focus on the tenets of Asianization and story, theory, and praxis although elements of all tenets are present throughout this paper. For example, the literature review illuminates explicitly socio-historical contexts of Southeast Asians to (re)construct new historical perspectives regarding their racial exclusion while this study advocates for social justice and the eradication of oppression for SEAA students. Asianization highlights important racialization processes that impact the experiences of Asian American groups. This study will showcase how Asianization explicitly affects SEAA students, who may be subject to multiple levels and processes of racialization.

21

Additionally, this study also honors the voices and experiences of participants as a key attribute. There is value in the stories of SEAA communities. Their stories will inform not only future recommendations and practices in community colleges but also advance future understandings of AsianCrit and its applicability for SEAA populations.

AsianCrit is a useful conceptual lens for exploring the experiences of SEAA college students for three reasons. First, AsianCrit acknowledges the presence and impact of racism on the experiences of SEAA through Asianization, which essentializes Asian American populations based on fixed beliefs about the group. Essentialization refers to essentialist thinking, referring to the belief in fixed category essences (Haslam & Abou-Abdallah, 2001). Racism, intended and unintended, influence policies, practices, and discourse, which subsequently, has resulted in the hypervisibility of SEAA communities in higher education. Second, AsianCrit seeks to excavate the voices and stories of SEAA communities, which accordingly can be used to highlight the unique experience of being racialized as SEAA and the implications and impacts resulting from such racialization. In centering the experiences of marginalized populations, AsianCrit facilitates the exploration of new SEAA student-centered solutions and avenues for addressing racial oppression. Third, AsianCrit seeks to end racial oppression along with its intersections with gender and sexuality, among other oppressions. AsianCrit can highlight how racism has functioned to marginalize and oppress these populations and we can engage in new dialogues about how to address educational inequities for SEAA students.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided the background and statement of the problem as it relates to the educational inequities experienced by SEAA community college students in terms of their invisibility due to data aggregation efforts, degree attainment, stereotypes, and deficit ideologies. I centralized these issues within the community college environment to provide an institutional context for better exploring their situated experiences. I offered a set of key terms that form the basis of this research study, provided the purpose of this study, delineated the research questions guiding this study, and offered up the significance of such an endeavor for improving the success of the SEAA community college population. Finally, I provided a rationale for utilizing AsianCrit as a framework for guiding this study on the racialized lived experiences of SEAA community college students.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

This chapter provides a review of the scholarship on the experiences of Southeast Asians in the U.S. I categorize the scholarship on SEAA educational experiences in three overarching but related sections. First, I explore the larger socio-historical contexts that include a discussion of Southeast Asian migration experiences within these communities, which has significant impacts on their educational experiences. Second, I review the literature on the SEAA educational experience, incorporating K-12 and postsecondary education scholarship. In this section, I also delineate cultural explanations of SEAA educational outcomes. Third, I explore the ways that SEAA students have been racialized in education and how they experience race and racism at different levels, which produces complex consequences for students. Fourth, I aggregate the limited scholarship on SEAA students in community colleges to provide current understandings of their experiences.

Socio-historical Context of Southeast Asian Americans in the United States

Sociohistorical context significantly impacts students' experiences in education (Kiang, 1997). The erasure of context and history perpetuates dangerous and deficit narratives of SEAA students (Gorski, 2011). To understand the positioning of SEAA students in the U.S., it is critical to explore the larger contexts of Asian migration experiences and their U.S. origins (Kiang, 1997; Museus & Iftikar, 2013). Acknowledging and understanding this context is critical for developing a holistic

understanding of the challenges and barriers that SEAA communities face in relation to other Asian American groups.

Waves of migration.

While this review considers all SEAA groups together, the ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences between and among groups are significant as are their prior histories. Their diverse experiences before and after the Vietnam War are particularly relevant. To begin to map the general SEAA experience, I describe how different waves of migration of Asian groups into the U.S. have resulted in many variations of their educational outcomes and attributes.

While other communities of color (e.g., Black, Latino, Native American) have had much longer established histories and existences in the U.S. due to slavery and colonization, it was not until the 1840s that the first Asian groups entered the country. There were two significant waves of Asian migration into the U.S. (Hune, 2002). The first significant wave began in the 1840s and ended in the 1930s, with mostly Chinese groups entering the country to pursue economic opportunities to work on the Transcontinental Railroad. During this period, smaller populations of Asian Indians, Japanese, Filipino, and Korean also arrived to work on sugar plantations in Hawai'i. These communities quickly established connections and networks in the U.S. despite a period of strict immigration regulations, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Immigration Act of 1924, which respectively barred many Asian groups from entering the U.S. (Tamura, 2003).

The second significant wave of migrants into the U.S. occurred after the Immigration Act of 1965, which relaxed immigration laws specifically for southern and eastern European groups (Tamura, 2003). However, an unintended consequence of the act, which allowed for the reunification of families in the U.S., opened doors for more Asian groups to enter the country (Chan, 1991; Tamura, 2003). As a result, the Asian population increased considerably. Before the 1970s, most Asian groups came as skilled workers from East Asia, India, or the Philippines. However, the advent of the Vietnam War caused a new group of migrants to arrive as refugees.

The Vietnam War played a significant role in creating the conditions for political instability in the Southeast Asia region. The U.S. attempt to contain communism initially focused on preventing the Nationalist-Communist forces of the Viet Minh from gaining power in Vietnam in the 1950s (Buzzanco, 2016). However, the Viet Minh were successful in obtaining control of half the country, and fighting would continue for two decades. Repeated bombings of the country and surrounding areas from 1961 to 1975 decimated the landscape, forcing many Vietnamese to flee the country. The attacks were not limited to Vietnam but also affected neighboring countries, who were also experiencing internal conflicts and civil war (Wright & Wu, 2008). The Ho Chi Minh Trail bombings also destabilized the Cambodian government while a U.S.-backed coup d'état enabled the Communist Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, to seize power (Wright & Wu, 2008).

In 1975, when the U.S. pulled out of the region, the Khmer Rouge emptied the urban city centers, forcing the Khmer people out into the countryside to build an agrarian,

utopic society (Tucker, 2011). Consequently, the Khmer people were forced into concentration and labor camps. Meanwhile, any individuals who were educated, assumed to be educated, or connected to the previous government, cultural, or religious institutions, were systematically executed (Wright & Wu, 2008). In four years, an estimated one to three million Cambodians were killed either through execution or starvation (Wright & Wu, 2008). In 1979, Vietnam invaded Cambodia, resulting in another two decades of conflict. Many people fled into the mine-filled jungles and undertook dangerous journeys to the Cambodia-Thailand border and settled into makeshift camps. While many upper-class, well-educated Cambodians were able to escape before the Khmer Rouge taking over, most of the population consisted of rural, agrarian peoples, who had minimal contact with the Westernized world and limited educational experiences (Dao, 1991).

In Laos, another Communist regime, the Pathet Lao or "Lao Nation," came into power in 1975 though this regime was not genocidal. Nonetheless, many Lao people who held connections to the former government feared for their lives and escaped into the Laos-Thailand border. Many Lao came from higher socioeconomic classes and were well-educated compared to their Khmer peers (Wright & Wu, 2008). Additionally, the Hmong people are an ethnic group who live in the highlands of Laos, with culture and language that is very different from Laotian cultures and traditions. The U.S. government recruited many Hmong soldiers to resist the Pathet Lao in what is now known as the "Secret War" (Wright & Wu, 2008). Despite claims of an agreement with the Central Intelligence Agency to trade Hmong assistance in the war for protection, the U.S.

evacuated only 2,000 Hmong people, leaving the rest to the mercy of the regime. As a result of the war and attempts to flee to the Thailand border, many Hmong were killed (Wright & Wu, 2008).

Due to the political turmoil in the Southeast Asia region, millions of Southeast Asians have been displaced since the 1970s, and many of them entered the U.S. as refugees. Their migration also occurred in multiple waves. As the Vietnam War began, many Vietnamese from urban and highly-educated backgrounds fled the country in Wave 1 while later refugees (e.g., Cambodian, Hmong, and Lao) in Wave 2 came from more rural backgrounds and had less experience with formal education systems (Museus & Yi, 2014; Smith-Hefner, 1990). These differences are significant to note because they help to explain the many disparities in education and income that exist within the Southeast Asian community. For instance, of the four major Southeast Asian ethnic groups, Vietnamese students attain baccalaureate degrees at higher rates than their counterparts characteristics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), due in part to their pre-migration backgrounds. The shared complex histories of the Southeast Asian migrant experience are worthy of exploration. As U.S. educational systems endeavor to support these communities, it is vital that we seek to understand their lived contexts fully.

Refugee experiences.

The Southeast Asian migrant population in the U.S. is a unique community in that involuntary, and forced displacement, characterizes their migration stories. Most Southeast Asian ethnic groups (e.g., Cambodian, Lao, Hmong, and Vietnamese) came to the U.S. as refugees and not as voluntary immigrants (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). The

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines a refugee as an

individual:

> Owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (n.d.).

Due to the events in the Southeast Asian region, hundreds of thousands of Southeast

Asian refugees were displaced while the continued instability in the area hindered

repatriation efforts to facilitate their return to their countries.

There are salient differences between immigrants and refugees due to the nature

of their migration from their home countries to their countries of resettlement. Also,

there are significant factors that differentiate the refugee population from other immigrant

populations. These factors include specific reasons for why refugee populations leave

their home countries, limited options to return to their home countries, the (in)voluntary

nature of their departure, and the circumstances affecting their pre-migration and post-

migration (Hsu, Davies, & Hansen, 2004). Refugee experiences have been characterized

as varying widely, "but are characterized in all cases by certain chaos-generating physical

and emotional universals: deprivation, upheaval, fear, uncertainty, and loss" (Lustig,

2010, p. 242).

Indeed, these experiences have significant implications for refugee families that

have manifested in unique ways. Kunz (1973) describes a push and pull model that

characterizes refugees as being "pushed out" of their countries due to instability while

immigrants are "pulled out" due to the promise of more economic opportunities

elsewhere. The push out effect for refugees is characterized by persecution and conflict in their home countries and results in their displacement. This displacement is due to a variety of factors related to religious and political persecution, war, genocide, loss, and violence. For refugees, their migration is a forced movement to preserve their lives or their freedoms (UNHCR, 1967).

Fundamentally, choice, or lack thereof, has a significant impact on the motivations of migrant populations in their movement from one place to another. Immigrant communities typically make conscious decisions to leave their countries of origin. There may be some acknowledgment and understanding of the mental, emotional, and physical preparation involved in this decision. For refugees, the choice is not an option, which results in profound and lasting impacts on their migratory experiences, as well as their acculturative experiences in their new home countries. Furthermore, the opportunities to return home are very limited for refugee populations due to various reasons such as instability in their home countries. This experience also has lasting psychological impacts on individuals, families, and the community. Additionally, the above factors of migration also affect their post-migration situations, which are impacted by difficulties acculturating, high unemployment, and separation from families, among other factors (Hsu, Davies, & Hansen, 2004).

Since 1975, over three million refugees from Southeast Asia have resettled in the U.S. (Vang & Trieu, 2014). Resettlement is a process of transferring a refugee from their country of first asylum to a third country (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012). Currently, the U.S. is the top resettlement country in the world (UNHCR, n.d.) and the

Southeast Asian refugee resettlement process was the most significant endeavor in the history of refugee resettlement policy (Mortland & Ledgerwood, 1987). The goal was to support these populations toward economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible to lessen the negative impacts these groups might have on the American economy (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012).

It is essential to understand the resettlement process, in which U.S. refugee policy sought to disperse Southeast Asian refugees throughout the nation in the effort to prevent ethnic enclaves of "unassimilable" refugees (Smith-Hefner, 1990; Vang & Trieu, 2014). The resettlement process provides a context for understanding the sociopolitical conditions of SEAA refugee communities. Many refugees were resettled into low-income housing among other populations of color, and these communities were offered limited resources and support to account for the resulting population increase. Language and cultural barriers increased feelings of isolation, anxiety, and fear within these refugee communities.

Another fundamental concern for refugee resettlement is the process of acculturation. Acculturation is defined as a process of adapting to a new culture that involves decisions on what is to be saved and what is to be sacrificed from old culture (Messer & Rasmussen, 1986). This adaptation process has been represented through a variety of different models and stages throughout the years and includes, for example, a two-dimensional process of adoption (Berry, 1986), stages of acculturation (Buriel, 1993), and conceptions of mutual acceptance (De Anda, 1984). These different models of acculturation consider various aspects of the acculturation process, in which the

31

acculturating communities make conscious or unconscious decisions about whether to maintain their cultures or adopt new ones. However, the abovementioned models, among others, have indicated the need for an acculturating process that supports culture-of-origin while adopting chosen characteristics of the new culture (Okigbo, Reierson, & Stowman, 2009).

The acculturation processes for early Southeast Asian refugee communities have been extensively studied since the 1990s. Adaptation to a new environment is a challenge in itself; however, the refugee acculturation process is made even more difficult considering the lack of choice and trauma that refugees face prior to and during their migration to the U.S. In comparison to other immigrant groups who favored biculturalism, Southeast Asian refugees were more likely to prefer ethnic maintenance (Wong-Rieger & Quintana, 1987). For example, while resettlement policies in the 1980s attempted to disperse refugee communities across the U.S. to speed up acculturation, Hmong families migrated into concentrated communities and created enclaves, which served to preserve their culture and inhibit acculturation (Miyares, 1997). As a result, the Hmong community has developed strong community networks.

Refugee children experience displacement and trauma and must adjust to new environments and languages. As a result, refugee children are also at higher risk for learning difficulties, behavioral complications, and psychological distress (Fox, Burns, Popovich, Belknap, & Frank-Stromborg, 2004; Messer & Rasmussen, 1986). These challenges can potentially negatively impact their self-esteem and educational experience. For example, in a quantitative study of 237 K-12 students, who were

32

Vietnamese (N = 135), Cambodian (N = 88), and Laotian (N = 14), Fox et al. (2004) found that positive self-esteem was associated with a higher grade point average, while low self-esteem was associated with a higher risk of depression. While the researchers also found that some students with high rates of depression had average grade point averages, suggesting no association with depression and school performance (Fox, Burns, Popovich, Belknap, & Frank-Stromborg, 2004), maternal depression levels were correlated with low educational achievement of some Southeast Asian groups (Caplan, Trautmann, & Whitmore, 1989). These challenges can impact the extent to which these students are able to participate in their schooling. In the following section, I explain the ways that this problematic transition has played out within U.S. education systems and consequently has produced significant issues for SEAA students.

Southeast Asian American Educational Experiences

SEAA students can experience significant disparities similar to other underserved and minoritized populations (e.g., Black, Latino) but very little is known about their educational experiences in relation to other communities (Museus et al., 2013). Consequently, literature specific to the experiences of SEAA students, a smaller subset of the Asian American population, is even more scarce, albeit growing. Furthermore, knowledge about SEAA students focus on their achievement levels, which can reproduce deficit thinking, which places blame, directly or indirectly, on students rather than accounting for the ways institutions and systems continually fail to support students in critical ways (Gorski, 2011). Given the relatively new arrival of SEAA students, in comparison to their East Asian counterparts, a majority of the literature focuses on their

33

K-12 experiences (e.g., Chhuon & Hudley, 2010a; Kim, 2002; Vang, 2004) although recently more attention has been given in postsecondary research (e.g., Lee, 1997; Museus, 2013b; Xiong & Lam, 2013). Even within the postsecondary research arena, research on Asian populations overall has been concentrated at four-year institutions while comparatively little is known about their experiences at two-year institutions.

In K-12 education, the scholarship on the educational experiences of SEAA students has primarily been concerned with reportedly low levels of achievement for these groups. More specifically, much consideration has been given to exploring why SEAA students struggled with educational attainment (e.g., Her, 2014; Rumbaut, 1985). As previously mentioned, due to the acculturative stresses related to assimilation into U.S. systems and society, as well as the traumatic impacts of a history characterized by war, genocide, and forced departure from their home countries, such experiences have critically impacted SEAA youth in direct and indirect ways. Consequently, early studies of Southeast Asian youth have noted the relatively high levels of stopout and delinquency associated with these communities (Rumbaut, 2008). For example, Rumbaut (2008) reported findings from two national surveys conducted in 2001 to 2004 regarding the educational mobility of 1.5 and second-generation young adults from different ethnic backgrounds, including 790 Cambodian and Laotian participants. He determined that 14% of Cambodian and Laotian students were more likely to earn Ds and Fs in high school and this trend continued into college, with 6.5% of these students stopping out of high school, limiting their access to educational mobility. Consequently, matriculation into college and bachelor degree attainment may be negatively impacted.

Postsecondary research on SEAA college students is further limited. As previously mentioned, achievement outcomes for SEAA students have been sources of consternation of many scholars (Boyer & Tracz, 2014; Rumbaut, 2008; Wallitt, 2008; Warikoo & Carter, 2009). Little is known about how SEAA students persist in college due to the population being relatively small compared to other communities as well as the aggregation of Asian American students in research. Furthermore, research on the larger Asian American racial group in higher education has been impacted by burdens of demystifying stereotypes, justifying the need for such research, a lack of financial resources to support such scholarship, and a limited knowledge base on the population (Museus & Chang, 2009). SEAA college students are often ignored in broader conversations about Asian American education.

Comparatively, within SEAA ethnic groups, much of the literature has focused on Hmong and Vietnamese ethnic groups while more needs to be explored about Cambodian and Laotian ethnic groups (Ngo & Lee, 2007). The scholarship on Hmong students is building and is especially thriving in recent years. It has focused on evolving gender roles as female Hmong college students increased in number (Goldstein, 1985; Lee, 1997; Walker-Moffat, 1995). For example, while traditional Hmong culture encourages teenage marriages for Hmong women, Lee (1997) complicated assumptions about Hmong American college women who navigated both cultural, economic, and racial barriers in their pursuit of higher education. Lee determined that Hmong culture is not a static entity but rather a dynamic process that is changing and Hmong women are central agents of change within this process (Lee, 1997). As more Hmong students enroll in

35

college, more research has started to highlight the racial experiences they face in the form of microaggressions and stereotypes (Kwan, 2015). The shifting nature of research on Hmong students mirrors that of broader trends of exploring the ways that students are not passive participants but active agents in their education.

Research on Vietnamese populations has focused on their achievements and attributed much of these to their Confucian religious ideologies (Freeman & Foner, 1996; Kim, 2002; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). For example, Kim (2002) determined in a comparison of the religious cultures of Vietnamese and Cambodian communities that the Confucian ideologies of patriarchal hierarchy, collectivism, and educational values may play an important role in Vietnamese students' successful adaptation into U.S. education, while Cambodian religious doctrine based on Theravada Buddhist tradition is more individualistic. Compared to their SEAA counterparts, Vietnamese students attain degrees at the highest levels of all SEAA groups. As such, they have been considered high achieving. However, Vietnamese students also reported experiences with racial discrimination in the form of bias and stereotypes, which can have deleterious effects on their psychological well-being and academic performance (Lam, 2007; Nguyen, 2014). Despite their perceived educational success, Vietnamese students still experience negative racially-motivated interactions and experiences in college. Overall, due to their relatively significant numbers on college campuses, scholars, such as Lam (2007), have been able to utilize both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore these populations.

On the other hand, research on Cambodian populations has mostly focused on their difficulties in education. Many studies have also explored how Cambodian students ethnic identities in relation to positive or negative perceptions about their academic achievements (Chhuon & Hudley, 2010a; McGinnis, 2007a). Tang (2015) determined that Cambodian students were faced with stereotypes and expected to excel academically although fear of disappointing educators often caused them to remain silent about their struggles. Furthermore, other studies have highlighted the intergenerational conflicts (e.g., gender roles and family obligations) that exist between Cambodian youth and their parents (Chhuon, Hudley, & Macias, 2006; Lin, Suyemoto, & Kiang, 2009). Despite these barriers, some scholars have shifted from exploring the problems these students face toward exploring how successful Cambodian students have navigated these experiences. For example, Chhuon et al. (2010) conducted a qualitative inquiry of 10 Cambodian undergraduate students and complicated simplistic understandings about the relationship between traditional cultural values and achievement; instead, the interaction of cultural values and school experiences are pivotal for students in developing academic success. The scholarship on Cambodian students has increased over the years turning towards a focus on the success rather than the struggle of these students. Much of the literature on Cambodian students have been qualitative.

Research on Lao populations is even more scarce and has also significantly focused on their struggles in K-12 schools (Ima, 1995). Though research on this population is scant, a few scholars have explored the experiences of Laotian female high school students, specifically their experience navigating their identities in ways that

37

position them inside or outside of Black/White binary, as well as the importance of examining the ways that their ethnicity interacted with other social factors to constrain or allow for social capital transfer (Bucholtz, 2004; Shah, 2007). Comparatively, there are very few published studies focused on Lao college students, with the most recent research exploring the impact of familial influences on the educational and occupational aspirations of ten Lao college students (Phommasa, 2015). Phommasa (2015) determined that both parents and extended family members played pivotal roles and exerted significant influences on Lao student aspirations. Due to the relatively small populations of Laotian students, most of these studies are qualitative in nature and focus on a small number of participants. Despite the limited knowledge regarding the Laotian student experience, many of these studies speak to the need for a more critical and nuanced understanding of who these students are and what they experience in different educational environments. Overall, the above review only provided a small, limited view of the research specific to each population. More needs to be understood regarding the experiences of each population as distinct, different, and unique communities; however, as evidenced above, the relatively smaller populations of these students make it difficult to conduct large-scale quantitative studies. For the broader review, I highlight the experiences of these ethnic groups together to illustrate the SEAA college student experience in the following discussion of cultural explanations of SEAA college student experiences.

In one of the first comprehensive reviews of the literature on SEAA students, Ngo and Lee (2007) categorized current explanations for their struggles and success in

education into cultural and structural explanations. Cultural explanations have been structured in ways that point to the seeming incongruence between SEAA home cultures and school domains, as well as to the ways that culture has had positive impacts on the academic achievement of students. Culture, initially was broadly defined as traits, qualities, characteristics, and behavioral patterns of groups that are inherent or developed over time; however, emergent views have acknowledged that cultural characteristics and behavioral patterns are not intrinsic to a group but can be transmitted generationally and consequently reconstructed over time as it interacts with structural conditions (Zhou & Kim, 2006). Structural explanations highlighted issues related to unequal funding, access to quality teaching, college-preparatory curricula, and tracking practices that then contribute to limited access to higher education (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Structures have been defined as social factors or conditions that can constrain behavior and limit opportunity but are beyond an individual's control (Pearce, 2006). In the following review of the literature, I focus on general cultural explanations of SEAA student success and race as a significant structural explanation of SEAA student success. While many structural factors that impact success for SEAA students, for this review, an explicit focus on race is useful for highlighting the influence of race upon the experiences of SEAA community college students.

Culture and the Southeast Asian American educational experience.

Researchers have attempted to explore a variety of different explanations for SEAA students' levels of achievement when compared to their East Asian counterparts (Li, 2005; Rumbaut, 2008). Many of these explanations have pointed to culture as

critical factors that both create barriers and promote student success. Some early scholars

have asserted that some communities lacked the skills, capabilities, and cultural values to

achieve in education and society (Lewis, 1959; Moynihan, 1969). Such theories sought

to explain away refugee educational failures as merely incongruent cultural values

(Hopkins, 1996). This line of scholarship has impacted policies and research in ways that

have highlighted the many incongruences and dissonance between SEAA students and

U.S. education. Scholars have noted that SEAA students can experience an

incompatibility with schooling due to limited knowledge and experience with U.S. K-12

education systems, complicated relationships with school due to historical persecution,

religious and cultural beliefs about authority, illiteracy in home language due to

interrupted schooling and protracted stays in refugee camps, limited family support due

to familial separations, health and trauma issues, problems with second language

acquisition, and delinquency (Akiba, 2010; Dao, 1991; Vang, 2005).

Further complicating discourse regarding cultural influences as explanations for

educational achievement within these communities, there are assertions that SEAA

students may lack the necessary cultural capital to integrate into the academic

environment successfully. Originated by Pierre Bourdieu (1985), cultural capital has

been defined as, "socially inherited economic, political, and cultural resources that inform

social life and situate groups apart from one another" (Banks, 2009, para. 1). Socially

accepted and institutionalized forms of cultural capital associated with high economic

statuses, such as travel and art, can be transferred into more access and opportunity.

However, due to the concentration of SEAA communities in low-income, urban areas, their access to institutionally accepted cultural capital is limited.

Early research also pointed to a cultural mismatch as reasons for low achievement of SEAA students (Akiba, 2010; Akiba & Coll, 2004). However, these studies also highlight the role and responsibility of institutions and systems in relationship with the communities who are impacted by the 'mismatch.' Stephens and Townsend (2015) note that cultural mismatch occurs when cultural norms and values of mainstream institutions do not match cultural norms and values of social groups who are underrepresented in these institutions. Similarly, González (2008) indicated that cultural mismatch or incompatibility theory points to a perceived lack of fit between racially minoritized groups and the overall Western, hegemonic culture of schools and society. The cultural mismatch theory points to cultural differences between minoritized populations and institutions; however, it also asserts the responsibility of institutions to adapt to such communities rather than forcing such communities to change.

Such discourses about SEAA students and other racially minoritized populations further theoretical perspectives about college in regards to student departure and integration, which call for students with seemingly incongruent cultures to separate and detach from their home cultures to successfully integrate into the campus (Tinto, 1975, 1988). However, such perspectives place the onus on students to make potentially harmful decisions to detach and disassociate from their communities and their identities. More recently, other scholars have criticized such deficit and cultural incongruence perspectives (Museus, 2008; Museus & Quaye, 2009). In fact, many call for more

41

culturally congruent methods to engage students, such as culturally relevant or responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Kiang, 2002; Kiang, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Museus, Lam, Huang, Kem, & Tan, 2012; Museus, Mueller, & Aquino, 2013; Rendón, 1994). These methods work to support students and assist them by utilizing pedagogy that integrates students' backgrounds, histories, experiences, skills, and abilities that they have inherited and learned from their families and communities (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

Additionally, there are critiques of the assumption that SEAA cultures are static and cannot change or evolve over time. Ngo (2008) pointed out further complications with the concept of cultural mismatch or culture clash, which implies that cultures and identities of immigrants are static and unchanged over time. Instead, in her work with Lao American K-12 immigrant students, Ngo (2008) determined that the ways that these students represent themselves may be very different and often at odds with perceptions or expectations of community and peers, indicating that negotiation and evolution are occurring in the cultural identities of Lao American students. As such, this work calls for us to move beyond assumptions that cultures and identities function on an either-or paradigm and stay static. As the cultural backgrounds and identities of SEAA students continue to shift and evolve so must the culture and identities of the higher education institutions that educate them.

Parent, family, and community influences. The complexities of parental influence on Southeast Asian students also cannot be dismissed. Research has focused on parental influences, community, and familial values, which can affect student success

42

(Museus, 2013b; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Despite deficit-based assumptions that Southeast Asian parents fail to care and support their children in schools, many researchers have concluded that parents hold very high aspirations for their children and express a desire to be more involved (e.g., Akiba, 2010; Collignon, Men, & Tan, 2001; Museus, 2013b; Smith-Hefner, 1990). Akiba (2010) asserted that parental involvement could look differently from majoritarian assumptions about appearances of parental involvement. For example, despite not participating in normative ways such as attending Parent Teacher Association meetings, Cambodian parents may instill beliefs and values in their children that their educators are second-parents, thus enforcing the teacher as an authority figure and furthering a cycle of deference. These beliefs can result in students exhibiting behaviors in the classroom that are contrary to what is expected in the American educational system. For example, students may not seem to be participating in class but instead, are displaying traditional behaviors afforded to teachers such as deference and respect by not interrupting or questioning.

High academic aspirations may be predominant for many Southeast Asian refugee parents; however, the complicated nature in which these aspirations affect students is essential to understand. Museus (2013b) conducted a qualitative study of 34 SEAA college students and, while not focusing specifically on refugee students, the study addressed the parental influences on the educational experiences of SEAA, many of whom were refugees. The cultural backgrounds of the refugee parents influenced the students' educational trajectories in significant ways that facilitated the internalization of the following expectations: students' educational education was the key to success and an

43

understanding that parents had sacrificed for them. However, excessive parental

pressures, ethnic and gendered differences in educational expectations, and pressure to

declare majors that were not a good fit for these students resulted in adverse, detrimental

outcomes for students. Thus, Museus (2013b) argued that it is crucial for educators to

understand how parents, families, and communities shape the lives of these students.

In addition to parental influences, research has elucidated the importance of the

home and community connection for many SEAA students as strong factors for

integration into the college campus (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Museus, 2013b). For

example, Chhuon and Hudley (2008) conducted a qualitative inquiry of ten Cambodian

students and determined that educational opportunity programs, positive faculty contact,

participation in Cambodian Club, and home and community collaborations facilitated a

successful transition for the student from high school to college. Thus, the importance of

maintaining contact with the campus environment as well as their home communities

were both critical for their successful transition. Such findings complicate earlier

assertions by scholars, such as Tinto (1988), that students needed to separate entirely

from their home communities to be successful.

Curriculum, pedagogy, and the educational environment. Also, the curriculum,

pedagogy, and educational environment that SEAA students experience in schools can

play a significant role in impacting their success. McGinnis (2007b) explored two K-12

Khmer refugee students and posited that curriculum in schools frequently leave students

because it does not connect or bridge the gap between the worlds of the students,

impacted by social factors such as racism, poverty, peer pressures, and cultural beliefs,

and the world of the schools. A narrow curriculum that does not engage students' identities and cultural backgrounds through creative means is inherently inequitable and leave them behind. Standardized testing trends constrain the ways that educators can engage students beyond that of enforcing majoritarian cultural norms and English language literacy (McGinnis, 2007b; McGinnis & Fisher, 2007). Rather, engaging students' multimodal and multilingual skills through inquiry-based programs can be a means for connecting students' knowledge and skills to learning, thus minimizing disengagement that could result in a departure from schools (McGinnis, 2007b). Needham (2003) explored the language and literacy practices through observations of Khmer educators in a Khmer language class and determined that educational practices can be linked to social meaning. That is, pedagogies that reflect cultural understandings of language, how it is used, and the knowledge of the organization of social relations, affects the learning development of Khmer refugee students.

Culturally relevant pedagogy not only validates the experiences of the students but can also be utilized to encourage learning cross-culturally. In a mixed methods study of Hmong adults and undergraduate students who were involved in a Learning Circle designed to facilitate cultural exchange and one-to-one learning, Goodkind (2006) found that mutual learning created an environment where refugee experiences were validated and valued as sources of strength and resiliency. Due to the collectivistic cultures of Southeast Asian refugees, these communities are more likely to emphasize traditional Southeast Asian cultural orientations in interpersonal relations and rely on coethnic cooperation (Bankston III & Hidalgo, 2006). These collectivistic orientations can offer

45

new insights as to how best to engage the backgrounds of SEAA students as foundational tools for their learning.

Culturally relevant teaching can build bridges to connect families. For example, Lin, Suyemoto, and Kiang (2009) illustrate the social, emotional, and academic development of Cambodian American students within the school context through assignments designed to facilitate discussions of family histories of genocide and trauma between parent and child. These assignments work to build communication within families and resulted in an added benefit of assisting in the beginnings of healing from the trauma. Also, the connection to family and community is strengthened as students engage with community issues and social problems that affect them and their families personally (Kiang, 1997). Consequently, inclusive social and educational policies and practices have the potential for positively changing educational outcomes for SEAA students.

Recent scholarship in this arena has also underscored the benefits of positive cultural connections on SEAA student success (Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus et al., 2013; Museus, Shiroma, & Dizon, 2016). In one of the largest qualitative studies of a national sample of SEAA undergraduate students (N=33) across five institutions, Museus et al. (2013) conducted a grounded theory analysis of cultural factors that impacted SEAA college student trajectories. They produced an explanatory model for SEAA student success that accounted for the importance of a variety of cultural factors that influenced students' academic dispositions and subsequent academic success, such as connections to cultural heritage, connections to campus cultural agents, and cultural

46

validation. These findings underscore the importance of cultural heritage and family and community connections as sources of strength and support while connections with campus cultural agents who understood and validated students' backgrounds significantly impacted students' success (Museus et al., 2013). Cultural influences have been shown to play a critical role in the experiences of SEAA college students. With the shift toward more culture-as-assets-based research on underserved populations, like SEAA students, a more comprehensive understanding of how these cultural influences impact students in higher education as well as how higher education impacts culture will be relevant and useful.

Most recently, Museus (2014) offered a theoretical model of student success that incorporated a more culturally-grounded approach to supporting diverse students. The culturally engaging campus environments (CECE) model postulates that access to culturally engaging campus environments is positively correlated with individual influences on students' outcomes (e.g., sense of belonging, academic self-efficacy, etc.) (Museus, 2014; Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2016). There are nine elements of the CECE model, separated into two categories: cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness. Cultural relevance refers to the degree that campus environments are relevant to students' cultural backgrounds and identities. There are five indicators: (1) cultural familiarity, the extent to which college students have opportunities to physically connect with faculty, staff, and peers who understand their backgrounds and experiences, (2) culturally relevant knowledge, the degree to which students have opportunities to learn and exchange knowledge about their cultural communities, (3) cultural community service,

47

the availability of opportunities for students to give back to and transform their communities, (4), meaningful cross-cultural engagement, students' participation in discussions regarding real social and political problems with diverse peers, and (5) culturally validating environments, the extent to which students feel their cultural knowledge, backgrounds, and identities are valued (Museus, 2014).

Cultural responsiveness refers to the extent to which campus programs and practices effectively respond to the needs of diverse students. There are four indicators: (1) collectivist cultural orientations, the extent to which campuses are characterized by values of teamwork and mutual success, (2) humanized educational environments, the environs in which institutional agents develop meaningful relationships with students, (3) proactive philosophies, institutional agents who go above and beyond in offering information, opportunities, and support to students, and (4) holistic support, the extent to which students have access to at least one faculty and staff who they trust to provide information and support they need (Museus, 2014). The extent to which campuses support diverse students through culturally relevant and culturally responsive programs and practices can significantly shape their experiences. The CECE model is a response to the shift in higher education for holding postsecondary institutions accountable for culturally conscious programs and practices, which can have significant implications for SEAA students who may also benefit from these practices.

Structures and the Southeast Asian American experience.

In addition to cultural explanations, Ngo and Lee (2007) also explored structural explanations for SEAA students' success. They referred to structural explanations related

to issues of class and race that are codified into educational structures and that produce inequities for SEAA populations. Structural inequalities are produced via educational systems and practices. Educational structures, and other structures (e.g., healthcare, the legal system, etc.), have historically (re)produced advantages for privileged populations based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and more. For example, socioeconomic status (SES) (e.g., class) is a structure that can significantly impact access, achievement, and attainment (Pearce, 2006). Students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds may be constricted by unequal funding, limited access to quality teaching, college-preparatory curricula, and tracking practices in their K-12 experiences that then contribute to limited access to higher education (Darling-Hammond, 2004). In a study exploring interpersonal factors (e.g., parental expectation, parental involvement, teacher quality) that influence college transitions among Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students from different SES backgrounds (N=1460) in the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS: 02/06), Museus and Vue (2013) determined that AAPI students from high SES backgrounds developed expectations for, applied to, and matriculated to college at higher rates than their peers from low SES backgrounds. While the sample was not disaggregated to determine how many of these AAPI students identified as SEAA, the study indicates the salience and importance of SES on educational experiences in general (e.g., transition, matriculation, attainment).

Simultaneously, socioeconomic status and other structures can impact access to social capital, which has been viewed as an integral aspect of education. Bourdieu (1985) first defined social capital as connections and networks, or membership in a group, that

produce resources, both economic and non-economic, that can be beneficial in a variety of different contexts. For example, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds typically have less access to the social networks and resources that can support them in navigating complex systems (e.g., education, health, and legal) compared to those from high socioeconomic backgrounds. The two previous examples of structural influences (e.g., socioeconomic status and social capital) have been shown to be related. Thus, low socioeconomic status, and all the conditions that come with it can limit and prevent access to the necessary social networks and resources (e.g., social capital) that can assist students, families, and entire groups in achieving an education.

For SEAA college students, this has significant implications, especially considering that colleges are one arena where social capital is (re)produced. In one of the few studies exploring the impact of social capital on access, adjustment, and success of SEAA college students, Maramba and Palmer (2015) interviewed 34 SEAA undergraduate students from five different institutions and determined that caring agents and supportive environments facilitated the development of SEAA students' social capital. Their study also reinforced the importance of social capital for student success before and in college. High school counselors, family members, pre-college programs, professors, and ethnic student organizations that offer a caring and supportive environment are instrumental for students' development of social capital. However, structural inequities, such as different access to resources in K-12 schools, which minimize the potential of these connections can have detrimental impacts on students' access to education.

Overall, structural inequality can create significant barriers for SEAA students regarding unequal access and opportunity in educational systems and structures. Focusing the lens on analyzing how structural inequality shapes SEAA student experiences is a necessary step toward comprehensively understanding their educational experiences. Regarding SEAA communities, there have been few studies that focus on race as a form of inequity that manifests in educational structures. Consequently, I locate the significance of race as it shapes the lives and educational experiences of SEAA community college students. In the next section, I highlight the U.S. racial system that has come to be a signifying factor of access and success for SEAA students.

Racism and the Southeast Asian American Educational Experience

The previous discussions of SEAA students' experiences have been useful for understanding how cultural explanations act as both barriers and opportunities for success. However, there are limitations in this discourse, especially considering that singularly focusing on cultural explanations still leave larger critical systems and structures of inequality out of focus. Consequently, this study narrows the focus on race and racism as it shapes SEAA students. Accordingly, in this section, I map the scholarship on SEAA students to make visible the system of racism. Specifically, I distinguish ways race and racism manifest systemically, individually, and internally to situate exactly how race and racism operate independently of, in tandem with, and through other structures to produce inequitable access and opportunity for SEAA students. I also complicate previous understandings of culture as a static, unchangeable entity that is often essentialized and used to portray cultural and racial groups negatively.

51

Rather, the significance and influence of human agency cannot be discounted, especially as it relates to SEAA students navigating community college systems. Ultimately, I showcase how race and racism are critical factors that must be acknowledged and addressed to move toward a more comprehensive understanding of SEAA students' experiences.

Some scholars have explored ways race and racism have impacted the educational experiences of marginalized communities (e.g., Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012; Museus & Park, 2015; Ngo, 2006; Truong, Museus, & McGuire, 2016). However, despite consensus that race continues to play a significant role in the higher education experiences of minoritized students, there has been limited research on the impacts of race and racism on Asian American, and specifically SEAA, college students' educational experiences (Museus, Ledesma, & Parker, 2015; Museus & Park, 2015). SEAA college students are subject to inequitable systems and structures that similarly impact other racially minoritized populations.

SEAA students' experiences highlight the reality that SEAA students, like all other minoritized groups, are racialized in a racial system (Museus, Ledesma, & Parker, 2015). Yee (2008) characterized racialization as a set of processes, in which groups are defined by their race based on socially constructed racial assumptions, which happens in the context of class, gender, citizenship, and ethnicity, and is historically rooted in a capitalist society. Consequently, this process plays a vital role in the social stratification of society. Similarly, Loury (2003) argued that race is a social phenomenon resulting from a combination of two processes: (1) categorization, involving the process of sorting

of persons into manageable groups and (2) signification, including the activity of associating specific connotations, or race-based meanings, within these categories. Ultimately, race then is an "embodied social signification," in which racial classifications can be acted upon by influential social actors (Loury, 2003). This classification or racialization then allows for the reproduction of racism, defined as an "organized system of privilege and bias that disadvantages a set of people on the basis of their group membership" (Gaertner, Dovidio, Levine, & Hogg, 2010). These processes work invisibly to mark difference and to signify which groups are provided access to power, wealth, and influence.

There has been extensive exploration of the racial positioning of various groups (Kim, 1999; Okihiro, 1994). However, the Black and White paradigm continues to be the significant frame through which other populations of color are analyzed and understood. While this discussion is relevant for helping to situate how SEAAs may describe their racial positioning, it is significant to note that the literature regarding racial positioning can reinforce racial hierarchies and the Black and White paradigm. While Okihiro (1994) described a racial hierarchy where racial groups were organized along a single plane with Asian groups holding an intermediary status between Black and White populations, Kim (1999) introduced the concept of a "field of racial positions" where Asian Americans are racially triangulated between White and Black communities. The racial triangulation of Asian Americans is shaped by the linked processes of relative valorization and civic ostracism. Relative valorization refers to processes where dominant groups (Whites) valorize Asian Americans relative to subordinate groups (Black populations). Civic

ostracism refers to processes where dominant groups construct Asian Americans as innately foreign and unassimilable, as alien (Kim, 1999). Asian American accomplishments have been lauded and valorized; however, such accomplishments are tempered by sentiments that restrict Asian American membership and status in U.S. society. The triangulation of Asian Americans between Black and White populations is potentially complicated by the experiences of SEAA communities, which may be subject to both processes simultaneously.

Cultural racism and racial stereotypes.

Cultural racism occurs when society privileges customs, values, and beliefs of dominant groups while marginalizing those of other races and ethnicities (Harrell, 2000). Cultural racism takes such essentialist views on culture and seeks to ascribe specific attributes to cultural groups, often in dichotomous ways that position other cultures in a negative light. It has been used to justify beliefs and assumptions about cultural groups, often in detrimental ways, and which influence larger structures and systems based on these perceived differences.

Similarly, stereotypes are used to mark difference and signify meanings based on racial categorization. Stereotypes have often been used to pit racial groups against each other as a racial project. Omi and Winant (1994) define racial projects:

> A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines. Racial projects connect what race *means* in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially *organized*, based upon that meaning. (p. 56).

54

As a racist narrative and racial project, which "reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 71), stereotypes bestow and withhold certain privileges for Asian American communities and in juxtaposition to withholding privileges from other communities of color. Additionally, Black, Latinx, and Native American communities are also essentialized through various racial projects and stereotypes. Stereotypes are essentialist at their core while upholding structures of domination in hegemonic ways. They function as a racist tool for delineating which communities are positioned along the insider-outsider and Black-White binary, and as a result, who are deemed deserving of certain benefits and who are not. Additionally, Lee (2004) asserted, "groups who are identified as being like Whites earn social privilege and economic opportunities." On the other hand, being associated with Blackness has potentially negative social and economic consequences" (p. 306). As SEAA students are racialized in different ways to limit their access and opportunity, disparate outcomes in education and socioeconomic attainment are produced.

Bonilla-Silva (2006) asserts that a social reality exists with real effects on actors who are racialized as "Black" or "White." The social reality of our current racial structure awards specific material privileges to White bodies and those who are in closest proximity to Whiteness. As such, Asian Americans, through stereotypes, are provided benefits that are both a product of and a way to maintain the racial structure while other populations, even within the group, are restricted from these benefits in different ways. In addition, these stereotypes have persisted throughout generations in part due to beliefs and assertions that the traits, qualities, and attitudes attributed by these stereotypes (e.g.,

55

high academic achievement) are in some form or fashion directly connected to the cultural backgrounds of these groups. For example, as previously mentioned, Confucian values of Vietnamese communities have been viewed as positive cultural influences on their high academic achievement (Chou, 2008); as such, associating cultural traits to specific groups have been used as justification for their positioning in our racialized system. In the following section, I delineate the three significant stereotypes and myths that impact Asian American and SEAA populations and are examples of cultural racism: perpetual foreigner, model minority, and deviant minority.

Perpetual foreigner myth. The perpetual or "forever" foreigner myth has been invoked in the past to signify Asian communities as others or dangerous threats to White American ideals (Lee, Park, & Wong, 2016). This depiction results from ignoring ethnic and generational differences between Asian groups, increasing anti-Asian sentiment and overstating the economic parity that has been achieved (Tuan, 1998). The depiction is closely related to beliefs that Asians are also "yellow perils," intending to infiltrate America, steal jobs, and undermine American values and systems. Furthermore, the perpetual foreigner myth has been used to assert that Asians are illegitimate Americans and can never be true Americans. Such sentiments have waxed and waned during times of war and conflict, with Asian Americans often bearing the brunt of negative public perception. For example, during World War II, Japanese Americans were imprisoned due to fear and xenophobia, and currently, due to Islamophobia, South Asians have been targeted as dangerous foreigners and terrorists. The racial positioning of Asian American

56

populations is precarious and subject to the times that dictate whether their foreignness is magnified or minimized.

In addition to the previous examples of institutional and systemic responses toward Asian populations, the perpetual foreigner myth continues to influence the daily lives of Asian Americans today. Their Americanness is always in question whether they are fourth generation or naturalized citizens. Asian Americans are more likely to be mislabeled as coming from another country or as a non-native English speaker (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). Studies have shown that both Asian American and Latino/a individuals are negatively affected by the perpetual foreigner myth (e.g., Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Huynh, Devos, & Smalarz, 2011). Huynh et al. (2011) conducted a series of three survey studies on 231 Asian American, 211 Latino/as (Study 1), 89 African Americans, 62 White Americans (Study 2), and 56 Asian Americans and 165 Latino/as (Study 3) college students to determine whether awareness of the perpetual foreigner stereotype predicted identity and psychological adjustment. They concluded that the stereotype was a significant predictor of identity conflict and a lower sense of belonging to American culture for ethnic minorities. Additionally, it predicted lower hope and life satisfaction among Asian Americans. Museus and Park (2015) also highlighted experiences of Asian American college students navigating the stereotype, whether being assumed to be non-American despite being born in the U.S. and being interrogated continuously about where they are from. The perpetual foreigner myth has significant consequences on the experiences of Asian American students. Furthermore, it is rooted in cultural racism that deems non-White groups to be potential national enemies despite their citizenship or

57

national alliance and due to essentialist beliefs that culturally Asians are different from Americans. The myth is one of many racial projects that keep Asian Americans positioned in a contradictory and ambiguous space (Lee, Park, & Wong, 2016).

   Model minority myth. The model minority myth is now arguably the most pervasive stereotype about Asian Americans (Museus, 2013a; Museus & Chang, 2009; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 2002). Alternatively, while the model minority myth is viewed as a positive stereotype, it and the perpetual foreigner myth are actually parallel racial projects that seek to undermine Asian American status while upholding dominant narratives (Lee, Park, & Wong, 2016). The model minority myth itself is rooted in a racist history. Its earliest forms can be traced back to intentional characterizations of Chinese railroad workers as hard working laborers in opposition to their African American counterparts, who were deemed not as hard working (Yi & Museus, 2015). The myth also resurfaced during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. William Peterson reintroduced the term "model minority" in 1966 in an issue of The New York Times, which depicted Asian American children as, "Those Asian-American Whiz Kids." Consequently, the myth was reborn with renewed vigor, successfully resulting in a new scheme for setting up the model and problem minority binary and reproducing deficit ideology about the inherent assets or lack thereof of specific minoritized communities. The stereotype characterizes all Asian Americans to be universally an intellectually superior monolithic group, achieving both academically and occupationally (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 1977, 2002; Uyematsu, 1971; Wu, 1995). However, the model

minority myth masks the diversity within the Asian American racial group as well as serious inequities (Museus, 2013a).

The cultural foundations of the model minority myth have been based on the Confucian tradition and values assumed by most Eastern Asian cultures. Confucianism is a set of proposals for living a proper, socioethical life based on social order, polished manners, respect, harmony, and orderliness (Chao, 2008). These values have been well-accepted as the foundations for why early Asian groups (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) have been able to successfully assimilate into American capitalist culture (Chou, 2008). The same cultural foundations that have supported the model minority myth have also functioned as cultural markers that signify these groups as different from White groups.

Meritocracy and hard work are implicit in the notion of the model minority myth as it has become synonymous with stories of success and achievement for the 14.7 million Asian Americans and Asian immigrants in the U.S. (Museus et al., 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Furthermore, the myth inherently suggests that Asian Americans are a model for other minoritized populations to follow. Ultimately, it then indicates that the inability of other groups to achieve at the levels of Asian Americans is related to their inherent failures and inadequacies (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Subsequently, some Asian Americans have adopted a belief in the superiority of Asian Americans over other minoritized groups. For example, Park and Martinez (2014) found in a quantitative study of a subsample of Asian Americans in the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen

(NLSF) that on average, young "elite" Asian Americans believed Asian Americans were more competent than non-Asian groups.

The model minority myth has been used to signify both a superiority to other racial minority groups as well as inferiority to White groups (Chou, 2008). The myth has been used to maintain the status quo, legitimatize meritocratic narratives, and perpetuate the depiction of Asians as achieving social acceptance as "honorary Whites" (Li, 2005; Tuan, 1998). The "honorary White" characterization has been attributed in part due to populist beliefs that Asians have overcome their immigrant and minority status and have undergone a "whitening" process similar to what immigrants from southern, central, and eastern Europe have experienced (Tuan, 1998). However, this status has also been refuted by those who point to the simultaneously opposing characterization of Asians as foreigners.

The model minority has long been considered to produce favorable assumptions about Asian Americans. However, perceptions and attitudes toward the model minority myth have been determined to be complicated, indicating the stereotype itself is not as harmless as perceived both within and outside of the Asian community. Maddux, Galinsky, Cuddy, and Polifroni (2008) determined across four psychological studies of perceptions of Asian Americans as model minorities, that these perceptions led to an increased feeling of threat, on the part of non-Asian groups, based on scarcity of resources such as educational, occupational, and economic opportunities, which also influenced negative attitudes toward Asian Americans. Such dichotomous racializations have manifested throughout history in a variety of ways as anti-Asian sentiments waxed

and waned. One such impact of anti-Asian sentiment resulted during the Rodney King riots when several Korean-owned shops in the Los Angeles neighborhood Koreatown were looted and burned to the ground, revealing burgeoning racial tensions and divides between Black, Latino, and Korean communities. These racial tensions and divisions would highlight assumptions about Asian Americans as potential threats to both White populations as well as other minoritized groups.

The model minority myth is problematic in a variety of ways (Museus, 2013c, 2013a; Museus & Chang, 2009; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 1989, 2002). It reinforces colorblind ideologies that racism does not affect these groups (Museus, 2013a). Also, it fuels misconceptions that the racial group is problem-free, delegitimizes their challenges, and perpetuates assumptions that they do not require resources or support (Um, 2003; Yi & Museus, 2015). Chou (2008) asserted that the model minority stereotype is a *de facto* form of anti-Asian sentiment despite its benign nature. However, assumptions based on this stereotype are not harmless at all and are "destructive" for students (Li, 2005).

Other scholars have outlined many different negative assumptions underscoring the model minority myth such as social ineptitude, predispositions for excelling academically and consequently not needing assistance, and extraordinary pressures to succeed (Hune, 2002; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Museus & Park, 2015; Teranishi, 2007). The impact of the model minority stereotype on Asian groups manifests itself in a multitude of way. Viewed as prosperous and self-reliant, programs and services for these groups are limited (Choi & Lahey, 2006). Furthermore, Lee (2006) asserted that viewing

Asian American students as model minorities ignore their specific needs. Rather, Lee (2006) argued that it is more important to examine the intersections of identity that Asian American students experience in order to serve their needs better. Many scholars have pointed out the many ways that the model minority stereotypes pose significant threats to Asian American students who have been categorized as underachieving (Li, 2005). For example, the model minority can reinforce victim-blaming due to over-attributing Asian American success to parental involvement and cultural traits while overlooking the roles and responsibilities of schools and educators in supporting students who may be struggling (Li, 2005). Such practices can be detrimental for students, SEAA included, who may more likely come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and may require more attention and support; yet, they may feel inordinate pressures to be successful while also feeling as if they should or could not ask for assistance.

In the community college arena, the model minority myth has not been as extensively explored compared to the experiences of Asian American students at four-year institutions. Recently, Assalone and Fann (2016) conducted a phenomenological inquiry of 28 Asian American community college students in Texas to explore how the model minority stereotype influenced their experiences and perceptions. Their findings indicated that the students' responses and perceptions regarding the myth were either conflicted, in which students perceived the myth to hold both positive and negative characteristics, color-blind, in which students considered the stereotype to be positive, or were in contempt, in which students perceived the stereotype to be offensive due to its historical foundations. Assalone and Fann (2016) confirmed previous assertions that the

myth caused students to feel pressure to meet unrealistic expectations and that students experience the myth to varying degrees. Their study provides a foundation for further exploring how the myth impacts SEAA students specifically, especially when we consider the vast diversity of Asian American diversity and the influence of another insidious stereotype that affects SEAA students.

   Deviant minority myth. Given the ethnic diversity within the Asian American racial category, not all groups have been associated solely with the model minority myth. Even within the Asian American racial group, microcosms of the larger racial structure are enacted within and between specific communities, most notably with the Southeast Asian population. As previously mentioned, these communities' socio-historical contexts position them closer to other communities of color from low-income backgrounds. Consequently, these communities have been racialized more closely in relation to Black and Latino groups, who have been stigmatized as problems, inferior, or deviant (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Despite their positioning under the Asian American racial category, the positioning of SEAA students is further complicated by a deficit view that they are high school dropouts and delinquents (Lee, 2001; Ngo, 2006; Um, 2003).

   As previously mentioned, the refugee experience that affects many within the SEAA population in the U.S. provides an essential context for understanding how the deviant minority narrative came into existence for this community. SEAA communities share a common refugee background, which has impacted the social and economic mobility of these groups in significant ways. Upon their emigration into the U.S., a majority of Southeast Asian refugee families moved into low-income areas in urban cities

63

and, as a result, some began to identify more with the experiences of Black and Latino communities than with the White mainstream population (Reyes, 2005, 2007). Consequently, SEAA youth can adopt characteristics in opposition to "acting White" (Osajima, 1993) to construct their own identities through language (Bucholtz, 2004; Pyke & Dang, 2003; Reyes, 2005, 2007), attire (Chhuon & Hudley, 2010b; Lee, 2004), and attitude (Lee, 2004). As a result, they are considered either apathetic or dangerous (Chhuon & Hudley, 2010b). However, it is important to note that SEAA students employ a variety of strategies in negotiating their ethnic identities. For example, to counter negative images about SEAA students, some students may more readily identify with a panethnic Asian identity because it was perceived to be a path to a positive academic identity (Chhuon & Hudley, 2010b). Thus, associations with academic achievement become further bifurcated and aligning with the model minority or deviant minority stereotypes.

The deviant minority myth (Museus, 2013a), or inferior minority myth (Museus, 2008a), characterizes students as academically inferior, dropouts, gang members, welfare sponges, and resistant to assimilation (Bucholtz, 2004; Museus, 2013a; Museus & Park, 2015; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Rim, 2007). This stereotype has been closely associated with Black and Latino students as well resulting in lasting impacts on students (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Museus, 2008a). For example, Museus (2008a) described how one female, African American student internalized the inferior minority myth in ways that negatively affected her engagement in the classroom. The deviant or inferior minority myth functions to highlight the ways that these communities are seen to enact perceived

negative behaviors that are popularly considered to be the causes for their struggles. It furthers previous assertions that cultural factors are the causes of SEAA students' low performance and achievement. Ultimately, such characterizations continue to perpetuate deficit ideologies.

The deviant minority myth also creates educational and social barriers for SEAA students. For example, of the nine themes Museus and Park (2015) identified in their qualitative study of 46 Asian American students and their experiences with racism in college, one theme highlighted the social challenges SEAA students faced as a result of being characterized as "ghetto" or poor due to the inferior minority myth. The authors noted that SEAA students are mutually shaped by both the model minority and inferior minority myths (Museus & Park, 2015). However, the deviant minority myth continues to plague SEAA students and impact their educational experiences in ways not sufficiently explored in higher education (Museus, 2008a). Currently, there is a dearth of research on the source and impact of the deviant minority myth stereotype on SEAA college students.

Overall, the influence and impact of cultural racism and stereotypes on Asian American and SEAA experiences cannot be discounted. As these myths attempt to invoke different characterizations of Asian American and SEAA students as enemies or model citizens or deviant and dangerous, they all effectively essentialize groups of people into racial categories that are harmful and degrading. These stereotypes especially influence beliefs and attitudes toward SEAA students in complicated ways that can impact the ways they show up and participate in the classroom. More needs to be

65

understood regarding the implications of racialization on their educational experience.

Consequently, in the following section, I describe the different experiences with racism

that SEAA students face situated within a three-level framework for understanding how

racism is embedded across the educational environment.

Levels and instances of racism.

Jones (2000) identified three levels of racism that are helpful for exploring new

hypotheses for race-associated differences in health outcomes, and which can also be

useful for studying race-associated differences in educational outcomes for SEAA

students. The first level, institutional racism, is systemic in nature and manifests in both

material conditions and access to power. In terms of material conditions, this manifests

as differential access to goods, services, and opportunities by race. In terms of access to

power, this manifests as differential access to information, resources, and voice.

Accordingly, this has produced and perpetuated a connection between socioeconomic

status and race. The second level, personally-mediated racism, is defined as prejudice

and discrimination. Prejudice—differential assumptions about abilities, motives, and

intentions of others—and discrimination—differential actions toward others—both occur

based on race. These actions can be intentional or unintentional, with some examples

including, lack of respect, suspicion, devaluation, scapegoating, and dehumanization of

racially minoritized groups (Jones, 2000). The third level, internalized racism is

acceptance of negative messages about abilities and intrinsic worth by members of

racially minoritized groups. Internalized racism manifests as embracing of Whiteness,

self-devaluation, resignation, helplessness, and hopelessness (Jones, 2000).

66

The three levels of racism may be distinct, yet they are not exclusive of each other, working in tandem within and among systems to produce differential outcomes for racially minoritized groups. Jones (2000) uses an allegory of a garden to capture how these levels of racism impact different flowers in the garden and to highlight that institutional racism is the most fundamental level to be addressed. Jones' (2000) framework provides a useful lens for exploring the impacts of racism on the educational experiences of SEAA college students.

Indeed, SEAA students have been racialized based on their ethnic and racial group membership in ways that have resulted in their marginalization in many aspects of U.S. education through institutional, personally-mediated, and internalized racism. These experiences were documented in one of the first studies on the adaptation of Southeast Asian refugee youth in K-12 education. Rumbaut and Ima (1988) conducted a qualitative study of 579 Southeast Asian high school students in San Diego, California and identified many instances in which almost all refugee students were subject to racial baiting (e.g., name-calling) or other forms of racism from peers and educators. Some of these instances resulted in physical confrontations, which increased refugee students' motivations toward joining gangs for self-protection (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). Racial prejudice has negatively impacted Southeast Asian refugee youth adjustment in K-12 education (Kiang & Kaplan, 1994; Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). Accordingly, racism continues to manifest in different ways and to varying levels for SEAA students.

Race and racism play a significant role in impacting SEAA students' experiences in college, specifically in the form of racial stereotypes, cultural conflict, and prejudice

67

and discrimination (Museus, 2008a, 2013a; Museus & Park, 2015; Suzuki, 2002). While research on the impacts of race and racism on SEAA college students' experiences have been limited, Museus and Park (2015) conducted a qualitative study of Asian American (N=46), including SEAA (N=36), undergraduates at six 4-year postsecondary institutions and explored how these students experienced racism on a daily basis in college. They identified nine ways these students experienced racism: racial harassment, vicarious racism, racial isolation, the pressure to racially segregate, the pressure to racially assimilate, racial silencing, the perpetual foreigner myth, the model minority myth, and the inferior minority myth. While not exhaustive, Museus and Park's (2015) findings indicate that Asian American students experience many types of racism in college. Additionally, SEAA college students specifically experience differential racialization compared to their East Asian counterparts as both model and deviant minorities (Museus & Park, 2015). However, SEAA students can experience racism at many levels and in many other forms overtly and covertly. In the following section, I delineate different manifestations of racism at the institutional, personally-mediated, internalized levels that impact SEAA college students' experiences. Before continuing, it is important to note that these manifestations of racism may overlap significantly and further in-depth analysis of the relationships is warranted although not within the scope of this paper.

  Institutional racism. At the institutional level or racism, it has been shown that SEAA students are subject to a system that allows and restricts for differential access to goods, services, opportunities, information, resources, and voice. The previous discussions about the ways culture and race impact SEAA students highlight how they

are restricted access to the above rights. This restriction of access has manifested in under-resourced K-12 schools, lack of quality teachers, a curriculum that does not reflect their identities, backgrounds, and cultures. SEAA student cultures are also considered deviant, deficient of positive American values, and problematic. Consequently, SEAA students can experience both cultural and institutional racism. This is evident in the ways that cultural values of SEAA students are considered deficient in comparison to dominant groups.

SEAA students are subject to multiple systems that have institutionalized racism (e.g., education, media, prison) and these systems work in tandem with each other to ultimately limit their access to education. For example, the hypercriminalization of SEAA youth, especially men, can severely limit their access to educational opportunity due to beliefs that they are deviant and criminal. There is a growing body of research exploring SEAA involvement in crime and delinquency (Chong et al., 2009). According to the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (2007), Southeast Asian youth were arrested at relatively high rates compared to other Asian Pacific Islanders. In a report produced by Asian American/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy, Ahuja and Chlala (2013) reported Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander men were routinely stopped and profiled as gang members despite having no affiliation. Furthermore, many SEAA youth are at high risk of being tried as an adult and are subject to an enhancement of criminal charges due to gang stereotypes (Ahuja & Chlala, 2013). SEAA students regularly experience under-resourced school systems, poverty, racial profiling, over-policing, and mass incarceration (Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, n.d.). The criminalization of SEAA youth has

69

resulted in the funneling of SEAA and Southeast Asian refugees and immigrants into the school-to-prison and the school-to-prison-to-deportation pipeline respectively (Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, n.d.). For those students who are pushed from system to system and ultimately into prisons, the pathway to education becomes even more difficult. Even more troubling, the systemic oppression of SEAA youth through hypercriminalization (re)produces negative assumptions that SEAA youths are deviants and criminals, restarting the cycle of harm and oppression.

For those who can attend college, institutional racism continues to manifest on the college campus, especially in the ways the curriculum and physical space of the campus neglect to represent SEAA students. Many often are the only ones or one of the few in their ethnic groups in classrooms and can experience isolation. Museus and Park (2015) determined in their qualitative study that Asian American, and subsequently SEAA, college students experience racial invisibility, isolation, and silencing on their college campus. Specifically, students noted that their voices, stories, cultures, and histories were not included in the curriculum or the library or other physical spaces on campus. As a result, students felt voiceless, can have critical impacts on students' identity development, sense of belonging, and overall campus environment experience (Museus & Park, 2015). In this case, the curriculum and physical campus environment act as barriers to students' access to their voice. Consequently, invisibility, isolation, and silencing are symptoms of a racial system that prevents students from feeling as if they are full-fledged, valued members of the campus environment.

Personally-mediated racism. At the personally-mediated level of racism, SEAA college students experience racism in a variety of ways personally in the form of racial prejudice and discrimination. These experiences can be overtly or covertly racist and are produced in the form of racial prejudice and stereotypes, racial hostility, and racial microaggressions, among others. First, racial prejudice and stereotypes feed differential beliefs about SEAAs abilities, intentions, and motives based upon the essentialization of their cultures and ethnicity. Second, racial hostility manifests in racial slurs, racial bullying, and racial profiling (Museus & Park, 2015), as a result of racial prejudice and stereotypes. Examples include being called "ghetto" or "chink" or being stopped by police on campus due to race, which reflects the perpetual foreigner and deviant minority stereotypes respectively. Third, racial microaggressions are covert, subtle insults or slights that can be conscious or unconscious, in which the victims can experience irreparable harm in feeling belittlement, anger, rage, frustration, alienation, and invalidation (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2009). Some examples include being asked "Where they are really from," being told that they speak English well, or being subjected to inaccurate assumptions about their intellectual ability.

Asian American and Pacific Islander students experience the highest rates of bullying compared to other racial groups with 54% of these students reporting they were bullied in the 2008-2009 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Racially-motivated bullying, especially, can have severe impacts on SEAA students in school. For example, Maffini (2016) conducted a quantitative study of SEAA students (N=645) in the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey, to determine mental health outcomes as a

71

result of perceptions or experiences compromising school safety (e.g., bullying) and

concluded that SEAA students can experience greater perceptions of feeling unsafe,

which were associated with lower self-esteem and increased levels of depression. Such

symptoms can have detrimental impacts on academic performance. Furthermore, the

ways teachers treat SEAA students can have potentially damaging effects on their

academic performance. Lee (2004) determined that many educators ascribed to beliefs

that Hmong students struggled academically due to incompatibility with American

culture. Furthermore, such beliefs perpetuated the hypercriminalization of students in the

classroom, activating the school-to-prison pipeline. Specifically, the impact of racial

prejudice and stereotypes among peers and from authority figures are important to

explore as these beliefs feed and reproduce racial hostility and racial microaggressions

against students.

     Internalized racism. At the internalized level of racism, SEAA college students

begin to accept negative depictions and portrayals of their ethnicity and culture in

insidious ways. Stereotypes also play an influential role in the ways that SEAA students

begin to accept essentialist, negative views about themselves due to the hostile

environment. In the past few decades, research on the impact of stereotypes has

flourished; consequently asserting that the existence of stereotypes can potentially

threaten the intellectual environment for stigmatized individuals (Inzlicht & Schmader,

2012). Steele and Aronson (1995) identified the presence of stereotype threat, which

asserts that negative assumptions about the academic ability of a group can diminish the

academic performance of members of that group. They conducted four experimental

studies and used ANCOVA and MANOVA statistical analyses to determine that African American students were vulnerable to negative stereotypes, which then caused a negative impact in their standardized test performances in relation to White students; however, they also determined that when conditions were designed to alleviate the stereotype, these students performed better (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Consequently, SEAA students can experience a self-fulfilling prophetic effect in which their socialized negative beliefs about their academic ability can create undue pressures and stresses that can negatively impact their academic performance and can cause students to internalize these negative beliefs about their skills.

Other studies have explored the impact of stereotype threat on African American students, Latino students, and women, and affirmed previous findings about the negative effects of stereotypes on these populations (e.g., Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Guyll, Madon, Prieto, & Scherr, 2010; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Lesko & Corpus, 2006; Massey & Owens, 2014). Incidentally, few studies have explored the impact of stereotype threat for Asian American or SEAA students. This oversight is possibly due in part to assumptions that stereotypes about Asian Americans are positive or good stereotypes. Ironically, the lack of research on the impact of stereotypes on Asian American students, and the above-postulated reason, further perpetuate the invisibility of the population in many scholarly areas. Furthermore, the existence of stereotypes in the environment can manifest itself in complex ways for Asian American students. For example, Asian Americans face immense pressure to perform academically due to presumptions that they all are good at math and science. Students then can experience anxiety in their efforts to

live up to the stereotype, can descend into depression, and can become too embarrassed to seek help (Chhuon & Hudley, 2010a; Lee, 1994). The internalization of stereotypes can often reaffirm and legitimatize stereotypes, resulting in false-image and psychological damage to students (Lee, 1994; Museus, 2013c). Specifically, SEAA students who internalize these damaging stereotypes may be less likely to persist in their educational pursuits resulting in low rates of persistence and degree attainment for these groups, which negatively affect their abilities to gain employment, pay taxes, and move out of poverty.

Despite recent efforts to delegitimize the model minority myth and a marked shift from deficit perspectives to exploring the strengths and assets of communities of color, stereotypes and assumptions persist. Museus (2008a) asserted that while the stereotypes of the model or inferior minority may negatively impact campus environments and engagement in the classroom, serving as barriers to learning, very little is known about how these stereotypes influence behaviors and outcomes of students. The extent of the influence of stereotypes on student learning and engagement is unclear, especially regarding the competing characterizations of the model minority and deviant minority myths. Precisely, for SEAA college students, the opposing assumptions underlying the two stereotypes situates them in problematic ways and produce varying outcomes that are often perceived as negative. Yet, very little is known about the how this influences their educational experience or how the internalization of these stereotypes impacts their sense of identity and belonging on the college campus.

Some studies have indicated that many SEAA students actively negotiate ethnic identities in different contexts to resist stigmatization (Bucholtz, 2004; Chhuon & Hudley, 2010b). For example, Chhuon and Hudley (2010b) conducted a qualitative study of 52 Cambodian high school students in Southern California and determined that the students negotiated in ethnic and panethnic identity politics by adopting or rejecting specific identities according to the context or situation. Specifically, for students who identified with the panethnic Asian American identity, they were highly aware of assumptions that Cambodian students struggled academically; consequently, they adopted the model minority identity as a pathway to being perceived as academically successful at the expense of holding more internalized, negative attitudes about their Cambodian identity. For students who identified with the ethnic Cambodian identity, two groups emerged; both groups held stronger, more positive associations with their Cambodian identity. However, while one group was determined to utilize the backdrop of negative assumptions about their educational achievement as motivation to prove others wrong about their ability to achieve, the second group, mostly male, adopted more adversarial or harmful behaviors in response to being stigmatized as gang members and marginalized in the classroom. These findings reveal the depth of complexity in how students must navigate their ethnic and panethnic identities as well as beliefs about their achievement against a larger structure of racialization, stereotypes, and marginalization.

Acknowledging racism.

SEAA college students experience racism at many levels and in many different forms. Much of the scholarly conversations surrounding the experiences of SEAA

college students have focused on cultural and structural factors while relatively little has been explored in terms of encounters with racism. Only recently have scholars begun to call for more comprehensive analyses of racial differences in achievement that includes race and racism as significant factors (e.g., Harper, 2012). For example, Harper (2012) conducted a systematic analysis of 255 articles across seven peer-reviewed higher education journals to determine how scholars discuss, theorize, and explain racial differences in achievement and outcomes. He discovered that the scholarship deigned to address race and racism as critical factors that explained the outcomes of racially minoritized populations and used "semantic substitutes" (e.g., alienating, hostile, unsupportive) for racism (Harper, 2012). Ultimately, Harper (2012) argued that scholars must critically examine racism to influence how college environments can be transformed to support marginalized populations.

It is with the above revelations in mind that I situate previous discussions about cultural and structural factors impacting the success of SEAA college students along with the explicit acknowledgment and excavation of how race and racism impact SEAA students. An exploration of cultural and structural factors is essential but incomplete when there is no explicit acknowledgment of the ways racism affects students. Especially for SEAA students, the manifestations of racism they experience are wholly unique as they are subject to racial prejudices and stereotypes from a variety of fronts. There is a critical need to explore how cultural, structural, and racial barriers all interact to impact the educational experiences of SEAA college students.

Southeast Asian American Students in the Community College Environment

Given the above discussion of cultural and racial factors that impact the SEAA college student experience, it is essential to situate these relationships within the community college learning environment for a variety of reasons. First, the literature on these students' experiences is scant. According to Lew, Chang, and Wang (2005), in their review of the literature on Asian Pacific American community college students, there were only eight published studies at the time. There are still a limited number of studies that focus specifically upon Asian American community college students overall and subsequently even fewer on SEAA students. While a search of journal databases uncovered a variety of dissertations that focus specifically on Asian American community college students, there are few published articles on this topic.

Second, most of the literature on Asian American community college students focus on academic aspirations (e.g., Wang, Chang, & Lew, 2009; Yang, Rendón, & Shearon, 1994) and diversity within the group (e.g., Chu, 1991). Some have explored students' dissatisfaction with unwelcoming faculty attitudes, lack of representational diversity, and discriminatory behavior of staff and students (e.g., Pham & Dykstra, 1996). Additionally, much of this literature examined students within the context of a state or local system or campus (e.g., Assalone & Fann, 2016; Chu, 1991; Pham & Dykstra, 1996). While important and useful, there is a need to apply more critical lenses that explore how race impacts these students' community college experiences. With the recent application of CRT and the exploration of students experiences with the model minority stereotype, Assalone and Fann (2016) have illuminated a need for more critical

77

frameworks and excavations of the racialized experiences that Asian American students experience at the community college level.

Third, community colleges are uniquely situated as open access, low tuition, and local geographic proximity institutions that attract a variety of students who make college choices based upon academic preparation, financial capacities, proximity to family, and career choices, among others. According to the AACC (2015), and dependent upon whether enrollment and graduation trends stay constant, to meet the 50% completion goal, community colleges would confer over 13.8 million awards by 2020. Given the changing U.S. demographics and the likelihood that many of these incoming students are students of color and from low socioeconomic backgrounds, community colleges must be prepared to support the needs of these students. For these reasons, community colleges play a pivotal role in the education of our democratic society as they are spaces that attend to a variety of needs of a large and diverse population. Consequently, community colleges are prime spaces of inquiry for advancing knowledge on racial inequities that can have detrimental impacts on the educational achievements of its student population.

Accordingly, community colleges are prime spaces for exploring how culture and race interact to influence students' educational experiences. While other recent studies have begun to explore the impact of stereotypes and racial microaggressions in the community college environment (e.g., Assalone & Fann, 2016), this current study seeks a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of how cultures and race interact in the community college environment to influence SEAA students' experiences. Furthermore, in the tradition of and alignment with AsianCrit, an exploration of these experiences

through the voices of SEAA students is warranted. The experiential knowledge of SEAA community college students will allow us to understand better how the community college environment enacts and reproduces racism.

Advancing Knowledge of Southeast Asian American College Students

There are several implications for future research based on the experiences of SEAA college students. First, early understandings of SEAA populations were developed under deficit perspectives that focused on the problems impacting these communities and what they lacked to be successful. Simultaneously, these studies neglected to consider and address ways systems and structures have created barriers for SEAA students that limit similar levels of achievement expected of other Asian American groups (e.g., Dao, 1991; Ima, 1995; Rumbaut, 1985). While SEAA students have been highlighted much more in recent research (e.g., Akiba, 2010; Kwan, 2015; Museus, 2013b; Tang, Kim, & Haviland, 2015; Xiong, 2012), more needs to be done to investigate the many complex factors that influence their educational achievement. Additionally, future investigations must actively and explicitly counter deficit-based ideologies about these populations.

Second, as previous scholars have pointed out (e.g., Museus, 2013b; Nasir & Hand, 2006), further exploration of the ways cultural and structural factors mutually shape the educational experiences of students is necessary. Given the increased focus on the ways that campus environments must acknowledge and attend to the cultural backgrounds and values of their diverse student bodies as well as the structures that impact their experiences, it would be prudent and necessary to explore this relationship

79

further. Such exploration is necessary to produce a more comprehensive, holistic, and nuanced understanding of the system of factors that act as both barriers and opportunities for SEAA students.

Third, it is imperative that future inquiries consider how racism impacts SEAA college students. Many scholars have explored the impact of the model minority stereotype on the experiences of Asian American students and SEAA students, but relatively little is known about the effects of the deviant minority stereotype on SEAA students. The depiction of SEAA students as both models and deviants, while mentioned briefly in prior studies, has not been sufficiently explored and has not been the central focus of systematic inquiry. Furthermore, the mutual impacts of these two stereotypes are insufficiently understood. Also, SEAA students can experience racism in a variety of ways that have not been sufficiently explored. As racialized bodies, SEAA students present a unique opportunity to explore how dual, polarizing stereotypes about their educational success can offer new ways of understanding race, racism, and racialization processes in higher education and their impacts on student outcomes.

Fourth, with the current and increasing focus on the impact of campus racial climate on students, little is known about this impact on SEAA college students specifically. Previous studies that focused on racially minoritized students' campus experiences have indicated that students hold more negative perceptions of the campus than their White counterparts (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Museus & Truong, 2009; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Polarizing stereotypes and racialization may uniquely impact SEAA students' perceptions and experiences with the campus racial climate. More

80

research in this area is necessary to understand whether SEAA college students experience their campus environments differently than their peers.

Finally, SEAA students are an essential and relevant population of study. Their experiences and outcomes may mirror that of other students of color; however, they are a unique population, with histories, cultures, and experiences that significantly shape how they experience the education environment. As much of the recent scholarship has begun to explore the ways that campus climates and environments can impact student outcomes, SEAA is a prime population for examining how educational environments can impact students. Further studies that highlight their experiences in different postsecondary contexts (e.g., two-year community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, predominantly White institutions, and minority-serving institutions) is also necessary as these environments have different characteristics that can significantly impact success. As such, this study will focus on the community college environment as experienced by SEAA students.

SEAA college students can no longer be overlooked and misunderstood. As the goal of education continues to be to produce a highly educated population that can participate fully in a democratic society, we can no longer ignore the needs of our most marginalized and underserved communities. To create a truly democratic society that is characterized by a just education system founded on equality and equity, we must strive to support our most invisible communities. To reduce this invisibility of SEAA college students, we must pursue a more critical and robust body of knowledge in coming years.

SEAA college students have much to offer in the classroom and college environment, and we must ensure that their experiences and needs are recognized.

Chapter Summary

As evidenced in the above review of the literature on factors that impact the educational experiences of SEAA students, SEAA students may contend with various cultural and racial barriers and challenges to their success in higher education. Altogether, these factors create a complex, complicated web of relationships and systems for SEAA students to navigate; however, despite the many barriers identified in the scholarship, opportunities and successes have also been identified. Despite significant obstacles, SEAA students also possess support systems and assets (e.g., family, community) that indicate a high potential for success in education. The body of research on SEAA students in both K-12 and postsecondary education is expanding in response to the necessity to address the existing opportunity gap and to augment the limited knowledge on these populations. Future inquiries would do well to consider new strategies for achieving these goals.

Chapter Three: Methods

The purpose of this study is to arrive at a deeper understanding of the meaning of the raced and racialized experience as described by SEAA community college students. This inquiry seeks to understand the essence of the relationship between racialization and educational experience. While there are many alternative and qualified traditions of inquiry that would be useful in exploring different aspects of the nature and essence of this experience, phenomenology is appropriate and best suited for this specific inquiry as it allows for thick, rich description and interpretation of SEAA community college students' racialized lived experiences. Furthermore, the AsianCrit perspective and phenomenological research methods are well-suited as both are philosophically grounded in the belief that individuals are the experts of their own experiences and lives (e.g., Museus & Iftikar, 2013; Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). Consequently, the researcher becomes the learner and what results is a collaborative dialogue between the two parties where mutual engagement, learning, and meaningmaking occurs (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). In the vein of social constructivism, in which knowledge is generated and maintained through collective human action, thought, and discourse (Collin, 2013), the resulting process produces a collaborative product of knowledge and understanding that is rooted in context and situation. This context and situation are bound in the moments of connection between myself and the participants and how I interpret their experiences.

83

In the following section, I offer a rationale for engaging qualitative research methods, specifically phenomenology, as the best-suited mode of inquiry for this study. Next, I describe my researcher reflexivity, which addresses my connection to the phenomenon of focus and its potential influences on my participation in the study. Then, I delineate the procedural steps of data collection and data analysis and account for the trustworthiness of the process and potential limitations of the study.

Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research is oriented toward the natural world (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). It is rooted in a subjectivist paradigm, in which reality and knowledge are constructed subjectively and are bound by context (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). Accordingly, qualitative research does not deal with the absolutes or "givens" in the positivist vein of quantitative research (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). Instead, qualitative research is interpretive in nature, and it offers the opportunity for in-depth exploration of a problem or issue (Creswell, 2013). For this to happen, researchers need a sophisticated, detailed understanding of the issue, which requires dialogue with people and multiple forms of data. Additionally, qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the context and settings that people exist within. While quantitative researchers focus on testing hypotheses through experiments, quasi-experiments, or correlation while trying to control various influences, qualitative researchers do not believe that multiple aspects of the world can be controlled (Rossman & Rallis, 2011).

Qualitative research methods are appropriate for this inquiry for a variety of reasons; however, possibly the most critical considerations lay in the beliefs, and

philosophical assumptions of the researcher are essential for deciding which inquiry to use. Creswell (2013) asserts that researchers bring beliefs and philosophical assumptions into their work, which influence the questions we ask, the theories we use, and the ways we gather data.

Perhaps the most critical philosophical assumption I make as a researcher is the ontological view that nature consists of multiple realities that are viewed differently by individuals. Thus, qualitative inquiry becomes the most appropriate method for exploring these different realities as it attends to the subjective nature of different perspectives. These multiple realities are lost within the positivistic paradigm of quantitative research, which seeks absolutes.

Furthermore, epistemologically, I ascribe to the perspective that knowledge can be known through the subjective experiences of people (Creswell, 2013). Thus, the importance of getting to know participants in a study and lessening the distance between the researcher and the participants to understand how they describe their subjective experiences is of the utmost concern (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative interviews become the best mode of understanding these subjective experiences as it allows for the excavation of multiple perspectives and diverse views, which can facilitate a more profound, sophisticated understanding of a problem or issue.

Finally, I affirm the axiological belief that all research is value-laden and that biases are always present throughout the conceptualization and completion of the study. My researcher values and preferences influence every aspect of the study from beginning to end. Qualitative inquiry allows for and encourages the researcher to report on these

values and biases via a positionality or reflexivity statement, which enables the reader to describe their backgrounds and how it will inform the interpretation of the study (Creswell, 2013). Researcher values and biases are significant and are entirely relevant to the study including the participants and the audience.

Qualitative research provides a method of exploration of problems or issues by channeling stories through the voices of individuals (Creswell, 2013). Stories are especially relevant as the SEAA community is silenced, underrepresented, and marginalized. Participants have the opportunity to share their stories and experiences, which can result in detailed understandings of their complex issues (Creswell, 2013). Also, qualitative research methods are useful for exploring how, what, and why questions in an in-depth exploration through detailed information (Creswell, 2013). These questions can elicit rich, detailed descriptions of how participants experience a phenomenon and what meaning they ascribe to it. Such descriptions are vital for the meaningful generation of knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon. As such, it is the most appropriate method of inquiry for this present study.

Phenomenological Perspectives

Phenomenology seeks to uncover the meaning of nature and things—the essence of the phenomenon (Saldana, 2011). Specifically, a phenomenological approach to research is an attempt to understand better the lived experiences of certain individuals who experience a particular phenomenon or situation (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology provides the reader with a closer, more meaningful connection to the essence of the lived experience through the voices of subjects (Gliner, Morgan, & Leech, 2009). Lived

86

experience is an experience that individuals live through before they take a reflective

view of it (van Manen, 2014). Phenomenology seeks to come to a shared understanding

of a particular lived experience for a group of individuals (Creswell, 2013).

Phenomenology as a philosophy and method has been influenced significantly by

German philosophers, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heiddeger (1889-1976).

Husserl first originated transcendental phenomenology, which seeks to derive essence

and meaning of a phenomenon through rick, thick description. Husserl believed that

phenomenology should be a philosophy without presuppositions; researchers should

suspend judgment in a process called epoche. Epoche is often referred to as bracketing,

an attempt by the researcher to set aside prejudgments and to have an honest, receptive

presence; it is to view the phenomenon with an open, transcendent ego (Moustakas,

1994). Other core processes of transcendental phenomenology are transcendental-

phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation. After epoche, transcendental-

phenomenological reduction considers each experience in its singularity and the

phenomenon is perceived and described in its totality (Moustakas, 1994). Textural

descriptions of the meanings and essence are formed. Next, imaginative variation aims to

understand the structural essence of the experience, to "present a picture of the conditions

that precipitate an experience and connect with it" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 35).

Transcendental phenomenology is purely descriptive.

On the other hand, Heidegger believed in the interpretive nature of

phenomenology. He introduced hermeneutic phenomenology, which called for

"interpretation of the engaged, unreflective ready-to-hand activity of participants"

(Walsh, 2012, p. 2). Heidegger considered hermeneutics as a "natural process of understanding, or as a way to understand or make meaning of the world around us" (Vis, 2008, p. 4). Contrary to Husserl, while Heidegger acknowledged the presuppositions that researchers bring with them and attempts could be made to set them aside, he asserted that they are never transcended (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). While Husserl pursued an objective understanding of one's subjectivity, Heidegger believed that how one sees the world depends on how one interprets it (Vis, 2008). Accordingly, researchers should not control their sense of interpretation but to include it as an evolving knowing experience (Vis, 2008).

These two branches of phenomenology have strongly influenced current understandings of the philosophy. Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (2014) offer the most recent interpretations of phenomenological research inquiry, with Moustakas ascribing to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and van Manen taking up Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology tradition. The descriptive-interpretive process is always present in some form in phenomenology (van Manen, 2014). In this study, I choose to incorporate the hermeneutic tradition of phenomenology. However, I utilize Moustakas' systematic methods for conducting a phenomenological inquiry with the caveat and understanding of van Manen's (2016) assertions that procedural methods may contradict the original philosophy of phenomenology. I chose hermeneutic phenomenology to explore how SEAA community college students experience race and racism in a racialized institutional environment and how they describe these experiences because it is my positionality and my interpretation that can offer a nuanced look at these

experiences. As a phenomenological researcher, I sought not to transcend but to interpret the experiences of participants. While rich, thick description for the reader is always my goal as a researcher, I contend that my lens, as influenced by AsianCrit and my abovementioned philosophical underpinnings, offers insights into the unique experiences of SEAA community college students.

Researcher Role and Reflexivity

Many scholars assert that every phase of the research study can incorporate assumptions of the researcher (Creswell, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2011; Van Manen, 1990). Though prior researchers stress the importance of minimizing research subjectivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) recent scholars embrace a constructivist approach in which the researcher reflexivity is a critical aspect of the analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Reflexivity is a two-part process in which a researcher identifies experiences with the phenomenon under study as well as explores how these experiences shape the interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2013). Indeed, as a researcher with a Southeast Asian identity, I bring much subjectivity to this process. It is essential that I position my experiences and myself as the position of the researcher is a critical element of data analysis. My personal experiences, biases, and assumptions will inherently play a role in the shaping of this research study, as evidenced in the philosophical rationale for utilizing qualitative inquiry in this present study.

I am a Khmer American woman. I am the first U.S.-born child of Khmer refugees who experienced a multitude of horrors from war, genocide, familial losses, refugee camps, and a host of other traumas related to these life-changing experiences. In

watching my family and my Southeast Asian community struggle to navigate the U.S. system of education, and struggling myself, I have realized that our histories and contexts deeply influence the possibilities we believe are available to us as well as the choices we believe we can make. Watching my family strive to survive in a new country has deeply shaped my views of the world. In their attempts to make a new home, they have been forced to make critical changes in their attitudes and behaviors to adapt. Our language and ways of communication have slowly been eroded as English began to replace Khmer in the household. As a second-generation Khmer American woman, I feel a deep sense of loss for the sacrifices my family has made to build a new home. Still, the concept of home itself is complex and complicated. I question how there can be a sense of home if my community continually feels a sense of displacement, both physically and psychologically.

Furthermore, how I have been able to navigate education as a Khmer woman compared to my Khmer brothers has illuminated some deep inequities even within our microcosm of educational possibility. My sister and I hold at least a bachelor's degree while my brothers faced significant barriers to earning their high school diplomas. Back then, my question was always, "What are my brothers doing wrong?" Today, my question is, "What was wrong with the system that it could not, would not support my brothers?" This experience is the impetus of my focus on this phenomenon of racialization and its impacts on educational experience. I have learned to ask different questions that place accountability on our educational systems rather than the victims.

As Southeast Asian students, we are undoubtedly invisible within larger conversations about students of color, as evidenced in the literature. As we traverse the higher education landscape, we are also subject to marginalization in a variety of different contexts and environments. One such environment is the community college setting. While I have never attended a community college, having only helped my brothers navigate the community colleges they attempted to attend and having only taught one course at a community college, I find these important spaces are often ignored due to its open-access nature and perceived lack of prestige. Community college was considered the "only" possibility for my brothers when they briefly considered pursuing higher education. In the end, that "only" possibility became no possibility in terms of achieving a postsecondary degree. Accordingly, I came to question again the system of education and the ways it can constrain, limit, or even end opportunities, especially when considering the impacts of race.

When I think of the most marginalized individuals, I think of those who are the most silenced and oppressed, who are left to their own devices, asked to pull themselves up by their bootstraps; yet, are ultimately pathologized as the problems when systems work as designed, which benefit White supremacy and oppress marginalized populations. So many community college classrooms are filled with the faces of students of color and many SEAAs. Community colleges are marginalized within the hierarchy of postsecondary institutions and the students who must navigate these spaces are further hidden. Consequently, I come with a passionate quest for exploring the racialized lived experiences of SEAA community college students. With the hopes that what can be

learned from their experiences can highlight solutions to solve their inequitable access to opportunity and resources.

Even though I may share a common racial and ethnic identity and culture with many participants in this study, I do not presume to know or truly understand their experiences in the community college context. As much as I may be an insider in some ways, I am just as much an outsider as a researcher and as intimately close as I may come to understand this experience, I can never come close enough. And yet, the importance of exploring this lived experience can never be overstated, and I must strive to come close as possible. It is this closeness and intimate connection to this subject that must be deconstructed. I recognize that I place a significant value on the topic and I am also completely biased in my perspectives on it.

While Moustakas (1994), and other scholars have extolled the importance of epoche or bracketing the researcher's subjectivities, I question whether that is possible. On the one hand, it is critical to set aside prejudgments and begin the interview in an unbiased and receptive manner to come to know the phenomenon with openness and freshness in transcendental form (e.g., epoche) (Moustakas, 1994). However, I identify strongly with Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology, in which while the attempts can be made to identify and set aside presuppositions to the work, there is an innate understanding that these presuppositions can never be truly transcended (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). In fact, these presuppositions are what make this present interpretation valuable at this moment and time. This understanding also speaks to the conclusion one can make when accepting that the researcher can only come to know the phenomenon

92

through their subjectivities and perspectives, as well as those of their participants, that the interpretations made are personal ones. There is no omniscient, transcendental perspective, which based on the philosophical assumptions previously mentioned, is not possible within the realm of qualitative inquiry. That is not what I seek as a researcher. I only seek to bring the phenomenon of the racialized experiences of SEAA community college students to light (Eilifsen, 2011). I pursue this study for personal reasons as a Khmer American scholar. I seek the make visible what has previously been unseen. I seek to reflect the experiences of a resilient people who dare to make new hope and new possibilities despite overwhelming barriers. I am possible because my families made it possible. We are possible.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study explored the experiences of SEAA community college students with race and racialization. The overarching research questions guiding this inquiry asked: What are the racialized experiences of SEAA community college students? And, how do SEAA community college students describe their experiences of being racialized and of experiencing racism?

Data Collection

In the following section, I detail critical decisions regarding data collection for the present study. I detail participant recruitment strategies, details of the participant sample, provide an overview of interview strategies and questions, and offer my position on data saturation.

Recruitment.

To acquire information-rich cases for this inquiry, I solicited assistance from AANAPISI faculty and staff who work closely with SEAA community college students. First, I identified AANAPISI institutions across the nation who have specifically targeted support programs for SEAA students and have a large population of SEAA students enrolled. I intentionally targeted recruitment from these environments as SEAA student participation in AANAPISI programs may increase their likelihood to have had opportunities to think deeply and critically about their identity and experiences. Accordingly, I sent out a recruitment email including a link to a questionnaire that was disseminated via professional and campus networks to the relevant student population (see Appendix A). The questionnaire collected demographic information and solicited responses to questions designed to engage the interests of potential participants in sharing their experiences as SEAA community college students (see Appendix B). The responses were analyzed and potential cases contacted for participation in the study via interviews.

Sample.

In phenomenological research, a sample of three to fifteen participants is the suggested size for exploring a phenomenon of study (Creswell, 2013). For the present study, the participant sample size was ten. I employed purposeful sampling for participant selection as it is a logical and powerful method for selecting information-rich cases that allow for in-depth study (Patton, 2002). I sought information-rich cases to yield rich, detailed insights of the questions under study (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, maximum variation is a purposeful sampling technique that seeks to capture and describe

the central theme that cuts across variation; this allows for heterogeneity in participants who represent a wide array of SEAA backgrounds (Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Vietnamese). It also produces high-quality, unique descriptions and shared patterns or themes that cut across the heterogeneous cases (Patton, 2002). In addition, snowball sampling is another purposeful sampling technique that allows for the identification of information-rich cases through existing networks (Patton, 2002). This is an effective method for identifying potential participants who have been vetted by participants or other notable individuals. These sampling methods allowed for the identification and recruitment of information-rich cases. The criteria for participant selection included: (a) participants who identify as SEAA (e.g., Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese) and (b) currently attend a community college, and (c) completed at least two semesters of community college.

Participants. A total of ten participants participated in the study. The demographic breakdown of participants included: six women, two men, one agender individual, and one genderfluid individual. I use the preferred pronouns of each participant. The ethnicities of participants included: three Khmer or Cambodian Americans, three Hmong Americans, two Vietnamese Americans, one multiracial Vietnamese and Pilipino American, and one multiracial Vietnamese and Mexican American. All but one of the participants lived and attended community colleges on the West Coast. One participant attended a community college in the East Coast. Additionally, five participants identified as first-generation college students and five identified as second-generation college students, whose parent(s) attended college in the

95

United States. *Table 3.1* offers a visual representation of the demographics of each

participant. Pseudonyms were selected either by the participant or myself. Chapter four

provides a brief profile of each participant.

Participants	Ethnicity	Gender	Geographical Region	Student Status
Chau	Multiracial – Vietnamese & Mexican American	Woman	West Coast	Second Generation
Chee	Hmong American	Woman	West Coast	First Generation
Chenda	Khmer American	Woman	West Coast	First Generation
Hien	Multiracial – Vietnamese & Pilipino American	Woman	West Coast	Second Generation
Minh	Vietnamese American	Man	West Coast	Second Generation
Miss	Hmong American	Woman	West Coast	First Generation
Qu	Vietnamese American	Agender	West Coast	Second Generation
Sokha	Khmer American	Genderfluid	East Coast	First Generation
Sophea	Khmer American	Man	West Coast	First Generation
Sua	Hmong American	Woman	West Coast	Second Generation

Table 3.1 Participant Demographics

Interviews.

According to Moustakas (1994), the long interview of phenomenology is a

primary method of data collection. It is an informal, interactive process culled through

open-ended dialogue and while interview questions can be structured, flexibility and

variations or alterations of questions are not uncommon depending upon the openness of

the participant in sharing the fullness of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). It should be the goal of the researcher to create a space that is comfortable enough to convey and reciprocate authenticity and care. I conducted a three-part interview process with each participant spanning across a two-to-four-month period. Before the interviews, I piloted the interview questions with a Cambodian American college graduate, who attended community college before transferring to a four-year institution. Their feedback allowed me to revise and clarify the focus of any questions that were potentially unclear. I made minor revisions to the interview protocol before data collection.

Each interview was conducted one-on-one in a semi-structured fashion and lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. These interviews were conducted in-person at a public location (with a private, enclosed space) of the participant's choosing or via video conferencing when distance and scheduling prevented in-person meetings. Before the first interview, the participants completed a demographic form (see Appendix D) and a consent form (see Appendix E). Open-ended questions were used to elicit participants' perceptions and descriptions of the phenomenon of racialization in a community college setting. These broad questions were designed to obtain rich, substantive descriptions of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

These interviews were audio-recorded under the consent of the participant. I transcribed each interview. Notes about the process were recorded, which informed the development of further questions in the following interviews. This three-part interview process allowed for the necessary trust building between myself and the participant to occur to produce a rich, detailed dialogue and discourse about the phenomenon under

study. I conducted all three interviews with seven of the ten participants. Two

participants, Chee and Sua, declined to continue participating in the study after the first

interview due to various reasons related to the time commitment requested. One

participant, Minh, did not respond to requests to complete his third interview. In sum, I

conducted total of 25 interviews across the sample of ten participants. In the following

sections, I outline the purposes and structure of each interview session.

Interview 1: Introduction and building trust. The purpose of the first interview

was to create a relaxed atmosphere that encourages trust, collaboration, authenticity, care,

and reciprocity while participants were asked to share their educational backgrounds and

experiences (see Appendix F). These were foundational concepts for building a

relationship between the participant and myself that allowed for deep, rich conversation.

It is my responsibility as a researcher to seek and achieve this climate (Moustakas, 1994).

Before beginning the interview, I asked participants to review, acknowledge, and sign

their consent to participation in the study. A copy of the consent form with relevant

information about the study regarding the purposes of the study, benefits, and risks

involved, and a request for audio recording were provided to the participant and

discussed in detail. Additionally, I shared my motivations for conducting the study,

including my background and educational experiences. Moustakas (1994) notes that such

social conversations or other meditative activities are important for building trust and

atmosphere. Initially, I prompted the participant to share their backgrounds and

educational journeys. The initial interview questions were intended to engage

participants in reflecting upon their educational experiences and racial identities as well

as the relationship between the two. Specific stories were encouraged as well as in-the-moment insights and revelations regarding their experiences. After the first interview, I scheduled the second interview and invited the participant to reflect on their experiences and share them at the next meeting.

   Interview 2: Reflexivity and insights. The purpose of the second interview was to clarify experiences shared at the first interview, to excavate any insights inspired by the discussion, and to explore specific experiences of racialization in the community college setting (see Appendix G). The interview began with a brief reflection of the first interview, which may have inspired new thoughts or questions that can be discussed and clarified. The first part of the interview involved a discussion of any questions that arose from the first preliminary analysis of the first interview. The participant had the opportunity to clarify and add to their stories and experiences. The second part of the interview focused in detail on participants' current identities as SEAA community college students; specifically, the questions centered around their perceptions of race, racism, and racialization, along with its impacts on their educational experiences. I asked variations of the following questions: Tell me about a time where your identity as an SEAA was pointed out in a class. How does this experience impact the way you see yourself as a college student? How do faculty, staff, and other students perceive you as an individual and student in class? What messages do you receive about your SEAA

identity in community college? At the end of the interview, I asked participants to reflect on the preceding conversation and share their perspectives.

     Interview 3: Concluding thoughts. The purpose of the third and final interview was to understand participants' perspectives regarding their educational experiences in community college as SEAAs (see Appendix H). The interview began with another reflection and opportunity for participants to share their thoughts and feelings through the course of the research study process and its impact, if any, on their identities as SEAAs and as students. I asked clarifying questions about the stories shared in the last two interviews. Next, I asked participants to share their thoughts on what their identities as SEAA mean in relation to college generally, and community college specifically. At the conclusion of the interview, I asked the participant to share their final thoughts and ask any questions related to the progression of the study, which included a member checking process, where participants had the opportunity to validate the accuracy and authenticity of the researcher's findings (Creswell, 2013). I made member checking meeting arrangements after data analysis.

Observations

     Given that the unit of analysis was both the participants and their community colleges, whenever possible, at opportune times, I traveled to their community college to observe any spaces they mention as well as the entire environment. If the institution was within driving distance in California, I made concerted effort to visit. However, some of the institutions required air travel, which prevented me from being able to visit given the cost of time and resources. I informed participants that I would visit their campus and

important spaces they identified. The purpose of these non-participant observations was to understand better the ways participants described their community college environments and to collect data that could assist me in understanding their institutions and circumstances. During observations, I recorded detailed field notes that I cross-referenced with their descriptions of their campus spaces.

On data saturation.

To achieve rich, detailed descriptions, initial interviews were used to develop findings that can be used to refine the subsequent interview question protocols. When data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously, it allows for more control by the researcher to ensure as much data is collected as possible. While other qualitative traditions pursue the point of data saturation, in which data is collected to the point that no more meaning is uncovered, phenomenology is philosophically opposed to such processes. Scholars such as van Manen, Higgins, and van der Riet (2016) contend that there is no saturation point concerning phenomenological meaning because each question is a bottomless one—there is no way to capture the entire meaningfulness of a phenomenon. Indeed, while the purpose of this inquiry is to capture and explore the essence of the phenomenon of SEAA racialization in a community college setting, I accept that this inquiry cannot, and should not, be the sole, penultimate understanding of this lived experience. Again, this exploration is context-bound and situated in the current understandings of myself, the researcher and learner, and the participants, the experts, at one point in time. There will always be opportunities for further inquiries into this phenomenon under different contexts. Even with this point in mind, data collection

101

efforts in phenomenology seek to uncover as much rich, detailed information as possible and the three-part interview process is useful for achieving this goal.

Data Analysis

Unlike other qualitative research methods, there is no uniform, universally accepted data analysis procedural steps in phenomenology. Scholars such as van Manen (2016) note that original phenomenology and procedural steps do not pair well philosophically. Wilding and Whiteford (2005) concur that there are few methodological signposts for using phenomenology in practice. As such, phenomenologists have turned to general qualitative research steps that can offer some direction for conducting phenomenological research. The data analysis procedures in this study are influenced by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell, Hanson, Plano, and Morales (2007), who offered some systematic steps for coming to an in-depth understanding of the essence of the phenomenon.

Moustakas (1994) offers the following systematic steps of phenomenological data analysis, which I followed. First, I reviewed the transcribed interviews in great depth through multiple reads and identifies significant statements or quotes (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007). Each statement made by the participant was given equal weight and value as all other statements made; this receptiveness is considered horizontalizing (Moustakas, 1994). In this process, I identified invariant horizons or constituents, which point to the unique qualities of a phenomenon. Second, I organized these horizontal statements into meaning units. Third, I identified core themes from these meaning units and removed overlapping or repetitive statements. Fourth, these themes

102

enabled me to create individual textural descriptions of the experience, which captures the vivid description of what was experienced (e.g., situation, condition, relationships). Fifth, I developed individual structural descriptions, which account for the underlying dynamics of the experience or how it was experienced. Sixth, I developed composite textural and structural descriptions that incorporate all participants' experiences. Finally, I developed composite textural-structural descriptions to synthesize the meanings and essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

The above is a time-consuming process that requires living within the data, which entails multiple reads, considerable thinking and rethinking, and many researcher notes. Throughout the process, I created analytic memos detailing my reactions to the interviews and noting any thoughts regarding any emergent patterns within the data. These memos, as "written records of analysis" helped me to think and rethink what I was noticing in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 117). This reflective process was critical as this study spanned over the course of seven months during data collection. In recording my thoughts throughout the process, I could review and revise my thinking and analysis of the data. Additionally, these memos shaped the questions for following interviews.

Once this process was complete, and I identified the themes relating to the essence of the phenomenon, I provided the findings to the participants as a form of validating the data via member checking. Also known as participant validation, member checking is the process of presenting emergent findings to participants to elaborate upon, correct, or argue about (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). At the end of the data analysis phase, I

compiled the data and produced a synthesis of the underlying meaning, or essence, of the racialized lived experiences of SEAA community college students.

Trustworthiness and Validation

Over time, conversations regarding the applicability and relevance of validation and reliability in qualitative research have shifted from attempts to find equivalents that paralleled quantitative traditions of validity (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982) to offer alternate conceptual goals such as trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The trustworthiness of any study is based upon whether it was conducted systematically and competently that attended to the ethical considerations of the study and subject and addressed sensitive power dynamics (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). Relevant dynamics related to the systematic and competent inquiry are rigor and credibility, in which the principles of scientific research (e.g., significant questions, linking theory, empirical methods, and coherent reasoning) are considered (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). This process is critical for ensuring the validity of the study, which Creswell's (2013) considers the "accuracy of the findings as best described by the researcher and the participants" (p. 250). It is with this pursuit of accuracy in mind that I utilized the below validation strategies.

In understanding that a qualitative researcher seeks multiple truths and not just one Truth, the rendering of their participant's worldviews must be done as honestly as possible (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). First, prolonged engagement and persistent observation involves building trust, knowing and learning the culture, and checking for misinformation (Creswell, 2013). Trust is an important element of qualitative study. Second, conducting member checks or participant validation can ensure that participants'

voices are recorded exactly as they desire in transcripts. Any issues or confusion that arise can be resolved in this process. Involving the participants in this process yielded a much more nuanced and accurate description of their experiences. I believe this process to be the most critical, not only to validate findings but to participate in the mutual construction of knowledge about the process as well as the phenomenon.

Third, triangulation of multiple, different sources of data, methods, investigators, and theories can be used to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007; Rossman & Rallis, 2011). Fourth, assembling a community of practice consisting of valued and highly regarded colleagues who are engaged in critical dialogue regarding emerging ideas can strengthen the integrity of the study. Fifth, throughout the data analysis process, I engaged with six peer debriefers who helped me to process various conclusions and concepts that emerged from the analysis. In the debrief sessions, I described emerging themes, and they offered feedback regarding any underdeveloped or unclear concepts, asking questions that pushed me to clarify main points. Three of these debriefers also identify as Southeast Asian American women and together, we interrogated the essence of the experience of SEAA racialization through our perspectives and experiences. Finally, rich, thick description offers readers the ability to come to their assumptions about the transferability of the study to other settings. While I, as a researcher, make no assertions that the results of this study can transfer to other settings or populations, the vivid descriptions of the essence of the phenomenon will allow the reader to come to their conclusions. These strategies can ensure the accuracy of

the study's findings and will be the cornerstones for producing a trustworthy and valid phenomenological study.

Ethical Considerations

Since the conceptualization, design, conducting, interpreting, and writing up of the study is influenced by the researcher, so must the researcher's moral principles guide the ethical considerations of the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). As many ethical issues may arise at any stage of the research process, the researcher must address these situations with care and respect. Concerns about privacy and confidentiality, in which the researcher must take steps to protect the identities, names, and roles of participants as well as keeping what they share in confidence, are paramount. As such, I took strict and detailed measures to ensure the confidentiality of participants. Also important is obtaining fully informed consent, in which the participants completely understand the purpose of the study, willingly consent, and understand they may withdraw at any time during the study. Also, the nature of qualitative research requires trust and relationship building between the researcher and the participants. This can entail the sharing of sensitive, unethical, and illegal activities. The process for understanding ethical decisions to be made in these situations must be clear.

Consequently, I addressed many of these ethical considerations in the process of obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before the start of conducting the study. I provided participants with a consent form that detailed the benefits and risks of the study. While there was no direct benefit to the participants in the study, their perspectives can help inform deeper understandings of the racialized experiences of

106

SEAA community college students. Additionally, the risks associated with their participation were minimal in nature and may involve negative or distressing emotions related to some of the interview questions. Participants were informed that they could choose not to answer any question or choose to withdraw from the study at any time. The data collected from the study (e.g., interview recordings, demographic forms, transcriptions) were kept in a password-protected, cloud-based server and computer, of which only I had access. Identifying information was struck from these records and only a master key was used to identify participants. This key was kept in another secured file separate from the rest of the data. Additionally, detailed notes and other documents were kept in a secure file. Stringent measures were taken to protect the confidentiality of the participants and to address any ethical considerations that arose, of which there were none.

Limitations of the Study

As previously noted, I recognize that the interpretations and conclusions that I came to at the end of this study are tentative in nature and bound by the context of the situation as well as the subjectivities of the participants and myself. In and of itself, this may be considered a limitation. However, even with the following discussion of the limitations of the study, I keep in mind the purpose of phenomenological inquiry—that is to bring the phenomenon to light through rich, description that can illuminate the essence of the lived experience (Eilifsen, 2011; van Manen, 2014). Furthermore, the interpretative nature of qualitative research assumes the conditional nature of the inquiry, understands knowledge is elusive, and the claims made should be humble and judicious

107

(Rossman & Rallis, 2011). Given the complexity of the human experience, limitations exist in some form for all studies.

First, while the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize, some readers may view this as a limitation, so it is important to note that the study is context-bound and cannot be generalized to other contexts or populations due to its small sample size and the community college context. While this sample size lends itself well for phenomenological inquiry in terms of allowing the researcher to capture rich, thick descriptions, the perspectives shared cannot be transferred to other groups or similar situations. It should be noted that this is not the purpose or goal of phenomenological inquiry. The study may potentially be replicated; however, the dynamics of the researcher, participants, and contexts are bound to deeply influence the findings in ways that may produce different insights than those presented in this study. That is the nature of phenomenology in its most philosophical form.

Second, the makeup of the current sample may be of potential concern. I attempted to achieve as heterogeneous a sample as possible regarding ethnic identity, gender, and other demographic backgrounds or identities. However, there was a lack of Laotian American representation in the study. Due to the complexities around identifying SEAA-identifying students, it was difficult to solicit a heterogeneous sample regarding ethnic breakdown. Additionally, all but one participant lived and attended community college in the West Coast, specifically in California. While I attempted a national sample, given the constraints on access to SEAA students across the U.S., I was most successful relying on personal and professional networks.

108

Third, I did not explore differences across the different ethnic groups represented in the sample. Given the small sample size and the diversity of ethnic identities in the sample, group differences could not be explored in great depth or detail. While there were similarities between participants' experiences and accounts of the racialization they experienced as community college students, there were also some differences. However, these differences could not be attributed to any potential group differences within the sample.

Fourth, while the findings from this present study can offer some insights into the ways SEAA community college students experience racialization, the study did not offer insights into any long-term outcomes (e.g., success) experienced by the population. The focus of this study is on the lived experiences of racialization experienced by the participants. While there is a potential that these experiences can impact any outcomes for students, I did not explore this relationship in great depth or long-term.

Finally, there is a potential that participants did not fully disclose their experiences for fear of or aversion to the possible discomfiting nature of the questions or the desire to answer in socially acceptable ways or to please me. It is in these potential situations that the importance of trust and relationship building is paramount. I further clarified the importance of sharing truthful perspectives with participants as a reminder that their perspectives, in all forms, will contribute greatly to the overall understanding of the experience of SEAA community college students as racialized subjects.

Chapter Summary

  In this chapter, I offered a rationale for utilizing qualitative methods, specifically phenomenology, as the appropriate method of inquiry for answering the questions: What are the racialized experiences of SEAA community college students? And, how do SEAA community college students describe their experiences of being racialized and of experiencing racism? I described my researcher reflexivity statement and delineated its influence upon my interests in the topic of study. I then mapped relevant data collection and data analysis procedures for the study. Finally, I explored issues of trustworthiness and validation of the study, identified any ethical considerations of concern, and discussed potential limitations of the study. This chapter depicted a procedural roadmap for guiding my approach to gathering, analyzing, and presenting pertinent data related to the racialized experiences of SEAA community college students.

Chapter Four: Profiles

As a Khmer American scholar and researcher, I strive toward honoring the lives, integrity, and perspectives of my participants, who have willingly, fearlessly given me an intimate view of their most difficult and vulnerable moments. The bravery that my participants displayed is awe-inspiring. To give of themselves despite being subject to essentializing, dehumanizing stereotypes and assumptions, and to help reshape the world's understanding of who Southeast Asian students are and can be, is the most courageous expression of humanness. As such, I always strive to center my participants in this study. As I grapple with emerging themes, I am always conscious and intentionally considerate of rooting these developing ideas in the humanness and spirits of my participants. This chapter is critical because it highlights how and why this study was possible in the first place—through the open hearts and resilient spirits of my participants. It was possible because these beautiful, wise, authentic, and vulnerable individuals were willing to open themselves up to me—not for their benefit but for the goal of helping the world see them and their communities in their wholeness. As such, the humanity of my participants must always be uplifted and centered. In the following section, I offer brief profiles of the participants in this study so that we all may come closer to seeing and understanding their hopes and visions for their futures.

Chau

Chau is multiracial, born to a Mexican father and Vietnamese mother. Her mother was a refugee of the Vietnam War. Chau is the eldest child. She is very close to her mother, who spent a lot of time instilling the importance of education and working hard in Chau, while her father also worked to support the family. Chau speaks fluent Vietnamese and some Spanish. Chau was born and raised on the west coast and attends the local community college where her parents also attended and met. She is very proud of her family's success, especially on her mother's side, who came to the U.S. as refugees and had to learn another language. She derives motivation from their stories.

Chau has struggled with her identity. When she was younger, people would not believe that she was multiracial. People only see one side of her, and she feels as if she cannot relate to most people. Additionally, she shared experiences of intra-ethnic conflict, where other Vietnamese community members considered themselves "better" than her. Additionally, she notes that there are variances in acceptance between Asian groups. Chau believes in working hard, respect, and helping others out through hard situations. She often felt insecure about speaking her home language out in public.

As an Asian American, she views these as her central ideals in life, sharing "It shows who [she] is and how [she] grew up. And it represents the struggles that [her] family went through to have this American Dream and having an education, getting a good job." She feels as if there is no difference between her identity as Southeast Asian American. She notes that most people generalize Asians into one group and her ethnic identity becomes more salient when she is around majority Asian. There are differences

112

between Asian groups though most people do not know much about Cambodians, Laotians, and Hmong. She feels Southeast Asian communities have lower expectations than other Asian groups who may be more advanced.

Educational Background

Chau had some difficulties trying to fit in in school. She considers herself a quiet person, and it was hard to make friends. As a student, Chau strove to try hard in school. She asks for help when she needs it. But she felt pressure to do well in school. She experienced depression and was not able to eat when she was not able to perform to an A standard in class.

Money was a barrier to her education. She was unable to pay fees for taking the AP exam and was disappointed that she did not qualify for any fee waivers to take the test so that she could go straight to university. However, she does not regret going to a community college. She feels more confident in herself, has better grades, and she enjoys connecting with other AAPIs who understand her and share similar stories. Community college was the first time Chau found individuals who went through similar issues as her. Chau chose to attend community college due to her mother's influence. Chau learned that community colleges were less expensive and she would be closer to home. She was disappointed at first because she thought she could make it at a four-year institution, but she does not regret going to community college. Chau works part-time at the library on campus. Chau is considering pursuing an education in child education or social work. She has a desire to help people. She would both like to advocate for early

113

childhood education and support families in navigating government assistance programs

and finding resources.

Chau takes advantage of some resources on campus such as Extended

Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) and the learning community. A coordinator

personally telephoned her before the start of school to share more about the learning

community, which was started to support Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander students

on campus. About 30 students are involved. Students are required to take classes

together. Additionally, she has several individuals she can go to for assistance and

support. She knows that without guidance she would feel lost on campus. Chau

recognizes the importance of the learning community on campus as a space to challenge

misjudgments about SEAA students. She appreciates that they are trying to help students

who are typically assumed not to need help. The learning community coordinators are

very transparent about the importance of the program. She wants to help recruit more

students.

Chau is learning about data disaggregation efforts. People assume all Asians are

all smart, but all people struggle and have financial or family problems. People must be

willing to learn or acknowledge these struggles. It makes it difficult for people to ask for

help due to assumptions. For Chau, the learning community is taking the initiative and

reaching out to students. Without it, she would not feel represented on campus. While

appreciative of the learning community, she notes that the school still does not know the

difference between AA and SEAA students. She also feels more included and welcomed

by the learning community rather than at other cultural organizations such as Mexican American clubs, although she is interested in exploring more of her Mexican identity.

Chau took an Asian American History class at Delta to learn more about Asian American experiences. She would like to take more classes when she transfers to a four-year institution. Overall, Chau considers herself an average student. She tries hard and works to pay her college tuition. She feels like sometimes she slacks off and that she does not study as hard as other students.

Chee

Chee is a Hmong American first-generation college student. She is the youngest daughter of seven children. She emigrated to the U.S. from Thailand when she was eight or nine years old. She experienced great difficulty learning English, recalling moments when she was made fun of and ridiculed by her classmates. She recalls her family gathering up her siblings and driving them all to a relative's home to get assistance with schoolwork. Chee identifies as both Hmong and Asian American currently; however, when she was younger, she would only identify herself as Asian American. It was not until recently that she began to assert her Hmong identity. She received many "what are you" questions from her peers. Many people do not know much about her ethnic group and history, especially as Hmong come from various places in Southeast Asia.

Chee felt that it was very difficult for her has a Hmong woman. She is expected to care for her siblings and shop and cook for her entire family while the men in her family are not required to fulfill the same duties. She vented some frustrations with being a woman and consequently considered not good enough to go to school since the

115

expectation was that Hmong women marry young. Chee expressed many moments where she hated being Hmong because of this messaging. However, she asserts that Hmong women are very talented and she is determined to prove that through pursuing education. She recounted the moment she learned that many Hmong fought during the Secret War, giving her great pride in her ethnic group. Her love for her identity was fostered in high school when a non-Hmong educator helped instill a great sense of pride in her culture. Chee was fascinated and surprised that this educator knew more about her Hmong culture than she did. Currently, Chee is very proud of being Hmong. However, Chee also recognized some negative messages about her community; that they kill each other and are not considered to be able to "go higher." She recounted stories of Hmong stereotypes of ghettoness.

Chee recognized that Asians are thought to be very smart, especially in math, but she rejects these assumptions as she struggles often. She finds it difficult to ask for help. Those stereotypes indicate to Chee that she should be able to do it on her own that help is not available to her. She acknowledges that while the stereotype is a good thing, it still makes it difficult for her because she does struggle. She was also subject to racist jokes and misidentification as Chinese, which greatly frustrated her.

Educational Background

Chee has always loved school. She acknowledges that she is very different from her siblings, who do not care for school in the same way she does. Chee is motivated to do more than what is expected of Hmong women. Her parents were concerned that their children would not do well in school; however, Chee was determined to prove that she

116

could get into college. While her parents were not supportive of her attending a college

far from home, they were very proud that she graduated with honors from high school.

By the time her father approved of her attending college, it was too late, so she enrolled

at the local community college. While her parents are unfamiliar with college, Chee

receives support from other organizations and resources on campus. Chee is motivated to

go to school for a career in pharmacy or to become a teacher because she is interested in

teaching and sharing her culture. She hopes to transfer to a four-year institution near

home.

She was personally invited to join the local learning community at her community

college. She was determined to engage differently in community college, noting that she

often was too shy to take advantage of the many opportunities her high school teachers

gave her. She had difficulty asking for help from her teachers. However, her

involvement with the learning community has surrounded her with others who

understand her and who are willing to help her. It is very important for her to connect to

those who share similar experiences. Chee feels that there should be more support

programs and resources that specifically support Asians and that every community

college should have these resources.

Chenda

Chenda is a 20-year old Cambodian American woman and first-generation college

student. She is the second youngest of nine children, born to Cambodian refugees. She

was born and raised on the west coast. Her parents had few schooling experiences.

Chenda has many responsibilities. As the current oldest child living in the home, she is

responsible for supporting her youngest sister as well as her parents and grandparents. She translates for her parents and takes them to their meetings with caseworkers and doctors. There are often many young children in the home, which makes it difficult for Chenda to study. In addition to going to school full-time, she also works two jobs, as a babysitter and an assistant manager at a local yogurt store. Chenda has a strong sense of responsibility and deep commitment to supporting her family. Chenda is involved with a cultural community organization committed to the leadership and development of young Khmer girls. Her sister introduced her to the organization during her freshman year of high school. To date, the organization is the only space where she feels she can talk about her identity and experiences. It was also the first place where she learned about her family's history and culture.

Chenda strongly identifies with her Cambodian heritage and family history. She describes her relationship with being Asian American as "a little hard." Growing up in a family of refugees has impacted her greatly, especially her educational experiences. Everyone has their own stories, but no one understands what the Cambodian community on the west coast has gone through, which was significant. She describes the meaning of being Khmer as struggle, poverty, family-oriented, strong, and resilient. Her family impacts her greatly as a person. She sees it now as her turn to support her elders. Her identity has always been important to her, but her ability to focus on her identity has lessened over time as her responsibilities increased and she had less time to think about it.

Chenda wishes that schools taught Khmer American history. She finds it unfair that her family's history is not taught. She believes this leads to further

misunderstandings about the state of the Khmer community and makes it hard for them. She wishes that people would understand that there are reasons for why many in the Khmer community live in poverty or are dependent upon the family. Despite some of the negative associations regarding the community, she asserts that Khmer families are family-oriented. Chenda is aware of stereotypes about Asians as always good at math, but also gang-affiliation is an issue. She is aware of low graduation rates among Asian students. She also experienced being told that she should be smart at math and school in general, which annoys her. She believes she could never be that stereotype. As a Southeast Asian American student, Chenda feels that they are an unknown, often misidentified as other Asians, and believed not to have struggled.

Educational Background

Community college was not Chenda's first choice. She applied to her local four-year institution, but there were issues with her application that could not be resolved in time to start, so she started at her local community college. When she started, she had very high hopes for her college experience. She wanted to get involved on campus. However, there were few opportunities, and she was very busy with her responsibilities. Chenda is currently pursuing a certificate in medical imaging. She wants to be an ultrasound technician. She previously had no intentions to continue schooling after receiving her certificate, stating that she needs to be home; however, she has since indicated an interest in continuing her education. She has attended community college for the past three years, taking mostly full-time classes, although this semester, she has transitioned to part-time as her workload has become difficult to manage considering her

119

many responsibilities. She believes a college education is important. Her parents encourage her to go to school, but beyond that, they are unable to help guide her. Additionally, her siblings all moved out and were unable to help her, so she learned on her own. She depends mostly on her cultural community organization or tutoring sessions to help her succeed in college. Chenda often does not have time to study, and her responsibilities often take precedence over attending classes or completing assignments. She is struggling because she does not have time but asserts she needs to work on that. She is often tired and cannot focus. She feels her instructors do not understand her situation despite doing her best in school.

Chenda describes her high school as a place where she enjoyed herself and learning on her own. She was on top of her work and was one of the "really, really good students" taking advanced placement courses When she first started college, she also felt on top of it, but as her responsibilities increased, she began to feel less and less motivated. Regarding connections with her teachers, Chenda described it was "like I wasn't there." As a quiet student, she often felt lonely, unable to talk to her instructors. She never felt any deep connection with any of her teachers and any relationship she may have had with them were mostly "fun," and never got any deeper. They never asked about her family life. She describes these experiences as a major barrier for her in school, being unable to connect to professors who wanted to know her background and might understand what she was going through. She believes that they might think of her as a slacker, which minimizes her sense of motivation to go to school. The few times she

communicated that she might need an extension, she did not feel as if she received much understanding, increasing her assessment that professors are scary.

While the school reached out to her at times with resources, they were not relevant or useful resources for her. There are no cultural or identity centers on her college campus for specific groups. Chenda enjoys cultural events on campus; however, she feels there should be more of those. Also, access to counselors and support is difficult due to the bureaucracy of the institution and impacted student population. As such, Chenda feels like the school has no time for her. She finds it hard to talk to professors because she feels like they would put her down or "talk down" to her because she is not doing well. She finds that they do not understand the level of responsibility that she has. Furthermore, Chenda feels that she is not as successful as she could be due to her responsibilities. However, she is hardworking and optimistic that she will get through school with the changes she has made in the semester.

Hien

Hien is a first-generation college student. She is multi-racial/multi-ethnic Vietnamese and Filipino. Her father is a Vietnamese refugee, and her mother is Filipino. She is the youngest of two children. Her older brother is eight years older and has influenced her greatly regarding encouraging her to pursue education. Hien is 19 years old. She enjoys singing and feels as if she is finding her voice.

Hien identifies as Asian American, specifically mixed race Asian American. She does not speak Filipino and Vietnamese fluently but has had to code-switch often in her life between the two cultures. There are many facets to explore her identity, and nothing

121

is ever Black and White. People are always curious about her external appearance, curious about "what kind of Asian" she is. Her identity did not factor much for her until she started community college. She describes her younger self as frustrated and angry because she wanted to be viewed as an individual but felt that she had to suppress parts of herself that made her individual. Specifically, she felt she had to "dumb" herself down in classes because she did not want to stand out as the "smart Asian." She loved school and did well until she started noticing being singled out by her teachers for her ability, which caused her peers to ostracize her in school. She shares that her GPA was very low and she was not interested in college beyond high school at first. Hien went to an IB program but never felt the urge to stress herself out over the school. She wanted to learn but just not in the ways she was expected to learn. When she started to fall behind in school, her teachers held the attitude that she was failing because she did not care rather than realizing she needed help. She shares that she felt anger at herself and internalized the belief that school was not her thing. She had given up at graduation. Despite these negative experiences, Hien did have three major teachers influence her life, one being her theater teacher, who encouraged her to apply to community college (along with her brother).

Regarding stereotypes, Hien is aware of assumptions that all Asian students are going to succeed regardless. She rejects this concept as there are so many different cultures and narratives within the group. She feels that the SEAA community is at a lot more risk of losing narratives. Their history is not taught. She contrasts Vietnamese and Filipino cultures, sharing that she can feel comfortable with a group of Filipinos while

122

her Vietnamese side as a certain sense of "fleetingness" to it as more narratives are lost over time. Hien also referenced the Hmong40 Story Project as space where communities are attempting to recapture their history. She also feels privileged to advocate on behalf of SEAA groups, feeling a heavy responsibility to do so.

She acknowledges that she needs to "recover" her Vietnamese identity. She experiences struggles in her identity of not "being Asian enough." She feels pressure to adhere to her Vietnamese identity especially when intrafamily dynamics cause her to feel as if her Pilipino side is more welcoming. Regarding the violence within the SEAA community that was prevalent during her brother's school experiences, Hien shares that her mother warned her not to get involved in those dynamics, reading into the idea to "not stay too close to your race." These experiences also impacted her relationship with her Vietnamese identity.

Educational Background

Hien went to predominantly White schools. She would not describe herself as particularly successful as a student in high school, although she was involved in extracurricular activities, such as theater. Hien loves learning. She believes in education as a foundation for everything. She also shares that there is a lot of healing that should occur within the K-12 system, which is inequitable. So many students are falling through the cracks, and people become statistics, tokenized. She believes educators' jobs are very difficult as is but there needs to be more care taken about kids who are just trying to survive school. Also, kids are labeled as failing based on traditional measures of success. Furthermore, Hien shares an experience of being told she was not college material due to

123

her grades. Hien acknowledges that she did not have a relationship with the counselor, but it was an impactful moment for her. And she questions how many kids are told this. Hien also realized that there were differences, or holes, in the ways she and her family engaged in education. She noticed that her friends and their parents engaged in ways that were very different from her family regarding education. While she appreciates all that her parents have done for her, she knows there are differences in how education is accessed and passed down from parents to children.

Hien was encouraged by her brother and high school educator to consider community college. She took summer classes at a nearby community college and then transitioned to another closer to home. She hated the previous, sharing that it was an awful experience due to the school being predominantly White and students were of high socioeconomic status. She was one of three people of color in a class, and the professor held a strong bias against her. He did not make eye contact with her and was not supportive when a family member passed. She was very disappointed and felt unsupported during her first semester in college. She also took another class where an Asian international professor was made fun of by the students. There were many comments about Asians made in the class that made her uncomfortable.

She next attended a community college that was also an AANAPISI. She describes it as a liberal, open, loving environment where she could work on campus and help the API community movement. She felt it had good energy. Her experience helped her to see that change and reform at community colleges are possible. She attributes this to the students and staff who care about more than just going to school and going home.

124

Also, there are resources for the cultural center to support students. She points out the importance of having faculty and staff who represent the student body, sharing that her counselor and boss, who is Filipino, is one of the major supports in her community college experience. He "revolutionalized" what it meant to be a counselor for her. While at her community college, she did not feel the blatant racism that she felt at her first community college; however, there were microaggressions from students and professors. For example, a professor assumed she did not speak English well but then also assumed she would be very smart. Another professor in a journalism class proceeded to conduct roll call and then used stereotypes associated with students' names and identities. He referred to Hien as a Lolita in class and Hien expressed her discomfort at being hypersexualized in such a way. In a later class, another professor self-identified as a straight White male and used that to excuse his offensive comments. He asked the class what their experiences with racism were. Hien spoke up, but the professor's response was insufficient, and so she dropped the class.

Overall, Hien had fond memories of her community college experience. Hien considers herself to be very focused and driven. She found a "spark to get education." She felt freedom in being able to pick her classes and found structure. She describes herself as "recently awoken." Despite her negative experiences, her positive experiences and association with the cultural center and access to support systems helped her develop a stronger sense of identity and prepare her to transition into a four-year institution.

Minh

Minh is a Vietnamese American queer man. He is the youngest of three children for his father and only child to his mother. His father fled the Vietnam War as a refugee while his mother emigrated later in 1993. His mother is fluent in Vietnamese and French, having studied in France for a while. She believes in the importance of education. Minh shares an appreciation for his father's struggles to make a life in America, referring to many instances of his father fighting against communism in the war. As a child, he grew up in the Vietnamese community in San Jose. When he moved to northern California, his environment changed, and he attended predominantly White schools.

Minh identifies as both Vietnamese American and Asian American. As an Asian American, he has been impacted by the ways others have viewed him. He struggled with the stereotype that all Asians are smart. He felt that it was an undermining stereotype and at one point in high school, did his best to resist the stereotype by rejecting school and slacking off. The identity holds a lot of baggage for him that he cannot avoid. Also, knowing what his father went through during the war and holding that with him always. Also, how people interact with him is another dimension. He expects interactions to be difficult, with people assuming he does not understand English. He can predict conversations in which he must explain something regarding his identity to other people. He has been asked where he is really from and if he is communist, all which frustrate and anger him. Furthermore, people always assume that he is East Asian. When people bring up Asia, he feels a disconnect because he knows that they are referring to East Asian countries. Minh also struggles with feeling stuck between his Asian identity and American

identity. He does not feel connected to his Vietnamese culture, understanding some Vietnamese but not enough to be completely fluent. He also feels that his parents want him to assimilate to be successful. Regarding stereotypes, Minh shared some Vietnamese stereotypes focused on assumptions of communism. He shares that most Vietnamese are urged to be doctors or lawyers. Also, Minh points to the difference between Vietnamese and Vietnamese American stereotypes.

Educational Background

Minh is currently studying linguistic studies. He hopes to earn his bachelor's degree after transferring to a four-year institution. He is in his third year at his local community college, an AANAPISI. Minh took a gap year between high school because he was struggling to figure out what he wanted to do in life. He shares a discontentment with the way education systems work, pushing students to figure out their entire lives in high school before college. It frustrates him that students are pushed into higher education and not allowed time to figure out what they want in life.

Minh went to predominantly White schools and was often the only other Asian in classes. While he did well in junior high, high school was a difficult time for him. He attempted to disengage from school due to being stereotyped as smart. Having an inspiring teacher during that time was pivotal for him. At the end of high school, Minh realized that his method of rejecting schoolwork in attempts to deny and challenge the stereotype was only hurting him, while others still applied stereotypes to him. He did not feel connected to his school or teachers; rather he found solace with online friends. Furthermore, in high school, Minh did not have meaningful connections with educators. Additionally, his

127

sexuality played a major role in his high school years. One educator attempted to out Minh to his father. These experiences further alienated Minh from education. He could not trust teachers, and he felt embarrassed to ask for help. Minh's mental and emotional health suffered during this time and impacted his current educational experience. He struggles with depression and anxiety and does not feel that he can ask his professors for help. Minh still experiences microaggressions currently, sharing that he is often alienated by other Vietnamese colleagues who were born in Vietnam. He often feels as if he is not Vietnamese enough. As a Southeast Asian community college student, Minh considers himself as trying to build something for himself, just as his parents built a new life for their family.

Minh's early experiences in community college were like his high school experiences; however, he became involved with the cultural center on campus as a student intern and connected with peers who shared similar experiences. This made a major difference for Minh, and it was clear that he was happier and excited about being involved in the cultural center on campus. Minh relished the opportunity to connect his struggles with depression and anxiety to his work as an intern, to help destigmatize conversations about these issues.

Miss

Miss is a first-generation Hmong American woman. She is 21 years old and is the youngest of four children. Her parents are refugees and entrepreneurs. They own a grocery store. Her siblings all went to or are currently attending community college. Miss often feels like she is part of a world that is foreign and far away. Miss has a very

strong connection to her Hmong identity and culture. Despite this, she also struggles

with her Hmong and American identity at the same time. She sees beauty in the

collective, family and community-oriented nature of the Hmong culture. However, she

also feels a draw to be independent and free to figure out her path, something she

attributes to American culture and ideals. She is in a struggle to find this path. Some of

the ways she has struggled include dealing with cultural and gender restrictions, such as

being limited to having male friends or not being allowed to play sports. She expressed

frustration with some of these limitations. And yet, Miss desires to uphold strong Hmong

values of family. She wants to be able to honor both aspects of her identity. And yet she

continues to feel guilty in the process.

For Miss, to be Hmong is to always center community and family and consider

how to provide for the next generation while also considering the previous generation and

making them proud. The Hmong community is very selfless. To be Hmong American is

more conflicting. She desires to be able to find herself and help herself so that she can

help her family. She is in the questioning process regarding these issues. While she feels

the urge to step away from the culture at times, she acknowledges that it always brings

her back home. People will rarely understand her outside of her community, and she

comes back home to family and community to find some understanding. She also knows

that she is not the only one to go through this identity crisis. She knows that American

society is based on White ideals and that Southeast Asians were not expected to be here

despite American involvement in the war as a cause for why SEAs are in the U.S.

Miss also notes that there are interethnic differences among her other Southeast Asian friends. Miss also points to colorism within the Asian racial category, noting that Asians are biased and do not embrace darker skin. She also acknowledges that here light-skin offers her different privileges than her dark-skinned peers, who often are perceived as trouble. Also, Miss feels like she does not fit in due to Asian beauty standards.

Educational Background

Miss attended very diverse schools and was often around racial diversity. She noticed that as they all grew older, racial and ethnic identity because more prominent in her and her peers' lives, shifting and shaping the nature of their relationships. Many of her peers are also first-generation students. She described herself as not very studious and rebellious. No one suspected that she was struggling with school, fitting in, and socializing. She pointed to assumptions that Asians are just doing well in general, which made it hard for her to connect with others. She pointed out that school systems were made for White students and only now are educators beginning to change systems to mirror the actual student population. In senior year of high school, Miss independently decided to enroll in a charter school, where she felt more supported with smaller classes and a more flexible curriculum. For Miss, she had to be able to apply what she learned to her own life and experiences. She enjoys education, just not the ways she has been traditionally taught. Part of the problem had to do with overly large classes due to the recession. She felt this was a barrier as the groups were big and diverse and teachers struggled.

As an artist, Miss enjoys using visuals to help others. She was part of the Hmong40 Project as a volunteer and as an artist. Some of her art was held in the exhibit, and she expresses that she was very proud of her involvement and happy for the experience. She noted that the project gave an opportunity for the Hmong community to come out and see their history represented. It also provided a means for connecting new, incoming refugee populations, such as Syrian refugees, who also attended the exhibit. For Miss, she the project symbolized the Hmong community standing its ground.

Miss decided to attend community college due to financial barriers. She did not want to burden her family since they struggled as immigrants here. There were financial resources that helped her alleviate the financial burden on her parents (e.g., BOG waiver). She also considers community college to be a better way to transition to a four-year institution. There is not as much pressure there, and she wishes people did not look down on those who attend a community college. The idea that community colleges are not as good enough is prevalent in the community, and her parents also believe this. When she first started at her local community college, she was nervous. She often felt the loss, but "fought [her] way through." Her current experience is positive although she notes the school is predominantly White and that there are not as many support services for racially minoritized populations such as Black, Latino, and Asian students in general. Miss is involved with the cultural center on campus. As a student employee, she helped to create and plan events. She developed API week for the campus and felt as if she were creating her world, where the diversity in the API community was acknowledged and celebrated.

131

Miss has transferred to her local four-year institution to pursue a degree in graphic design. She is interested in organizing information in ways for people in her community. There is a difference in the diversity represented at the four-year institution compared to the community college. She misses her community college environment and is adjusting to her new surroundings.

Qu

Qu is a second-generation Vietnamese American. They identify as queer agender. They were born in the Midwest as a middle child of three. They have one older and one younger sibling. Their family moved to California 12 years ago. Their parents were refugees from Vietnam. Their mother grew up speaking English and escaped the war early on while their father came to the U.S. much later. Their mother is currently a medical doctor, and their father holds a bachelor's degree. Qu considers their family to have much privilege given that their parents are college-educated and fluent in English, which has shaped their educational experiences. They acknowledge that other Southeast Asian students have had more barriers than they have faced in their life and education.

As a child, Qu participated in Vietnamese youth groups, and their parents taught them some traditional Vietnamese practices, but Qu notes that they do not have strong ties to their Vietnamese American identity, at least in childhood. They share that they have felt divorced from their culture and it was not until recently that they have begun to do work in uncovering their relationship with their identity as a Vietnamese American. Much of this work was initiated through the guidance of their older sibling, who attended a four-year institution and was significantly involved with a community program with the

132

university retention center. While in high school, Qu participated in a conference for Southeast Asian American students. It was through their participation in this conference for the last few years that Qu has begun to explore their family's history and their relationship with this history and identity.

In addition to finding a community that understood their ethnic background and identity, Qu has also found another community to support their exploration of their queer identity. They share that they never knew spaces and communities like this ever existed, noting that "you are yourself, but you aren't your whole self until you've explored these different communities within you." Another important community they are involved in is with their local youth group, which has been important for their identity process at present. They are in a space where exploring these identities are very important for them. Qu differentiates their identity as Asian American and as Vietnamese American. They share that their Asian American identity was given, or applied, to them. They believe that it is an identity in which people can view them rather than a way they viewed themselves. Now, they identify more with the Southeast Asian narrative.

Regarding experiences with stereotypes and discrimination, Qu relates many experiences with the model minority stereotype. Growing up, Qu was often one of the only Asian students in their classroom. Despite that, they noted that they received "pokes and jabs" regarding their Asian identity and faced stereotypes about their intellectual ability as an Asian. They share experiences of being othered by their student peers, such as their food being made fun of at school. Regarding other stereotypes, especially those that impact Southeast Asians, Qu noted that many Southeast Asians are more dark-

skinned and hinted at the associated negative stereotypes associated with those with darker skin in general. As an SEAA student, Qu is aware of the statistics regarding attainment rates in the community. They desire to prove these statistics wrong. Additionally, they acknowledged the bootstraps myth that SEA communities need to work harder, have fewer children, speak better English, and do better in school. Qu also acknowledges that the education system is inequitable regarding resources and opportunities. They share that their Southeast Asian peers have internalized some negative beliefs about their ability to attend college and be successful. However, through their involvement with their communities, they are now more able to interact with Southeast Asians who desire to succeed and want to make not only their lives but the lives of their families better.

Educational Background

Qu was influenced by their parents' and older sibling's educational trajectories, sharing that education was "number one" priority. They participated in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program in high school and had high aspirations for their career. They desire to pursue a career path that would enable them to support their family. Qu is currently pursuing an associate's degree in biology and science at the local community college, with intentions to transfer to a four-year college. While their professional plans are not yet set, they are interested in the medical field, especially as it relates to health disparities within the Southeast Asian community. In their prior educational experience, Qu shares that they were never the smartest one in the classroom; however, they were always helpful to others who asked for assistance. As a self-described extrovert, Qu

enjoys camaraderie with their peers. In reflecting on their high school experience, they share that they did not have much purpose in that environment; however, in community college, they have a larger purpose and goal. Qu also describes an awareness of knowing that the education system is "junk" and yet also does not want to be a "statistic." In their desire to succeed, they acknowledge that they must play by the rules.

Qu realized that while they did not face the same barriers other SEAA students faced, they struggled with not having a role model to look up to. Someone who would motivate them beyond the same refrain of doing well in school. Qu did not have a goal of wanting to accomplish something in school early on. Consequently, Qu wants to become a role model and figure who could motivate others. Qu also shared that they keep their academic identity separate from their social identities. Due to their experiences and messaging, they felt like they had to keep it separate. They shared the pressures to keep their identities away from academics because there was no space for it. They described rules and messaging about speaking and acting in specific (e.g., White) ways.

Qu went to a high school where many of its students attended elite four-year institutions. They wanted to go to a four-year research institution but was not accepted to their top choices. They decided to attend community college and transfer. Since their sibling went through the process, they knew the differences in schools and what was necessary to do. They noted that there is a very strong stigma against community colleges—that it is "less than." Their father did not want them to attend community college although their mother was supportive. As time passed, Qu began to become

135

involved on campus. They developed a community of friends and became involved with the cultural center.

Qu acknowledges that many students can have very different experiences at their local community college, noting that they feel more included on campus when participating in their respective communities like the cultural center. Their experience at the cultural center helped connect them to resources and people. It also gave them the opportunity to participate in workshops and engage in topics relevant to their identities. As a student intern, they appreciate the opportunity to explore their identities. They described the alternative as being in a desert and having part of their identity "shriveling up" due to not engaging it.

The model minority stereotype is much more pronounced in their community college experience, with much of their success attributed to their racial background rather than their intellectual ability. They share struggles of getting their peers to understand that sometimes they do not understand a concept. Qu shared experiences with other students assuming they do well in school. They experience the same stereotypes they faced in their K-12 education. They also shared experiences of watching other Asian American students struggle with the stereotype, sharing the analogy of being trapped in a room without help and then realizing that learning about the context of the model minority myth opened the door and offered a world of freedom from its constraints.

Sokha

Sokha is a Cambodian American first-generation college student. She identifies as genderfluid. Born on the east coast, she is a child of refugees who fled the Khmer

Rouge. While her parents have not been very involved in her education in traditional ways, they play a very significant role in her life. There are expectations from her family that she can support them in their old age. Sokha has struggled with her Cambodian identity. She feels disconnected from her Cambodian community despite her involvement with Cambodian cultural dance groups in her youth. It was not until getting involved with a cultural community organization that she began to learn more about her identity. She joined to connect with similar, like-minded individuals who shared the same experiences and to discuss social issues, such as sexual assault. Sokha has had many experiences in which her identity as a Cambodian has been questioned. She shared experiences of speaking Khmer to a peer, who was born in Cambodia. The peer indicated to them that she was surprised that she was Khmer, instead stating that she expected Sokha to be Egyptian or Black. These experiences have been discouraging for Sokha as she felt that unable to associate with her or assert own identity due to the ways other people misidentify and treat them.

Being Asian American has played a significant role in her life, especially regarding stereotype. Some of these stereotypes include being viewed as smart or rich, being dismissed as not experiencing any hardships or circumstances, and thought to have not worked hard to gain benefits. Sokha shared a significant experience of participating in Black Lives Matter (BLM) rallies but being confronted by a colleague who rejected the idea that Sokha could understand what she [Black communities] was going through. Ultimately, Sokha was not seen as having experienced any hardship because she was Asian American. Sokha shared experiences of only being Asian if she minimized her

137

experiences of hardship. Others do not believe she experienced poverty or knew what it is like to live in "the hood." These experiences have created difficulties for Sokha in her quest to fight for BLM, which frustrates her as she wants to fight for her rights along with BLM rights.

Despite this, Sokha recognizes that people also do not consider Khmer people to be Asian. Rather, they are more associated with Black populations due to the "true Asians" being more light-skinned, small-eyed, petite-framed, and docile. Sokha rejects these identifiers personally as she does not consider herself to be docile or submissive. In discussing more negative stereotypes about Khmer communities, Sokha shared assumptions other people make about Cambodians, such as saying she is "practically Black" and of course, would like Black guys. She referenced social media memes associating Khmer people with Blackness. In the local Cambodian neighborhoods, gang affiliation and prostitution are issues that affect the community.

Educational Background

Sokha is pursuing an associate's degree in Health Sciences at her local community college. She hopes to complete a master's in nursing. Also, she is motivated to learn three different languages, including sign language. She developed an interest in the health field due to her own experience of being in and out of hospitals in her youth. Sokha originally wanted to be a surgeon; however, she felt her grades would not make that possible. Overall, Sokha considers herself to be an average student. She did not have many positive experiences in K-12 schooling as she was in and out of hospitals in elementary and middle school. In high school, Sokha was often truant and had to go to

138

court, where she did not feel like she had much support from authority figures. She was viewed as a "typical troublemaker" and authorities never really listened to what Sokha had to say about the reasons why she was unable to attend school regularly. Furthermore, Sokha was told that she was a "bad apple" and had "no future." During this time, Sokha was uncomfortable being around people and was struggling with depression. Additionally, hearing negative comments about herself, including those referencing her identity, made her not want to go to school. Also, Sokha shares experiences of teachers being surprised when she would "talk back" or being frustrated when Sokha would ask questions.

Sokha also shares concerns regarding the current political climate, especially as it relates to the education system under Betsy DeVos' leadership. Sokha is concerned that funding will go to the wrong places and schools will continue to shut down, limiting opportunities for students, who are already feeling displaced. She also referenced an increase in funding going to prisons rather than education.

Sokha decided to go to her local community college because it was the cheapest option for her and she wanted to build her student resume. She noted that there is a lot of stigma at the community college level; it is the "13th" grade and is not challenging as a four-year institution. Many adults and professors have indicated that the community college is very different than a four-year institution. She does not connect with very many professors on campus. Additionally, it is very difficult to access campus counselors on campus. In community college, Sokha is also viewed as a smart Asian. Her peers are often surprised to see Sokha struggling. Sokha shares feelings of

discomfort from seeing pitying looks from peers and teachers. She feels anxiety and does

not want to experience the shame, pity, or annoying looks. Sokha desires to be judged on

her abilities and not what "abilities should be founded off [her] race." She is often unable

to express discontent or worry about a grade due to assumptions about her academic

ability.

Sokha became involved on campus as an organizer and activist after participating

in a petition for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). She enjoys being

involved on campus and connecting with students to learn about different perspectives,

although some of these perspectives continually perpetuate Asian stereotypes. She feels

that others think that she wants to hijack the goals of the group. She also volunteers with

student government. She tried to join the Khmer club and revive it, but it was an

unsuccessful effort. At her community college, there are no resource centers for specific

groups with the only group targeted for institutional support—African American. She

would like to see more resources for communities such as her own. While there are

welcome events, it is very difficult for students to get involved on campus due to

positions filling quickly and few opportunities. The events on campus also do not speak

to the students here. Sokha had negative experiences of being misidentified by campus

security. These experiences caused her to be reluctant to reach out. She also has had

experiences in a class where her professors made racist comments. These experiences

negatively shape her experience and cause frustration for her. She feels a level of

invisibility and feels frustrated that her peers dismiss her experiences. She feels caught

140

between the assumptions and in turn, does not want to think about her identity because many times another identity was imposed on her.

Despite her involvement and leadership at the school, Sokha still feels inadequate due to the stereotypes about her as both Cambodian and Asian. She also feels as if she cannot ask for help. Despite these experiences, Sokha enjoys engaging and educating others to get resources. She shares that she feels pressure to take on and overburden herself with opportunities to prove that she is a good student. She wishes that there were more resources for students, especially to deal with mental health and awareness.

Sophea

Sophea is a Cambodian American man from the west coast. He is a first-generation college student and child of Cambodian refugees. He has three siblings, and he is the only son. He was raised in southern California until his parents determined that the area was no longer safe for their children due to the prevalence of gang violence in the community. They moved to another suburb in southern California. Sophea feels a deep desire to honor the sacrifices and experiences of his family. It took him a while to understand the depth of his family's experiences and to also understand the choices they made to remove him from the Cambodian community. He strives to live up to his parents' hopes and goals. Sophea has also come to understand his family's fear and mistrust of the police due to their experiences. However, Sophea acknowledges that their choices, based on fear, impacted him and his sisters deeply in their experience in America. He understood that his parents' goals for him to "get an education, get a better job to have a good life" were because they never had that. They wanted the American

141

dream for him. His family has had a huge impact on his life, and their experiences motivate him to be a hard worker and to prove to his family that he can take care of himself.

Sophea's parents attempted to teach him how to read and write in Khmer, but he was not interested in that as a child. He celebrates Cambodian traditions and ceremonies but considers his Cambodian identity as not "as important as [he] thought it should be." He shared that he hardly knows his culture. As for his Cambodian American identity, Sophea described others as expecting him not to be a citizen or not American. He shared an experience of an educator specifically pointing out that people who described themselves as [ethnicity] American, highlighting only those who did this. That shaped how he viewed himself as Cambodian American.

Sophea shared that people believe Asians are smart and passive. He explained that culturally Asian communities do not want to disgrace their families and this was instilled in children. This impacted him greatly as he was often afraid to mess up. He tried to find his place and fit in in the world; however, his parents often encouraged him not to be noticeable. Sophea struggled with this but now he is grateful for his military experience for helping him to assert himself. While Sophea has been subject to many stereotypes and assumptions about Asian Americans as smart, he does not feel that these experiences were discriminatory. Many of these experiences occurred among friends, who often joked about these stereotypes to Sophea. Sophea typically laughs these jokes off and tries to educate others that people learn differently. While some get it, others do not.

Sophea acknowledges that the Cambodian community is subject to many negative stereotypes and associations. He shared that people consider Southeast Asians to be "jungle Asians" due to their dark skin and the stigma of Asians eating pets. Other stereotypes included Asians being viewed as short, submissive, passive, know how to fight, and are intelligent. These stereotypes spanned across all Asian groups, partly because when he shared his ethnicity, people do not know what that is and then revert to "oh, you're Asian, and you must be smart." Sophea finds this funny. He tries to zone the stereotypes out and pay them no mind. He noted that the stereotype of being smart at math is a terrible one since he is not good at math. While these experiences were not overtly negative, they were not positive either.

Educational Background

Sophea never considered himself to be a committed student. He considered himself academically average. Though not a troublemaker, he was focused on having fun in school. His teachers knew he had potential, but he felt that they said that about everyone. He was disillusioned by the education system during high school, noting that this pushing of students to enter college right away was not always the best choice for all students. He felt that youth should be able to explore their options, interests, and desires instead of being put on the pathway to college. It puts pressure on children to go through the motions when there was no guarantee of a high-paying job at the end. He values education; however, he believes that there should be more effort put into the education system beyond "institutionalizing students to follow a certain path." He noted that at his high school, many of the students were encouraged to pursue community college as an

affordable option so that they can earn certificates and transition into relatively well-paying jobs quickly.

Sophea did not attend college immediately after high school. He did not want to take the standardized tests as he was pressured to by his educators. Instead, Sophea worked as a part-time video game tester. He loved his job; however, he was disillusioned when he was passed over for promotion to fulltime. After many more years of working, he decided to enlist in the army. He served three years active duty. After he returned home, he took advantage of military benefits, including the GI Bill, which allowed him to return to school. He enrolled at the local community college and attended for eight semesters. He has since transferred to a local four-year college.

Sophea enrolled in community college because it was affordable. He acknowledged the stigma of community colleges as being "lower" than other higher education institutions. Sophea enjoyed his experience in community college. He feels that his community college is very inclusive and that there are many opportunities for students to get involved on campus and to receive support. Sophea recognizes that other students may feel scared or do not know where to go for help. He receives much support from the Veteran's Office. Sophea chose studio art as his major, and he enjoys the classes, sharing that his teachers support him. He has positive relationships with his teachers. Sophea also worked on campus. Sophea is often frustrated by others in school who come to class and do not interact with others and are just focused on their issues. He feels that community college offers a wealth of opportunities that students are not taking advantage of.

144

Sua

Sua is a second-generation Hmong American college student. She is the eldest of three children. Her parents were refugees from Thailand (mother) and Laos (father). Her father passed when she was in eighth grade, which significantly impacted her in terms of magnifying the sense of responsibility she felt to support her family as the eldest child. Her mother is college-educated, with a master's in counseling. She is currently a counselor at a school. Sua grew up in a predominantly White environment and had very few Hmong friends. Currently, Sua notes that there is a lack of Southeast Asian or Hmong role models. She has never met a Hmong medical doctor. She stresses the importance of being able to visualize other people who look like her in leadership roles. She desires to be a role model.

Identity

Sua currently identifies more with Asian American than Hmong. Due to her upbringing and that most surveys only offer Asian American as an option, Sua readily identifies more with Asian American. Only when she is around other Asian individuals will she differentiate her ethnic identity. When she was younger, Sua identified more as Hmong, but she often had to explain her ethnic identity to other people, causing her to defer to Asian. Even as she does this, Sua feels like she is "cutting a part of [her] identity." She does feel that she is more than Asian and rejects the assumption that all Asians are the same. She does not feel that the Asian American community faces much discrimination. However, as she is growing older, Sua's identity as Asian American is becoming more important. She wants to learn more about her people. She notes that

145

U.S. schools prioritize U.S. history and the only opportunity she had to learn about Asian history was in a Modern East Asian History college course, which focused only on Japan, Korea, and China.

Sua feels stuck between two cultures. She describes being Asian American as complicated. She feels stuck between "two ideals that [she] should follow" and it is a constant struggle. While it is not as salient now, she is still learning to merge these two worlds. She had a difficult time having to defend her decision to attend a four-year institution away from home. She wanted to go away and be independent. Returning home was for her family, "the Asian part of [her]." This struggle was "complicated for [her] to know what's best for [her]."

Regarding her identity, people always assume she is Chinese or Japanese. Due to this, she has felt "subpar as a Southeast Asian American, in general." She points to perceptions that the Southeast Asian community recently immigrated here and lived in poor communities. Hmong people have been associated with poverty. She also points to gang violence as an issue. In feeling subpar, she feels as if she is not full Asian due to the institutionalization of East Asian culture in media and history. Sua notes that many cultures and languages are dying, but there are efforts to revive the Hmong language, culture, and traditions, which makes her happy.

Educational Background

Sua is a biomedical engineering major in community college. She spent her first year at a public four-year institution with the hopes of pursuing a law degree; however, she decided to return home after committing to changing her major to become a medical

146

doctor. She desires to go to medical school and wants to earn an M.D./Ph.D. She went to a law-themed high school and was urged to attend law school; however, Sua was always drawn to the sciences although her school was limited in resources. She never had access to any STEM-related programs that she noticed other students had at college. She enjoyed her time away at college, but it was expensive to attend classes. It was also hard to get into classes due to over-enrollment. There were not many resources for Asian American students. Additionally, Sua did not qualify for financial assistance. She had to pay for her courses out of pocket. Furthermore, Sua wanted to be closer to home, in the community, and to help support her brothers.

Sua enjoys school and loves learning. She recalls that eighth grade was hard, which was around the same time her father passed, but her mother encouraged her to continue. Sua also views education as a pathway to guide [her] through more doors. In high school, Sua was involved in mock teams and enjoyed public speaking. She notes that her teachers viewed her as the stereotypical smart student. She didn't mind since it was better for her to be viewed this way but she also shared that she was more than the smart kid. Sua also shared that this assumption has been a problem for her because she also needed help but was always expected to help others due to being bright. Sua notes that she is one of the few family members in college. She has tried to encourage her male family members to attend college, but they maintain that they are not smart enough for college.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I honored the stories of the ten SEAA community college students who participated in this study. I provided brief profiles of participants' experiences related to their families, educational experiences, and academic goals to offer important contexts that shape their experiences with racialization. This chapter honors their investment and commitment to giving back to their communities and families.

Chapter Five: Findings

A Poetic Transcription and Composite Narrative

It shouldn't be a battle.

But it is.

To be an improper Asian.

Being a representative before just being myself.

You have to be good at everything.

That's supposed to be my role.

And if I'm not,

It's my fault.

I live so much of my life being,

"I need to be good."

As if I'm under a microscope.

Always being assessed and judged

Against this impossible standard.

And when I come up short,

It's proof I'm a failure.

I feel subpar as a Southeast Asian American. I really didn't feel like I belonged

anywhere. It feels intimidating; it feels like I don't fit. There are biases within the Asian

community. They would consider the "true Asians" to be Chinese, Japanese, Korean. Basically any Asian that's fair-skinned, really small eyes according to them, a petite body frame. They don't really embrace the darker skin, like my brothers and sisters, in media or advertisement or in other shapes--or bigger shapes--or smaller shapes. They really want to have this whole prestige look. Dark skinned Asians aren't really considered to be Asian. Like Khmer people. A lot of people say we're the Black people of Asians or the jungle Asians. We're not the light-skinned beautiful. It definitely caused a lot of identity issues growing up because usually when people say that, you can see in their expressions, it's like you're considered less than.

I really was unsure of myself as a student. You're told you are actually behind spending your years in community college. In the API community, there's a stigma towards it because I know my parents—even though I was still on a route to getting an education—they hated that I was at a community college. They think of community college as purgatory, where they don't think you're doing anything successful. I always felt like I shouldn't be here because I'm supposed to be Asian and smart. Community college is the place you go to if you're a failure and you want a chance.

I do feel sometimes inadequate. I felt I really needed to step up my game. It would push me to overload myself with work, just to keep up this certain image of myself so that way I could be considered good enough. Prove myself. I struggle with anxiety and depression, and sometimes I just don't do as well because of personal stress. I would go into a depression state, and it was really hard to get out. My family didn't really understand that often I feel all this pressure in my head and I just want to sit and do

nothing because I'm hearing all this negativity. It's just very hard to explain to people who don't really get it. For some reason, I always felt there's kind of a stigma and shame to bring it up. I know my professors should be understanding about it, but I always feel like I shouldn't bring it up because it's kind of embarrassing.

It's hard to ask for help and say I don't understand it when other folks are always imagining you to understand, especially when they believe I know everything and I can help them. But I can't ask them to teach me here because that's supposed to be my role. It actually makes me feel like they don't want to help me. Sometimes it feels like a physical thing making you isolated from your peers. There's a lot of shame behind it because I'm not this good Asian or I'm not a good enough Asian to achieve my goals, because I have a 3-point-something average instead of a 4.0. They would still have high expectations of me, but then they won't take my complaints seriously at the same time. That's also really confusing because if I express my discontent or the fact that I got a D, they say, "Oh, well you're just being Asian. It doesn't matter; you're still doing good." Or, "You're not being a good Asian. You need to do better. Are you really an Asian?" Hearing those comments over the years, how I'm this or that or not truly this. It kind of just made me not want to go to school over time. There's this sense of shame, or I'm not working hard enough. I'm not enough. I live so much of my life being like, I need to be good.

It's hard to find resources for Asian people. Even though our struggles are different from others, there are ground-level things that are just hard to talk about or just aren't talked about. I feel like I'm on my own. I'm here I'm on my own I need to figure everything out, and I need to get out on my own. I have to do this by myself because

there's no one there to help me. I don't know where the resources are. I don't think I even have resources. I'm just going to figure it out.

I think that it's such a huge part of silencing in a way where we are expected. We as Asian Americans, whoever people imagine whenever they think of the model minority. So, the reason why I feel I should help people on things I don't even understand, and the reason I feel bad about not understanding things is because of this stupid thing that they created a whole bunch of years ago because they think Asians got to be better because we've treated them really terribly and we need to rectify that by calling them the model minority. But instead of rectifying the past issues we're just going to make it worse by putting them against all the other minority communities instead of helping them be better and giving them more opportunities. We're not represented how we truly are.

On top of that, with not being able to experience hardship--the only time I would be considered to be Asian is when someone would try to minimize my experiences. So, I'm not capable of experiencing poverty because my clothes look nice or something. To them, I would have unlimited funds, and I never experience "the hood" even though most of the city is considered the hood. And because of the way I talk and present myself, to them, they think that I grew up in a suburb. When I try to make attempts to fight for Black Lives Matter, I get shot down by fellow peers. They say I had no idea what they're actually going through and I would never experience it because Asians are the model minority. So, I shouldn't even be participating at all.

I want to tell my educators this: don't forget about people that are in the back because they help with a lot of things too. They struggle with a lot of things. It's also very

152

inhumane to forget about people's struggles and think about the successes of others because they can live off that better. I had some struggles with self-identity, being a Southeast Asian American.

My SEAness is a part of me that is hard to identify just because it's such a big part of me. When I think about my SEAness, I think of it as whatever it is that I've gotten from my parents. There's the SEA part, and there's the child of refugee part, that while they're separate, they've always been very intertwined just because of the narratives my parents--so much of their life was running away or escaping Vietnam and then trying to build a life here. A lot of what they are and what they believe and all their values have been passed on to me. From being refugees to the value of family, the value of sticking together, the values of not spending lavishly, the values of always helping other people, the values of community, always being involved in community, either by giving back or asking for help when you need help. So, there's this urgency that we cannot fail at anything or then all our parents' efforts were for nothing.

I've just been more involved in community and there's a sense of community and a sense of, I want to be a part of this next generation or this next era of Southeast Asian Americans, where I want them to succeed, and I want them to grow, and I want to be that resource for them. I definitely think that that's helped that sense of being. I feel lighter and happier and more engaged in the world. I just feel more connected to the world because a lot of times if someone focuses too heavily on academics, they kind of lose sight of being connected to reality and being connected to worldly issues and worldly status of what's going on. And so, I think it's something I want to be able to do, to

continue my academic path but also stay connected to the world and not lose sight of the humanness of it all, of rights and equity.

To convey the essence of the experience that SEAA community college students describe regarding their racialization, I developed both a composite poetic transcription and a composite narrative to present their experiences to the reader. Glesne (1997) defines poetic transcriptions as creating compositions in poetic form from the words of participants. In this process, I selected meaningful phrases that were uttered by participants as they described their experiences and that I found meaningful. I recorded these phrases as I transcribed the data and kept in my memos. Each time I referred to these phrases, I felt to the power and emotions of these words. I present this poetic transcription as one personal interpretation of the essence of participants' experiences. This experimental form of writing and re-presenting qualitative data is one way to make visible the interplay between my subjectivities as a researcher and the data as this creation is as much a byproduct of participants' words and my perspectives.

I also developed a composite narrative that offers the reader texture, fullness, and richness of the experience (Wertz, Nosek, McNiesh, & Marlow, 2011). Todres (2007) created the method as a way to blend both the texture and the structure of the phenomenon. It is relevant and aligned with my perspectives regarding hermeneutic phenomenology, wherein interpretation leads the way toward an in-depth understanding and resonation of the experience. In the above composite narrative, I selected important phrases and quotes that not only stood strongly and resolutely on its own as a moment of power expressed by its original speaker but also, when connected to the thoughts of

154

others, illuminated an even more powerful reflection of the collective experience. One could describe it as a moment of synergy as I selected the phrases because of my visceral responses and collectively melded them to form a collectively powerful account. The above creations reflect my subjectivity as a Khmer American researcher as I connect to the experiences of my participants and attempt to re-present their stories authentically.

The present study illuminates the racialization process that reinforces the racial structures and racial oppression of SEAA communities. Racialization is a social process, in which certain groups become lumped into a racial category, based on perceived physiological differences, and defined by overgeneralized racial attributes that lead to unequal treatment (Clark, 2012; Yee, 2008). These processes function at multiple levels for SEAAs and showcase how SEAA community college students must navigate and contend with multiple layers of oppression based upon their tenuous positioning in the racial field among Asian Americans and among the Black/White paradigm, which often shapes our understanding of race and racial systems. The two research questions that guided this study include the following: What are the racialization experiences of SEAA community college students? And, how do SEAA community college students describe their experiences of being racialized and of experiencing racism?

In this chapter, I present emergent themes that describe SEAA students' racialization and their subsequent racial and ethnic isolation in community colleges. *Table 4.1* illuminates the corresponding themes for each participant. There are three overarching that each includes multiple subthemes. The first theme relates to SEAA students' racialization, as it describes how processes reinforce their racial positioning and

155

subsequent racial and ethnic isolation. Within this theme, four processes are highlighted:
(1) Asianization, (2), racially-ascribed deviance, (3), institutional invisibility, and (4)
community college stigma. The second set of themes highlights the internalization and
(re)production of the racial structure, which can be perpetuated through (1) the ascription
of meritocratic beliefs, (2) disassociation from deficiency or inferiority, (3) seeking racial
legitimacy, and (4) personalizing failure. The third set of themes illuminates sources of
strength, resiliency, and agency that enable SEAA students to resist their negative
racialization experiences. These critical sources of support include (1) campus
subcultures, (2) cultural community organizations, and (3) familial aspirations and
support. I provide a more in-depth exploration of these themes in the following sections.

Participants	Assumptions	Misidentification	Decontextualization	Censure	Delinquency	Colorism	Institutional Invisibility	Community College Stigma	Meritocratic Beliefs	Dissassociation	Seeking Racial Legitimacy	Personalizing Failure	Campus Subcultures	Community Organizations	Familial Aspirations
Chau		X				X	X	X			X	X			X
Chee	X		X	X					X			X			X
Chenda	X	X		X										X	X
Hien	X			X		X	X				X	X			X
Minh	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Miss	X	X			X	X	X					X			X
Qu			X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
Sokha	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Sophea	X	X		X	X		X	X							X
Sua		X		X					X	X	X	X			X

Table 5.1 Participant Theme References

Before continuing, I present an important caveat as the reader interprets these
findings. An important tenet of AsianCrit focuses on the intersections of various systems
of oppression, such as class, gender, and sexual orientation, that impact Asian

communities. There were many moments where participants' experiences highlighted

these important intersections that manifested in educational structures that were designed

in ways not to serve them; however, the focus of this present study mainly center around

their experiences of racialization and its connection to educational structures.

Consequently, the racial system of oppression is especially highlighted here. However,

this does not imply that other systems of oppression and identities did not significantly

shape students' experiences.

SEAA Racialization, Racial Positioning, and Racial and Ethnic Isolation

The racialization of SEAA students produces a sense of racial and ethnic isolation

that characterizes their racial positioning in the racial field. While racial isolation has

been conceptualized in relation to geography and physical space (e.g., Kodama, Poon,

Manzano, & Sihite, 2017), with individuals often noting feeling as if they were the "only

one" in their relative spaces and places, the racial isolation I refer to is one that is both

physical and psychological, characterized by a sense of distance and separation for SEAA

students even when there is significant Asian American representation on campus. Many

participants in this study spoke of feeling as if they were the "only ones"; however, this

sense of racial and ethnic isolation transcends physical space. There is a sense of

distance not only from the campus environment in general but also a sense of

displacement within the Asian American community that SEAA students must contend

with. Ancheta's (1998) description of how society characterizes Black communities as

inferior and Asian American communities as outsider and alien offer an insightful frame

for understanding SEAA racial and ethnic isolation. The racial and ethnic isolation of

SEAA community college students is shaped by racialization processes that function to make invisible, omit, exclude, and isolate them from resources, support, visibility, and belonging. This is accomplished first through erasure of the lived racial realities of SEAA communities. The perpetual erasure of the actual experiences of SEAA communities contributes to policies and practices that render them invisible, subject to essentializing narratives that position them as not needing support. When the actual realities of students clash with dominant narratives, SEAAs themselves are deemed as undeserving and inferior. What results is an absolute sense of racial and ethnic isolation, where both outsider and inferior status restrict access to support and services.

In this section, I present findings that illuminate how SEAA students are racialized, reinforcing their racial and ethnic isolation within a field of racial positions (Kim, 1999; Xu & Lee, 2013). This creates a tenuousness that particularly salient for SEAA students as they are positioned SEAAs as outsiders and inferior. This section is conceptualized to account for the impact of SEAA racialization and to identify how deficit ideology can be internalized. However, opportunities exist for community colleges to own that there are crucial ways they can mitigate the negative ways SEAA students are racialized.

Participants stories highlight how Asianization essentializes SEAA students as the model minority and creates various barriers. Their experiences also indicate how deviance is racially-ascribed to their bodies, through an association of delinquency and colorism, which is a discriminatory process where people of color with light skin are privileged over those with dark skin (Hunter, 2005, 2007). Also, participants'

158

experiences in community colleges indicate a prevailing and perpetual institutional invisibility founded upon assumptions about Asian success and omission from institutional priorities. Finally, community college stigma further complicates SEAA students' racialized educational experiences. Ultimately, these processes reinforce their racial and ethnic isolation while also making possible the reinforcement of deficit ideologies that shore up the racial structure. This played out in important and unique ways for SEAA participants, as I describe herein.

Asianization.

Asianization, as an AsianCrit tenet, refers to the pervasiveness of racism and how it racializes Asian Americans as model minorities, perpetual foreigners, or yellow perils to racially oppress Asian Americans (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). In relation to the racial field of positions, the racialization of Asian Americans has been theorized as one of racial triangulation between Black and White populations, in which Asian populations are both relatively valorized and civically ostracized (Kim, 1999). The model minority stereotype is a racial mechanism used specifically to relatively valorize the Asian American community in relation to other populations of color (Kim, 1999). Its various incarnations, meant to reward and valorize meritocratic beliefs and behaviors often creates challenges for SEAA students as they are often held to standards that do not necessarily align with their lived realities.

Assumptions: "You're good at math, right?" First, it is important to acknowledge the many ways SEAA community college students are subject to racialization, especially considering the polarity of their racialization as both a model

159

minority and deviant minority. Particularly, the model minority stereotype and its associated functions of associating high academic achievement with Asian populations were especially salient across all participants' experiences. Each participant shared experiences with being stereotyped and racialized in accordance with the assumptions and basis of the model minority stereotype, which placed pressure on students to perform accordingly. The model minority myth and its assumptions significantly impact SEAA community college students' experiences.

One of the most fundamental foundations of the model minority myth relates to the assumptions of intellectual superiority of Asian Americans, especially regarding math ability. Participants described multiple experiences across their lives where others made assumptions about their academic abilities based on the stereotype of intellectual ability and superiority. For example, Hien, a second generation, Vietnamese and Pilipino American student was often frustrated by these assumptions, sharing, "For me, a big thing is just always the assumption that 'Oh, you're good at math, right?'" Many of these assumptions were related to beliefs that all Asians were smart at math and experienced universal success in education. Educators and peers expressed these sentiments both across participants' entire life experiences and within the community college setting. Sophea, a first-generation Cambodian American student, noted that jokes and references about all Asians being smart at math were common in his interactions with his peers and he learned to dismiss them with humor:

> I took them as a joke most of the time because I would joke back at them and say
> well, I'm breaking the stereotype. But I tell them you know what, everyone has a

different learning process, everyone learns differently, some it sticks better with others, others it doesn't.

While Sophea notes having to educate others while challenging stereotypes through humor, participants were forced to choose whether and how to respond to these situations; however, it was made more difficult given the different instantiations of these stereotypes. In one instance, Sokha, a first-generation Cambodian American student, shared that her teacher was surprised by her outspokenness in the classroom when she was struggling with a subject. The teacher stated, "Oh, I thought you Asians were supposed to be good at math and good students and such." These experiences indicate that SEAA community college students are subject to the stereotype about their academic ability from many different fronts, including peers and educators. Additionally, the teacher's reaction to Sokha's directness suggests an assumption that Asian American students should be obedient, an attribute closely linked to Asian American status as "honorary White."

The ubiquitous nature and frequency of these assumptions caused much frustration for participants. Specifically, Chenda, a first-generation Cambodian American student shared, "It's annoying because I hear it a lot and it's kind of hard for me too…it's not true…I could never really be that stereotype but when I was always told that, it just got really annoying." While students reacted differently to these assumptions, two participants attempted to reject the stereotype by choosing not to perform well in their K-12 education. For example, Minh, a second-generation Vietnamese American student expressed immense frustration toward others' assumptions about his intellectual ability:

It's always kind of had an impact on me…It's impacted a lot of how I viewed

myself but also professionally at times. Oh, when I was growing up in school, it's

a little embarrassing. I really hated the whole smart Asian stereotype and I

always--I tried really hard to prove that it was wrong because it was just so

undermining. People assume you're only smart because of this. Instead of like,

thinking about the hard work that comes into it.

Minh described how the model minority stereotype impacted his self-perception to the

point that he did not want to do well in school. He was not the only participant who

attempted to reject this assumption. Similarly, Hien described not wanting to stand out in

class as a smart or gifted student despite her affinity for math because of its impact on her

peer relationships:

I think I was just young and frustrated and angry at everything--well not angry I

guess but--yeah it was kind of like feeling that to be an individual I had to

suppress parts of me that made me the individual that I am…I think I almost

dumbed myself down in some classes because I didn't want to stand out in that

way. I remember in elementary school… I remember being really good at

everything…I stood out in the crowd when I was younger…And then the kids

next to me were like "Oh, how do you do that?" and the teacher would call me

Speedy Gonzalez…and it was really nice in that moment and then I started to

realize that as soon as we left the classroom on the playground, everyone kind of

pushed away from me almost and I feel like that was--like I didn't want to stand

out in that way and I didn't want to be the Asian girl who's just…really smart.

162

Hien expressed how deeply the stereotype affected her classroom experiences and her relationships with her peers, leading her to become disillusioned enough to disengage from school and her peers, which later negatively impacted her eligibility to attend a four-year institution. Such interactions can cause great damage to peer relationships and to the psyche of SEAA students who may struggle with the ways they are positioned in school.

Misidentification and "What are you?" Asianization also perpetuates the continued misidentification of SEAA students. Particularly, there is an erasure or denial of the actual diversity in experiences of Asians and Southeast Asians. SEAA invisibility is exacerbated both by lack of interest in disaggregating data and interactions with individuals who accept the myth of monolithic success of Asian Americans. Chenda alluded to how the limited knowledge of Southeast Asians perpetually reinforced assumptions that they were the same as other more-known Asian communities:

Me, being a Southeast Asian student, I feel like we're just a little more unknown...Oh, they automatically think we're Chinese or like other Asians. If it's not Chinese, it's Filipino…People don't really know who we are as an individual…People think we have it really easy. People would just think you're an Asian; you're successful, you're good to go. They think they have it way harder than we do when they probably might but background, history-wise, it's pretty clear. As a Southeast Asian, I feel like we're a little unknown.

Chenda not only reinforced the assumption of success and no struggle but also that she is often misidentified as a different Asian ethnicity due to the limited knowledge the public

163

has regarding the diversity within the Asian population. Indeed, participants detailed many instances where they were misidentified based on more popular understandings about the Asian community. Furthermore, Chenda's assessment that Southeast Asians are "unknown" highlights the invisibility of the population within academia. For participants, there was a constant struggle to be known and recognized for their actual identities.

Many of the participants expressed frustration regarding experiences with being assumed to be East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.) or another race or ethnicity completely. For example, Sokha mentioned incidences of being misidentified as another ethnicity multiple times in our interactions. Sokha noted that her ethnically-ambiguous features created dissonance for others. In one instance, she shared that she was often thought to be Egyptian because others could not place her ethnicity. In one of these instances, the perpetrator was an international student from Cambodia. Not only did Sokha experience misidentification from others but also from within her ethnic group. Additionally, Sokha shared another experience that created a strong sense of exclusion for her:

> There are these windows on campus that people used to go through whenever
> they were too lazy to go through the door on the front, so there's a lot of tension
> around these windows…I was in full traditional costume because I was
> performing for an event and I came to one of these windows to talk with a
> friend…And a security guard happened to pass by on her bike, and when she did,
> we finished the conversation, and I closed the window, and I went back to the

floor just to talk with people…I was approached by one of the security guards, and he was like, "Yeah, I was told an Indian chick was trying to let someone through the doors." …So, he was like, "I don't want to have to shut down the event, but if you do that again, I'm going to shut down the event." …I was confused, "Who is Indian? I am not. I'm not Indian" …. And, they're just, "No! It's you." And they were really aggressive with me.

For Sokha, being misidentified and accused of wrongdoing was a significant experience for her. This, paired with other experiences of faculty making negative associations with the Cambodian community caused great frustration for Sokha, as it caused her to be reluctant to reach out for assistance. Furthermore, it caused her not to want to talk about her identity as inevitably, the conversation turned to questions like, "What are you?" and to assumptions about her identity. These experiences created strong negative associations for participants like Sokha. Minh also expressed exasperation with being assumed to be another ethnicity. In one situation, Minh shared a significant experience where he was called by another name simply because it was assumed to be a common Asian American name. For Minh, being called another name was an erasure of who he was and his identity, which was harmful and demoralizing. These experiences illuminate the consequences SEAA students face because of the essentializing nature of the model minority belief. These consequences further (re)produce invisibility and exclusion for SEAA students.

Decontextualization and denial of struggle: "[You] would never experience it because Asians are the model minority." Not only does the racial field position SEAA

165

students in opposition to their Asian American peers within the racial category, but it also positions them in opposition to other populations of color. The racial and ethnic isolation of SEAA students is reinforced through the expectations of universal success from various fronts, including from within the Asian ethnic hierarchy and from other racial groups. This manifestation results from the decontextualization of SEAA experiences, which serves to negate and dismiss the lived experiences of SEAAs. The constant denial of the struggle for SEAAs is rooted in the persistent belief in the monolithic success of Asians. This myth has considerable consequences for SEAA communities.

Model minority assumptions foster the belief that Asian Americans do not suffer from many of the challenges and issues that other racially minoritized groups face. However, participants often reflected on the struggles they and their families had to overcome as refugees from Southeast Asia. While there was a diversity in background and upbringing in terms of access to resources and support, all participants signaled that their families had to struggle to succeed in the U.S. Some of these struggles included the difficulties they faced in their own home countries due to the Vietnam War, genocide, and other civil unrest, the upheaval of having to leave their home countries, learning a new language, new culture, and new rules, and facing challenges regarding access to resources.

Additionally, socioeconomic status, both from their home countries and within the U.S. context, significantly shaped the experiences of participants. Second generation college student participants noted that their parents provided for them in the home; however, many of the first-generation college student participants indicated that their

families struggled financially. Chenda, Chau, Sua, and Sophea detailed financial difficulties that their families face, which often led to increased responsibility for the students. For example, Chenda matter-of-factly and resolutely described significant responsibilities expected of her as a young Cambodian daughter. These responsibilities included caretaking for parents and grandparents, providing transportation, completing paperwork, setting appointments for her elders, and translating during housing, welfare, or doctors' appointments. Also, the need to contribute financially to the household required that she work multiple jobs, which often impacted her academics. Recently, she reduced her credit load to part-time to manage these responsibilities. For some participants, familial responsibilities were a significant aspect of their lives, highlighting the important reality of the significant struggles SEAAs face.

Furthermore, the assumption of lack of struggle or suffering invariably influenced the ways others viewed participants and their motivations. Indeed, the model minority myth, as a racial project has been successfully wielded to drive a wedge between populations of color as Asian Americans are presented as "honorary Whites." This has impacted relations between populations of color. For Sokha, the assumption that Asians do not struggle or suffer proved to be a significant challenge for her as a Cambodian American student attempting to become involved as an activist on campus. Specifically, Sokha detailed a difficult interaction with an African American colleague regarding her desire to support and be more involved in the Black Lives Matter movement:

> I was speaking with one of my colleagues about discrimination and such, and you know how the Black Lives Matter movement is very strong these days and I

actually participate in the rallies and such because one of my best friends is

African American and I always wanted to fight for her rights. So, I chose those

opportunities too. That particular colleague, she said that I had no idea what

they're actually going through and I would never experience it because Asians are

the model minority. So, I shouldn't even be participating at all. I guess, to her I

was just trying to get 15 minutes of fame or something. And that she would also

say things like, "If you went back to your country people would--they would

accept you, but Africans would not actually accept me."

Sokha recalled this specific incident twice in two separate interviews, indicating how

deeply it frustrated her that others perceived Asians never to have experienced struggle.

Additionally, Sokha's ethnic background and family circumstances did not align with her

colleague's perceptions; yet, the absolute pervasiveness of the model minority stereotype

had an impact on her relationships with peers. This interaction highlights how systemic

and institutional forces significantly influence interpersonal relationships among

populations of color, where erroneous assumptions create separation.

Accordingly, Sokha and other participants indicated that they wished others knew

of the struggles they and their families experienced as refugees and immigrants in the

U.S. and how for some of them, those struggles were still a constant. Thus, the model

minority both obscures and dismisses the struggles that SEAA students face within the

ethnic hierarchy and the larger racial hierarchy. SEAA students can experience denial of

struggle and suffering on multiple fronts.

Censure: "You actually need help?" Due to assumptions about Asian intellectual ability and dismissal or denial of academic struggle within the Asian community, SEAA participants detailed situations where others were surprised when they expressed difficulty in school. Participants explained that others were astounded when their experiences did not match up to others' expectations about Asian students. For SEAA students, this resulted in both internal and external censuring that prevented them from seeking help in academia. Sokha elaborated on the difficulties many students, including herself, may face in seeking help:

> And a lot of people wouldn't really expect Asians to reach out and help, especially
> when it comes to their academic work and such and their grades are slipping. I
> would say a lot of students are really reluctant to get help and I would say that
> applies to me as well because I would get strange looks, "Hey, wait you actually
> need help? Why don't you understand this content?"

Furthermore, students also experienced censure, judgment, or disbelief when they expressed frustration about their academic progress or sought assistance in school. Sokha also detailed how others reacted to her expressions of anxiety about schoolwork:

> A lot of people often assume that I should be ace-ing my classes with no effort
> really. And they're kind of surprised to see me stress over a certain presentation
> or an essay, you know because I'm Asian. Or that if I go in and---I see a certain
> type of pitiful look or a look of shame where I'm not catching up to something as
> quickly as I should be.

In this case, Sokha identified feeling judged when she felt that she was not meeting

academic expectations. Sokha was especially impacted by these experiences as she

would later detail the specific behaviors she thought were expected of "good students."

Other participants also shared similar experiences. Chee, a first-generation Hmong

American student, born in Thailand, explained how these experiences indicated to her

that she was on her own:

> It actually makes me feel--when they say that, it's kinda like they don't want to
>
> help me. That you're good enough to do it on your own. But for me, no actually,
>
> I'm not like that. I actually really struggle. Just because I'm Asian doesn't mean
>
> that I'm smart, you know?
>
> It's really hard. When they say, oh you're Asian, you're smart! For me, as for
>
> what I see, it's like, oh you're smart, I don't need to help you, you could do it on
>
> your own.

These examples highlight the double-edged nature of the model minority myth as it

constrains SEAA students and hinders their options for seeking help.

Peers were not the only ones who expressed dissonance with seeing participants

struggle. Educators were also perturbed by participants' attempts to seek help and

understanding of difficult subjects. Sokha further detailed her experiences with educators

being "taken aback" when she would ask too many questions, where educators assumed

her to "talk back.". Despite her attempts to seek help through asking questions and

engaging in class, she was considered a troublemaker. These experiences highlight an

expectation gap for educators, who make assumptions about the abilities of their students

170

based on racial stereotypes, and when confronted by students' lived realities, are taken aback by these situations. In this case, it was simply easier and more convenient for the educator to attribute Sokha's behavior with troublemaking or deviance rather than assess that she was indeed seeking assistance.

Consequently, participants registered or internalized these experiences in pivotal ways that shape their desire and willingness to seek assistance. For Chee, this manifested into a fear of asking for help. Chee shared, "Especially I'm always scared to ask my teacher for help. I usually stay until they come up to me and say, 'Are you okay? do you need help.' I usually stay until the teacher asks me." Similarly, other students acknowledged barriers that prevented them from seeking assistance. This manifested in insecurity in when and how to ask for help or an inability to reach out for assistance at all. Qu, a second generation, Vietnamese American agender student, acknowledged that while they were extroverted and more likely to ask for help than their peers, would only seek assistance in cases where they felt very comfortable. They recognized that this was an issue that they and their other Vietnamese peers experience in the classroom:

> For my friend I could never imagine her being like, I don't understand this could someone help me. It's those physical things that she does that I understand that she's not quite understanding, but she doesn't do anything verbally. She doesn't even do exaggerated hand motions or sigh loudly. She would literally just sit there and stare at her paper. And write things and scribble it out and then just sit there and look at it. There's nothing big; there's no sense of asking for help in the way that she's being. And so, it's kind of isolating and silencing.

171

Due to the multitude of negative reactions to SEAA students' efforts to seek assistance in the classroom, participants detailed significant consequences they faced. These include the fear of, inability, or unwillingness to seek help from their peers or their educators, which adds to the sense of racial and ethnic isolation and silencing of SEAA students. There is not only the physical distance that keeps them separated from their peers, but the psychological impact of Asianization continues to create distance for SEAA students that are difficult for them to bridge alone. Asianization continually influences others' perceptions and understandings of SEAA students, who are often subject to assumptions that they are intellectually superior, who experience constant misidentification, who experience decontextualization and denial of struggle, and who experience censure for seeking help. Subsequently, these experiences further reinforce their racial and ethnic isolation on community college campuses.

Racially-ascribed deviance.

While SEAA community college students are subject to Asianization via the model minority myth, they are also subject to systems and structures that pathologize them as deviants and inferior, similar to the ways Black and Latinx communities have been positioned (DePouw, 2012; Lee, Park, & Wong, 2016). This has important consequences for SEAA students while also underscoring the pervasiveness of both anti-Black ideology in the U.S. context and the tendency to ascribe deviant behaviors to communities of color (e.g., Black, Latinx, and Native American) through criminalization and vilification.

While racial triangulation highlights how Asian Americans are relatively valorized in comparison to Black communities (Kim, 1999), SEAA participants highlight the multidimensional reality of their racial positioning within the Asian American racial category and in comparison to other communities of color. The deviant minority myth positions SEAA students as undeserving, in similar ways that other communities of color have been pathologized as culturally deficient and inferior (Kim, 1999). Specifically, participants' experiences illuminate how the deviant minority stereotype functions to ostracize and alienate them from within their Asian American community, positioning them both as outsiders and as alien (Ancheta, 1998). This sense of being both inferior and alien is particularly salient for SEAA participants. This section highlights how this positioning of both inferiority and outsider is achieved through the criminalization of SEAAs and discrimination via colorism, wherein SEAAs are racialized in conjunction with other communities of color.

While some participants reported on the salience of the deviant minority stereotype as significantly impacting their lives, others did not report the same level of salience. This might be explained by a variety of reasons. First, different populations might experience different racialization processes; this is also the case within and among the different ethnic groups in the Southeast Asian American community. Among participants, this difference was especially noticeable when considering which students discussed being racialized as deviant minorities versus those who did not. Specifically, all Cambodian American participants mentioned being personally racialized negatively in comparison to other Asian populations. As previously mentioned, disparities in

173

educational attainment within the diverse groups also exist, with some groups (e.g., Vietnamese) attaining at much higher levels, which may also explain varying levels of salience and connection to the deviant minority stereotype.

Second, students' backgrounds and educational contexts may also influence the level to which either stereotype functioned in their lives. About half of the participants were second-generation college students, had parents who attended college and went to predominantly White high schools. Many of these participants shared that they were relatively privileged in their educational access and opportunity because of their parents' level of education and professional backgrounds. For these students, who often lived in higher income neighborhoods away from much of their ethnic community, the deviant minority stereotype was not as explicitly present in their experiences. However, those students who were first-generation college students, who mentioned coming from low-income backgrounds, and who went to diverse high schools explicitly pointed to negative associations about their ethnic communities.

Delinquency: "Southeast Asians are gangsters." While the deviant minority myth played a more salient role for some participants than others, all participants expressed their awareness and acknowledgment of the negative ways SEAAs were depicted in their communities. These depictions ranged from an acknowledgment of the challenges and barriers in the community due to the refugee experience and experiencing poverty to the negative characterization of some SEAA communities in association with delinquent behaviors. Participants reported experiencing negative characterizations of their ethnic communities. For example, Chee shared, "Usually, they say that Hmong

people always cause trouble…They don't know how to love each other. They always kill each other, being Hmong…They cannot go higher." Chee attended a diverse high school in California, where there were large populations of Asian ethnic communities. As a young Hmong woman who immigrated to the U.S. as a young child, Chee experienced a complex relationship with her ethnicity due to hearing negative messaging about her Hmong community being unable to advance because of a perceived propensity for violence.

Given the attention and focus on the intellectual abilities and beliefs in the monolithic success of the Asian population, model minority assumptions caused a heightened awareness of any deviation from such assumptions. In the case of SEAA students, this resulted in a hypervisibility of challenges for participants, whether regarding their academic experiences or within their communities, such as poverty and violence. For some participants, there was a strong association with perceived attributes of low socioeconomic levels of their SEAA communities. Sokha described the ways that the Cambodian community was viewed in her east coast city:

> Going out and about in the city and the very urban-like city…I would see like
> memes on the internet talking about the differences between Asians and how
> Khmer people or Southeast Asians are gangsters and all this stuff. And there's
> certainly --you could see differences in different parts of the city over here. In
> [east coast city] … a lot of people would say it's a lot of gang activity and
> prostitution over there and they would associate everyone with that.

175

Several participants highlighted the prevalence of gang activity and affiliation within the SEAA community. They also shared that they knew of community or family members who were affiliated with gangs. Thus, the association of SEAA communities with gang violence created a hypervisibility and awareness of associated behaviors and dress. For example, Chenda noted that her male peers were often profiled as gang members, sharing, "If they see you dressed in a baggy shirt, loose pants, and you're sagging the cops would probably automatically think or assume that you're in a gang and would pull you over." The hyper-focus on the appearance of SEAA individuals often led to profiling of SEAAs as gang members or delinquent.

As a result, participants' parents and family members often warned them to stay away from peers who were affiliated with gangs. Sophea shared that his parents moved him out of the Cambodian community in Southern California due to fears that he would become involved. He shared that his mother told him, "I don't want you to end up like this family's kid because they're in a gang and they're doing drugs." Indeed, other participants also shared that they were often raised away from their ethnic communities due to these negative assumptions. Hien's family also made this decision, and she shared how she initially accepted this as the norm and internalized this messaging to not "be too Asian":

> I had to adapt in that way in order to survive, and it seemed like a common-sense kind of thing. I remember at the time that I didn't think about it putting a bias on a whole entire group of people, and not just the Asian people but all the other minority groups banding together.

176

In Hien's family's case, the idea of being "too Asian" was associated with being too

Southeast Asian, where assumptions of gang involvement and deviance were persistent

within the community. Her parents attempted to shelter her from these perceptions by

both a physical and figurative distancing from the larger ethnic community. Thus, the

hypervisibility of challenges, such as poverty and gang violence, within the Asian

community (re)enforced negative perceptions for SEAA families and their children.

Families made significant attempts to protect their children from negative associations

and offer many opportunities for participants to internalize these perceptions. Parents'

attempts to distance their children from what they perceive to be negative cultural traits

within their ethnic communities reinforced the belief that any associations with

criminality, gang affiliation, and other deviant behaviors were undesired and dangerous

for their success. This highlights how some SEAA parents internalize beliefs about

preserving and enacting model minority behaviors to protect and insulate their children.

Consequently, they encourage modeling behaviors that they perceived would garner more

success.

   Colorism: "We're not light-skinned beautiful." Participants acknowledged that

there were certain models of Asianness, which specified features that were considered

Asian. Participants were aware of the bias within the Asian community for accepted or

desired physical standards based on skin color. Often, these depictions were based upon

East Asian physical descriptions, namely light skin. Sokha asserted that, when people

thought of Asians, they pictured a "pale-skinned Chinese person or a Korean person that

usually has kind of small eyes, mono-lids, real pale skin." Additionally, Miss described the ideal Asian woman:

> …Pale face, the smallest eyes they can find on an Asian woman…And black hair, straight. A lot of the times, super slender…They really go toward the pale face. They don't really embrace the darker skin, like my brothers and sisters, in media or advertisement or in other shapes--or bigger shapes--or smaller shapes. They really want to have this whole prestige look.

Miss indicated that she often felt as if she didn't "fit" with accepted standards of Asianness, which created pressure for her to focus on her physical appearance. Miss also pointed out the deep bias within the Asian community for lighter skin in media and that any variation from the accepted standard was not embraced. However, Miss also recognized that she was not subject to the same issues as she noted her light-skinned features. She mentioned that her darker-skinned Asian friends often got into more trouble. She mused whether this association was related to their skin color, "Like that's been expected." Miss highlighted an important association between darker skin color and getting into trouble. As a lighter-skinned woman, Miss recognized that she is not subject to the same associations that her darker-skinned friends experience.

Many SEAAs were considered not to be well-associated with East Asian characteristics. In fact, the darker skin of many SEAA ethnic groups was highlighted in stark contrast to ideals of Asianness. Qu offered an example of the descriptions that reinforce the colorism in the SEAA community:

Southeast Asians are generally more dark skinned so they're not the light skinned East Asians that are always succeeding. And statistically succeeding a lot. Yeah, primarily that we're brown. We're not; we're not the light-skinned "beautiful," etc.…I think that definitely feeds into a lot of the different stereotypes that go in with darker skinned folks.

Other participants more bluntly described the difference. Sophea shared, "As vulgar as it sounds we're considered jungle Asians." Sokha also shared, "Dark-skinned Asians aren't really considered to be Asian. Like Indian or Khmer people. Yeah, a lot of people just say, oh, we're the Black people of Asians." The comparison of some SEAA groups to the Black community was described to varying extents. While Cambodian participants, Sophea and Sokha described the ways their communities were often associated with the Black community, this was not as explicitly shared personally by other participants despite it being acknowledged as a general perception impacting the SEAA community. Potentially, this association is much more salient for the Cambodian participants. Additionally, Sokha described how her body and physical appearance was hypersexualized. She shared, "A lot of people would just say, "Oh, because you're Cambodian, of course, you'd like Black guys because you're practically Black yourself. You could tell by your body shape and such." The above examples significantly highlight perceived associations between dark skin, hypersexuality, and delinquency. SEAAs are subject to an ethnic hierarchy, in which lighter-skinned individuals hold more privilege in comparison to their darker-skinned counterparts.

179

The ways some participants framed their racialization in conjunction with the Black and White paradigm suggests that this paradigm significantly shapes their understanding of where they are positioned in relation to other communities. While the Black and White paradigm often renders other communities of color invisible in conversations about race, the experiences of SEAAs highlight that in attempting to make sense of their own racial and ethnic positioning, their descriptions reflect their understandings of how race is viewed in the U.S. Particularly, there is a recognition that the racial system valorizes enactments of Whiteness while invalidating enactments that have been wrongfully racially-ascribed to communities of color, especially in relation to Black communities, who have been egregiously oppressed throughout history. Participants recognize this racial and ethnic hierarchy exists in some form, but more importantly, it has real-life impacts on their experiences and how they make sense of their own racial identities.

Institutional invisibility.

Community colleges reinforce the racialization of SEAA students in ways that maintain the status quo and perpetuates conditions that cause racial and ethnic isolation for SEAA students. This racial and ethnic isolation is reinforced at the community college level due to the institutional invisibility of SEAA students. Due to a lack of knowledge about or interest in learning more about their lived experiences, stereotypes and assumptions guide the inception of policies and practices that continually restrict access to resources for SEAA students. For participants, the community college environment perpetuates the institutional invisibility of SEAA students in many ways.

180

First, assumptions of monolithic success are codified into data aggregation that constantly lumps all Asian ethnic communities under one racial category, masking disparities and diversity within the Asian racial category. Second, limited understanding and recognition of SEAA students' needs prevent equitable allocation of resources and support, which have traditionally been leveraged for populations who share many of the same barriers and issues of access.

First, this lack of consideration for SEAA student experiences is partially the result of the aggregation of data pertaining to Asian America students. Participants like Minh expressed frustration at being "lumped into other categories." This lumping of SEAA students into the Asian aggregate was the source of consternation for many participants like Hien and Miss, who described the need for disaggregated data to understand the different needs of Asian ethnic groups. Without this data, the values of the institution are then based on stereotypes and assumptions. Hien shared, "And I wish that we got that disaggregated data…I mean I think that the stereotypes are kind of reflected in the institution's values and the lack of resources."

Participants echoed calls to disaggregate data to understand the experiences of SEAA students fully. Hien explained that disaggregating data would be a start for recognizing differences within the Asian American population:

Giving me an adequate box to check on whatever little registration, survey…I distinctly remember when I registered, it was always Asian American, Chicano/Latino, whatever, White, Native American, Black. I think that's kind of the first impression that you get walking into your experience there because

181

you're registering to be a student there…that sets the tone of recognizing the

different ethnicities within that huge umbrella.

Chenda also underscored the importance of accurate data and consistent surveying to

inform community college efforts. She noted that high school graduation rates of SEAA

students were also a good indicator of the issues impacting the community. She

highlighted the existence of important sources of data external to the institution that can

help develop a more comprehensive understanding of SEAA educational contacts. Thus,

participants note there is no shortage of information that can better inform institutional

priorities.

While Hien acknowledged institutional efforts to disaggregate, she also

mentioned that efforts were slow, stating, "Well I know for a fact that at this campus, our

data isn't disaggregated at all and they're working on it, but it's like a three-year-long

process." Given the slow progress of disaggregation efforts, SEAA participants faced e

continued invisibility and neglect of their needs due to perceptions of success in the

Asian community. Hien explained the ways Asian students are perceived in education:

I think that speaks a lot to like how particularly Asian students are viewed within

education systems. Because it's like why do we need to provide services? They—

Asian students—are just gonna succeed regardless but that's just like not true at

all. There's so many multiplicities just within API or APA umbrella, there's so

many different cultures, and within the cultures, there's so many different

individuals and narratives that just kind of fall through the cracks.

Hien's comments illuminate the collateral damage SEAA students are subject to, of falling "through the cracks," when assumptions influence the allocation of services and resources. Consequently, the aggregation of data on Asian American students continues to reinforce their invisibility on campus.

Second, the lumping of Asian groups and resulting data aggregation impacts SEAA students' access to needed resources and support. Several participants referenced the lack of resources allocated toward supporting SEAA and Asian American students in general, especially given the resources available to other populations. Particularly for Minh, Hien, Qu, and Miss, who attended the same community college, they shared that while there were resources for Black/African American and Latinx populations on campus, there were none for Asian American students. Participants acknowledged the importance of resources to support these communities; however, they point to disparate access to resources for their SEAA communities when they are impacted by similar barriers. They all noted the existence of learning communities and programs for other populations of color, which had positive impacts for creating communities for them on campus. Specifically, Miss noted the lack of that "kind of community, which is unfortunate." Miss lamented on the lack of support for Asian American students and pointed out that Asian Americans are left out of conversations. She also noted the model minority as the reason for this lack of support, stating, "They seem like, 'Oh, Asian people, they got it held down.' But no, it's still a struggle." Minh also pointed to the lack of resources to support Asian American students on campus:

183

I will have to say that it's somewhat hard to find resources for Asian people. In our campus, we have Puente and Umoja for Latino or Black students, but we don't really have that kind of resource for Asian students. And it did feel a little just weird because there are--even though our struggles are different, we are more kind of successful--there are ground level things that are just hard to talk about or just aren't talked about. Kind of like the pressure of being the model minority or the pressure to be anything outside of STEM or more artistic major. So, I kind of just wish there was something on our campus that did kind of talk about that.

While Minh asserted that Asian students might be considered successful, the struggles they face are different. Additionally, Minh underscored the pressures of the model minority and other pressures to pursue specific careers within the Asian community, such as those related to STEM, health, and law. Hien also affirmed the disparity in support for students of color on campus, sharing that there were no intentional spaces for SEAA students. She elaborated, "Literally the only spaces I could ever imagine are the office hours of Southeast Asian professors." However, participants also noted that there were very few Southeast Asian faculty and staff on their campuses. As such, these spaces were also further limited by the lack of Southeast Asian representation at the faculty and staff levels on campus. As such, resources and support, both in the form of learning communities, key institutional agents, and others were limited for SEAA students.

The above issues reinforce institutional invisibility of SEAA students on community college campuses. Their issues are not reflected in the data that is used to inform institutional priorities, and they are subsequently ignored when it comes to

184

resource allocation. Participants were highly cognizant of these inequities and called for more support. They expressed the responsibility of their institutions to recognize and acknowledge their struggle and to provide opportunities for them to have spaces to help them explore their identity and build community in the ways other groups are able. For example, Hien acknowledged that the existence of support services for specific groups of color and the noted absence of support services for Asian students was not lost on her. She further asserted that she wanted to find a community that represents her identities because "there's different codeswitching that has to happen when you're in a different group." Hien underscored the need for spaces that help support students' various identities and their engagement and integration into the community college environment. The existence of Umoja and Puente suggested some level of institutional commitment to Black and Latinx communities; however, the absence of support also indicated a lack of commitment to supporting Asian students.

Overall, assumptions of monolithic Asian success and data aggregation continues to mask diversity and disparities among the Asian American population; specifically, SEAA students are especially impacted. These efforts inform the development of institutional priorities and the allocation of resources among the student population. The resulting institutional invisibility of SEAA students is (re)produced in a cycle of invisibility, omission, and exclusion, adding to the collective racial and ethnic isolation that these communities face. Not only are they not reflected accurately within conversations about Asian groups, but they are also rarely reflected wholly and accurately in the institutions they attend.

185

Community college stigma.

Community colleges offer students a low-cost educational experience compared to other postsecondary institutions. Of the ten participants, community colleges were the first or best possible choice for all but three. Sua attended a four-year state university initially but decided to return home and enroll in the community college in her second semester. Qu was not accepted into their first-choice institution, and Chenda was unable to enroll into her local four-year institution due to a situation that was not resolved in time for the start of school. Participants had many reasons for attending community college; however, their decisions were not without critique or judgment from their peers, families, and educators. As such, the stigma of attending community college as an SEAA and Asian American fostered complex feelings for students as they attempted to navigate various expectations from their families, educators, and peers.

For many of the participants, the desire to stay close to home and near family was a significant factor. Miss described her reasoning for attending community college as not wanting to burden her parents with college costs:

I don't want to be a burden to my family because money is a struggle. They work so hard all their life, being immigrants here. Working in swap meets and picking up trash and stuff like that. They used to pick up worms to sell--like canned--for fish as bait. And so--which is why I feel so guilty asking them, like something so privileged like education. And having money to pay for a four-year university, so I don't want to, you know, add on to their hard work. I don't want to take that

186

away from their hard work. So, community college definitely helps relieve that

burden.

Likewise, Chau initially wanted to attend a four-year institution; however, as the eldest in

her family, she also expressed a desire to be closer to home. As a second-generation

college student, Chau was supported by her mother to attend the local community college

as her mother also previously attended the institution. For participants, financial and

family responsibilities were important considerations in their college choice journeys.

They discussed the desire to honor and support their parents' sacrifices and not to

overburden them with their educational and financial needs.

However, the decision to attend community college was not without its

difficulties, especially given the mixed messages students received from their peers,

educators, and family about the value of a community college degree. Specifically, some

reactions from parents and family members reinforced beliefs that community colleges

were not as prestigious as four-year institutions. For example, while Miss intentionally

chose to first attend community college as to not to burden her parents financially, she

still faced pressures from her parents to attend a four-year institution. Miss shared that

her parents felt it was more prestigious to attend a four-year institution and that

community college was more of a "purgatory…where they don't think you're not doing

anything successful." Despite her parents' assumptions, Miss acknowledged their

unfamiliarity with the American education system and committed herself to working hard

so her parents would not worry about her prospects. Miss strove to keep her own

academic goals in mind and persisted despite her parents' beliefs. Also, participants

acknowledged the popular belief that community colleges were considered an extension of high school. For example, Sokha elaborated on the stigma of community colleges being the "13th grade" and a "stepover, like a high school." Furthermore, some participants noted that this stigma was especially salient within the Asian American community. Hien identified feeling as if she should not be at a community college due to assumptions about where Asian Americans should attend school:

> I think that specifically to the API community there's kind of like a stigma towards it because I know for me like, my mom, my dad too, even though I was still on a route to getting an education, they hated that I was at a community college. Whenever my mom would talk about it to her, gossip to her Filipina sisters, she'd be like "Yeah, she's at a community college, but she'll be transferring da da da da," so it in that way I always felt like I shouldn't be here because I'm supposed to be Asian and like smart or whatever.

Accordingly, Hien identified an added layer of racialized complexity surrounding the decision to attend a community college. For participants, the pressure to live up to model minority standards of academic success existed in many fronts; this pressure came most notably from their parents who desired that their children attend four-year institutions because it was what was expected of good Asians.

Not only did participants face these thoughts from others outside the community colleges, but they also faced this messaging from their educators who reinforced the perception that community colleges were not as highly regarded learning environments as four-year institutions. Sokha shared that her educators also acknowledged that a

188

community college education was not considered as rigorous at other institutions. She shared that some of her faculty expressed sentiments that "teaching at a community college is very different from teaching at a university…They often find themselves making excuses as to why they're working in the community college as opposed to a four-year university." Consequently, Sokha expressed that she became concerned that she was behind:

> I really was unsure of myself as a student…And when I was told, yeah, you are actually behind, as you're spending your years in community college, I was really freaking out. I really needed to step my game because maybe society won't take me seriously if I'm still at the community college. But over the years, I kind of grew numb to that... because time is money and you really need to save money.

These sentiments impacted participants in different ways initially. Many expressed concerns about how they would be viewed in comparison to their peers. Particularly, for Minh, he shared that he initially did not want to attend community college for related reasons:

> Oh man, I actually thought about this a lot. I had a talk with my coworkers about our high school experiences. Basically, with my high school, I won't say which one, the perception was, if you're not transferring into a four year, you're kind of stupid…Our community college is the place you go to if you're a failure and you want a chance…It's just like, you weren't good enough, so here's a bronze medal, more or less. And that was a big reason why I didn't go to community college

189

right off the bat. It was because I kind of felt like I was just ashamed of admitting

that I wanted to go to it.

Minh highlighted an important impact of the stigma surrounding attending community

college. As an SEAA student, Minh internalized messaging about what academic success

entailed, and the community college was not included in that concept. As such, Minh

described how this messaging negatively impacted his beliefs and choices in his

academic career. Especially considering that Minh did not immediately enroll in college

after high school, he internalized this stigma in such a way that prevented him from

continuing his education.

Thus, participants expressed significant experiences in navigating negative

messaging and stigma regarding their choice to attend community college not only from

their families but also their educators and peers. The stigma of attending community

college also involved an added layer of complexity given students' identities as Asian

American and SEAA. Some SEAA participants' parents and families exerted pressure on

participants to attend a four-year institution because of assumptions that they were better,

more prestigious schools. Consequently, the pressure to conform and live up to model

minority ideals of academic success was especially salient. The corollary to this

experience is that it also reinforces stereotypes of the academic inferiority of SEAA

students, especially considering the high likelihood that most SEAA students attend

community colleges.

Overall, the above examples highlight how racialization of SEAA students

extends into the community college environment. Participants reported significant

190

intentional and unintentional interactions with peers, educators, and family members that reinforced racial structures because of the influence of stereotypical assumptions about the abilities of Asian and SEAA students. As individual agents within a system, peers, educators, and family members acted in accordance with stereotypical assumptions about SEAA students and ultimately reinforced racial dynamics and structures.

Internalization of Deficit Ideology

SEAA students described critical aspects and processes that shaped their unique racialization within the racial field. Their experiences highlighted nuances and insights as it relates specifically to the ways essentializing stereotypes impact their lives. Despite these experiences, SEAA participants attempted to negotiate and (re)define their identities within the racial field and structure. Specifically, SEAA students attempted to resist the essentializing nature of their racializations ways that may potentially reinforce and reproduce the racial and ethnic hierarchy. As previously mentioned, two participants, Minh and Hien, specifically described attempts to counter and disprove the model minority as a myth by disengaging from their education, which they acknowledged only hurt their educational prospects. Their experiences highlight the grim reality that individual attempts to challenge racial systems may be in vain. However, racial processes and the racial structure immensely influence how SEAA students navigate and negotiate these systems. In this section, I illuminate critical experiences that shape how participants might internalize deficit ideology. Specifically, I seek to showcase the insidiousness of messaging that promotes the (re)production of deficit ideology.

191

SEAA racialization is shaped by deficit ideology, which in turn shapes the experiences of SEAA students significantly. Participants reported many situations where deficit and racist messaging shaped their experiences. Relatedly, internalized racism involves acceptance of negative messages about the abilities of stigmatized groups (Jones, 2000). To be clear, I make no assertions that participants in this study accepted these negative messages, especially as this was not the focus of this study. Rather, participants' accounts illuminate how they are constantly bombarded with messaging that potentially facilitates the internalization of deficit ideology, which can occur through four interrelated and mutually reinforcing processes. These processes include ascribing to meritocratic belief systems as a means for proving participants worked hard, attempting to distance or disassociate from deficiency or inferiority of SEAAs, seeking racial legitimacy to prove their value, and personalizing failure. Ultimately, the racialization of SEAA students perpetuates the (re)production of deficit ideology.

Ascribing to meritocratic beliefs.

The influence of meritocratic beliefs on SEAA community college students is significant. Many participants described their and their families' connections to and beliefs in achieving the American Dream. Participants pointed to their parents and families as important conveyors of the belief that hard work was the sole source of success and the keystone of American ideals. Particularly, American ideals included the notion that individuals needed to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, to work hard, to assimilate into American society without fuss. Participants noted that their parents desired to achieve the American Dream and guided their children accordingly to these

192

beliefs. Qu described the pressure to work harder while contending with beliefs from conservatives that highlight bootstraps mentality while also admonishing communities for having too many kids or not speaking English well. They admit that her parents uphold many of these beliefs, questioning why their siblings do not work harder, finish education, or stop having children. While Qu problematized the notion of meritocracy and the American Dream, they also highlighted the significance of SEAA parents ascribing to these notions, which foster judgment and dissent in their communities regarding perceptions about what hard work meant. Given the influence of parents on SEAA students' educational aspirations, the potential for students to internalize and ascribe to meritocratic beliefs is significant.

Indeed, some participants associated failure to achieve or challenges within their community with deficit-based ideologies that focused on negative or un-American ideals. For some participants, there was a perception that some in their community took advantage of welfare and other systems of support. For Chau, who watched her mother and father work hard to provide for their family, this was especially salient:

> There's some people that don't want to work hard. They'd rather take advantage
> of the government, which, I wish they didn't because there's a lot of people that
> need that, but there's some people take advantage of food stamps and disability.
> Even though they have all this money, they still want more, like greedy. So, it's
> really hard to say because I know there are some people that are honorable but
> some people that are not willing to work for this country.

193

Chau's father opposed reliance on social programs and desired to work hard to support his family. As such, Chau internalized the importance of hard work and not taking advantage of resources, which also impacted her educational experiences, especially during moments when she felt that she did not work hard enough. Additionally, Sophea also contrasted his parents' beliefs of working hard and not "cheating the system." When younger, Sophea struggled to understand how other families were more well-off compared to his family despite sharing similar struggles. He later learned from his father that they were taking advantage of the system. Additionally, Minh shared the foundational belief in meritocracy, "Just work hard, and you know that you'd get a better life." This idea that working hard would result in a better life or achieving the American Dream was salient for participants. Thus, there was a strong likelihood for participants to internalize and ascribe to meritocratic beliefs as a source and guide for pursuing success, which heightened perceptions of failure.

Disassociating from deficiency or inferiority.

A strong belief and conviction in meritocracy and the American Dream is rooted in the idea that individual effort is the truest source of an individual's and group's value and worth in society (Shifrer, 2013). As a result, any explanations regarding outcomes associated with failure and challenge were attributed to individual deficient action or inaction. This can result in internalizing deficit perspectives about themselves and their communities. It can often manifest in attempting to disassociate from negative assumptions about SEAAs. For example, internalizing beliefs in meritocracy can lead to negative perceptions of those who are perceived to be not assimilating into American

194

meritocratic values. Consequently, participants attempted to distance themselves from such associations.

Despite the assumption that the model minority myth is a positive stereotype, a significant consequence of the myth is the development of beliefs about personal deficiency or inferiority in academia and society (Kim, 1999). Several participants noted that due to the model minority myth and its high expectation of academic success, they developed beliefs that they were not as good as they should be. For example, Sokha explained the pressure to do well in school and her own subsequent evaluation of herself as an average student:

> Well, I see myself as average as opposed to good just like--usually, when growing up, Asians have this idea that because you're this model minority, we're all supposed to have straight As or 4.0 GPAs or higher than that. And if you fall anywhere less than that, then we're considered to be average, if not bad. And, yeah, just growing up with those expectations and that standard, that's the hard thing to reach. So, I see myself as an average student.

Again, the assumption of monolithic success creates a tension for SEAA students as they navigate education. The belief that if they cannot meet academic ideals, then they must not be good enough was shared among other participants.

Beyond academic expectations, participants shared that general perceptions of SEAA positioned them in a lower status than other Asian groups, as reinforced by colorism. Sua, a second-generation Hmong American student, shared perspectives about feeling inadequate or "subpar" when compared to other Asian groups, "I guess, Southeast

Asian, in general, it's kind of lower than Chinese, Japanese, or Korean." Sua also

elaborated on feeling incomplete as Asian:

> I felt like I wasn't full Asian, I guess you can say. Because when people talk about
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> Asian, they mainly think of those three, that I have stated before. And whenever
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> they--when someone brings up Asian culture, it's always Chinese, Japanese or
>
> Korean, when there's so much more out there. I guess it's because of that, that's
>
> been institutionalized in a lot of people, to automatically think of those three
>
> Asian cultures instead of all the other ones.

Sua highlighted an important concept that our society had been socialized into developing

specifically defined standards regarding Asian populations. In referencing the

institutionalization of specific knowledge about Asians, Sua points to the history books,

which offer brief glimpses of the contributions of East Asians (e.g., Chinese, Japanese,

Korean) and even fewer accounts of the experiences of Southeast Asian communities. As

such, the limited representation of Southeast Asian communities offers few opportunities

for SEAAs to feel positively reflected. This fostered a sense of feeling not good enough

for participants.

For participants, there was a hyper-focus on challenges faced by the SEAA

community. Challenges within the community were often associated with the belief

SEAA community members were not working hard enough, not assimilating, and

participating in delinquent behaviors, such as gang and criminal activity. These

perceptions were fostered and reinforced by SEAA parents who warned participants to

stay away from other ethnic peers who were thought to associate with gangs or other

delinquent behaviors. Additionally, the struggles within the SEAA community were attributed to beliefs in the deviant minority stereotype. The use of the term "ghetto" in relation to SEAA communities was mentioned by several participants. Chee described the ways her Hmong community were perceived to be ghetto:

> Usually the Asian groups--they in the same group--but for the African American peoples, they in the same group and the Hmong people stay---the Hmong people are the ghetto ones...And especially the Hmong people--they always fight, sometimes, in high school.

This reinforced the belief in the academic inferiority of SEAAs, which also resulted in attempting to distance themselves from the negative associations within their ethnic communities. One participant described not wanting to identify with her ethnic communities. Specifically, Chee detailed these thoughts regarding how she made sense of her identity as Asian American:

> Right now, it's really important for me. It doesn't matter, right now, if people ask me, I am able to answer. Where I'm not hating myself. Where I'm---I hate being Hmong or being Asian. Back in high school, I used to think that I was--man, I'm going to be whitewashed. I don't want to be Hmong people because at that time, even though I came from Thailand, I still had that feeling. I don't like to be Hmong. Hmong, they can't do nothing at all, you know? They can't even do nothing.

Chee shared feelings of not wanting to identify as Hmong. She identified messaging that implied that the Hmong community was not valued. In high school, she expressed

wanting to distance herself from negative perspectives about her community. While she currently expressed pride in her identity in community college, for Chee, there was a contested relationship involving both moments of disillusionment and moments of pride in her identity. Similarly, Minh described how he internalized beliefs in elitism from his parents due to his family's educational successes:

> And so, I feel like there's kind of like a sense of elitism that was brought up in our family because since they were just naturally educated, they're like, we're smarter than other Vietnamese people. Like subconsciously…it did make me feel like I was better than other people in my community. Or like, they would--they weren't up to my level.

Participants' experiences indicated a significant potential for SEAA students to develop and internalize deficit and negative beliefs regarding their ethnic communities. In conjunction with ascribing to meritocratic beliefs and deficit ideologies regarding their ethnic communities, the belief in negative messages can result in internalization and reproduction of racism.

Seeking racial legitimacy.

Due to their polarizing racialization, participants sought racial legitimacy. Given the polarizing ways SEAAs were racialized either as successful or as failures, participants developed a desire to prove that they were good enough. This caused them to distance themselves from negative portrayals of their community and to seek legitimacy as good or successful Asians. As such, participants detailed a drive to seek racial legitimacy due

198

to a devaluation of SEAA ethnic communities within the Asian ethnic hierarchy and a pressure to perform up to model minority standards.

First, the devaluation of SEAA ethnic communities within the Asian ethnic hierarchy is evident given the previous discussions about the privileging of East Asian cultures and standards of beauty over that of SEAA communities. Participants expressed a heightened awareness of others' perceptions of themselves as SEAAs within the Asian ethnic hierarchy. Additionally, Sokha noted the existence of ideals for a proper Asian based on East Asian characteristics:

> So, to the first thing--to be an improper Asian. I've noticed a lot of people; they don't really consider Khmer people to be Asian…They would consider the "true Asians" to be Chinese, Japanese, Korean. Basically, any Asian that's fair-skinned, really small eyes…, a petite body frame.

Again, Sokha reinforces her peers' assertions about who is considered Asian and who is not. Often, those with darker skin and who were often associated with the deviant minority myth were excluded from this ideal. Further, the idea that SEAAs were closer to the Black community instead of the Asian community was reinforced, with Sokha detailing her struggle with perceptions that Cambodians were "Black Asians." Specifically, Sokha described the impact this knowledge had on her, explaining it "caused a lot of identity issues growing up because usually when people say that, you can see in their expressions that…it's like you're considered less than." This perception that to be SEAA is to be less than caused participants to grapple with beliefs about who could be considered successful and who were not.

199

Second, the pressure to perform model minority behavior was significant for many participants. For some, this spurred a move to distance themselves from negative perceptions within their community in response to observations that SEAA ethnic communities occupied low positions within the Asian ethnic hierarchy. Several participants detailed an ardent desire and pressure to enact desirable behaviors often associated with the model minority myth and being a good student, such as excelling and being involved on campus. Specifically, Sokha described a pressure to become involved on campus and to be a good student, sacrificing sleep to achieve:

It would push me to overload myself with work, just to keep up this certain image of myself so that way I could be considered good enough. Like, some people "Hey, I'm actually Asian." And also, being Cambodian is especially hard because you know, we don't really get to be seen as actual Asians. There's a lot of comparisons to the Chinese or the Korean or Japanese and how they're, "Asian, Asian." Actually, Asian as opposed to being a brown Asian and kind of being cast aside a lot. So, it kind of shaped my experience. At first, I went through a depression. I didn't really want to get involved, but now I'm kind of overloading myself to get involved so that way, I could prove myself. Hey, this is who I am. I'm Cambodian. We are good Asians or whatever.

For Sokha, the desire to prove her worth as a "good Asian" influenced how she thought she should show up on or engage in community college. Similarly, Chau also detailed a pressure to succeed to live up to the model minority stereotype. She experienced pressure not only internally but also from her parents to do well in school and to achieve

200

success. Like Sokha and Chau, Sua was aware that it was better to be perceived as smart

than to not. She asserted, "But I honestly didn't mind because you know if you see me as

smart, then I guess that's better for me." Participants acknowledged it was better to be

perceived as smart and successful rather than not. Thus, there is a desire to prove oneself

and to seek legitimacy within the Asian racial hierarchy because of the devaluation of

SEAAs.

     Personalizing failure and psychological impact.

     Finally, when participants perceived themselves to have failed to achieve and

represent the model minority myth, they personalized the perceived failure in damaging

ways. Related to strong beliefs in meritocracy and working hard, any perceptions of

failure to meet model minority standards resulted in many psychological challenges

related to anxiety and depression for SEAA students. Participants shared experiences of

believing they were not able to live up to standards placed upon them as Asians, where

they personally internalized failure. These experiences created psychological impacts for

participants as they struggled to navigate societal expectations regarding their academic

abilities and performance.

     First, participants internalized beliefs about their perceived failures to live up to

the model minority stereotype. Several participants detailed difficulties in feeling as if

they could not meet expectations of success. Qu explained the experience of

internalizing when one has failed:

     It's very personalized where it's my own personal failure that I'm not

     understanding this. It's hard to ask for help…when other folks are always

201

imagining you to understand it just because…You're Asian, you know everything.

You can help me…If I'm supposed to teach you, and I don't understand it, I can't

ask you to teach me here because that's supposed to be my role…And then in

connection to that shame, it's hard too; sometimes it feels like a physical thing

making you isolated from your peers.

For Qu, there is a sense of personal failure and inability to live up to standards, which

results in difficulties in seeking help. Qu also highlights an expectation that Asian

students are to help others as an important aspect of their roles. This is an added

dimension in which Qu points out that Asians are expected to be smart and able to teach

others. However, for Qu, any inability to live up to these standards results in

internalizing failure and shame. This adds to the isolation that SEAA students may

experience as they contend with feelings of shame about any perceived inability to live

up to expectations and standards.

Second, students experience anxiety about their academic abilities in connection

with perceptions of failure to achieve. Chau explained that her parents considered her an

average student and often compared her to her peers, which created insecurity for her.

Consequently, she consistently believed she was "not working hard enough," despite the

hours she spent working and studying. Additionally, Sokha also detailed feeling anxiety

about her academic performance in class:

Well, it gives me a lot of anxiety because I don't want to make a bad impression

on the professor and I don't want to hear--I don't really like seeing those

202

expressions from my peer's faces like looks of annoyance or looks of pity or
shame or whatever.

Sokha described at many different points during her interviews that she felt judged and prevented from just being a student, where she could present whenever she struggled. However, she came to expect judgment from her peers and her educators throughout her educational career. Participants seemingly detail a sense of constant surveillance regarding their academic performance, which creates heightened anxiety surrounding their ability to live up to expectations.

Third, the anxiety often manifested into depression and other mental health challenges for students, specifically for Hien, Chau, Sokha, and Minh. For Minh, who struggled with depression throughout his educational experience, the community college experience was no different. He explained, "With college, on a personal note, I struggle with anxiety and depression and sometimes I just don't do as well because of personal stress." Similarly, Sokha expressed experiencing depression when she felt she was considered not as good as other Asian students. Additionally, Chau described her difficulties with dealing with depression about her academic abilities:

Well, if that were me, I would go into a depression state because I did go through that before and it was really hard to get out. My parents didn't understand. My sisters didn't really understand that often all this pressure in my head and I just want to sit and do nothing because I'm hearing all this negativity.

203

Participants experienced significant pressures to succeed from peers, educators, and family. Any perception of failing to meet those standards resulted in feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and depression, which impacted their overall academic experiences.

Overall, the pressure to succeed creates significant psychological impact for SEAA students and has serious negative consequences for their mental wellness. Minh described how difficult it was for him to bring up his mental and emotional health to his educators:

It's just very hard to explain to people who don't really get it. For some reason, I always felt there's kind of a stigma and shame to bring it up. I know my professors should be understanding about it, but I always feel like I shouldn't bring it up because it's kind of embarrassing.

Minh experienced periods of depression throughout his educational experience, which significantly impacted his experiences in school. He felt that it was difficult to explain his struggles to others. The sense of failure and shame that participants described when they felt they could not personally meet academic expectations was reinforced with the knowledge of the stigma surrounding mental and emotional health. Bringing up such issues would seemingly only enhance the sense of failure that participants described. Additionally, Sokha described moments in her K-12 education where her educational struggles were dismissed as a product of her being a "bad apple" rather than educators recognizing that her behaviors were a call for help. Thus, participants struggled with the psychological impact of their educational experiences in isolation and alone,

experiencing a deep sense of failure and shame that is a self-fulfilling prophecy. This cycle of shame perpetually keeps them isolated from being able to access support.

Given SEAA participants' multiple accounts of feeling racially and ethnically isolated, of experiencing exclusion on community college, and of interactions with others who made assumptions about their racial and ethnic communities, there are many opportunities for SEAA students to potentially internalize negative and damaging perspectives. SEAA students are constantly either ignored and dismissed or bombarded with messaging about the standards to which they should perform, live up to or against. Such experiences cause great consternation, struggle, and psychological impact for SEAA community college students as they attempt to navigate their education. Particularly, an important element of participants' experiences with internalizing these messages is that they potentially struggle with them in isolation. In personalizing these experiences, participants highlight a crucial point in which they feel isolated and alone, unable to connect to support to help them complicate or address their struggles holistically and positively. Without intervention or resistance, this internalization, self-flagellation, and unintentional (re)production of the racial structure may continue to go uncontested.

While this study highlights the racialized conditions and subsequent racial and ethnic isolation of SEAA community college students, it also illuminates sources of strength, resilience, and agency for SEAA community college students navigating their racialization. Most importantly, SEAA community college students enacted behaviors, attitudes, and strategies that help them to develop resistance to the negative consequences

205

of their polarized racialization. Critical sources of support helped them develop agency, enact resistance, and engage in activism to challenge assumptions about their communities. These critical sources of support included: (1) campus subcultures that provided connection to key institutional agents who espouse proactive philosophies, humanize the campus environment, and provide holistic support and opportunities to engage in programs and practices that support anti-essentialism and incorporate culturally relevant knowledge, (2) cultural community organizations that served as racially and ethnically safe spaces, for connecting students to individuals who share their ethnic identities and experiences, and link students to on-campus support services, (3) family support systems characterized by high educational aspirations that shape students' intrinsic motivations and legitimize community colleges as a viable educational pathway. Consequently, critical sources of support provide significant benefits for SEAA students as they help to minimize and mitigate their racial and ethnic isolation on campus, offer space to connect to their identities and communities and support the development of positive attitudes and associations with their racial identities.

Sources of Strength, Resilience, and Agency

The preceding section suggests a permanence to the impervious nature of deficit messaging in our society, which has significant consequences for SEAA students. However, there are still pockets of hope and resistance that enable SEAA community college students to develop positive attitudes and exercise their agency. Despite the grim outlook intimated by participants' accounts of experiencing racialization, there were also many examples of SEAA students' resistance, agency, and activism in rejecting societal

perspectives about their abilities and value. These examples are significantly shaped

through access to spaces, communities, and individuals, as critical sources of support

who helped students develop strong identities as SEAAs. This section specifically

highlights both important aspects of strength, resiliency, and agency that shape the

humanity of SEAA students and how community colleges can interrupt the cycle and

support SEAA students to practice their inherent agency and resistance to negative, racist

messages.

Before providing an overview of the relevant critical sources of support that

enable SEAA community college students to practice hope and resilience, it is vital to

recognize that while the participants are subject to many harmful experiences and

messages that negatively shape their perspectives, the fact that they continue to persist

and strive for a future is an enactment of agency and resilience itself. Despite the racial

and ethnic isolation participants experience on their campuses, they choose to continue to

step into spaces that are often hostile and even violent. To subject themselves to

situations and environments where they know what to expect due to past negative

experiences is a continual act of resistance. Stepping foot onto the community college

campus despite knowing they will feel isolated, disconnected, and alienated is resistance.

One of the most significant ways participants enacted or practiced hope and

resilience to continue resisting was to have hope for their futures so that they can "give

back" to their communities. This was the main source of strength for participants that

drove many of their motivations for persisting. For example, when Miss described the

constant tension she felt with her Hmong identity and her American identity, she

elucidated moments of frustration with feeling restricted as a young woman by Hmong

patriarchal traditions and culture; however, she also held to her convictions regarding

giving back to maintain her cultural identity:

> Being Hmong is like having a community…it's always about community and
>
> family and what you could provide for the next generation and think about your
>
> previous generation and trying to make them proud, uphold it. But being a
>
> Hmong American, it's a little bit more conflicting because it's like what can you
>
> provide for you? Like, how can you get through yourself with college…. Like
>
> you, you, you. Within the Hmong community, it's we, we, we… I want to focus
>
> on what I can do so I can gain the skills to give back….

Other participants also shared a collective desire to give back to their families and

communities. Despite the seemingly opposing ways participants framed the tension

between their ethnic identities and their academic identities, they still strove to give back.

This desire to give back to community highlights the hope participants hold to

steadfastly. Culture and community is still a source of strength for participants even

despite the complicated ways they described their relationship with their ethnic identities.

Critical sources of support helped them to practice agency, enact resistance, and

engage in activism to challenge assumptions about their communities. There were three

critical sources of support for SEAA community college students. First, campus

subcultures provided connection to key institutional agents who espouse proactive

philosophies, humanize the campus environment, and provide holistic support and

opportunities to engage in programs and practices that support anti-essentialism and

208

incorporate culturally relevant knowledge. Second, cultural community organizations

served as racially and ethnically safe spaces, for connecting students to individuals who

share their ethnic identities and experiences, and link students to on-campus support

services. Third, family support systems characterized by high educational aspirations

shaped students' intrinsic motivations and legitimized community college as a viable

educational pathway. Consequently, these critical sources of support provided significant

benefits for SEAA students as they minimized and mitigated their racial and ethnic

isolation on and off campus, offered space to connect to their identities and communities,

and supported the development of positive attitudes and associations with their racial

identities. In the end, SEAA participants' involvement and connection to these critical

sources of support indelibly shaped the ways they enacted their resistance.

Inclusion and support within campus subcultures.

Campus subcultures refer to spaces connected to the community college campus

that provide a sense of community and belonging for students who may not feel included

in the overall campus culture. These spaces include cultural centers, cultural student

organizations, and learning communities that serve as spaces that reflect the multiplicity

of identities of community college students. For participants in this study, while the

larger campus culture may not have cultivated a strong sense of inclusion for participants,

instead campus subcultures served as spaces where students could feel included in their

microenvironments. This sense of inclusion is particularly important for SEAA students

who may feel racially and ethnically isolated. In these subcultures, participants described

209

a stronger sense of inclusion compared to their sense of inclusion on the larger campus community.

Campus subcultures fostered opportunities for participants like Chau to feel, "Important. Someone cares. Someone actually wants to help me." The sense of feeling important and included fostered more positive associations with the campus. Specifically, campus subcultures created inclusion and belonging for SEAA students through connecting students to key institutional agents, who proactively connected participants to support, who honored the cultural contexts of students, and who humanized the campus environment. Campus subcultures also offered students opportunities to engage in intersectional exploration and anti-essentialist practices to educate and create awareness of the diversity within the Asian American racial category. However, not all participants had access to campus subcultures, highlighting the disparities across different community college campuses.

Key institutional agents' proactive, holistic, and humanizing support. Campus subcultures helped to facilitate connections to faculty and staff who, as key institutional agents, both understand student backgrounds and engage students in proactive ways. Access to individuals who held professional positions on campus and who took an interest in students helped participants feel supported. Many participants described how faculty and staff proactively reached out to them, offered support, and connected students to resources they needed. Chau shared that counselors and faculty at her campus called her to personally invite her to be a member of the newly developed Asian American learning community, which had a specific focus on increasing retention of Southeast

210

Asian and Pacific Islander students on campus. Chau became involved, and this created a

sense of feeling welcomed and included for her. Consequently, Chau became more

comfortable reaching out for assistance because "they were welcoming" and "made me

feel comfortable." These individuals helped Chau problem solve regarding challenges

that were not just academic. According to Chau, the learning community was the pivotal

space that helped connect her not only to its organizers but other resources on campus.

Participants noted the importance of key institutional agents honoring the entirety

of their experiences as SEAA students. Particularly, they referred to being considered

wholly and from a holistic perspective by faculty and staff who understood their cultural

contexts and who supported them beyond their academic identities. The holistic support

these campus representatives provided helped students to feel supported and visible

within campus subcultures. For example, Hien shared the importance of her connection

to a key institutional agent: But I think getting acquainted with people who are like for

me, [counselor], being a Filipino man …There would be times where things would get

really awful with my family, and I would call in; I'd text him and say, 'This is really

bad…There's a lot of stuff going on between my mom and I and my dad and I, and he

would understand that the parental intergenerational healing that needs to happen is

different within the API community…If I were to tell a White boss that, I feel it would be

a different story whereas where [counselor] has always been, 'Heal what you need to be

okay and come back to us when you're ready.' But I think having people who understand

your narrative from experience or from having empathy towards and being surrounded by

them on a day to day basis…because I think that it takes a village kind of attitude. That's super lost within the community college aspect.

Hien notes the particularly important element of having a counselor who understood her cultural experiences and backgrounds from either experience or empathy. The holistic support these individuals provided was characterized by an intimate understanding of students' situations and contexts beyond that of academia.

Key institutional agents also played an integral role in shaping students' perceptions of campus subcultures and spaces as inclusive spaces by humanizing the environment. They humanized the environment by connecting to important values of collectivism, community, and family. Hien described how the same counselor, who was also her supervisor, shaped her experience and understanding of the cultural center on her campus. She described him as "good-willed" and "who want to help students and the community." Specifically, she noted how this counselor connected family values in the academic space:

> …The first day in the office, my boss introduced me and he's like this is like familia here…He wants us to talk to the other program. He's like, 'Go talk to your cousins about it.' It's very shared space and very community-oriented…So, I think that space means a lot and the community in there.

Similarly, Qu described the cultural center as the most inclusive space for them on campus:

> I think that the [cultural center] that I'll be working in is definitely something I'm not really used to, where everyone--it's a working space, and I'm getting paid, and

212

we're doing things. But in the same vein, we're all talking and chilling, and we

call each other family. We get food together. And so, I definitely think that's the

most inclusive space that I've experienced so far in my community college

experience. Just because it stands on inclusiveness. It stands on diversity, social

justice, acceptance of different types of people, different backgrounds, and

different walks of life--that sort of thing.

Accordingly, this sense of community, inclusion, and family is an important

characteristic of campus subcultures that is also informed by key institutional agents who

help to shape these aspects. The family aspect of campus subcultures is especially

important in helping participants to feel included and to counter their racial and ethnic

isolation. Significantly, participants describe important elements related to the culturally

engaging campus environments model; specifically, cultural responsiveness, in which

key institutional agents effective respond to the needs of SEAA students in proactive,

holistic, and humanized ways (Museus, 2014). SEAA participants place significant value

on having key institutional agents who they feel they can go to for anything and who help

keep them connected to the campus. In many ways, these individuals help SEAA

participants feel seen and supported.

    Owning intersections in identity and anti-essentialism work. Campus

subcultures offer students the opportunity to explore the intersections of their identities

and to engage in antiessentialism on campus. Furthermore, this created a sense of

ownership among participants who engaged in these activities. These opportunities

include exploring identity and addressing specific issues impacting participants'

213

educational experiences (e.g., gender identity, mental health). For many participants, campus subcultures were important spaces that offered opportunities to address their identities. For example, Minh shared how he was able to feel connected to the cultural center:

> Brave space was my first introduction with [cultural center]. And I brought up topics that I didn't feel comfortable bringing up to strangers. I brought up my perception of race, being a queer person, and then the intersectionality between those two, and how difficult that gets. It was just nice to feel safe to say something like that. Or that, if someone did have a negative view on it, they wouldn't really lash out on me. Just evening out that playing field was really impactful.

Minh expressed how pivotal it was for him to be able to discuss the most salient aspects of his identities and the difficulties he experienced related to his identities. As a result, Minh pursued opportunities to become a student intern for the cultural center. Other participants also expressed that this space was the first time they deeply thought about their identities. Specifically, Hien expressed how her interest in her identity flourished due to her connection to the cultural center on campus, sharing that she initially tried to ignore her ethnic background and cultural identity before college.

Campus subcultures also created opportunities for participants to conduct antiessentialism work through hosting brave spaces for dialogue, exploring social topics, and educating the larger campus about diversity. In the case of Miss, Hien, Minh, and Qu, their cultural center was student-run, and so students were actively involved in

shaping cultural center activities, which was a great source of pride for them. Miss described her involvement as one of "making our own world on campus." Miss especially noted her developing agency in helping the campus to engage in topics that addressed social injustices:

> I feel like [cultural center] really shaped me too because we do a lot of social topics. Especially social injustices too to just clarify any injustices people have on campus. So, some people won't feel so angsty about these conversations. We have a lot of conversations and lectures and spaces to talk. We facilitate them so they could be very college constructive and professional so that people aren't just ranting or becoming enraged in their own confusion. We try to educate people with actual professional speakers and experiences.

This aspect of educating the campus was a particularly salient experience for participants. For example, Hien proudly showcased a poster for the first Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Week on campus. Hien found fulfillment in co-creating an event that highlighted and celebrated the diversity within the Asian American and Pacific Islander community. For Hien, this was a pivotal moment for advancing Asian Pacific Islander causes in the community college. Similarly, Miss described feeling pride in her efforts to educate her campus:

> It made me feel more proud because I put more effort into it. I understood what it's like to come represent something that isn't represented. Making your voice heard, so I feel more proud in that way because it's kind of the overall experience,

physically, mentally, and stuff like that…We had lectures about model minority

and the bamboo ceiling.

These experiences highlight how SEAA participants take advantage of opportunities to

engage in work that attempts to deconstruct and de-essentialize the experiences of Asian

Americans on campus. There is a great sense of pride that participants express in their

involvement with practices that effectively work toward anti-essentialism.

Campus subcultures were also spaces where students developed agency and

resistance to the negative impact of students' racialization experiences. For example,

Hien described how her involvement in the cultural center on campus strengthened her

resistance to stereotypes and racialization:

I feel like it doesn't limit me anymore. The more I realized things, the more I

realize it doesn't hold me down. Like being Asian. The model minority. It

doesn't hold me down to certain expectations. And just knowing that makes me

feel--gives me more strength in things that I want to do.

For Minh, becoming connected to the cultural center on campus as an intern positively

changed his community college experience. He shared that it was the first time that he

could talk about issues related to his Asian, SEAA, and queer identities. Specifically,

Minh could connect with others who shared similar identities, which fostered his sense of

feeling reflected and supported. Minh explained the that his involvement with the

cultural center offered him opportunities to incorporate specific struggles with

stereotypes and depression into his on campus and class work. He explained, "I feel

more of like a fleshed-out person. When people see me, they already get their little

216

stereotypes right out the bag." Also, Minh highly valued his opportunities to discuss his

relationship with depression in an official capacity as a student intern:

> And then, with my position…I feel like I can talk about things such as depression.
> That's something I feel like the API community has a big struggle, is talking about
> mental health and how much of an issue that really is for us. I feel like I can
> incorporate that with my classes and just what I do at work. Last semester, in my
> speech class, I did a speech on depression and how much of an impact that has on
> a person. And I 'fessed up and said that I deal with this for six years at this point.
> And it is a waking struggle. So, I don't feel as much of a caricature anymore. I
> feel like people can really see who I am as an actual person.

For Minh, incorporating his own experiences and struggle into his academic work offered

him an opportunity to express his full self. It was another opportunity to make visible

what was previously invisible. Participants relished the opportunity to explore their

identities in the campus context, as students at community college. More importantly,

they pursue opportunities to educate their campuses about their diverse experiences. In

the process, participants expressed feeling whole, which is an important aspect of anti-

essentialism.

   Disparate access to inclusive campus subcultures. Some participants benefited

greatly from having access to inclusive campus subcultures that offered them

opportunities to connect with faculty and staff, to explore their identities, resist

essentialization, and explore important issues impacting them in college. However, not

all participants had access to such spaces. Of the five community colleges represented in

217

this study, only two provided resources such as a cultural center or a learning community to participants. Of the ten participants, seven attended these two schools. The other three participants, Sokha, Chenda, and Sophea, attended community colleges that did not have many targeted spaces of support for students of color. As such there were limited opportunities for them to engage in cultural or identity-based campus subcultures. These participants were not explicitly connected to the campus in significant ways as their other counterparts despite some, like Chenda, indicating that they would be more involved if these spaces existed on her campus. Additionally, Chenda often felt as if she were the only one on campus and desired opportunities to connect with people like her.

However, even though some campuses had support, these spaces were often the only spaces of support on the entire campus. Even as these spaces were strong symbols of support and validation, participants acknowledged the need for other spaces. Chau asserted that her learning community was the only space that represented Asian Americans on her community college campus. She contended that this was the "identity for Asian Americans in the community college." Consequently, Chau asserted that without her learning community she would not feel represented on her campus despite the significant population of Asian and SEAA students on campus.

Despite SEAA students' racialization, not all the participants' experiences in community college were negative. Rather, the community college environment also provided opportunities for connection and spaces for support for participants. They were also spaces for asserting and redefining identity for participants. Despite being racialized in essentializing ways, some participants enjoyed opportunities to exercise and express

218

the multiplicity of their identities. Also, many participants espoused that their community college experiences enhanced their understanding of diversity and issues of social justice. In their struggles to make sense of their identities and racialization experiences, they acknowledged that their growth was the result of having access to critical spaces, such as campus subcultures, and people on campus, which helped them to feel included while also offering opportunities to explore their identities and resist anti-essentialism. Ultimately, the existence of campus subcultures offered SEAA students the opportunity to learn about and redefine their relationships with their own identities in positive ways. Such opportunities can have positive influences on students' sense of identity.

Seeking community off-campus.

Not every community college offered campus subcultures that were relevant for SEAA participants. Several participants attended community colleges that had little to no support systems for SEAA students. As such, some participants who attended these institutions reported lower levels of inclusion at their institution. Specifically, Sokha, Chenda, and Sophea attended these institutions. While Sophea, an older veteran student, reported that he felt supported by Veteran Services, he noted that there were no group-specific resources beyond student organizations on his campus. While he reported a higher level of inclusion than Sokha and Chenda, his experience as an older veteran might have strong influences on his ability navigate his institution. For Sokha and Chenda, their support systems existed off-campus, which were local cultural community organizations focused on empowering young Cambodian women. With the lack of

219

targeted support systems available to Sokha and Chenda on campus, they either sought out or were connected to community organizations that were deeply connected to their identities as Cambodian women.

Additionally, even for some students who had access to cultural centers on campus, connections to other regional campus organizations helped to support their identity development. Specifically, for Qu, they had access through a sibling to more SEAA-targeted support systems, which helped them to develop a stronger ability to navigate their racialization. As a high school student with an older sibling who attended a large, public institution in the area, Qu received assistance navigating their identities, and they also participated in SEAA youth conferences. As such, the existence of off-campus spaces of support was critical for SEAA participants for various reasons. First, they served as racially-safe spaces. Second, they offered opportunities to engage with important issues impacting their community. Third, they served to connect participants to on-campus resources and support. Fourth, they also facilitated opportunities to develop a stronger sense of identity.

First, given the limited resources and support on the community college campus, SEAA students sought out racially-safe spaces in cultural community organizations in their areas. Sokha and Chenda's cultural community organizations specifically focused on the experiences of Cambodian female youth and their empowerment. Sokha and Chenda attended community colleges in areas where there were large Cambodian communities; however, they mentioned not feeling very connected to other Cambodian individuals on campus. These spaces connect participants to others who share their

identities, as Sokha mentioned, "I'm starting to learn a little bit more about myself and my culture. And it's a little bit hard …But yeah, as I meet other Cambodians--I don't actually get to meet that many despite the numbers here." Thus, participants seek out these spaces to be reflected. Sokha and Chenda also shared that through their connection to cultural community organizations, they began to reflect on their own identities as Cambodian women as they participated in activities and dialogue designed to elicit thinking about said identities. Chenda explained, "So the only time when I was able to open up about my identity was when I was in [cultural community organization]." Trust-building is an important characteristic of these spaces for participants, as Chenda further clarified:

> They have one on one conversations with us. They try to look at each member
> and ask you how are you how are you doing with school, pretty much to check up
> on us. They open us up a lot, it's a space, and we also do a circle, a group so
> when one person opens up that shows me that I can open up too and trust these
> girls.

Consequently, for some participants, cultural community organizations were important spaces for developing their racial and ethnic identities in a trusting, safe environment.

Second, seeking out racially-safe spaces to feel connected, feel supported, and for identity development, participants also expressed a desire to engage with issues impacting their communities. For example, Sokha had specific goals for investing in these spaces, sharing:

I wanted to reach out to other people that are in the same situation as myself. People that have grown up in a very disconnected way with their culture or their families and communities. And just give them an environment where they could talk about social issues, such as how they're being treated in public. How other people perceive them and just mainly tackle the sexual assault types of issues that revolve around Cambodian Americans.

Additionally, Chenda shared that her involvement helped her better understand her own experiences in the larger scheme of Cambodian American experience and it helped her to develop a perspective about her struggles and the struggles of others. She explained, "I feel like it's good for me because I know that I'm not the only Khmer girl, so I know their struggles too." As such, cultural community organizations are pivotal spaces for that connect students not only to their struggles but also those of others like them. The experience of coming to understand the individual experience and then connecting it to larger conversations about the group or collective experiences positively impacted participants' desire to be involved in mitigating these issues. Furthermore, these spaces offer students opportunities to develop important skills and to be involved in political and community activism. For Chenda, her cultural community organization mentor helps her to develop grant writing skills, event planning, and office administration. Beyond connecting students, organizers help students develop into community leaders who can positively impact their communities through activism.

Third, cultural community organizations also serve as connectors between students and community colleges. Often, when participants needed support, they went to

their respective cultural community organizations and the individuals, mentors, and advisors connected to them. These individuals played critical roles in supporting students and connecting them to resources on campus. They leveraged their networks and resources to support students. For example, Chenda shared that the only spaces she went to for assistance were the community college tutoring center or her cultural community organization. Additionally, it was the cultural community organization leaders that connected Chenda to the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) office on her community college campus to receive support. Thus, participants are connected to community college resources through external support systems, indicating that cultural community organizations can play an important role in connecting students to community colleges.

Fourth, off-campus support systems facilitated opportunities for participants to develop a stronger sense of identity. Like Sokha and Chenda, who expressed a desire to address issues impacting their community, Qu also mentioned important opportunities to question her identity in a supportive environment that encouraged connecting the individual to systemic experiences. For Qu, their involvement in multiple youth conferences targeted for SEAA students helped them to develop a strengthening sense of identity and empowerment. Qu shared how her social justice-minded older sibling was connected to their SEAA student support center at their institution. As a result, Qu was also connected to this space and became involved with many activities. Qu described the spaces as critical for helping them become more socially aware in addition to providing them with a community. In this community, they could question and query the issues

facing their ethnic community. Without these spaces, Qu mentioned they would never have seen them:

> And being in that space of people who are also really socially issue-minded I suppose and we're like we're going to deconstruct! Destroy the patriarchy. And all that bad stuff in the world. I definitely think that they not only have shaped me in a lot of the knowledge that they passed on but making me want to be intentional in terms of being aware of these different things. And that's another reason why we got to have more spaces like that…

In addition, Qu also felt better connected to their ethnic history and identity as they learned to connect to their parents' history and struggles:

> This is your history. This is who you are in relation to your history. In relation to your community now. And kind of making you think about this thing that you don't really think about…was a really big influence in terms of my community and identity.

Consequently, cultural community organizations and other external student organizations played an important role in supporting students' ability to develop a stronger sense of both individual identity and collective community. These spaces offered an opportunity to alleviate the racial and ethnic isolation of SEAA students off-campus.

Familial aspirations and resistance.

While family aspirations for SEAA participants deeply shaped their racialized experiences in complex ways, family members also served as a critical support system that helped students to persist and resist some of the negative consequences of their

224

racialization in the community college environment. First, high parental aspirations

paired with the knowledge of familial struggle intrinsically motivated students to persist

in their studies. While these pressures were often intense, participants shared that having

an intimate understanding and awareness of what their parents and families went through

as refugees and immigrants served to be an important source of motivation. Despite

acknowledging limited awareness and knowledge of their families' struggles by others,

participants internalized their parents' dreams and aspirations in positive ways. All

participants described the desire to honor their parents' sacrifices to come to the U.S.

Hien explained feelings of gratitude toward her parents:

> For me, it's…being kind of grateful for the sacrifices that my parents and their
>
> parents had to make for me to be there. Always just being grateful for that.
>
> Knowing that even though I can't necessarily repay it, or something like that, I
>
> just need to show gratitude by doing the best I can.

Hien also spoke of building something for herself based on her parents' experiences of

starting with nothing. Chau spoke of watching her mother working hard to give her and

her siblings the best she could and so she internalized the desire to work hard to do the

best she can. Additionally, some participants spoke of the important values passed down

to them from their parents and families as sources of motivation to persist. For example,

Qu explicated the importance of her family's values in her life:

> And so, a lot of the things, a lot of what they are and what they believe and all
>
> their values, kind of have been passed on to me. And so, some of it is from being
>
> refugees to the value of family, the value of sticking together, the values of not

225

spending lavishly, the values of always helping other people, the values of community, always being involved in community, either by giving back or asking for help when you need help. Those sorts of values.

Thus, the values of community, family, and of giving back played significant roles in participants' educational experiences. Despite the challenges they faced in being racialized in polarizing ways, they continue to persist in community colleges. A significant factor in this motivation stems from their family's aspirations for them to succeed.

Second, family members legitimized community colleges as good options to pursue their education. While some participants shared instances of racialized pressure from family members to attend four-year institutions instead of community colleges, some participants noted that their family members or parents were some of the strongest advocates of community college as a legitimate source of education. For example, Chau shared that her Vietnamese mother was the strongest proponent of community colleges in her life. Her mother previously attended the local community college after emigrating to the U.S. and developed a career to support her family. Chau initially wanted to attend the local four-year state university; however, she committed to community college and began to see the benefits, which included being able to save money to transfer and to be home to help the family. Qu's mother was also a strong proponent while their father preferred they attend a four-year institution. Consequently, some participants were better able to navigate their college choice decisions in positive ways when addressing negative

reactions to their attending a community college. Miss concluded that community college was the right choice for her based on the diversity she experienced:

But yeah, community college is a good experience. It's a lot more diverse too. Like, socially too and economically, it's more diverse, with the people. Because at four-year universities, you get a very standard group of people that attend. But at a community college, it's more wide and diverse. Cause anybody can attend a community college because they have so many classes at a low level and a high level.

Qu also affirmed that they had no regrets about their decision to attend community college. Being close to home and family helped them to exercise freedom in a supportive environment and to develop a better understanding of what they wanted to pursue academically. Overall, participants expressed satisfaction with their decision to attend community college.

This section provided a pathway for understanding how SEAA participants enacted their strength, resilience, and agency in various ways. Strength, resilience, agency, and hope were all characteristics already present within participants. It was evident in the ways they described desiring to honor their parents' sacrifices, of wanting to give back to their communities, and of continuing to walk into often hostile spaces for the individual purpose of pursuing an education and for a collective purpose of uplifting their communities. Participants consistently seek out inclusive spaces and educators that validate their identities and experiences whether community colleges offer them or not. As such, there are opportunities for community colleges to respond to and offer

opportunities for SEAA community college students to practice this resilience and agency and help shape their resistance in vital ways.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented emergent themes from the experiences of ten SEAA community college students who shared their lived experiences of being racialized as SEAA. I illuminated the ways their racialization reinforces and reproduces racial and ethnic isolation that precludes them from accessing resources, support, community, and voice within both the racial field and in community college. I highlighted aspects of their racialization that depend on essentialization, racially-ascribed deviance, institutional invisibility, and community college stigma. I also showcased the many ways their racial and ethnic isolation is reinforced and enhanced in community college. I illuminated the interrelated and mutually reinforcing processes that encourage the internalization and (re)production of deficit ideologies. However, I also showcased sources of strength, resilience, and agency of SEAA participants and I explored three critical sources of support for SEAA students that helped to mitigate their racialized experiences in community college. In the following chapter, I discuss these findings in relation to previous research and then offer key insights into how community colleges can offer more equitable access to information, resources, and support to SEAA students.

Chapter Six: Summary, Discussion, and Implications

In this study, I conducted a phenomenological inquiry into the racialized experiences of SEAA community college students. The data comprising this study included 25 interviews with 10 SEAA participants. I utilized purposeful sampling techniques to recruit participants who can provide deep insights into their racialized experiences in education and specifically in community college. Their experiences provided a nuanced perspective regarding the ways racialization processes shape their education.

In this chapter, I provide a summary of the purpose, research methods, and the key findings of this current investigation. I situate the findings in this study within the current scholarship and knowledge related to SEAA students' experiences. I also offer a set of implications for policy, practice, and research as it relates to the success of SEAA students. Finally, I end with my final reflection on this process, which has shaped me indelibly as a Khmer American scholar and researcher.

Study Summary

The purpose of the current investigation is to explore and understand the racialized experiences of SEAA students in community colleges. I seek to illuminate processes of racialization that impact SEAA students' educational experiences. Particularly, I explore racialization process that reinforces the racial structures and racial oppression of SEAA communities. The central research questions guiding this study are:

What are the racialized experiences of Southeast Asian American community college students? How do SEAA community college students describe their experiences of being racialized and of experiencing racism?

Scholars have, and continue to, contribute knowledge regarding the experiences of many racially minoritized populations in higher education. Comparatively, knowledge on the experiences of SEAA students in community colleges is limited. The current study contributes new insights into the experiences of SEAA community college students as shaped by race, ethnicity, and racialization. It highlights the complex ways racialization shape their experiences and the ways they internalize dominant narratives about success and failure. It also illuminates the critical sources of support that help to foster their resistance and resilience against deficit messages about their communities.

I utilized AsianCrit as a conceptual lens for exploring the experiences of SEAA college students as it acknowledges the presence and impact of race and racism on the experiences of SEAA students through Asianization—an essential tenet that details the unique racialization processes that shape Asian American experiences in society. AsianCrit also excavates and highlights the critical narratives of SEAA communities to enable an in-depth understanding of such experiences. Finally, AsianCrit is a commitment to social justice, which also seeks to end racial oppression, along with other intersecting systems of oppression. Indeed, this study seeks to contribute to the collective scholarship on how race and racialization processes impact upon racially minoritized populations. The end goal has always been to eradicate all forces of oppression.

230

I utilized qualitative research methods to explore the racialized experiences of SEAA community college students as it offers an opportunity for in-depth exploration of a problem or issue (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, qualitative research methods place a high value on my subjective beliefs and philosophical assumptions as important contributions that shape the specific study (Creswell, 2013). Particularly, hermeneutic phenomenology, as a philosophy and method, seeks to understand, through interpretation, the essence of a phenomenon. I utilize hermeneutic phenomenology as it supports and acknowledges that how one sees the world depends on how one interprets it (Vis, 2008). As such, my interpretation of the current phenomenon in the study is a significant contribution as my positionality as an SEAA researcher can highlight important nuances in the experiences of participants.

In the study, I employed purposeful sampling to identify information-rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 2002). Specifically, I used maximum variation to capture heterogeneity in participants, who represent a wide array of identities, allowing for the identification of hared patterns and themes (Patton, 2002). Snowball sampling also allowed for the identification of information-rich cases through existing networks (Patton, 2002). The criterion for participant selection was based on the participants identifying as SEAA (e.g., Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese), currently attending a community college, and having completed at least two semesters of community college.

Data collection was comprised of 25 interviews with ten total participants and observations of some of the community college campuses. Interviews were conducted

231

either in-person, by phone, or via virtual conferencing software, depending upon the schedules and location of participants. Most participants participated in a series of three interviews. However, two participants exited the study after the first interview, and another participant did not return my efforts to schedule the third and final interview. Overall, seven of the ten participants participated in all three interviews. I created analytic memos that allowed me to continue to reflect upon the interview process and explore emergent patterns across the data. These memos were also a key component of the entire data analysis process.

I conducted data analysis through systematic procedures that included transcribing all the interviews and uploading the transcripts into Dedoose (*Dedoose Version 8.0.35, web application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative and mixed method research data*, 2018). I conducted multiple reads and coded the data to identify significant statements or quotes (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007). I identified horizonal and invariant horizonal statements, which point to the unique qualities of the phenomenon of SEAA racialization. I organized these statements into meaning units, which enabled the identification of core themes. I created individual textural descriptions of the experience to capture vividness of the experience. After, I developed individual structural descriptions that account for underlying dynamics of the experience. Then, I created composite textural and structural descriptions to incorporate all participants' experiences. In the end, I integrated these descriptions and produced a synthesis of the meanings and essence of SEAA racialization (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

232

I sought to maximize the trustworthiness of this study through prolonged engagement, in building trust with participants, through a series of three interviews over time. I also conducted member checks with participants, summarizing their collective individual interviews into a two-to-three-page profile, which I emailed directly to each participant for their feedback. I worked with a community of practice, which included valued and highly-regarded colleagues who understood the contexts of the study and the population of study. Finally, I sought to offer rich, thick descriptions of participants' experiences to aid readers in developing their assumptions about the transferability of the study to other settings.

Despite the above efforts to maximize trustworthiness, there are several limitations to this investigation. First, the interpretations and conclusions in this study are tentative and bound by the contexts of the situations as well as my subjectivities and those of participants; as such, they cannot be generalized to other contexts or populations due to the small sample size and institutional context. Second, while I attempted to achieve a heterogeneous sample, there was a lack of Laotian American representation in the study. Third, I did not seek to explore differences across the various ethnic groups represented in the sample. Fourth, long-term outcomes were not explored within this study and for this population. Finally, there is always the potential that participants did not fully disclose their experiences for fear of or aversion to possibly discomfiting questions or a desire to answer questions in socially acceptable ways.

The above procedures resulted in three main overarching thematic categories that illuminate the racialized experiences of SEAA community college students. The first set

233

of themes are related to the *ways racialization reinforces the racial positioning and subsequent racial and ethnic isolation of SEAA students*. I highlighted Four processes. First, participants' experiences highlighted how Asianization essentializes SEAA students as model minorities. Second, they also implicate how society racially-ascribes deviance to SEAA students. Third, there exists a prevailing and perpetual institutional invisibility of SEAA students based on the assumption that all Asians are successful. Fourth, the preponderance of stigma associated with attending community colleges further complicated SEAAs racialized educational experiences.

The second set of themes highlighted the *internalization of deficit ideology,* which is perpetuated through four mutually reinforcing and interrelated process. First, participants described a process of the ascription of meritocratic beliefs to prove they worked hard. Second, participants attempted to disassociate or distance themselves from any perceptions of deficiency or inferiority. Third, they sought racial legitimacy to prove their value. Fourth, participants personalized failure to achieve based on external expectations of success, which created significant psychological impacts.

The third set of themes illuminate *three critical sources of support that enable SEAA students to develop resistance and interrupt the cycle of internalizing deficit ideology.* First, campus subcultures provided connections to key institutional agents who espoused proactive philosophies, who humanized the campus environment, and who provided holistic support and opportunities to engage in programs and practices that help participants engage in antiessentialism. Second, participants sought out cultural community-based organizations that served as racially and ethnically safe spaces, for

234

connecting students to individuals who shared their identities and experiences, and who linked students to on-campus support services. Third, family support systems that were characterized by high familial educational aspirations shaped students' intrinsic motivations and legitimized community colleges as a viable educational pathway.

Discussion

A growing body of research has focused on exploring the conditions and environments on campuses that support the success of racially minoritized populations (Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus, 2008b; Museus et al., 2013; Museus, Lam, Huang, Kem, & Tan, 2012; Museus, Shiroma, & Dizon, 2016). Particularly, the focus on the experiences of Asian American students has increased (e.g., Kiang, 1992; Lee, Park, & Wong, 2016; Museus, 2013c; Museus & Park, 2015). For example, researchers have begun to explore how race and racism shape Asian American students in college (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Museus & Park, 2015; Suzuki, 2002), with a specific focus on the model minority myth, which has been a focal point of the Asian American experience (e.g., Assalone & Fann, 2016; Choi & Lahey, 2006; Chou & Feagin, 2008; Suzuki, 2002). In the early 1980s, a small but growing body of research began to shed light on the experiences of SEAA communities as marginalized populations within the Asian American group, which focused on the challenges and disparities they faced (e.g., Ima, 1995; Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). More recently, scholars have contributed significant knowledge regarding the ways culture and family play important roles in influencing SEAA students' success in college (Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus, 2013b). Others have explored the role of culture in the experiences of SEAA college students (Chhuon,

235

Hudley, & Macias, 2006; Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus, Shiroma, & Dizon, 2016), with a focus on how SEAA parents, cultural communities, and ethnic studies shape trajectories (Kiang, 2009; Museus, 2013; Museus et al., 2016). Certainly, attention and interest in SEAA college students have increased overall. This current investigation contributes to advancing knowledge and focus on a population experiencing marginalized at multiple levels.

Also, there has been more focus on the experiences of Asian American students in the four-year institutional context compared to the community college context (e.g., Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Museus, 2013b; Museus & Mueller, 2018). The literature on Asian American community college students focused mostly on academic aspirations (e.g., Wang, Chang, & Lew, 2009; Yang, Rendón, & Shearon, 1994). The current study extends knowledge on and about SEAA students into the community college context, where many racially minoritized populations begin their academic journeys. Additionally, this study offers a critical lens and approach to research on SEAA community college students—an area previously unexplored. This current investigation contributes to research by expanding our understandings of SEAA experiences in community colleges and the racialization processes that shape their educational experiences. Ultimately, this will enable scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to understand processes, mechanisms, and conditions that perpetuate inequality and oppression, not just for SEAA communities but all communities. Findings from this study both support previous scholarship and offer new insights into the ways SEAA

236

students in community college experience racialization and its impact on their academic experiences.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this current investigation. First, findings confirm that racism and racial stereotypes can shape Asian American students' experiences in significant ways (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Museus & Park, 2015). Particularly, it expands the limited knowledge about how racism and racialization shape experiences of SEAAs specifically. Many scholars have determined that racism and racial stereotypes can shape Asian American students' experiences in significant ways (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Museus & Park, 2015; Rumbaut & Ima, 1988; Suzuki, 2002). However, there is limited knowledge about how racism and racialization shape experiences of SEAAs specifically. Museus and Park (2015) identified nine ways Asian American students experienced racism, indicating that these students are not exempt from racism as model minority assumptions would suggest. Their study also indicated that SEAA students experienced racism, in both overt and covert ways. Most significantly, they found that even on campuses where Asian Americans were represented, SEAA students still experienced racial and ethnic isolation as they were often the only one or the few from their ethnic communities. Findings in this study may confirm this sense of ethnic isolation that SEAA college students experience, which also extends to the community college context.

Additionally, findings advance knowledge regarding the impact of both model minority and deviant minority stereotypes on SEAA students. While their study did not focus solely on SEAA students, Museus and Park (2015) also noted that both the model

237

minority and inferior minority myth had significant effects on their experiences. Findings in the current study confirm the continued significance of both the model minority and deviant minority stereotypes on SEAA students. Specifically, while the model minority was salient across all students' accounts and experiences, the deviant minority myth emerged much more significantly across Cambodian American participants' experiences. Most recently, Assalone and Fann (2016) explored the impact of the model minority myth on the experiences of 28 Asian American community college students. They also noted the perceptions of the stigma surrounding Asian students' choices to attend community colleges, which were mentioned in this current study. Results of this study indicate that race, racialization, and stereotypes play a significant role in shaping the experiences of SEAA students.

Second, the findings of this study indicate that AsianCrit is a useful framework for analyzing the experiences of SEAA community college students and their experiences with race and racialization. As a conceptual framework that centers the racial realities of Asian Americans, AsianCrit is a useful analytic tool for exploring conditions that impact their experiences in the U.S. (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). Indeed, AsianCrit served as a useful analytic tool for eliciting important nuances related to the conditions that impact SEAA students in community colleges. It offered in-depth insights into how polarizing racialization processes shaped participants' educational experiences. For example, participants' experiences highlighted the ubiquitous nature of the model minority in shaping how others perceived them to be successful and smart a math. Simultaneously, participants noted salient experiences highlighting the ways systems and its actors

racially-ascribe deviance to SEAA communities. Instead, many participants pointed to the hypervisibility of challenges within the population that fed into negative stereotypes about failure, deviance, and inferiority. This effectively served to create a distinction and separation between SEAA students and other Asian American populations, positioning SEAAs as both alien and inferior.

AsianCrit offers insights into the essentializing racialization processes that distinguish the experiences of SEAA communities. Specifically, SEAA students' insights might suggest important revisions of the AsianCrit framework to include and reflect the experiences of SEAA communities. While the Asianization tenet specifically outlines racialization processes, such as the model minority, perpetual foreigner, and yellow peril, that impact Asian American populations, it does not specifically locate the deviant minority myth or note the anti-Black sentiment that also shapes SEAA groups as a racialization process. Museus and Iftikar (2013) note that Asianization operates to (re)shape laws and policies that impact Asian Americans and influence their identities and experiences. Indeed, the deviant minority racialization serves similar purposes of redirecting resource distribution among the Asian American population and significantly influences identities and experiences of SEAA communities. More can be discerned regarding SEAA experiences to expand AsianCrit as a conceptual framework that has applicability across all Asian American populations.

Third, findings illuminate multilayered racialization processes that situate SEAA communities at the margins of both the Asian American community and among other racial groups. While Ancheta (1998) noted that Black communities had been deemed

239

inferior and Asian American communities have been deemed outsiders, SEAA participants' accounts indicate that they are subject to racializations processes that position them as both inferior and alien. Simultaneously holding an alien and inferior status has many implications for SEAAs, as evidenced by the experiences of participants. Consequently, the findings in this study complicate the Kim's (1999) theory of racial triangulation where relative valorization and civic ostracism processes shape the racial field of positions for Asian Americans. Particularly, SEAA experiences highlight how anti-Black ideologies and racism impact the racial stratification of SEAAs within the Asian American racial group. There is evidence that SEAAs are positioned subordinate to other Asian American groups.

Further, this investigation indicates that SEAA ethnic groups experience racialization in complex ways that complicate racial triangulation theory. That is, SEAA populations experience an added layer of relative invalidation. This concept of relative invalidation may extend Kim's (1999) theory of racial triangulation to address the actual racial realities of SEAA groups better. The relative invalidation of SEAA communities within the Asian American groups is innately connected to issues of colorism and anti-Black racism, in which racialization processes function to position the population along an ethnic hierarchy, with East Asian populations holding the dominant position and other populations subordinated based on their perceived closeness and connections to Blackness. These findings highlight the significance of anti-Black ideologies within the Asian community.

Fourth, the findings illuminate the many detrimental ways SEAA community college students are subject to deficit messages. Results confirmed that SEAA community college students are subject to ideologies and forms of discrimination, such as deficit-thinking, meritocracy, and colorism. They also suggest a potential for SEAA students to internalize these ideologies. Consequently, these ideologies and beliefs can negatively impact self-identity (Pyke & Dang, 2003). Jones (2000) defined internalized racism as the acceptance of negative messages about abilities and intrinsic worth by members of racially minoritized groups. This can manifest in embracing Whiteness, self-devaluation, resignation, hopelessness, and helplessness (Jones, 2000). While this study did not focus specifically on whether or the extent to which internalized racism impacted SEAA community college students, findings indicate SEAA students may be subject to reacting to or developing negative messages about their communities. Particularly, attempts to distance self from negative messages and assumptions did arise, affirming Pyke and Dang's (2003) assertion that Asian Americans experience pressure to assimilate and attempt to distance themselves from stigmas associated with their racial group. SEAA community college students must contend with being bombarded with messaging that impact their identity development.

Fifth, findings indicate a linkage between racialization and internalizing failure and depression. SEAA students can experience "unique performance pressures" based on positive stereotypes (i.e., model minority) (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000, p. 401). This indicates extreme pressure that heightens students' anxieties regarding their academic abilities. Furthermore, studies of stereotype threat have confirmed that negative

241

assumptions about a racial group's academic ability can diminish individuals' academic performance (Steele & Aronson, 1995). While less is understood regarding Asian American and SEAA students' experiences with stereotype threat, scholars have confirmed that these students can experience depression, experience false-image, and psychological damage (Chhuon & Hudley, 2010a; Lee, 1994; Museus, 2013c). Indeed, Cheryan and Bodenhausen (2000) also found that both fears of failing and failing to confirm a positive stereotype can undermine performance for Asian American students. Consequently, fear of failure has significant impacts on students' academic performance. Specifically, results suggest that SEAA students personalize failure to live up to model minority standards in detrimental ways. This study suggests an important linkage between perceptions of failure and mental health and well-being of students. The racialization processes that impact students' relationship with academic expectations and performance can significantly shape the ways they internalize negative beliefs about themselves and increase anxiety and depression.

Sixth, findings underscore the importance of campus subcultures that offer SEAA students the opportunity develop in their racial and ethnic identities. Scholars asserted the importance of campus subcultures that offer racially minoritized students membership on campus as a means to positively shape their experiences and outcomes (Guiffrida, 2003; Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus, 2008b; Museus, Lam, Huang, Kem, & Tan, 2012; Nguyen, Nguyen, Chan, & Teranishi, 2016). Many of these spaces, such as ethnic student organizations and cultural centers, offer students opportunities to engage with others who come from similar backgrounds as well as cross-culturally. Five participants

discussed the importance of engaging in cultural center activities that advanced

knowledge and awareness about their racial and ethnic identities and academic

experiences. The cultural center on their community college campus was an important

site of connection and validation. For those students who did not have access to campus

subcultures that offered these opportunities, they sought out other avenues of cultural

expression and racial and ethnic identity development, indicating that such opportunities

are important to students. Furthermore, campus subcultures are prime spaces for

connecting students to key institutional agents who serve as important sources of support.

Key institutional agents play an influential role for racially minoritized and SEAA

students, such as offering access to social capital and validating their cultural

backgrounds (Museus & Mueller, 2018; Museus & Neville, 2012; Museus & Quaye,

2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Indeed, the findings confirm previous assertions that those

students who have access to staff and faculty who understood their experiences and who

offered cultural validation and holistic support experience stronger connection to the

campus (Maramba & Palmer, 2014).

Seventh, findings highlight the critical role community-based organizations

(CBO) play in supporting and providing SEAA students with both racially-safe spaces off

campus and social capital in college. While research regarding CBOs is limited, Coles

(2012) reported that CBOs could play important roles in supporting postsecondary

aspirations and success for students. Specifically, these organizations bolster access to

information about college and academic aspirations when parents and families may have

little familiarity (Blank, Jacobson, & Melaville, 2012; Coles, 2012). Indeed, CBOS can

serve as cultural brokers between students and their families (Osterling & Garza, 2004).

For SEAA students, who may have limited access to campus subcultures or individuals

on campus who they can go to support, CBOs are stepping in to fulfill this role while also

fostering important connections between students and the campus itself. Also, like key

institutional agents on college campuses, staff and community leaders in CBOs play a

significant role in providing students with social capital and facilitating their access and

connections to campus support systems. Given that not all community college campuses

offer opportunities for racially minoritized students to connect regarding issues of race,

ethnicity, and culture, SEAA students are seeking out such spaces, and consequently,

CBOs are filling in. Indeed, more attention has been paid to the collaboration and

partnerships between CBOs and K-12 education compared to postsecondary education

institutions (Blank, Jacobson, & Melaville, 2012; Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2002;

Sanders, 2009).

Finally, findings support the continued significance of familial aspirations and

support for SEAA students' persistence in college. Despite previous assumptions that

parents were absent or were not supportive of their children's academic aspiration, many

scholars have found the contrary to be true (Akiba, 2010; Collignon, Men, & Tan, 2001;

Museus, 2013b; Smith-Hefner, 1990). Specifically, SEAA parents engage in supporting

their children's academic aspirations in culturally-driven ways, such as instilling respect

in children for their educators (Akiba, 2010). Participants in this study indicated that

their parents highly valued education and desired the best opportunities for them. How

this support manifested was shaped by their own prior experiences in education, if any.

244

These aspirations were present and shaped students' aspirations. Similar to Museus'

(2013b) study of SEAA parental influence on 34 SEAA students, this study highlighted

the complex nature of parental aspirations for their children. Particularly, while some

parents exerted pressures on students to attend four-year institutions over community

colleges because they felt these spaces would better set their children up for success, they

all deeply influenced participants' drive for academic success. Participants referenced

that their parents' sacrifices and experiences shaped their own goals. Additionally,

parents played an important role in legitimizing community colleges as a viable option

for students, which may have important implications for fostering the success of SEAA

students in community colleges. This study confirms the importance of continuing to

explore how parents and families shape SEAA students' motivations and academic

experiences.

Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for research, practice, and

policy as it relates to advancing knowledge on and about SEAA students' experiences

and regarding actions that can be taken to improve their experiences in community

college. First, I offer a set of recommendations for federal, state, and institutional

policymakers. Second, I present some recommendations for practitioners who may work

closely with SEAA community college members. Finally, I suggest some future

directions for research that will advance our understanding of the experiences of SEAA

college students.

245

Policy.

Our national college completion agenda strives to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. The federal government must take targeted measures to improve educational access and opportunity for our students. Many scholars have called for significant attention to be paid to racially minoritized student populations to achieve these goals (Harmon, 2012; Teranishi & Nguyen, 2011). Additionally, there has been a stronger focus on the role of community colleges in achieving this national college completion agenda (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010). Given the critical role community colleges will play in this arena, an increased focus on success outcomes, in terms of persistence, graduation, and transfer, at these institutions are warranted. This increased focus must also be paired with necessary resources and investment that will facilitate success.

This study reinforces and echoes calls for data disaggregation that better attends to the diversity and disparities within the Asian American population. In this study, the community colleges represented were mostly located in California, a state where efforts to disaggregate data at the state level have been successful despite significant resistance. As other states attempt similar legislative policies, the trend indicates an increasing awareness and focus on the role data plays in public policymaking. Such efforts are critical for crafting public policy that effectively responds to the diverse needs of marginalized populations, such as SEAAs. Data aggregation has long been considered a source for the misrepresentation and misunderstanding of Asian American educational attainment (Museus, 2013c; Teranishi & Nguyen, 2011). Disaggregated data can move

246

policymakers toward a better portrait of the actual experiences, diversity, and disparities among populations whose experiences have been masked and marginalized by data aggregation.

Minority-serving institutions play a significant role in supporting college completion for racially minoritized populations (Harmon, 2012). Indeed, the Institute for Higher Education Policy (2012) asserts that minority-serving institutions' (i.e., AANAPISI) focus on underserved students enable them to be integral players in closing the equity gap in national college completion goals. Policymakers must attend to diverse populations to achieve national goals. As such, there is a need for continued and increased federal investment in AANAPISI designations for postsecondary institutions that support the development of culturally relevant programs and practices as these can have positive impacts on their educational experiences in community colleges. Federal investments in minority-serving institutions overall indicate an acknowledgment and awareness of the important role these institutions play in not only achieving the national college completion agenda but in supporting the educational success and prosperity of all impacted students.

At the institutional level, policies should be revised to incorporate the realities of SEAA students' experiences better. This also requires attention to disaggregated data at the institutional level that can provide a more holistic and comprehensive view of SEAA students' experiences on community college campuses. Also, policies that are equity and inclusion-focused can serve SEAA students in impactful ways. For example, policies that consider the lived realities of SEAA students and are not based on essentialization or

247

assumptions about Asian American populations will better serve the population as institutions can deploy resources that address the actual issues students face.

Institutional initiatives that prioritize supporting programs and centers such as learning communities and cultural centers, like those mentioned by some participants, can significantly benefit students. These spaces have significant potential for both connecting students to key institutional agents who have the interest, skills, and capacity to support their specific needs and for providing students with opportunities to engage their identities, cultures, and backgrounds in an academic space. Museus at al. (2016) determined that cultural community connections positively benefit SEAA students and likely plays an important role in their success in college. This, cultural centers and learning communities that foster these cultural community connections are important. Institutional investments into these programs and centers

Practice.

The findings in this study also have important implications for practice on community college campuses. First, key institutional agents (e.g., faculty and staff) should consider the critical role they play in supporting SEAA student success. Participants in this study noted the important presence of key institutional agents, such as faculty, cultural center staff, and counselors, who significantly impacted students' experiences in positive ways. One of the more enduring traits of these key institutional agents that participants identified was their depth of understanding and knowledge about the unique experiences and circumstances that impact SEAA students. As such, participants noted that they felt supported and understood when these agents responded to

248

their cultural backgrounds. Consequently, hiring individuals who respond to students in culturally relevant and responsive ways can have positive influences for students. Community colleges should consider how their hiring practices prioritize individuals who deeply care about students' wellbeing and who can respond to their needs. It is imperative that students have access to key institutional agents who espouse proactive, holistic, and humanized support.

Second, training institutional agents on how racialized contexts might shape SEAA students' self-perceptions, behaviors, and mental health is critical. SEAA participants reported many instances where their self-perceptions were negatively impacted by stereotypes and assumptions about their abilities, whether these assumptions were considered positive or negative assumptions. These experiences can have a negative impact on their mental health. Indeed, many participants discussed experiences with anxiety and depression due to feeling as if they were not good enough to live up to model minority stereotypes. It is important that institutional agents understand how racialized contexts impact SEAA students. Educators who recognize these contexts can develop necessary skills to combat and counteract negative experiences for SEAA students through programming and opportunities for students to develop protective factors against their racialization. As this study indicates a connection between racialization and mental health outcomes for SEAA student, it is imperative that community colleges understand that their representatives play an important role in minimizing incidents that affect SEAA student mental health.

Third, it is imperative that key institutional agents are trained to recognize and understand the ways stereotypes may influence them to engage in actions that harm students. The preponderance of negative experiences reported by participants indicates that even the most well-meaning of educators can engage in stereotype-influenced behaviors and actions that hurt students' sense of belonging and that invalidate their experiences. Students spend many hours on campus, either in class or engaging with peers, faculty, and staff. There are many opportunities for interactions that are influenced by essentializing stereotypes. Without intentional efforts to train key institutional agents to recognize these contexts and to understand how stereotypes impact SEAA students, such interactions are bound to continue to inflict many wounds. Developing training programs that specifically focus on the impact of stereotypes and requiring all staff and faculty to attend the training, while offering follow-up support, can help to minimize these occurrences. Additionally, all students benefit from staff and faculty who are well-trained to counter instances of stereotypes and assumptions in class and on campus.

Fourth, it is important to foster students' awareness of their racial and ethnic identities to support their understanding of the impact of race on their lives. Specifically, students must be provided educational programming that enables them to recognize deficit-based ideologies and to challenge anti-Black racism. Many opportunities are available to accomplish this, such as through cultural center activities, through learning community engagement, and through curricular experiences. Prioritizing racial and ethnic identity development in a healthy, supervised environment can benefit students as they develop their understanding of their racial identities. Students have developed and

250

are continually developing racialized perspectives of the world, their communities, and themselves. As these processes occur, community college educators can disrupt the cycle of deficit-thinking and anti-Black racism that is prevalent in society.

Finally, given the important role that community-based organizations can play in connecting SEAA students to both opportunities to explore identity and to access campus support services, it is strategic for community college practitioners to foster partnerships with CBOs who have significant access to students and families. For many families, CBOs plays an important intermediary role for navigating and translating college knowledge to parents and students. Community colleges practitioners can intentionally collaborate with CBO leaders to strengthen communications networks and the pipeline that connects students, who may not necessarily feel connected to the community college campus. There is an untapped potential in partnerships and collaboration between community-based organizations and community colleges.

Research.

While this study offers many important insights for policy and practice, there are also many opportunities to advance knowledge regarding SEAA populations, given the paucity of research on their experiences. Many opportunities are available to extend and expand on the knowledge generated from this specific study. Since this investigation is one of the first to explore the racialized experiences of SEAA community college students, the findings must be interpreted with caution, especially as this study is not meant to be generalizable. To better, more comprehensively understand the racialized experiences of SEAA students, further inquiries should consider their experiences within

251

different institutional contexts, such as four-year institutions. Additionally, exploring

SEAA racialization across various geographical contexts may indicate varying

differences in the ways these students experience racialization. For example, Midwest

SEAA populations may experience racialization differently than from east or west coast

students given their geographical isolation. Indeed, Kodama et al. (2017) assert the

importance of accounting for geographical contexts that shape racialization and racial

identity. Both institutional and geographical contexts must be taken into consideration to

expand the knowledge on SEAA students.

Second, this study focused on four ethnic groups that make up the SEAA

community. The heterogeneity of the sample within this investigation allowed for greater

insight in the exploration of the phenomenon of SEAA racialization across the groups;

however, it prevents the exploration of characteristics within each SEAA ethnic group.

As such, any nuances and differences in racialization among the different ethnic groups

cannot be analyzed within this study. Future research should consider a homogenous

ethnic group sample to explore any nuances and insights into how various SEAA ethnic

groups' racialization is shaped by their social, historical, and cultural contexts;

particularly as there is great diversity within the SEAA ethnic group. Disaggregating the

sample and focusing on specific ethnic groups will aid in reinforcing the diversity within

the SEAA community. Such studies will also provide details on specific issues different

SEAA students face because of their racialization or ethnicization.

Third, this is one of the first studies to utilize AsianCrit to explore the experiences

of SEAA community college students. Findings indicate that the experiences of SEAA

college students offer critical insights into how race and racialization uniquely impact them. The findings also provide empirical support for continuing to explore SEAA experiences through the AsianCrit framework. Future inquiries should employ the framework to explore various cross-sections of the SEAA student community. As AsianCrit's Asianization tenet considers how Asian Americans are racialized via the model minority, perpetual foreigner, and yellow peril racialization processes, the deviant minority myth is noticeably absent within the framework. There are indications that the deviant minority myth plays a critical role in how racialization impacts SEAA students differently than other Asian ethnic groups. Additional inquiries that explore this connection can potentially extend AsianCrit as a theory to better encapsulates SEAA experiences within the larger Asian American population. Such studies are critical for advancing deeper understandings about SEAAs and Asian American populations in general.

Fifth, and related to the above recommendation, further investigations are necessary for exploring how racially-ascribed deviance has an impact the experiences of SEAA students. Scholars have implicated the role of schooling in the racialization processes of SEAA students, specifically highlighting the processes that criminalize and vilify SEAA youth (Lee, Park, & Wong, 2016; Ong et al., 1996; Uy, 2018). Other scholars have also noted how these processes effectively shift the responsibility and blame for academic struggles to SEAAs instead of institutional practices (Chhuon & Hudley, 2010b; Reyes, 2007). The focus on the impact of the deviant minority myth has recently intensified, and some scholars have called for more systematic empirically-based

253

understandings of its functions and impact for SEAA populations (Museus & Park, 2015). More needs to be understood regarding these processes, as well as how SEAA students engage in resistance to these ideologies. Future studies should consider how SEAA youth describe, engage, and resist experiences with the deviant minority stereotype. Additional research should explore how these stereotypes implicitly and explicitly harm SEAA students.

Sixth, the current investigation suggests that SEAA communities occupy a unique position among the racial triangulation of Asian Americans within the Black and White paradigm. Findings in this study indicate that SEAA populations are subject to additional racialization processes that indicate much more complexity than explored within Kim's (1999) theory of racial triangulation. Specifically, the process of relative invalidation within the Asian American racial group creates further stratification for SEAA groups. Future studies should explore the concept of relative invalidation of SEAA groups in relation to Kim's (1999) field of racial positions.

Researcher Reflections

In Chapter 3, I elucidated my positionality as a Khmer American scholar, describing the personal, vulnerable reasons why I embarked upon this study. I hoped that it would be an important contribution to the knowledge regarding SEAA communities. I hoped this study would bring about change. Consequently, I believe it is fitting that I should end with a reflection of the study itself and a reflection of the vital ways this research process has also changed me. In doing so, I strive to mirror the vulnerability and

254

openness of my participants, who were willing to give so much of themselves to this process because they believed in possibilities.

One of the participants, Chenda, discussed the concept of SEAAs history and our experiences being unknown. I interpreted this sense of being unknown as connected to the relative invisibility and subsequent isolation of SEAA students navigating spaces where assumptions and stereotypes masked our lived realities. Being unknown was also an experience I also grappled with as a student, navigating spaces where I was not fully seen on many levels, where assumptions masked my lived reality. I realized now that my entire academic journey was also one of seeking visibility, understanding, and acceptance while toiling in the margins—the shadows. Even now the thought of being visible is terrifying though it is the one thing I seek, not just for myself but for my family and my community. I seek to make visible the pain, the silence, and the struggle, but I also seek to make visible the beauty, the strength, the resilience of SEAA communities.

In pursuing this study, I wanted to shed light on a phenomenon—of experience, of being SEAA—an experience that has rarely been explored or even acknowledged. In my sensemaking process of the experiences that participants shared, I grappled with the desire to present and make sense of their stories and experiences in a way that would comprehensively and authentically encompass the entirety and essence of what it means to experience race and racialization as SEAA. I found it to be a difficult feat. The reality was that SEAA students' racialized experiences are a complex process of mutually reinforcing and interrelated webs that impact how we see ourselves and how we engage

255

with the world. Despite this complexity, I hope that I am helping to start unraveling this web.

In my attempt to better understand the nuances of SEAA racialization, the phenomenon under study, my conversations with my participants uncovered a critical aspect of the lived experiences of SEAA students—that is, SEAA students are racially and ethnically isolated from their peers. Our racial and ethnic isolation is shaped by racialization processes that function to invisibilize, omit, exclude, and isolate us from resources, support, visibility, and belonging. What was also succinctly clear was that my participants pointed to an integral aspect that shaped their experiences as SEAA students—of not simply experiencing a lack of belonging on campus but of experiencing isolation at many levels that keep them apart from their peers and the campus. This isolation resulted from multiple, educational experiences marked by racialization of our bodies, minds, abilities, and ultimately, our humanity. This racialization took on many forms as an insidious, pervasive shadow that concealed the beauty and humanity of SEAA communities. Not only is there an element of feeling alien or outsider but there is an added component of being made to feel inferior. This pushing away and devaluation has created deep wounds within our community.

This study strengthened my conviction and belief in the value of subjectivity and reflexivity in the research process. My positionality and subjectivity played a significant role in this process. It shaped every aspect of this experience. It influenced the questions I asked and shaped how I made sense of my participants' stories and experiences. At times it served as motivation and at others, a challenge as it was easy for me to become

caught up in the emotional, out of body experience of listening to participants talk about the same wounds and battle scars that I had developed throughout my education. It was simultaneously cathartic and painful to realize that I was not the alone in experiencing these feelings. Coming to understand that my positionality is a source of strength and conviction has been difficult but deeply validating.

Over the last six years, I have been developing my researcher identity and my ethnic identity; I have grown in confidence that my interpretations and perspectives matter. But it was never an easy journey. I felt as if I have, and continue to, come into my identity as a Khmer American researcher and scholar. This confidence has been shaken and has been reshaped over time as I grappled with my feelings of shame, failure, and impostor syndrome. There were plenty of moments when I questioned whether my perspectives would matter and many moments when I agonized over whether I was contributing anything useful to the world. The desire to live up to expectations and to represent my community and family well created immense pressure that often paralyzed me. Many of these paralysis moments were struggles in isolation. There was a cycle of shame and failure that I also personalized and internalized. It took deep intentionality, reflection, and a willingness to be vulnerable for me to escape this cycle.

Despite this, I have learned to trust the process and myself. As I sat in the data, the thoughts, the experiences, the feelings every day for the past six months, I was developing a deeper understanding of the essence of SEAA students' racialization. Where I ended up at this moment was not where I started, and this will most likely not be the end of my thinking, revising, reviewing, and redoing in this research process. I have

257

come to accept that that is okay. Just as I recognize that my participants have grown and changed over time despite their painful experiences, I have also grown and changed. I will continue to grow and change as a scholar. In some ways, I have learned that embracing self-evolution is just one way of resisting and eluding the negative psychological impacts of being racialized and essentialized.

This study focused on the complexities of race, racism, and racialization. Participants wholeheartedly gave of themselves and willingly opened themselves up to be analyzed. They are constantly subjugated to deficit ideologies and socialization into a racial system. I have also been socialized into this same racial system. As I attempted to make sense of the varying dimensions of their experiences, I recognized how insidious such ideologies were in shaping my perspectives of the world. I learned to ask different questions when it came to attempting to understand my brothers' educational experiences. But that process of learning to ask different questions to illuminate hidden parts of a racial system and structure is still happening for me. I am still experiencing an awakening. In this process, I had to confront and challenge my internalization of the racial structure continually. In some ways this was disheartening, and it furthered my sense of shame that default assumptions still surfaced for me; however, it highlights the fact that this work is never complete. I will constantly have to take care and attention to confront deficit perspectives in shaping my understanding of the world.

In the end, my participants showcased such strength and resiliency in their accounts of resisting overwhelming feelings of exclusion. They have demonstrated strength, power, resiliency, and agency in pivotal ways by seeking out critical sources of

258

support that are providing them with what they need to shore up their defenses against deficit, racist messages. This knowledge continues to give me hope. In centering the experiences of SEAA community college students to learn from their lived experiences, I hope that we can learn from my community's stories so that we all can be better and do better to help heal wounds and ensure success and livelihood.

This process was complicated. It was difficult. It was emotional. It was hard. It was also revelatory. It was thought-provoking. It was challenging. It hurt. But it is also a beginning. It is loving. It is healing.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Information

SUBJECT: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study: What's Race Got to Do with It? A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Racialized Community College Experiences of Southeast Asian American Students

Dear [Insert Name],

My name is Varaxy Yi Borromeo, and I am a Ph.D. student from the University of Denver's Morgridge College of Education. I am writing to invite you to participate in my dissertation research study about the lived experiences of Southeast Asian American community college students. You are being asked to participate in this research study because you can provide valuable information about your experience as a Southeast Asian American community college student. This study is focused on understanding Southeast Asian American college students' experiences in community college in relation to their racial/ethnic identity. Your perspectives will help advance knowledge about how best to support Southeast Asian American community college students.

I seek participants for this study who meet the following qualifications:
- Identify as Southeast Asian (e.g., Hmong, Cambodian/Khmer, Laotian, Vietnamese)
- Currently attending a community college in California
- Have attended at least two semesters of community college
- Have been involved in an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving-Institution (AANAPISI) program at a community college
- Willing and able to reflect upon experiences of being racialized in community college

Participation in this study will include up to three face-to-face or videoconference, audio-recorded interviews. Each interview would last between 60-75 minutes and would focus on your experiences as a community college student, including discussion about the ways your racial/ethnic identity has factored into your educational experience. Data collected from these interviews will inform the findings of my dissertation study.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may deign to end your participation at any time. For your participation in the study, you will be provided a $50 VISA gift card after completion of the interviews.

If you would like to be involved in this study or have any questions, please email or contact me at Varaxy.Yi@du.edu or via phone at (209) 401-2412. I will provide you with additional information on this study as well as relevant forms to complete.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Varaxy Yi Borromeo
PhD Candidate
Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver

Appendix B: Recruitment Survey

Recruitment Survey

To be disseminated via Qualtrics

Please answer the following questions:
1. How would you describe your community college experience?
2. What programs or activities are you involved in in community college?
3. What opportunities, if any, have you had in reflecting upon your identity as a Southeast Asian student?
4. Please describe the role/significance that your identity as Southeast Asian has played in your community college experience.
5. Please describe any experiences you have had with prejudice, discrimination, and racism in community college.

Demographic information
1. When did you graduate high school?
2. Where do/did you attend community college?
3. What year are you in college?
4. What is your anticipated graduation date?
5. What is your current college major?
6. What is your ethnic background [select all that apply]?
    a. Hmong
    b. Cambodian/Khmer
    c. Laotian
    d. Vietnamese
    e. Other:
        i. Please specify

Solicitation for participation
1. Would you be interested in participating in a research study on your experiences as a Southeast Asian American community college student?
    a. Yes, please provide contact information
        i. Name
        ii. Phone
        iii. Email
    b. No

Appendix C: Demographic Form

DEMOGRAPHIC FORM FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Please fill in the blanks or circle/check the most appropriate answer for the following questions. You may leave responses blank if you prefer not to answer a question.

What is your name? _____
(Your name will <u>not</u> be used in public files. All public research documents will include pseudonyms. We ask for your name for follow up purposes only.)

What is your email address? _____

What is your phone number? _____

What is your age? _____

Where is your place of birth (City/State/Country)? _____

Please indicate your race (circle all that apply):

Black/African American	Asian/Asian American	Multiracial/Mixed-race
Native American/American Indian	Pacific Islander White Hispanic/Latino	

Please list all ethnic backgrounds with which you identify (e.g., Cambodian, Puerto Rican, Samoan): _____

Please indicate your sex (e.g., male, female): _____

Please indicate your gender (e.g., man, woman, transgender): _____

Please indicate your sexual orientation (e.g., heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual): _

Please indicate your religious affiliation (e.g., Christian, Buddhist, Spiritual): _____

Please indicate your marital status (e.g., single, married, divorced): _____

Please indicate the highest educational attainment level(s):

<u>Yours</u>	<u>Mother/Guardian</u>	<u>Father/Guardian</u>
Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree
Professional Degree	Professional Degree	Professional Degree
Master's Degree	Master's Degree	Master's Degree
Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree
Associate's Degree/ Certificate	Associate's Degree/ Certificate	Associate's Degree/ Certificate
Some College	Some College	Some College
High School Diploma, GED, or equivalent	High School Diploma, GED, or equivalent	High School Diploma, GED, or equivalent
Some High School	Some High School	Some High School
Other: _____	Other: _____	Other: _____

If undergraduate student, please indicate your year in school? (Circle one)

First-Year   Second-Year Third -Year   Fourth-Year   Fifth-Year or beyond

Please indicate whether you live on- or off-campus:

On campus   Off campus

Please indicate enrollment status (circle one):

Part-time   Full-time

What is your potential or declared academic major(s)? _____

What is your potential or declared academic minor(s)? _____

What is your employment status?

Employed   Self-employed   Student   Retired

Please provide the best estimate of your parents'/guardian's combined total annual income:

Under $15K $15-$29K $30-$49K $50-$69K $70-$89K $90K and higher

How would you describe your socioeconomic background?

Working-class Middle-class   Upper-class   Other (please specify): _____

What programs and student organizations are you involved with on campus?

_____

_____

_____

Appendix D: Consent Form

Consent Form
University of Denver
Information Sheet for Exempt Research

Title of Research Study: What's Race Got to Do with It? A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Racialized Community College Experiences of Southeast Asian American Students

Researcher(s): Varaxy Yi Borromeo, PhD Candidate, University of Denver
Faculty Sponsor: Frank Tuitt, PhD, Senior Advisor to the Chancellor and Provost on Diversity and Inclusion

Description: You are being asked to be in this research study because you can provide valuable information about the experiences of Southeast Asian American community college students. This study is focused on understanding Southeast Asian American college students' experiences in community college in relation to their racial/ethnic identity. This form provides you with information about the study. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding if to participate.

Procedures: If you agree to be part of the research study you will be asked to participate in up to three individual interviews. The interviews will include questions about your experiences in community college and is designed to elicit productive conversations about your experiences as they relate to your identity. Each interview will take approximately 60-75 minutes to complete.

Possible risks: Participation in this study is associated with minimal potential risk. Potential risks and/or discomforts of participation may include the emergence of negative or distressful feelings in answering interview questions. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to and may stop participating in the interview at any time. You may speak with Varaxy Yi Borromeo to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation.

Compensation: For your participation, you will receive nominal compensation in the form of a $50 VISA gift card for participating in this research project.

This study is funded in part by a grant from the Interdisciplinary Research Incubator for the Study of (In)Equality (IRISE).

Audio-Recordings: You will be audio-recorded at each interview. The audio-recordings will be transcribed for data analysis. After transcription, the audio files will be destroyed. If you do not want to be audio/video recorded, please inform the researcher, and only hand-written notes will be taken during the interview(s).

Voluntary Participation: Participating in this research study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and end at any time. You may choose not to answer any question or choose to end your participation with the study at any time for any reason without penalty. If you decide to withdraw early, the information or data you provided will be destroyed.
Questions: If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please feel free to ask questions now or contact **Varaxy Yi Borromeo** at **(209) 401-2412 or at Varaxy.Yi@du.edu** at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the DU Human Research Protections Program by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researchers.

The DU Human Research Protections Program has determined that this study is minimal risk and is exempt from full IRB oversight.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

_____   _____

Participant Signature   **Date**

Appendix E: Interview Protocol 1

Interview Protocol 1

Introduction, Purpose of Study, and Obtaining Consent

Background & Identity
1. Can you tell me about your background? How do you identify yourself?
2. What is your relationship with your racial/ethnic/cultural background?
3. What is your earliest memory of when you came to know your racial/ethnic/cultural identity?
4. How important is your racial/ethnic/cultural identity to you?
5. How do you see yourself?
6. How do you think others see you?
7. How does race or ethnicity factor into your life, if at all?

K-12 Educational Experiences
1. What are your educational and professional goals?
2. Can you describe your relationship with education?
    a. What are your thoughts about education in general?
    b. What are your family's thoughts about education? How does it influence your decisions about college?
3. What role did your family play in your educational journey?
4. What is your earliest memory about going to school?
5. What were your experiences like in K-12 education?
6. How have your racial/ethnic/cultural identities shown up in your education?
    a. Keeping your racial/ethnic/cultural identity in mind, tell me about your interactions with your teachers.
    b. Keeping your racial/ethnic/cultural identity in mind, tell me about your interactions with other students.
7. How did/do you perceive yourself in school?
8. How were you perceived in school?
9. What experiences come to mind when you consider how your identity may have played a role in your K-12 educational experience?

Appendix F: Interview Protocol 2
Interview Protocol 2

Review summary of previous interview, check in with participant and answer any questions or concerns.
1. Do you have any thoughts or reflections about our last conversation?
2. Did anything else come to mind for you after our interview ended?

Community College Experience
1. Why did you decide to attend a community college?
2. Tell me about the first time you set foot on your community college?
    a. What did it feel like for you?
    b. Who did you see?
    c. What were the emotions running through your head?
3. How would you describe your current community college experience?
4. What is your typical day like attending community college? Tell me what you do before, during, and after school.
5. What programs or activities are you involved in at community college? If you are not involved in any programs or activities, what are the reasons that keep you from being involved?
6. How would you rate the level of inclusiveness and welcoming nature of your community college?
7. Are there any important spaces at community college that make you feel welcomed and included?
8. Are there any specific individuals that you feel you can go to for anything? If there is no one, why do you think that is the case?

Race/Ethnicity and Community College
1. What experiences come to mind when you consider how your identity may have played a role in your community college experience?
2. Keeping your racial/ethnic/cultural identity in mind, tell me about your relationship with your professors.
3. Keeping your racial/ethnic/cultural identity in mind, tell me about your relationship with other students.
4. How do the above experiences impact the way you see yourself as a college student?
5. Have you experienced any incidences of discrimination, real or perceived? What happened?
    a. How did/do you make sense of that experience?
6. What is the significance of your racial/ethnic identity in your experience as a community college student?
7. What messages do you receive about your Southeast Asian American identity in community college?

Appendix G: Interview Protocol 3

Interview Protocol 3

Review summary of previous interview, check in with participant and answer any questions or concerns.
1. Do you have any thoughts or reflections about our last conversation?
2. Did anything else come to mind for you after our interview ended?

Clarification of stories and experiences [follow up questions]
1. Can you tell me a little more about this experience….?
2. What else happened when…?

Final Reflections and Thoughts
1. Has anything changed in your reflections about our discussion on your racial/ethnic identity and its connection to your community college experience?
2. Given our previous discussions about your experience as a Southeast Asian American community college student, what thoughts do you have about how we can improve education for all students?
3. What does it mean to be a Southeast Asian American community college student?
4. What should educators know about Southeast Asian American community college students in general?
5. Do you have any other thoughts about anything else we've discussed during our time together?