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Troublemakers and Hell Raisers: A Critical Qualitative Inquiry of How Neoliberal Systems

Shape the Experiences of Asian American Student Activists in Higher Education

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

by

Hannah Hyun White

Committee in charge:

Professor Samuel D. Museus, Chair
Professor Theresa Ambo
Professor James Antony
Professor Curtis Marez
Professor Kit Myers

2024

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University of California San Diego

2024

DEDICATION

For my late father Gary, an educator that paved the way for me; for you, for me, for our family, we did it, Dad (June 8, 2021).

For my mother Brenda, the strongest woman I know and who has supported me unconditionally in every aspect of my life. I am my mother's daughter.

For my fiancé Bryan, my guiding light, reminder of critical hope, and the person who has never given up on me.

For my brother and sister-in-law, Eric and Feline, who always reinforce my strength and that my worth is not defined by an institution or a piece of paper.

For my niece Cora, who reminds me that the ability to feel our emotions is beautiful.

And for all the student activists that continue to collectively dream, love, and forge a path of resistance, care, and transformative change, this dissertation belongs to you.

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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Higher Education

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Troublemakers and Hell Raisers: A Critical Qualitative Inquiry of How Neoliberal Systems
Shape the Experiences of Asian American Student Activists in Higher Education

by

Hannah Hyun White

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, San Diego, 2024

Professor Samuel D. Museus, Chair

Neoliberalism continues to exacerbate systemic racism and restricts efforts to address racial and social justice issues. Consequently, there has not only been an increase of public

concern, but students are constantly driven to organize around their experiences. Asian American students are currently and have historically been one of these communities engaging in activism. Yet, there continues to be ongoing and pervasive misconceptions that they do not encounter any challenges related to race contributing the dismissal of their voices and experiences in postsecondary education. Consequently, scholarship surrounding Asian American student activists is still developing and there is still much to be explored in understanding their racialized experiences.

Through a critical qualitative inquiry, this dissertation study aimed to understand how neoliberalism shapes the experiences of Asian American college student activists. Findings revealed two core categories 1) how aspects of neoliberal culture were experienced by activists and 2) how it shaped the ways students navigated their activist work. The first category contained five subsequent sub-themes: 1) profit motives over people, 2) a culture of precarity, 3) an ethos of self-interest, 4) normalized exploitation of People of Color, and 5) advanced hyper-surveillance systems. The second category revealed an additional five sub-themes: 1) contextualizing students' activism and advocacy, 2) encompassing collectivist approaches to activism, 3) strategically engaging in the university, 4) dealing with activism pressures, and 5) prioritizing refusal and rest.

By engaging neoliberal frameworks in a rigorous empirical project, it deepened our collective understanding of how racialization of Asian Americans and neoliberalism are not mutually exclusive. It also provided critical insight and essential knowledge about how neoliberalism can be detrimental to students so we can better support and foster their development. This topic also contributed to the growing body of knowledge surrounding student activists and Asian American experiences, as well as the administrators, faculty, staff, and other

key stakeholders interwoven within the academy. Finally, it further underscored how student activism is not solely a critique or resistance of neoliberal systems, rather it can also serve as sites of critical hope and a desire for transformative and systemic change in postsecondary education.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

When I started college, I felt the heaviness of living up to expectations set by self-internalization of childhood trauma and the misconceptions of who I should become as an Asian American student. I ultimately found a sense of belonging and purpose in the Asian American and Pacific Islander cultural center on campus where I met a mentor who empowered me to shape my identity as not only an Asian American, but a transracial/transnational adoptee and I began to engage in activism to fight for racial and social justice at our institution. Collectively, a group of student leaders from the various cultural and resource centers and I formed a coalition of student activists where we released a 16-page list of demands to our administration to demand for systemic change, equity, and justice for all marginalized students.

Within these activist spaces, I silently observed how my community of Asian Americans were constantly excluded from institutions and other communities did not believe we experienced racism, or any form of discrimination for that matter. In our cultural center, we had often discussed the history of Asian Americans being excluded and silenced and, for many Asian American students in my community, engaging in this type of work was new and came with challenges. For the first time, we stepped outside the lines that had been drawn for us, broke down barriers, and challenged harmful stereotypes about our community. Yet we were often told we were not doing “enough” and, when we did speak-up, we were often met with silence or a dismissal of our truths and lived experiences. Even within my own Asian American community, I struggled in this work. I was labeled as the loud, outspoken, and angry Asian. I was constantly told by my community that I was not a “real” Asian because of my identity as an adoptee in a White family and I had no business engaging in this work because I would never understand the “true” Asian American experience. I was ultimately pushed out of these community and organizing spaces and haunted by questions regarding what it means to be Asian American and how, if at all, we fit within activist spaces. - Hannah Hyun White

The lived truth shared above comes from a piece I wrote for a class when I was a first-year master’s student reflecting on my experiences as an undergraduate navigating a Predominantly (Historically) White Institution (PWI) and trying to understand who I was and where my place was both within Asian American communities and activist spaces. My story is just one of many that underscore how, even within community and coalition building spaces that fight for social justice, the perpetuation of Asian American stereotypes remains prevalent and can negatively impact the ways Asian American students engage in this type of activism work (Grim et al., 2019; Museus et al., 2021; Nguyen & Gasman, 2015).

Through this dissertation, I conducted a critical qualitative analysis of how neoliberalism, or the prioritization of private over public interests that enables power to remain in the hands of authority figures and undermines progressive advocacy agendas (Ferguson, 2017; Saunders, 2010), shapes the experiences of Asian American student activists in higher education. In doing so, I challenged misconceptions of Asian American experiences and their “belonging” in activist spaces, but also aimed to deepen collective understandings of how neoliberal systems continue to reinforce harmful narratives of Asian American students that continue to racially oppress them and the ways that they are able to navigate postsecondary¹ institutional spaces.

Statement of Problem

Higher education institutions have the potential to operate as agents of transformative change and serve as a tool of empowerment for a more equitable society (Rendón, 1994); yet they continue to embrace and normalize neoliberal ideologies that harm students, especially those from racially marginalized communities (Museus & LePeau, 2019; Na et al., 2021). While it could be argued that postsecondary education institutions are merely recipients of neoliberal consequences as a result of the larger capitalist society it exists within, it is also important to recognize higher education institutions are not solely victims of neoliberalism but are also complicit players in upholding these ideologies (Na et al., 2021; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). For example, they treat students as customers and higher education as a commodity that students purchase and expend for their own personal economic gain, reinforcing an individualist and competitive mindset (Saunders, 2007).

Neoliberalism in higher education contexts is also intertwined with race, or how individuals are categorized based on physical traits (Iftikar, 2017; Omni & Winant, 1994).

¹ Higher education and postsecondary education are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation study, but both are understood as education past K-12 experiences, specifically in a college or university setting.

Neoliberalism minimizes the salience of racial identities and, more specifically, how the racialization of students of color shapes their experiences and contributes to racial oppression (Davis, 2007). Thus, fundamental to neoliberalism, and neoliberal values like consumerism and competition (Na et al., 2021), is the perpetuation of systemic racism which continuously harms and oppresses students from historically and racially excluded communities. Accordingly, the problem that drives this critical qualitative inquiry is neoliberal racism or the idea that racial identities, racialization, and racism are only essential and included when they can be tokenized under meritocracy (e.g., productivity is mutually exclusive with worth) but are deemed irrelevant in any other contexts (Davis, 2007).

Neoliberal racism, intertwined with other forms of oppression, has been a pressing issue in the U.S. (Museus, 2021). These systems of racism work to preserve the “status quo” (e.g., White Supremacy) by manipulating people into believing that, if they work hard enough and assimilate, they too can embody and reap the benefits of being “successful” within the current systems they are navigating (Davis, 2007; Linder, 2018). This notion is often amplified in discussions and misconceptions of the model minority myth related to Asian American communities, which I discuss in more detail in the following sections.

Within the context of higher education, institutional systems reinforce neoliberal racism through forms of systemic racism (Linder et al., 2019). Systemic racism leads to many students of color experiencing racial and social injustices (Museus, 2021). It is because of racism’s direct impact on these experiences and how neoliberalism continues to exacerbate systemic racism and inhibits efforts to address these issues that we have not only seen an increase in public concern to address these forms of oppression (Ferguson, 2017), but that students are driven to organize

around their racialized experiences as a form of resistance to systemic racism (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Hope et al., 2016; Logan et al., 2017).

Combined with the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s, addressing issues tied to neoliberal racism (e.g., systemic oppression) has led to a more narrowed focus on “improving higher education access and campus climates for underrepresented and marginalized populations” (Rhoads, 2016, p. 194). Embedded in this focus, Rhoads (2016) discussed that racial issues, like battles for racial equality and anti-racism practices, have been an essential component in the student activism we see in the present day. Most notably in late 2015 leading into 2016, student activists from over 80 institutions across the U.S. (e.g., Claremont McKenna, University of Alabama, University of Arizona, University of Minnesota, Yale) released lists of demands to fight for social and racial justice, which was largely initiated and inspired by students at the University of Missouri who protested against racial injustices on their college campus that ultimately led to the both the Chancellor and President resigning from their positions (Ferguson, 2017). These movements were seen as a renewal of college student activism (Ferguson, 2017) and have continued the momentum for student movements to develop and continue across college campuses in the United States.

The renewal of college student activism continues to inform scholarship on it in postsecondary education. Many scholars have underscored how systemic racism leads students to engage in activism and advocacy work (Gill et al., 2020; Guitierrez, 2021; Linder et al., 2019; Linder et al., 2019); however, there is still much to be explored in understanding how neoliberal systems, specifically neoliberal racism, shape student activist experiences. This may largely be due to the fact that analysis of neoliberal systems has been sparse in higher education scholarship and discourse.

Scholarship surrounding Asian American student activists is still developing and relatively difficult to find at this point in time. This reality may be partially attributed to the ongoing and pervasive misconceptions that Asian American students do not face any unique challenges and issues related to race and racism, and therefore are apolitical and uninterested in engaging in work that revolves around addressing social and racial inequities (e.g., student activism) (Museus, 2021; Yi et al., 2020). This type of racialization, which is related to neoliberal racism as I discuss in the following chapters, continuously contributes to the invisibility of Asian American activism and advocacy, as well as the overall exclusion of Asian American communities in academic research, scholarship, and praxis (Museus, 2009). Thus, this myth could be one contributing factor to the limited scholarship and understudied topic surrounding Asian American student activism that this dissertation study hopes to address.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to critically examine how systems of oppression contribute to the experiences of undergraduate Asian American student activists. Utilizing a critical qualitative inquiry approach, this study is guided by one overarching research question: How do neoliberal systems shape the experiences of Asian American student activists in higher education? There is a growing body of literature that examines the experiences of student activism in higher education broadly (e.g., Biddix et al., 2009; Gaston-Gayle et al., 2004; Linder et al., 2019; Quaye & Lange, 2020) and Asian American college activists specifically (e.g., Grim et al., 2019; Museus et al., 2021; Nguyen & Gasman, 2015; Park & Dizon, 2021), however, literature that centers the experiences of Asian American student activists in higher education remains sparse (Museus, 2014). As such, four additional sub-questions will help guide the study:

- 1) How, if at all, does neoliberalism catalyze Asian American students' activism on their college/university campuses?

- 2) How, if at all, does neoliberalism constrain Asian American students' activism on these campuses?
- 3) In what ways, if any, are Asian Americans navigating neoliberal ideologies in their work as student activists?
- 4) How does neoliberalism shape the outcomes of these students' activism?

Significance of Study

Politicized experiences in society and social movements as a response to the systemic oppression experienced by historically excluded communities (e.g., Civil Rights Movement) often impact higher education (Rhoads, 1998). Simultaneously, postsecondary education spaces also bring awareness and attention to these various experiences and issues (Linder et al., 2016) and, consequently, have served as significant sites for cultivating student activism engagement (Broadhurst, 2014; Renn, 2007; Rhoads, 1998). Thus, student activism is often rooted in desires to resist and address systemic oppression (e.g., neoliberal racism), which illuminates the need for efforts to advance equity in higher education (Museus et al., 2015; Museus, et al., 2017).

Currently in higher education discourse, there is a growing body of scholarship that continues to expand knowledge around the experiences of student activists and how they are addressing types of systemic oppression (Morgan et al., 2021). This scholarship around student activism disrupts traditional notions of advancing knowledge for the sake of knowledge production and works towards reframing social and political hierarchies related to knowledge generation (Davis et al., 2019). Moreover, literature around activism provides space for researchers to work collectively *with* student activists, and the former often have a desire to engage in reciprocal processes with these students and/or are personally connected to the work (Davis et al., 2019). This approach to research can also maximize the likelihood that leaders in higher education, who have the responsibility to foster equitable spaces in these institutions and

society, are held accountable for the well-being of all students, especially those from historically excluded communities (e.g., Asian American communities) (Museus et al., 2017).

Despite this growing body of activism literature in higher education contexts, the longstanding history of college student activism, and the increased awareness and attention paid to these student movements, research continues to emphasize how student concerns and needs are not being met (Cho, 2018; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). Thus, this dissertation aims to understand how neoliberal racism contributes to student concerns and how these systems ultimately shape the experiences of Asian American student activists in higher education. Moreover, research that underscores neoliberal racism and how it fuels the need for activism can strengthen our knowledge of student activist experiences and the nuances and complexities of systemic oppression that often motivate college students to engage in activism work. It also provides an opportunity to hold institutions responsible for the roles they play in contributing to the complicity of violent cyclical systems that continue to oppress and harm the students it was designed to serve.

With these contexts in mind, this dissertation will contribute to higher education research, policy, and practice in several ways. First, this study will contribute to existing research by building off current neoliberal frameworks. Neoliberalism is a framework that has become more prevalent in higher education scholarship in the recent years but specifically utilizing neoliberalism as a framework to critically understand how neoliberal systems shape the experiences of student activists is still uncommon and studies that leverage it to analyze Asian American activists in particular are virtually nonexistent. Connor (2020) began to invite scholars into conversations about how we understand neoliberalism in relation to student activism within postsecondary education in her book, *The New Student Activists*. Utilizing sociopolitical

development theory, Connor (2020) argued that neoactivists are emerging with and intentionally challenging neoliberal systems within higher education institutions. She also discussed activism as a developmental process in which institutional and societal contexts shape how students become activists within their institutions. This conversation initiated by Connor (2020) has set a crucial foundation for considering intersections between neoliberalism and student activism. Thus, my study's focus on utilizing neoliberalism as a guiding framework and critically understanding how these neoliberal systems shape activist experiences can provide us with essential knowledge about how neoliberalism can not only be detrimental to student activists, but also how they may leverage neoliberal ideologies in their own work, so we can better support, engage, and foster the development of *all* students. In turn, this may diminish how students feel the need to engage in this type of advocacy work, which often forces them to exert additional physical, emotional, and mental labor in fighting for transformative change in institutions (Anonymous, 2018; Green 2016; Linder et al., 2019; Renschler 2008).

In addition to understanding how neoliberal systems manifest in postsecondary education spaces, building off a neoliberal racism framework also has the potential to inform and shape higher education policy. Applying Iftikar's (2017) neoliberal racial projects to an empirical project and rigorous scholarly inquiry will deepen collective understandings of how the racialization of Asian Americans and neoliberalism are not mutually exclusive (e.g., neoliberal racism) and might help us more deeply understand how to create transformative institutional change that pushes towards spaces that are racially diverse, equitable, and inclusive through postsecondary education policy (which ultimately informs more just practices). Utilizing this knowledge can support policymakers in understanding diverse student experiences and ways that

higher education policy can be written and implemented to support not only Asian American students, but students from historically excluded communities broadly.

Second, this study will expand prior scholarly knowledge through the intentional focus on Asian American college activist experiences. To preface, there is a small and growing body of knowledge that intentionally focuses on the experiences of Asian American student activists (Grim et al., 2019; Manzano et al., 2017; Manzano, 2018; Museus et al., 2021; Nguyen & Gasman, 2015; Park & Dizon, 2022), but misconceptions around Asian American student experiences, such as reinforcements of the model minority myth, continue to harm and oppress these communities (Lewis et al., 2000; Museus, 2008a; 2013a; Museus & Kiang, 2009). The model minority myth can also be attributed to the exclusion of Asian Americans in higher education research (Museus & Kiang, 2009). This exclusion coupled with the failure to disaggregate data on the Asian American community (e.g., across ethnic groups) contributes to an ignorance about issues that severely impact Asian American students in higher education, such as mental health and the disparities of retention and degree attainment among some Asian ethnic groups (Museus & Chang, 2009). Furthermore, generally, the field of higher education does not understand the need or urgency for discussion and research on Asian Americans because of the (false) hegemonic narratives that Asian Americans are a successful, problem-free, and “high-achieving” group of students (Museus, 2014). Consequently, there is an exclusion of Asian Americans from higher education research and discourse (Chang, 2008). Underscoring Asian American student activist experiences and developing our understanding around how neoliberalism and neoliberal racism has shaped many of the misconceptions of Asian American communities (e.g., model minority myth) will directly challenge these violent narratives, White

supremacist logic (Yi et al., 2020), and institutional systems that continue to oppress and harm Asian American students.

Considering these dynamics, this dissertation has the potential to contribute to the growing body of knowledge surrounding the experiences of student activists, as well as the administrators, faculty, staff, and other key stakeholders interwoven within the academy. It also may further underscore how student activism is not solely a critique or active resistance of neoliberal systems, rather it can also serve as sites of critical hope, cautious optimism, and a desire for transformative and systemic change that would create authentic and non-performative spaces that are just and equitable for all students to thrive. Accordingly, my goal is not to necessarily critique the existing engagement and scholarship surrounding Asian American experiences and student activism, rather celebrate and honor this powerful body of knowledge that our communities possess, while building off this scholarship by offering alternative approaches to the ways we think about and discuss the experiences of student activists. My hope is that this study can serve as an invitation to others in the field of higher education to collaborate, celebrate, participate, and dream of new possibilities together.

Key Terms and Concepts

Some key terms and concepts are utilized throughout this proposal. It is imperative that I define them before moving forward to set a foundational understanding for how these terms are utilized and understood in the context of this dissertation study. Although definitions are based on past scholarship, it is difficult to find precise definitions for several of these terms and concepts. Thus, many of these definitions are grounded both in literature and my own understanding and interpretation of how they are utilized in various social and educational contexts.

- **Asian American:** individuals currently residing in the United States and of Asian ancestry (Museus, 2014). Asian Americans make-up a diverse community from twenty-

four ethnic groups (Lee, 2015), however Asian American are often only discussed as three core groups. For example, Accapadi (2012) utilized the following categorizations: 1) East Asian (i.e., Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Okinawan, Taiwanese, and Tibetan) (API GBV, 2019), 2) Southeast Asian (i.e., Bruneian, Burmese, Cambodian, Filipino, Hmong, Indonesian, Laotian, Malaysian, Mien, Singaporean, Timorese, Thai, and Vietnamese) (API GBV, 2019), and 3) South Asian (Bangladeshi, Bhutanese, Maldivians, Nepali, Sri Lankan, Pakistani, and Indian).² These are the primary categorizations often discussed within the Asian America diaspora. Yet, there are also two other categories that the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (2019) (API GBV) includes that are often not discussed in the larger Asian American context: 1) Central Asian (Afghani, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Georgians, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Mongolian, Tajik, Turkmen, Uzbek) and 2) West Asian, typically referred to as the “Middle East” and geographically includes the countries of Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey (situated in between Europe and Asia), United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. For the purposes of this dissertation study, all five categories were considered, especially in the participant recruitment process, and activists were able to self-identify their Asian ethnicity.

- **Academic Capitalism:** The adoption and propagation of capitalist values throughout the higher education system. This includes, but is not limited to, increased surveillance of professionals, the bureaucratization of higher education, and changing work conditions that emphasize channeling collective energy toward productivity and maximizing output of “goods” and “services” for the consumer (e.g., students) (Slaughter & Rhoades, 1997).

² It is important to that these ethnic categories do not encompass the entire Asian American community but may be used as a starting point in understanding the nuances of Asian America (Lai & Arguelles, 2003; Accapadi, 2012)

- **Activism:** any action, effort, or initiative that intentionally works to disrupt and challenge oppressive systems that impact historically excluded communities in order to bring about social justice and transformational change on a college/university campus.
- **Bureaucratization:** an organization's move towards more multifaceted systems and complex procedures that deliberately slow down decision-making processes (Weber, 1968). Weber (1968) argues that bureaucratization emerges from three main sources: 1) competition among other organizations in the market, 2) competition between states which contributes to the belief that authoritative figures need to control their staff and general society, and 3) middle-class citizens requesting equal protection within the law (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).
- **Commodification:** the translation of people and things into products or services that can be bought or sold (Karter et al., 2021)
- **Competition:** a core component of neoliberalism where individuals and organizations strive to gain or acquire something by out-maneuvering or establishing authority (e.g., power) over others working to do the same. Becker et al. (2021) discussed how competition is a tool utilized to increase productivity while simultaneously discouraging solidarity between and among individuals and communities (Foucault, 2008; Mirowski, 2014; Müller, 2013; Piketty, 2015).
- **Consumerism:** a neoliberal value that denotes how people are treated and perceived based upon the market value that they bring or generate (e.g., money) (Museus & Sifuentez, 2021). For example, in a higher education context, consumerism can often be seen through student athletes being assessed based on the value they bring through generating monetary revenue for the institution they attend.

- **Ethnicity:** social identities that are connected to a specific geographic region, culture, and/or language (Museus, 2014; Museus et al., 2021).
- **Model Minority Myth:** misconception that Asian Americans are a single group that achieves incomparable and general academic success (Museus, 2009, 2011; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 2002). Moreover, the model minority myth is also rooted in White supremacy whereby this type of ideological racism frames Asian Americans “universally successful racial group” (p. 551) in order to maintain systemic oppression that perpetuates violence on *all* historically and racially excluded communities (Yi et al., 2020).
- **Neoliberalism:** can be understood as a socioeconomic ideology that transfers capitalist priorities from the economic sphere to all other aspects of social and political life (Saunders, 2007). Thus, it prioritizes privatization and large corporations over public institutions and services aimed at benefitting the larger society (Harvey, 2005).
- **Oppression:** beliefs and structures that dehumanize and subject historically excluded communities to treatment and control that is unjust and inequitable (Museus et al., 2021)
- **People of Color:** Black, Native, Latino/a/x, and Asian American communities in the United States (Perry et al., 2009) or non-White racial groups.
- **Privatization:** in the context of higher education, privatization may be understood as a process with three core features outlined by Williams (2006): “1) a switch in who profits from research and innovation facilitated by the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980, which allowed universities to patent goods and profit from them; 2) the reconfiguration of higher education as a commodity to be purchased (at exponentially increasing prices) on an open market, reframing students as consumers rather than beneficiaries of a societal

investment; and 3) the increased reliance on contingent labor for delivering instruction, evidenced in the dependence on adjunct and temporary faculty to teach the vast majority of courses” (p. 966) (Karter, 2021).

- **Race:** in a United States context, race is a social and political construct that is used to categorize individuals based off phenotypes and physical characteristics (Omi & Winant, 1994).
- **Racial Equity:** the process of abolishing racism and racial disparities through improving, changing, and/or modifying policies, practices, systems, and structures by centering the needs and experiences of People of Color, thus improving social situations and contexts for everyone (Race Forward). Racial equity is intertwined with racial justice in that it is the process that ultimately pushes towards racial justice; it is necessary but not all encompassing for racial justice (Race Forward).
- **Racial Justice:** an intentional and reflexive process of working to transform educational spaces and society into places where racial hierarchies cease to exist, collective liberation is prioritized, and Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/x, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders are respected and have the resources, agency, and power to do more than survive (Race Forward).
- **Racial Justice Activism:** any action, effort, or initiative that intentionally worked to disrupt and challenge racism and racially oppressive systems that impact individuals and communities of color in order to bring about racial justice and equity on a college/university campus.
- **Racism:** racism is often discussed in relation to individual beliefs and attitudes towards other people based on their racial identity (Henkel et al., 2006); however, it can also refer

to the ways systems uphold power and privilege based on these racial identities that continue to oppress and marginalize communities and individuals that are not perceived as part of the “dominant” group (Harrell, 2000; Omi & Winant, 2014).

Racialization: how racial meaning is prescribed and given labels to individuals and communities that have historically and socially been excluded from racial significance

- **Social Justice:** a collective initiative to work towards cultivating and supporting a nondiscriminatory, equitable, and just society where all individuals and communities feel respected and validated (John Lewis Institute for Social Justice, 2022).
- **Surveillance:** underscores how people are watched and observed in attempt to monitor, police, or control their behavior. In the context of this dissertation, it explains how students are monitored to control the ways that they engage in activism and advocacy work (Giroux, 2009).
- **White Supremacy:** the belief that White Americans are superior to other racial communities and consequently are more entitled and worthy of receiving resources (Leonardo 2004; Mills 1997; Chen & Buell, 2017).

Organization of Dissertation Proposal

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. In the first chapter, I introduced the study through a discussion of the problem, the purpose for conducting empirical research on this topic, the core research questions used to address the problem, and identified key terms and concepts. In Chapter Two, I provide a comprehensive overview of neoliberal ideologies, the framework that guided this study, followed by a review of the pertinent bodies of knowledge surrounding Asian American realities, the model minority myth, Asian American activism, and activism in postsecondary education. Chapter Three described my rationale for qualitative research and a critical qualitative inquiry approach, how I collected and analyzed data, and the ways I ensured

trustworthiness and quality in my study. I also shared how my positionality and social location shape my approach, the ways I pursue this work, and the commitment I am making to my community to engage in work that honors, amplifies, and protects. In Chapter Four, I present the findings that emerged from data analysis. In Chapter Five, I engage in a discussion around the findings and the contributions this study has made to the broader discourse and scholarship in postsecondary education. Finally, in Chapter Six, I share implications and recommendations for future research, policy, and praxis and conclude with a letter to college and university personnel that was cultivated through discussions with activists in this study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides an overview of current scholarship relevant to understanding how neoliberal systems shape Asian American activist experiences in higher education. First, I outline my conceptual framework to set a foundation for understanding how neoliberalism and racism are intertwined with student activism. Specifically, I discuss how neoliberalism and academic capitalism have permeated and commodified higher education. I then utilize Iftikar's (2017) neoliberal racial projects for college students to deepen the understanding of how racism and neoliberalism are not mutually exclusive, but inextricably intertwined. Next, I discuss Asian American realities and how the racialization of Asian Americans contributes to upholding neoliberal notions and the desire for Asian American students to engage in activism on their college campus. I then review scholarship around Asian American college activism and intersections between activism and neoliberal systems.

Conceptual Framework

Neoliberalism

To guide this study, I utilized neoliberalism as a conceptual framework to critically understand how this ideology shapes the experiences of Asian American student activists in higher education. This section outlines a brief overview of this framework and Connor's (2020) conceptualization of neoactivism.

The neoliberal system was a product of the economic crisis and social justice movements in the 1960s and 1970s (Museus & LePeau, 2019). It transfers capitalistic values to all other aspects of society, including education and politics, and it centers ideas of privatization and a free market to dismantle public spaces and services (Cosgrove & Karter, 2018; Harvey, 2005). More specifically, Lipman (2011) defined neoliberalism as, "an ensemble of economic and social policies, forms of governance, and discourses and ideologies that promote self-interest, unrestricted flows of capital, deep reductions in the cost of labor, and shape retrenchment of the public sphere" (p. 6). In other words, we can think about neoliberalism as both an ideology and an organization of practices and policies (Ferguson, 2017).

Neoliberalism in Higher Education

Neoliberalism is fluid, constantly evolving, and changing depending on contexts and circumstances. People define neoliberalism in varied ways (Museus & LePeau, 2019); yet common elements of neoliberalism have been consistently identified across the literature (Adsit, Doe, Allison, Maggio, & Maisto, 2015; Burford, 2017; Darder 2005; Darder 2005, Davies, 2005, Giroux, 2008; 2011; McChesney, 1998; Morrison, 1993; Muehlebach, 2013). Specifically, Museus and LePeau (2019) outlined some of these core tenets of neoliberalism:

1. *Consumerism* relates to the privatization and commodification of people, actions, and products, whereby their value is determined based on the amount of profit they can create

(Museus & LePeau, 2019). In other words, productivity, and the ability to produce, is equated to individual worth.

2. *Competitive Individualism* outlines the priority of free markets connected to individual competition. Consequently, this reinforces ideas of meritocracy, which perpetuates distorted notions that everyone should act in their own self-interest (Museus & LePeau, 2019).
3. *Surveillance* is a product of both individualism and consumerism where individual agency is illusory because neoliberalism creates systems of surveillance (e.g., policing, accountability systems, etc.) that people continue to uphold neoliberal ideologies (Museus & LePeau, 2019).
4. *Precurity* involves perpetuating conditions where people are in a constant precarious state, where insecurity forces individuals into a mode of competing and fighting in order to survive (Museus & LePeau, 2019).
5. *Declining Morality* suggests that neoliberalism's increased emphasis on profit-making supplants governments and social institutions without accountability for the public good (Giroux, 2002; Museus & LePeau, 2019).

Neoliberalism is prevalent in almost every part of society and continues to be embedded within institutional structures (Museus, 2019). Neoliberalism redistributes resources and wealth upward (to the wealthy) rather than downward (Ferguson, 2017). In a higher education context, neoliberalism also works to negatively redistribute the power and autonomy of faculty, staff, and students into administrative authority (Ferguson, 2017). In the case of student activism, neoliberalism is able to perpetuate this by actively working against progressive student movements on campuses and reallocating social resources often issued by students through sets

of demands as activism tactics (Ferguson, 2017). These types of resources may include funding or additional staff support for spaces like cultural/resource centers that support students in their development of identity, culture, and sense of belonging. From this we can conclude that neoliberalism is not solely related to economic policy and political beliefs, but also redefines relationships between individuals and their institutions (Mirowski, 2009).

Giroux (2014) also outlined the impacts of neoliberalism on higher education institutions, noting that it “attempts to undermine all forms of solidarity capable of challenging market-driven values and social relations” by “eliminating those public spheres where people learn to translate private troubles into public issues” (p. 2). Put simply, neoliberalism works to eliminate any opportunities for students to understand the strengths of collective power that would directly challenge neoliberalism and its core priorities (e.g., surveillance and individualism), making it more difficult for students to push for transformative change through engaging in activism and other public forms of advocacy.

In contrast, neoliberalism has also played a significant role in cultivating social media as a central aspect in people’s lives (Cabrera et al., 2017). For example, people utilize Instagram and Twitter to update people on what they are doing and their accomplishments, which can often perpetuate a false sense of hyper-productivity. For student activists, however, social media can potentially serve as sites of power to cultivate community in online spaces and be utilized as a tool for organizing (e.g., accessibility) (Biddix, 2010; Pasque & Vargas, 2014). At the same time, social media also shapes the potentially counterproductive ways that student activists may engage. For instance, if someone is not actively posting on social media about their work, there is often a perception that they are not “engaged” in the work or within the community. In addition, if an individual or community consistently reposts content from other online creators or

“liking” posts, it can also create a *sense* of engaging in activism, but without actively challenging any organizations of power (e.g., low-risk activism), further complicating the conceptualization of activism (Cabrera et al., 2017). This arguably only perpetuates neoliberal ideologies related to productivity, competitive individualism, and surveillance.

Higher education’s continuation to uphold neoliberal notions can be partially attributed to the external pressures these institutions face to integrate “business-like” models into their institutional culture (Museus & LePeau, 2019). Consequently, in this neoliberal game, individualism is rewarded and encouraged, education is seen as a “product” where students are treated as commodities and consumers, and education is no longer seen as something with inherent value. Instead, education is treated as a commodity that a student must buy for their own personal gain (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

While it is important to recognize there is still a limited understanding of neoliberalism itself in the field of higher education (Museus & LePeau, 2019), it is also noteworthy to recognize that neoliberalism is interlaced with several other forms of systemic oppression, such as white supremacy, settler colonialism, and heteropatriarchy (Goldberg, 2015; Inwood, 2015; van Heerden, 2016; Paperson, 2017; Museus & LePeau, 2019). Neoliberalism reinforces these other forms of violence and oppression in broader society and within higher education institutions. Furthermore, advancing social justice initiatives within higher education becomes more challenging with neoliberalism permeating every aspect of postsecondary education and determining what is considered valid forms of knowledge and action within it (Museus & LePeau, 2019). Neoliberal systems reward institutions that uphold neoliberal agendas leading to higher education continuing to embrace these ideologies that often counter the advancement of social justice initiatives (Darder, 2005) and/or only allow equity to be pursued under neoliberal

conditions, thereby reinforcing these harmful systems that were made to be disrupted, deconstructed, and combated (Museus & LePeau, 2019).

Neoliberalism and the Value of Higher Education

Neoliberalism shapes institutions of higher education and how they operate, but the former is also reinforced through academic capitalism. Academic capitalism can be summarized as “the involvement of colleges and faculty in market-like behaviors,” (Rhoades & Slaughter, 2004, p. 37). These market-like behaviors often relate to the ways that faculty teach, conduct research, and engage in service related to generating and optimizing revenue for the institution (Saunders, 2007). With the generation of revenue at the core of many of these market-like behaviors, higher education becomes framed as a good or service that can be commodified (e.g., education as a service sold to students) (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter, 1998; Slaughter, & Rhoades, 2004). The belief is that for higher education to be considered “valuable,” it must demonstrate how it is a meaningful financial investment for individuals, governments, and society at large (Corces-Zimmerman, 2020).

The framing of higher education institutions and the knowledge they produce as a commodity that is essentially sold to students as well as other college campuses, corporations, and financial sponsors, for their own individual gain reinforces who within these institutions has value (Saunders, 2007; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). This commodification has mostly been discussed in relation to faculty experiences because they are typically seen at the core of driving this commodification of knowledge; however, we are seeing more of this emerge in higher education scholarship currently (Gumport, 2000; Levin et al., 2006; Museus, 2022; Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997; Slaughter, 1998). For example, Museus (2022) shared that, if neoliberal institutions are focused on maximizing revenue for institutional resources, faculty who can generate money from research grants or external funding are viewed as inherently more valuable

to the institution. Thus, other faculty in fields that tend to be more community-centered and student-centered in their pedagogy and praxis (e.g., Ethnic Studies) or may not have similar opportunities to acquire these types of funding are often dismissed by institutions and deemed irrelevant or unimportant to institutional contributions.

Related to this dissertation, this emphasis on commodification has negative implications on the students embedded within these institutions. For instance, there is often pressure placed on faculty to allocate more time on producing exorbitant amounts of research or to prioritize acquisition of funding through grants, contracts, and fellowships (Levin & Aliyeva, 2015; Museus, 2022). Consequently, they might have significantly less time that they can dedicate to engaging with students (e.g., mentoring), teaching the content of classes effectively and intentionally to maximize student learning and growth, and/or pursuing community-based or engaged work that could lead to transformative change within communities and for students (Levin & Aliyeva, 2015; Museus, 2022). This has the potential for lead to the neglect of students. Moreover, faculty who refuse to succumb to these neoliberal pressures to focus on efficiency and revenue generation may find themselves in more precarious positions because they have not obtained the desired research output or been financially productive in the funding they generate for the institution (Levin & Aliyeva, 2015; Museus, 2022). These notions only reinforce neoliberal ideologies of precarity related to competitive individualism (Museus & LePeau, 2019).

One of the driving forces for students to engage in activism is the commodification of education experiences, leading to increasing tuition costs, rising student debt, and decreased access to higher education (Cole & Heinecke, 2020). Moreover, when students do engage in activism work to bring awareness, visibility for marginalized communities, and a fight for justice

to their respective campuses, institutional responses tend to be dismissive, resistant, and lack accountability. Such responses only further reinforce racially oppressive and socially unjust campus climates (Cho, 2018). These realities demonstrate how universities are complicit players who actively engage and perpetuate neoliberal logics. Thus, the complicity of higher education institutions in these neoliberal games impacts how students are able to navigate their campuses and shapes their overall postsecondary educational experiences.

Neoliberalism and Settler Colonialism

It is also essential to briefly discuss the connections between neoliberalism and settler colonialism, given how prevalent both these ideologies continue to be in the broader global context. Much like neoliberalism, settler colonialism is still relatively new within academia, yet the parallels between these two ideologies are irrefutably distinct (Strakosch, 2015). To begin, Lorenzo Veracini and Patrick Wolfe utilized the term “settler colonialism” to discuss pervasive hierarchies of colonialism that shape the present conditions of our society and how these structures can also become ambivalent (e.g., forgotten history) (Strakosch, 2015). The logics of settler colonialism are often rooted by a “logic of elimination” (p. 40) in which colonizers and settlers work to take possession of land and reframe it as an economic and political resource. This thereby contributes to the erasure of Indigenous communities and societies and their deep connection to the land (Strakosch, 2015).

In addition, neoliberalism and settler colonialism are topics often engaged by critical scholars who have a desire to intentionally underscore and challenge structures of power (Strakosch, 2015) that continue to negatively impact communities, especially those who have been historically marginalized and excluded. Consequently, this exudes the underlying theme between the two ideologies of power and (White) supremacy that continue to impede any meaningful societal progress, especially related to ethics, morals, and values (Strakosch, 2015).

Furthermore, neoliberalism and settler colonialism are often thought about as two separate entities within a U.S. context (Strakosch, 2015). Yet, Strakosch (2015) discussed how neoliberalism and settler colonialism are interconnected with one another, in that at the core, both ideologies encompass stealing land and property and emphasize racial hierarchies. Thus, both neoliberalism and settler colonialism embody common themes and impact both Indigenous communities, policy, and well-being and larger global and societal contexts (Strakosch, 2015).

Interconnected with the aforementioned notion of seizing land and property, settler colonialism underscores a pervasive and continuing history related to military occupation. This has contributed to the formation and perpetuation of upholding neoliberal ideologies in both a U.S. and broader societal context because of aspects like regulation (e.g., surveillance) and resource accretion (e.g., consumerism) (Lloyd & Wolfe, 2016). While the focus of this dissertation study does not directly discuss settler colonialism, understanding the interconnections between settler colonialism and neoliberalism can further support our understanding of working to resist these types of organizational structures (Lloyd & Wolfe, 2016), further illuminate other systems of oppression, and challenge scholars to critically (re)consider how we can implement meaningful and sustainable change through expanding our understanding of neoliberalism and its' assemblage to settler colonialism.

Neoliberal Racism

In identifying and recognizing how neoliberalism and race are inextricably intertwined, many scholars have begun to theorize about neoliberal racism. Neoliberal racism refers to how race is either deemed irrelevant or restructured in a colorblind way by perpetuating the notion that race is inconsequential in social contexts and within contemporary society (Davis, 2007; Giroux, 2005). Neoliberal racism also utilizes race in a capitalistic way that ignores racial inequalities within economic contexts and (re)assigns identity-based prejudices to private and

personal sectors (Duggan, 2003) while failing to hold institutional structures (e.g., governments) accountable (Davis, 2007).

Neoliberal racism continues to be perpetuated in higher education contexts. For instance, neoliberal racism has historically embodied a racial colorblindness, that dismisses the importance of acknowledging how racism shapes the experiences and lives of People of Color and the ways that they are able to navigate certain spaces (Davis, 2007). Moreover, society has historically deployed race and categorization to racialize students of color (Omi & Winant, 2014). In thinking about the community of focus for this study, Asian Americans in higher education (along with other communities of color) are racialized in such a way that predetermines how students are perceived and the processes and actions in which they must engage in order to warrant recognition from other students, faculty, staff, and administrators on college campuses (Iftikar, 2017). Specifically, this can be seen through the racialization of Asian Americans as the idyllic neoliberal model minority (Iftikar, 2017) in how they are perceived and treated as individuals who achieve unmatched success through hard work and persistence, while simultaneously ignoring the racial realities encountered by this community (e.g., racism, hypersexualization, etc.). This form of racialization impacts how Asian American students are able to navigate higher education spaces, which will be further explored in this study through a college activism context.

Neoliberal Racial Projects for College Students

Building on the work of other scholars (Hall, 1980; Davis, 2007; Omi & Winant, 2014), Iftikar (2017) invites us to think about how race and neoliberalism do not need to be thought of as separate or a development of a new concept but can instead be understood as intersections that are reorganized through current frameworks (e.g., racial formation theory). Iftikar (2017) emphasizes colorblindness and diversity as two salient neoliberal subprojects. These inform the

broader neoliberal racial project framework, which can be utilized as a foundation to theorize and understand some of the “racial subject positions” (p. 151) that have been generated for college students. The idea of subject positions is particularly essential because it recognizes the positionality and social locations of students in relation to power hierarches, relationships with others, how it informs their identities, and the ways they think and behave (Hall, 1996; Iftikar, 2017). The following subsections discuss the three subject positions outlined by Iftikar (2017): 1) consumer, 2) commodity, and 3) “bad citizen.” It should be noted these are not the only racial project subject positions, rather they were strategically chosen given their notoriety in higher education scholarship surrounding neoliberalism and student experiences (Iftikar, 2017).

Consumer

As discussed in the core tenets outlined by Museus and LePeau (2019), the perception of college students as a consumer rather than a holistic human being is one of the most prominent effects of neoliberalism (Saunders, 2014). As a neoliberal *racial* project, students are still positioned as consumers but in more racialized manners (Iftikar, 2017). A primary example of this dynamic is institutional ambitions for “diversity” (Iftikar, 2017). Institutions take pride in advertising their ability to provide “diverse’ experiences to White students (Berrey, 2011). Consequently, “diversity” becomes a commodity that White students consume (Iftikar, 2017) to become more culturally competent, which in turn, better prepares them for the job market and pursuing graduate and professional education.

Commodity

In relation to White students and the consumer, students of color are often positioned as providers of this diversity (Leong, 2013; Uriciuoli, 1999), thus creating another racial subject position of students of color as commodities (Iftikar, 2017). In a higher education context, the performativity of diversity creates an inherent value in the presumed cultural and racial

differences (Iftikar, 2017). Therefore, students of color (e.g., non-White students) are only valued for their perceived expertise, experiences, and cultural differences that they provide for consumption in the university (Ahmed, 2012; DePouw, 2012; hooks, 1992; Iftikar, 2017; Leong, 2013; Urciuoli, 1999); students of color then become objects for White students to consume (Iftikar, 2017). They are the “walking encyclopedias” that are expected to educate and provide emotional labor for the sake of White people being able to learn; and in the context of the institution, they can be the success and stories of hardship and resilience, a narrative often pushed onto to student athletes and first generation students (to name a few) that they can then promote on the cover of their alumni magazine only amplifying the “prestige” and rankings of the institution (e.g., tokenization). In this way, students of color are objectified as not full students with their own needs and ambitions (Iftikar, 2017), but rather a commodity that the institution can advertise or sell, often without providing any support or compensation to their students of color.

The commodification of exploitation and tokenization aforementioned reinforces Marx’s conceptualization of exchange-value and labor (Felluga, 2011). In this type of capitalistic society, Felluga (2011) explained that “goods are exchanged in a way that directly relates one item to another by consideration of the ‘specific useful and concrete labor’ used to produce the object” (Marx, *Capital* 150). In the context of Iftikar’s (2017) discussion, diversity work is then imagined and something that students of color must provide (Marez, 2023). Consequently, the commodification of students of color tends to make the labor, that the institution benefits from, more ambiguous (Felluga, 2011; Marx, 1990). Thus, we might conclude that students of color are not only engaged in this work, but they are required to do this diversity work, creating a commodification of their labor (Marez, 2023). From this, we can understand how the motives for

higher education to employ this type of diversity and labor commodification is not to resist systemic racism and other types of social inequalities, rather a further perpetuation of these racial and social inequalities under the premise of working to dismantle them (Ferguson, 2017).

Bad Citizen

In the context of higher education, students who do not fit into the consumer mold are framed as the bad citizens of neoliberalism (Soss & Schram, 2011). Iftikar (2017) refers to the bad citizens as students of color who are constantly framed as “deviant or criminal” (p. 152). Although the usage of these words does not occur quite as frequently in today’s racial climate (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Omi & Winant, 2014), this idea has simply become reframed in a way where students of color in higher education are situated as outsiders who do not belong, have a place, or fit the mold of what a college student should be (Iftikar, 2017). This is often seen through how students of color are constantly targeted by campus police for simply existing in these spaces (Minikel-Lacocque, 2012; Museus & Park, 2015; Smith et al., 2007; Solórzano et al., 2000). It can also be seen in the imposter syndrome that students of color often experience when they are made to believe they do not possess intellectual capabilities to be in college, which is reinforced by false assumptions that they were only admitted due to affirmative action or “diversity” requirements (Fries-Britt & Griin, 2007; González, 2002; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Museus & Park, 2015; Solórzano et al., 2000).

In the context of student activism, the “Bad Citizen” is a neoliberal racial project that I anticipate being a salient part of student activist experiences. This subject is what I would refer to as the “troublemakers” and “hell raisers” of the institution; the students that administrators fear the most and are constantly trying to silence and suppress. We see some of these realities perpetuated where students of color who advocate for justice, equity, and inclusive practices in their institutions are framed as problematic, loud, angry, and ungrateful. These dynamics are also

reflected in student activists frequently facing disciplinary actions from administration and ostracization by their peers, faculty, and staff. Yet, when White students engage in the same types of practices they are often labeled as allies and woke and applauded for their efforts of solidarity and cultural competence. These tensions only continuously reinforce the neoliberal systems of oppression and the neoliberal racial projects outlined by Iftikar (2017).

Critical Perspectives of Asian American Realities

Asian American students in higher education are simultaneously a hyper visible and invisible community of students on college and university campuses (Museus, 2014). Many Asian Americans students are working to matriculate, persist, and obtain a college degree (Museus, 2014). At the same time, problematic misconceptions continue to contribute to the ongoing exclusion of Asian Americans in higher education research, policy, and practice discourse (Buena Vista et al., 2009; Museus 2009; Museus, 2014). Moreover, in scholarship that discusses People of Color (POC), Asian American students often find themselves absent from this literature or completely disregarded as POC, reinforcing hegemonic narratives that Asian American students do not need resources or support (Museus, 2014). It is for these reasons that Chang (2008) asserted that Asian Americans could arguably be one of the most misunderstood student communities in higher education. Furthermore, scholars that intentionally work to amplify the voices and truths of Asian American experiences continue to encounter resistance and are forced to justify why research on Asian American communities is relevant and needed in the field of higher education (Museus, 2009).

In the following sections, I delineate some of the racial and racialized realities of Asian American communities and Asian American student activists. I begin by providing a brief historical context of the model minority myth before discussing how this stereotype has been previously and is now currently discussed within higher education discourse. I then bring these

ideas together in conversation with neoliberalism to deepen our perspective of Asian American student experiences in postsecondary education. This foundation will provide in-depth understanding of the relationship of these contexts to student activism in higher education. I continue the conversation of Asian American realities by sharing the rich history of Asian American activism and how this legacy has continued in present day. Finally, I identify the ways scholars engage with and discuss Asian American activism, which has ultimately created a foundation for the work of this dissertation to build upon.

Model Minority Myth

A growing body of scholarship (which ultimately informs practice and policy) around Asian American experiences counters and actively refuses misconceptions of their realities and pushes towards a more authentic understanding of their experiences in postsecondary education (Museus, 2014). Among the realities discussed, one of the most prevalent is the racialization of Asian American students, specifically related to the model minority myth. Rooted in White supremacy, the model minority myth remains one of the most common fallacies about Asian Americans and suggests that they are a monolithic group that attains incomparable and universal academic success (Buenavista, 2009; Museus, 2009, 2011; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 2002). The myth also discounts how racism impacts Asian American communities (Museus, 2021).

Historical Context

Throughout history, anti-Asian racism has been prevalent in U.S. society. Beginning in the 19th century with Black and Chinese railroad workers, Chinese workers were praised for their work ethic, which only reinforced notions of anti-Blackness and pitted these racial groups against each other. Intertwined in these historical realities was also the forever foreigner myth

that stereotyped Asian Americans are perpetual foreigners who are unwanted in the United States and labeled as undesirable (An, 2016; Tuan, 1999; Museus & Park, 2015). These racist perspectives led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that banned Chinese immigrants from entering the U.S. and the Gentlemen's Agreement Act of 1917, which prohibited Japanese immigrants from immigrating to this nation (Lowe, 1996; Museus, 2021; Takaki, 1998). This racialized image of Asian Americans ultimately contributed to the widespread fear and mistrust of all Japanese immigrants during World War II, eventually leading to their incarceration in the 1940s (Yi & Museus, 2015; Museus, 2021). It was during this time that Japanese Americans also encountered absorbent amounts of pressure to serve as "model citizens" and assimilate into American society as a way to try and reduce the racism their communities were experiencing (Yi & Museus, 2015). Coupled with stereotypes that all Asian students are Chinese internationals (e.g., forever foreigners), this type of assimilation would continue to shape the students' experiences and their exclusion in certain postsecondary education spaces in the years that followed.

The 1960s was a pivotal point in the formation of a "new" Asian America. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act contributed to the United States' immigration policy and guided in Asian immigrants from new generations (Lee, 2015). The passage of this act has been influential in the growth of Asian American communities in the U.S. For instance, the arrival of transracial/transnational adoptees (Park Nelson, 2016) and Southeast Asian refugees (Lee, 2015) have not only increased the presence of Asian American communities through immigration policies in the United States, but also contributed to the diversification, multiculturalism, and transnationalism of this racial group in present day (Lee, 2015). Yet, misconceptions of Asian

Americans continue to obscure the realities and violence that Asian American communities have always encountered and continued to face in present day.

The model minority myth reemerged during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, during a time of increasing opposition to racism, prejudice, and discrimination throughout society (Lee, 1996; Osajima, 1987; Suzuki, 2002). The stereotype was continuously utilized by conservatives to weaponize and oversimplify notions of Asian American success and negate the role of structural racism in perpetuating economic and educational inequalities encountered by other people of color (Museus, 2021). This myth was also created to dismiss the legitimacy of the Civil Rights Movement by reinforcing notions of meritocracy and the widely held belief that those who work diligently can achieve the American dream (e.g., as Asians had purportedly done) and simultaneously placing blame for the “failures” of other historically excluded communities (e.g., Blacks and Latino/a/x) on them. Such perspectives minimized the need to critically interrogate the systemic racial and socioeconomic inequalities that continue to permeate society (Osajima, 1987; Museus et al., 2021). The link between the myth and meritocratic colorblindness was clearly demonstrated in a 1966 New York Times article titled “Success Story, Japanese American Style” (Pettersen, 1966). This article praised the achievements of Japanese Americans who were once problematized within the U.S. but rose above racial injustices and discrimination to embody the ultimate American Dream story (Yi & Museus, 2015).

These historical events suggest that Asian Americans have been exploited to ignore racial inequalities while simultaneously placing the burden on other communities of color, reinforcing notions of White Supremacy or the belief that White Americans are exceptional compared to other racial communities (Museus et al., 2021; Yi et al., 2021). The model minority myth also only amplifies racialization and underscores the magnitude in which historically excluded racial

communities' histories and realities are intertwined with one another (Museus, 2021). Moreover, the myth is utilized to maintain a racial hierarchy (e.g., with White Americans at the top) (Yi & Museus, 2015) and continues to permeate media and societal perceptions in the present day (Museus 2013; Yi et al., 2020).

Model Minority Myth in the Lives of Asian American College Students

The model minority myth continues to (negatively) impact the lives of Asian American students in postsecondary education contexts (Lewis et al., 2000; Museus, 2008a; 2013a; Museus & Kiang, 2009). Although often perceived as being “harmless” or even framed as positive or a compliment the stereotype essentializes Asian Americans and supports notions of meritocracy that lead to racial discrimination of other racial/ethnic communities as discussed above (Museus & Kiang, 2009). The myth also can have ramifications for individual Asian Americans (Museus & Kiang, 2009). For instance, scholars have underscored how Asian American students often feel forced to conform to the excessive and unrealistic expectations of perfection that the myth perpetuates (Chan and Hune, 1995; Chou and Feagin, 2008; Lewis et al., 2000), which can contribute to excessive stress that can hinder their ability and desire to engage in the fluid process of learning (Museus, 2008).

Furthermore, the model minority myth contributes to the exclusion of Asian Americans from university and college campus policies and programs in multiple ways (Museus & Park, 2015. p. 554). For instance, Asian American students may not receive resources to support their student development and sense of belonging on college campuses (e.g., cultural centers, mental health resources) because of how the stereotype reinforces the false belief that they do not need additional resources or support to be “successful” in college (Museus, 2014). Additionally, the model minority myth also perpetuates the exclusion Asian American communities by implying that they do not encounter racial discrimination, masking the suffering that Asian American

students experience (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). This only further justifies the need for critical discourse around this racialization (Lee, 2006; Museus, 2014; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ngo, 2006) and underscores why scholars in postsecondary education have and continue to engage in scholarship that counters misconceptions of the model minority myth that unpacks the nuances and complexities of understanding of Asian American student experiences.

We can see the prominence of the model minority myth in Asian American higher education discourse through the quantity of scholarship that has intentionally centered this topic. A review scholarship done by Poon et al. (2016) showed that there are over 112 research articles that engaged work on Asian Americans in higher education, many of which related to or intentionally discussed the model minority myth. Among the articles that have been discussed, Yi et al. (2021) noted that several articles focus on how the myth is harmful, rooted in a systemic racial issues that negatively impact Asian American communities (e.g., Museus et al., 2012; Ng et al., 2007; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Suzuki, 2002; Teranishi, 2010; Wing, 2007). These articles have problematized the myth that ultimately excluded Asian Americans from conversations around research, policy, and practice (Yi et al., 2021). At the core of this research, scholars have pushed towards a more critical understanding of the myth beyond this idea of “unparalleled academic success” (Yi et al., 2021, p. 542) which continues to inform research, policy, and practices that intentionally support Asian American students (Hartlep, 2013; Inkelas, 2006; Kwon, 2009; Lee & Kumashiro, 2005; Nadal et al., 2010; Ng et al., 2007; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Suyemoto et al., 2009; Suzuki, 1977; Suzuki 2002).

Several scholars have disaggregated Asian American ethnic groups to focus on those who are often disregarded in the Asian American diaspora (e.g., Southeast Asians) to critically understand their unique educational experiences (e.g., Cambodian, Filipino, Vietnamese, etc.)

(Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Museus, 2013; Nadal et al., 2010; Ngo, 2007; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Uy, 2015; Vue, 2013; Xiong & Wood, 2016). Yi et al. (2021) discussed how the work of these scholars underscored the unique challenges that Southeast Asian Americans communities encounter related to higher education access, degree completion, and the job market.

Disaggregating Asian Americans ethnic groups to intentionally acknowledge the significant discrepancies between Asian Americans ethnic groups (e.g., Southeast Asians and East Asians) not only illuminates the experiences of marginalized Asian American communities that are often framed as inferior to East Asian Americans, but may also invite Asian American scholars to dream of more inclusive ways of understanding the racialization of Asian American communities and consider the racial realities of all Asian American communities (Yi et al., 2021). It is also noted by the aforementioned scholars that it is important that educators do not perpetuate the harm of the model minority myth, but instead challenge it so this type of individual and racial systemic violence is not continuously replicated.

Lastly, scholars have begun building a foundation for utilizing the model minority myth to critically examine other issues and topics in higher education, such as the debate on affirmative action (Guzman, 1998; Museus et al., 2019). Asian Americans have been at the core of these types of debates, with anti-affirmative action individuals and groups framing Asian Americans as “overachievers” who are victims of affirmative action (Museus et al., 2019). In other words, affirmative action negatively impacts Asian American students in the college admissions process--a false assumption that has been debunked by several Asian American scholars (Museus et al., 2019; Poon et al., 2019). This type of framing has only perpetuated stereotypes surrounding the model minority myth and negatively impacted communities of color when it comes to race-conscious admission processes.

Neoliberalism and the Model Minority Myth in Higher Education Contexts

The current scholarship on the model minority myth enables us to complicate conversations around American experiences and the impact the myth has on them. We also see how the model minority myth has been weaponized by groups that either misunderstand the myth or choose to ignore the false realities and project harmful narratives onto Asian American communities. Moreover, the foundation of scholarship demonstrates just how conversations are evolving in understanding the pervasiveness of the myth in postsecondary educational contexts. As I think about the model minority myth in the context of my own work, I noticed how a majority of the literature reviewed did not explicitly discuss neoliberalism or did not use it as a guiding framework to critically understand the implications of the model minority myth on Asian American student experiences. I want to be explicit in stating this is not a critique of their work, as neoliberalism in the recent years has noticeably become a more prominent topic of discussion in the field of higher education and conversations that engaged a neoliberal framework were not as prevalent prior to 2015; rather, this is an observation and appreciation for the groundwork created by these scholars that has positioned me in such a manner that I am able to build off this work to critically understand the relationships of the model minority myth and neoliberalism.

With these aspects in mind, it is apparent from the common themes seen throughout the literature on the model minority myth that a majority of scholars have similar understandings and approaches in (re)framing the myth. In extending the work of these scholars to underscore the connection between neoliberalism and the model minority myth, I utilized Museus and Kiang's (2009) discussion around the five misconceptions of the model minority myth: 1) Asian Americans are a monolithic group, 2) Asian Americans are not considered racial and ethnic minorities, 3) Being racially Asian (American) means they do not encounter any significant

challenges, 4) Asian Americans do not need resources or support, and 5) Earning a college degree is equated to success.

Misconception 1: Asian Americans are A Monolith. Conversations around Asian American student success in higher education typically involve oversimplified and generalized statements of high levels of degree attainment (Museus & Kiang, 2009). The aggregation of Asian American data continuously reinforces notions that all Asian Americans have the same experience and ignore realities that various Asian American ethnic groups have unique and specific challenges, often related to social contexts like their socioeconomic status and family circumstances (Museus & Kiang, 2009). Institutions continue to fail to adequately disaggregate data and instead often aggregate all 50 Asian American ethnic groups, as well as Asian (international) and Asian American students, into one group (Museus & Kiang, 2009). Such practices misconstrue the data and how we understand the communities we are serving, but further perpetuates violence in assuming all Asian American students have the same experiences (Buenavista, 2009; Yi et al., 2021).

Misconception 2: Asian Americans Are Not Considered Racially or Ethnically Marginalized. Related to the first misconception, although Asian Americans are a historically excluded community, they are often not perceived as an “underrepresented racial/ethnic minority” (Museus & Kiang, 2008, p. 8) often resulting from White Supremacy. (Leonardo 2004; Mills 1997; Chen & Buell, 2017). As a result, they are often viewed as “the new whites” or “almost white) (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Museus & Kiang, 2009, p. 8). Yet, Asian Americans continuously report incidences of racism and racial discrimination, while simultaneously feeling pressured to conform to the model minority (myth) status pushed onto them by other groups and individuals at predominantly white institutions (Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Lewis et al., 2000;

Museus, 2007, 2008). While different, these experiences parallel experiences that other historically and racially excluded communities report experiencing (e.g., Black, Latino/a/x, and Native American students) (Allen, 1992; Feagin et al., 1996; Fries-Britt and Turner, 2002; Gonzalez, 2003; Hurtado, 1992; Lewis et al., 2000; Museus, 2008).

The practice of categorizing Asian Americans into one essentialized group and ignoring their racial realities by classifying them as a type of “honorary white” is a form of systemic oppression (e.g., White Supremacy) that is interwoven with neoliberal ideologies as previously discussed by Museus and LePeau (2019). White Supremacy is a form of systemic racism that contributes to racialization processes that aggregate communities into one category and labels them as a monolithic group with essential characteristics that are inferior to that of the White majority (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; (Museus, 2014; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 2002; Teranishi, 2010). This process connects directly to Museus and Kiang’s (2009) discussion around the misconception that Asian Americans are one group whose experiences can be generalized and oversimplified, and only serves to reinforce White Supremacy in the ways Asian Americans are racialized and how their experiences are ultimately (mis)understood (Iftikar & Museus, 2018)

Misconception 3: Asian Americans Do Not Experience Racial Barriers or Hardships.

Building off the second misconception, many scholars and practitioners in the field of higher education completely dismiss and do not care to acknowledge that Asian American students also encounter barriers that are challenging and important to address (Museus & Kiang, 2009).

Ignoring the experiences of Asian American students and characterizing them as a community that does not experience any sort of discrimination can perpetuate the neoliberal ideologies of competition and surveillance.

Related to competition, this myth emphasizes ideas of meritocracy ultimately leading people to believe they need to act in their own self-interest (Museus & LePeau, 2019) rather than understanding that at the root of this systemic racism and White Supremacy doing exactly what it was intended to do (e.g., maintain the status quo). It pushes for the idea of individualistic ideologies rather than collectively working to counter systemic oppression. Because of this type of individualism and competition, surveillance also becomes a tactic employed by both individuals and communities (Museus & LePeau, 2019). For instance, communities may try to police each other's behavior and responses and deem what is relevant and what is not when it comes to issues of race and racism (e.g., a type of "Oppression Olympics"). This type of policing can reinforce neoliberal values of hyper-surveillance and hyper-competition (Museus & LePeau, 2019). It should be noted that addressing the difficulties Asian Americans experience in higher education does not mean the realities of other racial/ethnic groups of students are irrelevant or unimportant (Museus & Kiang, 2009), rather, multiple truths and realities for different groups of students can co-exist simultaneously and combatting all forms of racial violence is necessary to advance collective liberation.

Misconception 4: Asian Americans Do Not Pursue or Need Resources and Support.

Related to the second and third misconceptions, the refusal to acknowledge the challenges Asian Americans encounter and making false assumptions that lead many higher education leaders into believing that Asian American students do not seek, nor do they need resources and additional support perpetuates the cycle of harm they experience (Museus & Kiang, 2009). The other side of this notion is the attitude often seen in student affairs that "if we offer it, they will come" (p. 10), which is also an inaccurate belief. Cultural and familial factors contribute significantly to how Asian American students choose (or not choose) to seek out additional resources and

support when they need it. There is also empirical evidence that shows Asian American college students, in comparison to their peers, are less likely to try and find support or resources (Uba, 1994; Zhang et al., 1998). Instead, most use what Museus and Kiang (2009) refer to as “avoidant coping strategies” (p. 10) to work through their own challenges silently and individually (Chang, 1996; Jung, 1995). This demonstrates how it is even more crucial for higher education and student affairs leaders to understand that Asian Americans not utilizing support and resources does not necessarily mean they do not need, require, or want them (Museus & Kiang, 2009).

This belief that Asian Americans do not seek or need resources and support may lead Asian Americans into a state of precarity. In this, they may experience feelings of insecurity through a fear of not performing to expectations placed upon them by misconceptions of the model minority myth in how they should behave, act, and what they should be achieving (Darder & Griffiths, 2016; Na et al., 2021; Osei-Kofi, 2012). This can show up in a variety of ways such as with academic productivity (e.g., being a well-rounded student), keeping an appearance of success (e.g., earning straight A’s), and finding external funding support to supplement cost and/or ideas of “success” (e.g., scholarships and fellowships) (Na et al., 2021). Consequently, it forces Asian American students into a mode of fighting in order to survive the pressures of the institution (Museus & LePeau, 2019) and ultimately may discourage Asian American students to reach out for support because of the socialized ideas of failure and success reinforced by the model minority myth.

Misconception 5: Earning a College Degree Equates to Success. It is known that many students choose to pursue a college degree because of the financial benefits that are assumed to come with obtaining a higher education degree (Museus & Kiang, 2009). Yet this generalized statement often ignores the racial components for many communities of students, including

Asian Americans (Museus & Kiang, 2009). For instance, Museus & Kiang (2009) discussed how several studies found that Asian Americans with the same level of education still earn a lower salary and are less likely to be in a managerial position (often referred to as the bamboo ceiling) compared to their non-Asian peers (Duleep and Sanders, 1992; Wong & Nagasawa, 1991; O'Hare & Felt, 1991; Woo, 1994). It is important to note naming this reality is again, to not pit other groups against each other or ignore the realities other communities of color are encountering in these scenarios, rather it further underscores how the perceptions that many people hold about Asian American experiences are inaccurate.

Museus & Kiang (2009) also discussed how researchers and educators in higher education have a responsibility and commitment to understand the needs and issues that Asian American students encounter so they can better prepare students to understand achieve equity when they pursue jobs outside of their higher education studies. By assuming that Asian Americans will automatically achieve financial stability simply by earning a college degree erases their experiences and realities workplace racial inequities (Museus & Kiang, 2009). By ignoring these aspects all together and encouraging Asian American students to pursue a college degree without any context and supporting them to understand all aspects of the higher education experience feeds into ideas of consumerism and a declining morality. There is a hegemonic narrative that if Asian American students earn a college degree, that automatically equates to success. This continuously pushes Asian Americans into institutions of higher education that see them as nothing more than a consumer (e.g., customer of education) that they can generate a profit from (e.g., tuition) (Museus & LePeau, 2019; Na et al., 2021). Moreover, it can reinforce dangerous narratives that their productivity and their ability to produce (e.g., earn a degree) is

equated to their individual worth (Museus & LePeau, 2019) which in turn, can be connected to aspects like opportunities and institutional support.

Finally, a declining morality combines all aspects of neoliberalism (i.e., consumerism, individualism, surveillance, and precarity) to emphasize this idea of profit making only further in relation to viewing and treating students as consumers of a public good (Museus & LePeau, 2019). Additionally, it relieves institutions of higher education from being accountable from any of their actions (Museus & LePeau, 2019) that may be linked to how they respond to racism, racial biases, and discrimination and further perpetuate the model minority myth.

Previous and recent scholarship surrounding the model minority myth have continuously encouraged critical conversations around challenging this type of systemic racial oppression. Moreover, they demonstrate just how much these conversations surrounding the model minority myth have developed over time. Because of the work that other scholars engaged in (prior to 2015), we now are afforded opportunities to engage in these types of critical conversations as demonstrated by Poon et al. (2016), Yi et al. (2020), and the discussion above. These conversations now pieces now join the contributions of other scholars surrounding how we think about, understand, and approach our work with the model minority myth. Their work, in combination with Asian American scholars before them, will immensely contribute to the ways I am able not only able engage in this work for this dissertation study, but how I will be intentional in choosing my approach to this work with both care and optimism for a transformative future in postsecondary education.

Early Asian American Activism

The model minority myth also contributes to the perception that Asian Americans are docile, and submissive, and “apolitical.” However, not only do Asian Americans have a

longstanding history of engaging in social and political movements and activism, but their communities' histories are also inextricably intertwined with those of other historically excluded communities (Lee, 2015). The 1950s and 1960s was a pivotal time in the rise of Asian America. Asian American activists began advocating for equality and working across racial lines during the post-World War II era (Lee, 2015). For instance, Japanese Americans and African Americans united to challenge the Whites-only rule in Los Angeles neighborhoods (Lee, 2015). This type of interethnic alliance supported the push for the city's civil rights agenda and set an important foundation or interracial activism that we would continue to see in the later years (Lee, 2015).

The momentum of these movements continued to build throughout the 1960s and 1970s with a new generation of Asian American activists building off previous activists' work to challenge racism and structural inequalities (Lee, 2015). These "new" activists were intertwined within broader social justice movements that changed how American society and politics engaged with specific Asian American issues and causes (Lee, 2015). Herein, I discuss three distinct examples of Asian American activists who got their start within the African American Civil rights Movements or Farmworkers' Movement (Lee, 2015) and continue to influence how Asian American communities continue to engage in social justice activism.

First, Yuri Kochiyama, who was born to Japanese immigrants in 1921, was incarcerated along with other Japanese Americans at a camp in Jerome, Arkansas (Lee, 2015). Following the end of the war, Kochiyama moved to California and continued to experience anti-Japanese sentiments and soon after moved to New York City where her interests in social and political movements began to develop (Lee, 2015). In New York, she met Daisy Bates, the NAACP Little Rock chapter president at the time who was a key leader in the fight to desegregate schools (Lee, 2015). It was after Kochiyama met Bates that she became significantly involved in the Civil

Rights Movement (Lee, 2015). This new awareness of the oppression other communities of color encountered informed her desire to fight for her community's own civil rights as well (Lee, 2015). Kochiyama became a community organizer that worked closely with Malcom X, which historically and socially, was a significant contributor to connecting Asian American movements on the East Coast to the ongoing Civil Rights movement for the Black community (Lee, 2015). Kochiyama went on to engage in several efforts, including protesting against U.S. imperialism in Asia, supporting the fight for ethnic studies in New York City schools, working to free political prisoners, and preventing racial profiling after September 11, 2001 (Lee, 2015).

Next, Philip Vera Cruz was part of the first group of Filipinos who immigrated to the U.S. in the early twentieth century (Lee, 2015). Cruz spent nearly three decades working on farms, canneries, and in restaurants before moving to California in the 1950s. Here, he engaged in the 1965 Filipino Labor Movement and helped organize the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee through multiple strikes and boycotts related to the grape industry (Lee, 2015). These movements led to the creation the United Farm Workers (UFW), which contributed to cross racial solidarity with Filipino and Mexican farmworkers. Under Chicano leader César Chavez, Vera Cruz served as the Vice President of UFW until 1977 (Lee, 2015). Vera Cruz continued his commitment to democracy and solidarity through educating and supporting the new generation of activists, as well as promoting and encouraging a critical understanding of grassroots organization and rights of the working class (Lee, 2015).

Lastly, Grace Lee Boggs, who was born to Chinese immigrants, began engaging in social and political movements in the 1960s (Lee, 2015). Unable to find a job in academia after earning her PhD, she moved to Chicago where she participated in African American civil rights activism with C.L.R James, a West Indian Marxist (Lee, 2015). A. Philip Randolph's push for fair hiring

practices in the American defense plants in the 1940s contributed to Boggs becoming passionate about African Americans' fight for civil rights (Lee, 2015). Later, she married African American activist, James Boggs, and they moved to Detroit and together and were key activists in several social movements or what Boggs referred to as "humanizing movements" (Lee, 2015, p. XX). These humanizing movements in the late twentieth century revolved around civil rights, Black Power, labor issues, women's rights, antiwar campaigns, environmental issues, and Asian American rights (Lee, 2015).

Kochiyama, Vera Cruz, and Boggs advocated rejecting the Oriental label, including the model minority myth (Lee, 2015). They underscored how Asian Americans are a part of panethnic identity and worked intentionally for interracial solidarity, coalition building, and transnationalism to work for "radical social change" (Lee, 2015, p. 304). The goal was to work to end oppression in the United States that would ultimately give Asian Americans visibility, belonging, and a voice in American politics (Lee, 2015).

A Continued Legacy of Activism

These three activists and their civil rights work were part of a larger community of Asian Americans that became involved with other radical movements, such as women's liberation and gay liberation movements (Lee, 2015). Similar to other women activists engaged in civil rights movements, Asian American women were often invisible in Asian American organizations (Lee, 2015). They were given background roles like typing leaflets and newsletters, taking notes, making coffee, and even cleaning toilets, while Asian American men led organizations in more visible capacities through making decisions, giving speeches, and being the "face" of the organization (Lee, 2015). Frustrated by their "triple oppression" of being part of an historically excluded racial community, women, and workers (Lee, 2015, p. 39), Asian American women

began to work to create change from within their communities. Soon, groups such as Asian Women United and the Organization of Asian Women emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s. They were led mainly by educated, middle class women (i.e., Unsuk Perry and Chang Jok Lee) who committed themselves to women's rights through education and service (Lee, 2015).

Asian American LGBT activism also emerged from social justice movements. LGBT Asian Americans felt specifically excluded from White mainstream LGBT organizations (Lee, 2015). Moreover, other movements that centered liberation were often dismissive of LGBT issues or even homophobic (Lee, 2015). One of the most significant examples of this reality was in 1970 when Helen Zia was put on trial in Boston by other members of the Asian American community and Black liberation activists (Lee, 2015). Zia was told there was “no place for gays” (p. 310) in these types of liberation movements and, even though Zia had not formally identified with the LGBT community, it was clear that doing so would lead the liberation community to force her out (Lee, 2015). By the early twenty-first century, the Asian American LGBT community was no longer considered at the margins of the broader Asian American community, but instead seen as growing and visible (Lee, 2015). Community organizers worked through an intersectional approach to bring awareness and acceptance to both Asian American and LGBT communities (Lee, 2015). Furthermore, Asian American communities and organizations contributed to same sex marriage debates in the states and ultimately Zia, along with her partner, became one of the first same sex couples to be legally married in the state of California (Lee, 2015).

Today, the fight for civil, social, and political rights continues in the United States. Most recently during the COVID-19 pandemic, reports that the virus originated in China and blame being placed on Chinese people for the cause of this global pandemic has been associated with

an increase of visible physical violence and harassment towards Asians both nationally and internationally (Museus, 2021). Consequently, initiatives have sought to protect Asian elders and movements have emerged on social media through the hashtag #StopAsianHate. Many Asian Americans have also advocated for affirmative action in college admissions and combatted misconceptions of this controversial topic (Museus et al., 2019).

Asian American individuals and communities have also continued the legacy of activism seen during the civil rights era with community organizations forming that specifically center issues that impact Asian American communities (Museus, 2021). Organizations such as Asian Americans Advancing Justice have continued the fight for civil rights broadly, while other subgroups are advancing specific causes. For example, Asian Pacific Environmental Network supports communities that are impacted by the toxic waste sites in the San Francisco Bay Area, the Southeast Asian Resource Action Center (SEARAC) advocates for Southeast Asian American refugee communities and the unique challenges and inequalities they face, and Adoptees for Justice continues their fight for citizenship for all international adoptees adopted into families in the United States (Adoptees for Justice, 2022) all emphasize activism for environmental, educational, and political injustices (Museus, 2021)

Despite misconceptions and hegemonic notions that Asian Americans are apolitical, the historical context discussed above demonstrates how Asian Americans have always been a part of interracial coalitions and cross racial solidarity building in some of the most significant social and political movements in United States history (Museus, 2021). We cannot continue to ignore the realities that the histories and lived experiences of different racial groups are interconnected. Grace Lee Boggs articulated her unwavering belief in the power of ideas and the need for organizing to build a twenty-first century America in that “people of all races and ethnicities live

together in harmony” (Lee, 2015, p. 303). Only by acknowledging these realities and recognizing Asian American communities and individual activists as significant contributors in activist history and the fight for civil rights can new advocates continue to build off the legacy and work of the activists before them.

Student Activism in Higher Education

In this section, I first provide a brief overview of some of the historical context surrounding Asian American college student activism. Given limited amount of scholarship at this time surrounding Asian American experiences specifically, I then move into a broader discussion around undergraduate student activism and the common themes noted in current scholarship, utilizing neoliberalism as a lens to interpret this research and understand activists’ experiences.

Establishment of Ethnic Studies Programs

Asian Americans were involved in the 1968 student strike at San Francisco State University (SFSU) (formerly known as San Francisco State College) (Gerson & Lin, 1997). Collectively with the Latino/a/x students, they formed the Third World Liberation Front that supported Black students in their fight for a Black Studies Department and better admissions practices for students of color (Gerson & Lin, 1997). This strike was partially initiated by the anti-war sentiments during the peak of the Vietnam War, which reinforced anti-Asian sentiments, and the release of Professor George Murray who was deemed “controversial” because of his criticality towards institutional policies and affiliation with the Black Panther Party (Gerson & Lin, 1997). The strike lasted four months and ended with the creation of the United States’ first School of Ethnic Studies (Gerson & Lin, 1997).

The actions of Asian American, Latino/a/x, and Black students continued to inspire the creation of similar programs at neighboring California institutions (partially out of administration's fear for the same type of actions that SFSU encountered) (Gerson & Lin, 1997). The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) created research centers for Black, Chicano, Asian American, and Native American studies programs on their campus and the University of California, Berkeley, at this point in time, created the nation's only Ethnic Studies PhD program. (Gerson & Lin, 1997).

The presence of student activism continued to persist across the country through the 1970s. In 1971, students occupied the Asian Studies building at City College of New York (CCNY) which led to the formation of an Asian American Studies program within Asian Studies (Gerson & Lin, 1997). A similar program was then formed at Cornell University in the late 1980s, followed by an Asian American Research Center created at Queens College of the City University of New York (Gerson & Lin, 1997). As Asian American Studies (AAS) programs began to become more prominent within colleges and universities, student activists saw this as an opportunity to continue defending these programs as a way of achieving social change within the institutions themselves (Gerson & Lin, 1997). Gerson and Lin (1997) discussed how student activists saw AAS as a means for understanding collective histories and culture, while simultaneously strengthening identity and pride in order to challenge institutional racism (Wei, 1993). Much of the effort of these activists are the reason we have seen increases in initiatives to recruit diverse faculty members and incorporate diversity and racial equity components in core curriculum in higher education (Gerson & Lin, 1997; Ryoo & Ho, 2013; Umemoto, 1989). Additionally, out of these fights for more just practices in higher education, Asian American students have been leaders in the establishment of Asian American student organizations on

college campuses and subgroups in ethnic studies (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Kiang, 2002; Museus, 2008; Museus et al., 2016; Vue, 2013).

Asian American Movement

The late 1970s continued to spark student activism, which brought forth the Asian American movement in higher education (Gerson & Lin, 1997). Asian Americans worked collectively with other communities of color to advance their respective activist agendas, while drawing inspiration from Black Power ideology (Nguyen & Gasman, 2015). As public perceptions continued to be shaped by anti-Asian sentiments, the model minority myth contributed to many of these misconceptions and erasing the challenges Asian Americans encountered, while also using it as a justification to continue racist sentiments towards Black Americans (Nguyen & Gasman, 2015). However, participating in the Asian American Movement was an opportunity to challenge false narratives of universal success and reframe approaches to solidarity (Nguyen & Gasman, 2015). The movement enabled Asian Americans to redefine their truths and identities, as well as their relationships with other groups, that were caused by the model minority myth because of the prominence of solidarity throughout communities of color as they recognized a shared oppression and accepting their authentic selves (Nguyen & Gasman, 2015).

The energy from the Black Power Movement continued to influence the ways Asian American activists developed a type of racial identity consciousness related to false ideologies of model minority myth (Nguyen & Gasman, 2015). Asian Americans began to challenge their positionality in the racial hierarchy (e.g., Asians tokenized as a success story) and interrogated their relationship and perceptions of their own liberation in the United States (Nguyen & Gasman, 2015). In addition, the “Black is Beautiful” cultural movement encouraged Asian

Americans to be proud of their physical features and cultural traditions, one form of self-validation that the model minority myth encouraged these communities to suppress (Nguyen & Gasman, 2015). It is through the Asian American Movement that Asian Americans continued to fight racial inequality and demanding fair representation, which we have seen through the Civil Rights Movement (Nguyen & Gasman 2015). Moreover, Asian American students, who once struggled to find their place in the “Black-White Struggle” (Nguyen & Gasman, 2015, p. 343) were empowered to actively participate in these monumental student movements that continued to inspire the work of Asian American activists in the years to follow. In present day, Asian Americans continue to engage in college activism around Black Lives Matter, Stop AAPI Hate, and the University of California COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment) demonstration and march (UC Davis Library).

Rooted in Solidarity

Although not explicitly mentioned, the actions of these activists demonstrated a clear resistance of neoliberal ideologies that have persisted in higher education institutions from the moment they came into existence. Neoliberalism also attempts to retain power within administrative and authoritative figures in higher education, while simultaneously keeping faculty, staff, and students’ abilities for independence and self-sufficiency suppressed (Ferguson, 2017). Student activism and tactics employed by these students (e.g., strikes) directly contest these power structures by redefining relationships between student activists and their institutions (Mirowski, 2009). For instance, the creation of the Third World Liberation Front underscored the resistance to a type of competitive individualism that neoliberalism prescribes for individuals to act in their own self-interest (Museus & LePeau, 2019). Through the creation of this coalition, and although the fight for a Black Studies Department was not overtly related to Asian American

communities, both Asian American and Latino/a/x students saw this as an opportunity to draw on solidarity as collective power and stand in unity with Black students in their fight for justice and equity, which ultimately benefited all communities in the creation of several Ethnic Studies programs.

In addition, neoliberalism actively works to weaken any form of solidarity that might risk these institutional structures from being challenged (Giroux, 2014). Asian Americans' engagement in critical self-reflexivity and coming into their own racial consciousness (e.g., self-awareness) is a powerful tool that neoliberalism actively works to discourage. They were able to interrogate and begin to understand their relationships to the structures intended to keep them oppressed that ultimately established a type of empathy and cross-racial solidarity and established a critical foundation for the ways Asian American activists would continue this work and engagement in the years to come.

Advancing the Movement

Given the focus on this dissertation, this section of the literature review focuses on current themes identified through a review of Asian American undergraduate student activism. In doing so, it builds off the previous conversation around the rise of Asian American activism and adds an additional nuanced layer to understanding Asian American student activist experiences. It honors and celebrates the work of scholars that have continued to write the legacy of Asian American activists into existence, while making connections to how their work created the groundwork for me to be positioned in such a way that I am able add to the existing conversations surrounding activism literature in higher education.

A review of Asian American student activism literature revealed a limited number of articles within the field of higher education that specifically discussed Asian American student

experiences with activism and advocacy work on college campuses. It is noted that there is a decent quantity of literature outside of higher education and student affairs discourse that directly discusses Asian American activism (e.g., history, sociology, and ethnic studies). Much of this literature did not specifically discuss Asian American activism in a higher education context or was not directly related to undergraduate student experiences; however, it provided valuable insight into historical contexts and foundational elements for understanding the nuances and complexities of Asian American activism discussed above.

Within the context of higher education, Asian American activism includes students engaging in efforts to respond to the (systemic) racism they are experiencing on their college campuses and in their nearby communities (Grim et al., 2019). A deeper dive into scholarly research on Asian American student activism and activism scholarship broadly underscores how racism and racialization of students are a contributing factor to students of color engaging in activism on their college campus (Bonus, 2020; Chung, 2014; Conner, 2019; Ferguson, 2012, 2017; Linder et al., 2019; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012; Liu et al., 2010; Museus, 2021; Museus, 2022; Rhoads, 1998; Ryoo & Ho, 2013; Umemoto, 1989). For example, the ways that Asian Americans are racialized as model minorities can shape their experiences and how they show-up in racial justice activist spaces.

Racial hierarchies and neoliberal notions of competition might also encourage interracial competition among students of color (Museus, 2022). Competition may emerge in these historically and racially excluded communities in their fight for limited resources that colleges and universities often do not prioritize in equity and justice agendas (Hancock, 2011; Museus, 200; Museus & LePeau, 2019). Consequently, students of color may unknowingly reinforce racial hierarches and racial binaries in deeming which communities are the “most” racially

oppressed in their fight to advance racial justice agendas. Much of this may be attributed to the neoliberal systems that force students into a state of precarity and individualistic mindsets as a form of survival (Museus & LePeau, 2019).

These neoliberal contexts and the racialized misconceptions surrounding Asian American communities may also lead Asian American student activists to feel isolated within racial justice efforts or make it difficult for them to find their place in these spaces (Museus, 2022). For example, Grim et al. (2019) conducted a study that focused on how Midwest regional contexts contribute to Asian American social justice activism. Findings of this study suggested that Asian American voices, issues, and concerns were often dismissed from conversations centering diversity and equity and the idea of Midwest “niceness” discouraged Asian American students from engaging in racial justice activism because of pressures they felt to conform to people’s perceptions of Asian American individuals. Moreover, Grim et al. (2019) found that staff (e.g., advisors and administrators) believed in the model minority myth and failed to disaggregate Asian American ethnic groups. Instead, they utilized the data to compare Asian Americans against Latino/a/x and Black students, justifying ignoring the former group’s realities and experiences. Thus, Asian Americans were continuously discounted in diversity and equity conversations (Grim et al., 2019).

Other studies on Asian American activist experiences have focused on panethnic identity development (Manzano, 2018; Rhoads et al., 2002; Suyemoto et al., 2015), intersections of leadership and activism (Leigh et al., 2021; Manzano et al., 2017) and the role of consciousness, solidarity, and collectivist orientations in relation to motivation and commitment to social justice (Lin; 2018; Museus, 2021; Museus et al., 2021; Park & Dizon, 2021). This research on Asian American student activists and racial justice activism in general has illuminated the harmful

realities this community of students encounters through racialized misconceptions of their experiences and identities. This scholarship has also continued to increase awareness in understanding systemic racial oppression, such as the model minority myth, and these types of deficit beliefs manifest in Asian American activism and their experiences and commitments to racial justice (Chung, 2014; Liu et al., 2010; Museus, 2021; Museus et al., 2012; Osajima, 2007; Ryoo & Ho, 2013). Moreover, the model minority myth continues to remain one of the most prevalent overgeneralizations and negative stereotypes experienced by Asian American students (Grim et al., 2019) by perpetuating a narrative that Asian American students do not encounter challenges or need support (Museus 2014). This ultimately has contributed to the absence of not only investing support in this community (Grim et al., 2019), but critically understanding the unique challenges Asian American students face and engaging in reflexive processes to counter the misconstructions of the model minority myth in relation to racial justice and activism work.

With these narratives of Asian American experiences still permeating higher education institutions, it has further contributed to the misconception that Asian Americans are not leaders and are not engaged in issues related to politics and social issues (Lien et al., 2003). Yet, from discussions above, it is evident just how deeply activism and social and racial engagement is rooted in Asian American communities. This dissertation study will continue to build off the work set forth by these scholars in critically understanding how neoliberalism is intertwined with and shapes the experiences of Asian American student activists.

College Student Activism

Due to the limited scholarship surrounding Asian American activist experiences in higher education, in the final sections of this literature review, I discuss student activism in higher education broadly. Following the brief historical context, I discuss the current state of literature on student activism in a higher education context. This section provides a glimpse into how

scholars have engaged and are currently engaging in this topic and clarifies the outer edges of this literature that I hope to extend.

Historical Context of Student Activism

Since the establishment of higher education institutions, college campuses have served as places for awareness and advocacy for social change (Linder et al., 2016). From students in the late 1700s protesting during the Revolutionary War (Altbach, 1989; Broadhurst, 2014) to students in earlier U.S. colonial colleges pushing administrators to boycott British goods (Broadhurst, 2014), activism is engrained in the history of higher education institutions. The 1960s was also a pivotal time for student activism on college campuses in the U.S. (Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). Students across the nation engaged in demonstrations (i.e., sit-ins and protests) as they fought to hold their institutions accountable for social justice issues impacting their communities (Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). Students in the 1980s were also actively involved in opposing divestment and demanding administrators to not engage with countries and businesses with unethical practices (Rhoads, 1998). Into the early 2000s, we continued to see activism on college campuses persist with students challenging administrators to reflect on their business endeavors with prison labor and sweatshops (Einwhoner & Spencer, 2005), as well as engaging in activism that was rooted in their own identities and experiences with exclusion and oppression (Rhoads, 1997).

In more recent years, issues that motivated student activism included immigration bans, sexual assault, tuition increases, discrimination, climate change, and the Israel-Palestine conflict (Harrison & Mather, 2017). Higher education scholars, practitioners, administrators, and policymakers have constantly worked towards a collective understanding of these issues and moreover, how to address them in order to strengthen institutions' ability to serve students

(Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). Yet, despite the attempt to address these problems and higher education continuing to develop and transform with society, they have still gone unaddressed, resulting in the relevance of these past issues remaining prominent in present day (Wheatle & Commodore, 2019).

Themes in Conversation

History has guided our understanding of how college activism emerged and has continued to serve as a catalyst for movements we see in present day on college campuses. Below, I review common themes identified through my review of college activism literature, utilizing neoliberalism as an analytic lens to highlight developing areas in activist scholarship. These themes center around the impact of activism on student outcomes, the relationships between institutions and student activists, the development of collective consciousness, the ways institutional structures impede progress, and how college students are embodying a neoactivist praxis in their engagement.

Impact of Activism on Student Outcomes

Positive Outcomes of Student Activism

As student activism remains prevalent in higher education, more scholars and researchers are studying the contemporary movements for social change and the activists in higher education who engaged in these movements (Quaye & Lange, 2020). An overwhelming amount of research concluded that participating and actively engaging in student activism was correlated with some positive student outcomes, such as civic learning outcomes and student development (e.g., identity development, critical consciousness) (Biddix, 2010; Biddix, Somers, & Polman, 2009; Gaston-Gayle, WolfWendel, Tuttle, Twombly, & Ward, 2004; Hernandez, 2012; Kezar & Maxey, 2014; Tsui, 2000). Amongst the scholarship that outlined positive outcomes, research

around student activism also centered on how activism benefited students personally. Linder and Rodriguez (2012) amplified narratives of women of color student activists about their engagement with activism around social justice issues as a “safe space” (p. 393). The positive correlation between engagement and safety was something relatively new in relation to positive student activism engagement outcomes, as many participants in other studies shared contrasting feelings of marginalization; thus, Linder and Rodriguez’s (2012) study underscored how these types of activist experiences and spaces could be used as opportunities for deeper connection and

Negative Outcomes of Student Activism

Scholarship has also discussed the negative effects of students engaging in activism in higher education (Linder, Quaye, Lange, et al., 2019). For instance, a study conducted by Vaccaro and Mena (2011) on the experiences of queer student activists shared that they experienced a decline in self-care and limited access to support systems while engaging in their activism. Consequently, students felt burnt out (e.g., compassion fatigue and racial battle fatigue), often leading to more serious and detrimental outcomes related to mental health (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Quaye and Lange (2020) also discussed how other studies found that some campus contexts had little to no impact on students’ political/social activism (e.g., being affiliated with Greek life) (Hevel, Weeden, Pasquesi, & Pascarella, 2015). Given the composition of literature focused on benefits and costs (i.e., positive, negative, and neutral) associated with student activism, there is still room to explore student activists’ experiences more deeply with meaning making processes with these types of outcomes as a consequence of engaging in activism on college campuses (Quaye & Lange, 2020).

Relationship Between Institutions and Student Activists

Institutional Responses to Student Activism

In addition to examining outcomes of student activism, Hoffman and Mitchell (2016) outlined how higher education scholarship focused on understanding relationships between higher education leadership (e.g., administrators and faculty) and student activists (Case, Kanenberg, Erich, & Tittsworth, 2012; Kezar, 2010; Ropers-Huilman et al., 2005). Within this context, the role of institutional support and responses to student activism is another significant point of discussion (Andaluz et al., 2017). For instance, Hoffman and Mitchell (2016) found that the responses institutions initiated to student activists often felt performative in that the language around commitments made to students were ambiguous, centered whiteness, and did not consider the contributions students made to their campus environments. As a result, some students understood these responses from the institution as reinforcing dominant narratives that often did not align with student values; thus, these responses specifically impacted how students with historically excluded identities perceived and experienced their college campuses (e.g., hostile campus climates) (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016).

One of the most salient examples of institutional responses to student activism was discussed in Gill's et al. (2020) qualitative study, where researchers explored the role of interest convergence in connection to the Black Student Movement and student demands issued at the University of Missouri (UM) in 2016. This article underscored the complexities of interest convergence among student activists (Black students and athletes) and university stakeholders (administration). It revealed that these interests among students contributed to the division of interests between the institution and its White administrators (Gill et al., 2020). Interest convergence, a core tenet of Critical Race Theory (CRT), relies on one foundational principle: the progression of social and economic progress of Black people can only transpire when

benefits for White people are outweighed by the benefits and needs of Black people (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Gordon, 1990; López, 2003).

Ultimately administrators held the decision-making power and whether the interests of Black students and White university stakeholders converged or not, which is based on individual interest and loss-gain analyses (Gill et al., 2020). For instance, administrators only decided to address the demands of Black students when they realized there was going to be a loss of profit because UM football players refused to play in the upcoming game (Gill et al., 2020). It is noteworthy how money was considered in the loss-gain binary; forfeiting the game against their opponent (Brigham Young University) would ultimately cost the athletic department \$1 million (Gill et al., 2020). Second to the financial interests of these White university stakeholders was the jeopardization of their social capital (e.g., race relations) with current and future students, fans, politicians, alumni, and college athletes (Gill et al., 2020). UM has struggled to maintain and increase an already low Black student enrollment and the university feared the attention of the boycott and demands would further decrease their enrollment and retention numbers (Gill et al., 2020). In short, for athletic department stakeholders, ending the boycott was in their best interest because (1) current Black athletes would feel their racial interests would be supported (e.g., student concerns/demands were appearing to be addressed), and (2) Black athletic recruits would still consider competing for the University of Missouri (Gill et al., 2020), allowing their number of Black students to continue increasing (e.g., reinforcing a culture of diversity and inclusion), and the continuation of profit generation for the institution as a whole through the athletic department.

Through all of this, Black student athletes also engaged in their own cost-benefit analyses and assessment of how their interests intersected with their non-athlete peers' interests (Gill et

al., 2020). Black athletes, specifically, held a certain privilege in being the most visible on campus and generating the most revenue for the college (Gill et al., 2020). Their involvement in the hunger strike was within their best interest because of the privilege they held in being visible, but it is also likely they faced external pressure from their peers, leading to their decision to boycott (Gill et al., 2020). In addition, strengthening relationships with their non-athlete Black peers was also in their best interest. The demands of being a college athlete often left many Black athletes feeling segregated (Rhoden, 1990) and engaging in these types of social justice initiatives was a way to counter some of those feelings of isolation (Gill et al., 2020) and potentially resist ideas of individualism that institutions often socialize students into equating with success (Bertram, 2012). These feelings of isolation and the student responsibility for civic engagement further reinforced UM's longstanding history of racism and racial exclusion (Gill et al., 2020).

Ultimately the decision between losing monetary benefits from the football team and ignoring the blatant issues of racism on UM's campuses continued to reinforce the notion that institutions are remiss to address any issue that does not directly benefit them in some way. Students are clearly viewed as consumers and a commodity to the institution. For instance, Jonathan Butler's hunger strike was unfortunately not enough to win the demands of Black students because higher education administrators were quite literally willing to allow a student to die rather than address the demands and concerns issued by Black students (Gill et al., 2020). It was only when this hunger strike converged with the boycott of the football team to not play that White administration suddenly had an interest in putting an end to the civil "unrest" being experienced on campus (Gill et al., 2020).

Moreover, the interests of White university stakeholders at UM and in the athletic department had nothing to do with any moral or ethical obligation to the students it serves; their concerns revolved around material property interests (Jackson, 2011) and the need to protect the social, cultural, and financial capital related to the institutional progress at the University of Missouri (Gill et al., 2020). Thus, the ability to produce or perform (e.g., profit generated) is equated to an individual's worth (Museus & LePeau, 2019) and this connection is a form of interest convergence that is intertwined with neoliberal logics of consumerism. Through the analysis of this article, it is apparent that Black athletes at the University of Missouri were viewed by institutional leaders as a commodity, whose sole purpose within the university is to generate profit through their actions of "productivity" (i.e., playing football). The dehumanization in viewing students as a commodity in thinking about football as a spectator sport for fans, alumni, students, and university stakeholders that generates millions of dollars for the institution, as opposed to viewing and treating these students as holistic human beings and students further reinforces the complexities of how neoliberalism constantly perpetuates violent systems of oppression that continuously oppress historically excluded communities.

Beyond Individual Student Experiences

The majority of research revolving around student protests in relation to activist experiences focuses primarily on students (i.e., motivations for advocating for change, tactics employed, and consequences of their engagement) (Cho, 2018; Rhoads, 2016; Rojas, 2006). While these types of scholarship provided a foundation for understanding the context and complexities with student resistance, constantly centering student experiences runs the risk of placing the responsibility on the individual student, and more specifically, what they should/could have done, rather than holding institutions accountable for the role they play in the experiences of student activists (Cho, 2018).

Museus and Sifuentez (2021) also emphasized how the current scholarship around student activists' experiences continued to center individual components of student activism in the U.S. (Altbach, 1981; Altbach & Laufer, 1972; Lipset & Altbach, 1969; McAdam, 1992; Rhoads, 1997, 1998a, 2003). They noted that this literature provided a deeper understanding of the activists as students and individuals (Duncan & Stewart, 1995; Stewart, Settles, & Winter, 1998), but often ignored the reality of campus organizational contexts and how they contributed to this cyclical need for activism and collective action on college campuses (Barnhardt, 2015).

The disproportionate emphasis on individual student experiences, with the exception of a few publications that explored systemic issues and responses (Barnhardt, 2014; Rhoads, Saenz, & Carducci, 2000; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Museus & Sifuentez, 2021; Squire, Nicolazzo, & Perez, 2019), demonstrates that there is an increased need to critically examine these larger systemic dynamics in relation to activist experiences, as well as interactions between administrators and activists (Museus & Sifuentez, 2021). As demonstrated through the Gill et al. (2019) article, such work has the potential to develop deeper understandings of the nuanced experiences of student activists and how these violent systems contribute to the cyclical process of marginalization, exclusion, and oppression that is often detrimental to the lives of students in higher education.

Development of Collective Consciousness

A significant number of studies focused on student motivation for becoming involved in activism on their college campuses. Their motivation stemmed from their own personal experiences with forms of systemic violence (e.g., racism, homophobia); however, over time, they developed an increased awareness of paralleled experiences and shared oppression with other individuals and communities (DeAngelo et al., 2016; Gabriele-Black & Goldberg, 2021; George Mwangi et al., 2019; Gutierrez et al., 2021; Goldberg et al., 2020; Hill et al., 2018;

Karter et al., 2021; Linder et al., 2016; Logan et al., 2017; Museus et al., 2021; Quaye and Lange, 2020; Schuster, 2021). In other words, students first experienced social injustices on an individual level, and eventually moved into recognizing how it impacts communities on a systemic level (George Mwangi et al., 2019). In particular, developing awareness around identity was salient in shaping the experiences of student activists.

In the study conducted by Gutierrez Keeton et al. (2021), researchers examined identity development of student leaders involved in activism at their institution in order to address racism and lack of representation on their college campus. Two of the most salient findings discussed meaningful relationships in regard to identity development, and coalition and kinship building (Gutierrez, 2021). The first theme outlined how participants described the people they encountered on their identity development journey. Many of these influences occurred in home communities, campus organizations and departments, and personal interactions (Gutierrez, 2021).

The second theme discussed how engaging in activism helped participants understand and name the discrimination they experienced before and during the time they attended their university. They were able to make connections between discrimination and institutional systems of oppression and racism, realizing how some of their identities were privileged (Gutierrez, 2021). Participants shared how building coalitions and depending on feelings of trust, kinship, and relationships with other students supported their endeavor to disrupt personal discrimination and resist institutional oppression (Gutierrez, 2021). One participant (Esther) was able to make connections between their activism and identity, “I eventually recognized that my identity and background were going to color some of the privileges and challenges I had in my journey. I feel like being conscious earlier really set me up to take advantage of a lot of opportunities, and that

happened to include my area of work now” (Gutierrez, 2021, p. 15). Another participant (Norma) described how learning about discrimination through faculty and other educational settings supported her in becoming a part of student activist groups (Gutierrez, 2021). She acknowledged that her student activism and involvement in these communities, such as MEChA influenced and transformed her perspective and understanding of about racial identity and oppression (Gutierrez, 2021). These findings in this study further illuminate how identity formation of student activists significantly impacted their engagement and experiences in developing consciousness in connecting individual experiences to deeper systemic issues (Gutierrez, 2021).

DeAngelo et al. (2016) also continued to build on existing knowledge by exploring how empowered undocumented student identity is constructed and ways that these students inscribe power in a system in which they endure marginalization and oppression. Findings in this study showed that individual introspection, as well as a sense of reciprocity to their larger community, allowed DREAMers to understand their identities and build empowerment (DeAngelo et al., 2016). This process allowed DREAMers to increase self-awareness through critical reflection as they advocated for themselves and other community members through their activism (DeAngelo et al., 2016). The second theme described how DREAMers pushed for a space for themselves as a way to voice their needs to exist within the institution (DeAngelo et al., 2016). Constructing political consciousness, blatantly naming racism, experiencing discrimination and resisting it, and engaging in efforts to transform the campus climate are ways that DREAMers claimed an empowered undocumented identity (DeAngelo et al., 2016). The last theme of inscribing power is based on “invisible processes with which undocumented students engage and struggle to expose the complexity of the taxing labor associated with generating empowerment” (DeAngelo et al., 2016, p. 225).

Hill et al. (2018) examined processes that lead students to participate in collective action and solidarity on behalf of Palestinian students. The first theme outlined how activists were knowledgeable in their historical narrative that led them to see the relations between their community's history and Palestinians (Hill et al., 2018); there was a sense of a shared experience and understanding. The second theme of intersectional narratives described how activism made connections between their personal collective truths and Palestinians truths. These discussions around the influence of power on individuals led students to make sense of their own identity as a part of a "politicized collective" (Hill et al., 2018, p. 8). In the third theme, the recollection of prior experiences with personal marginalization or discrimination became salient. Many participants were able to recall times in their lives where they questioned their parents' values and social ideals (people in power) which led to feelings of alienation (Hill et al., 2018). Finally, a motive for non-Palestinian activists to support Palestinian movements was the empowerment felt in having experiences publicly validated by other communities; there was a sense of joy in solidarity when activists were able to come together to achieve their goals and pushing for transformative change (Hill et al., 2018).

As discussed in the aforementioned articles, the development of critical consciousness is in direct opposition to the neoliberal pillar of individualism. Museus (2021) discussed collective critical consciousness as a component to critical agency in that it is an awareness of systemic oppression, is an essential foundation to involvement in social justice work (Freire, 2018; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). The findings in these highlighted articles support Museus' (2021) discussion around this notion. For instance, Gutierrez Keeton et al.'s (2021) piece demonstrated the importance of identity development in relation to developing consciousness. Identity development has been a prominent discussion within the field of Higher Education and Student

Affairs in how it is intertwined to students' sense of belonging, which can contribute to retention within institutions (Davis, Hanzsek-Brill, et al., 2019). Thus, it could be concluded that identity development is an essential component in developing collective consciousness and resisting neoliberal logics as student activists continue to make institutions of more equitable and just.

Neoliberalism works to eliminate any opportunities for students to understand the strengths of collective power that would directly challenge notions of neoliberalism (e.g., surveillance and individualism) where students are unable to push for transformative change through engaging in activism and other public forms of advocacy. Consequently, students are often socialized into a system that is designed to embrace a more individualistic mindset in both how we think and navigate spaces in higher education. For instance, institutions often bring students together for superficial and even performative conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion within our respective institutions (e.g., student task forces, student representatives on the Board of Regents); however, key institutional stakeholders do not want students to come together to advocate for justice, especially in manners that challenge hegemonic institutional systems and structures (e.g., protests, sit-ins, demands). Yet, students continue to develop their collective consciousness through meaning making of their own identities and recognize shared experiences of oppression through individual and collective experiences, while also finding pockets of joy in the activism work they engage in (Hill et al., 2018). Oppression is interconnected to one another, and activists cannot simply focus on one sole issue (Lorde, 1984; Davis, 2016). Understanding this type of community building, consciousness, and solidarity as a collective power is essential to collectivist efforts in understanding resistance to systemic forms of oppression; the antithesis to what neoliberalism prescribes in reframing individualistic mindset and approaches towards embracing collectivist orientations.

Institutional Structures Impeding Progress

The complexities of navigating a system that was not designed for students to succeed or exist, continued to be evident in the literature examined for this review. More specifically, the nuanced relationships between university stakeholders (e.g., faculty, administrators) and student activists (Andaluz et al., Anderson, 2019; 2017; Gill, 2020; Hoffman et al., 2016) and the costs and consequences associated with engaging in student activism (Albright & Hurd, 2021; Hope et al.; 2019; Linder et al., 2019) underscored the realities of how institutional structures impede progress as students work to change the systems that negatively impact their experiences while pursuing higher education. Furthermore, the literature deepens our understanding of activists' experiences by discussing a nuanced layer often invisible in this type of work.

In a qualitative study conducted by Linder et al. (2019), scholars interrogated traditional notions of student activism and promoted scholarship about the costs and consequences of it, specifically for students with historically excluded identities. Outcomes of student activism were used to frame the experiences of student activists in relation to emotional, mental, and physical labor (Linder et al., 2019). Findings revealed that participants engaged in activism as a form of survival in their minoritized identities (Linder et al., 2019), and moreover, there were emotional, personal, and mental costs and consequences affiliated with their engagement in activism initiatives (Linder et al., 2019). Students shared their experiences with administrators in how they protect dominance rather than trying to transform systems that would mitigate some pressure off minoritized students' need to assimilate to the hegemonic culture at these institutions as a form of survival (Linder et al., 2019). Students viewed this as administrators being more interested in protecting the institution rather than the students they served, which resulted in significant tension between these two groups (Linder et al., 2019). Student activists also received backlash from other educators on campus. This included negative reactions (e.g.,

withdrawing various types of support) and feeling disconnected from faculty, staff, and peers (e.g., isolation due to a lack of understanding of their experiences) (Linder et al., 2019). Furthermore, even with the backlash from educators and administrators, institutions were simultaneously and very clearly benefiting from the labor of these student activists, and moreover, students were aware of this unpaid labor they were providing institutions (Linder et al., 2019). There was no engagement of reciprocity, related to this sense of survival, in that students were providing free labor to their institutions in pushing towards transformation of justice and equity on their campuses, while at the same time many of these institutions not even offering resources to counter their personal and mental toll engaging in this labor took on their wellbeing (Linder, et al., 2019).

Schuster (2021) also discussed how student activism provided potential opportunities to promote campus and community awareness. In this qualitative study, students were able to identify the power and value of amplifying their voices, yet constantly treaded cautiously, specifically in not bringing their identities and views, that were often politicized, into the classroom out of fear of retaliation by peers and faculty. The experiences of these student activists underscored the power dynamics between activists and larger institutional structures (e.g., academic spaces, university employees) and the complicity of cultivating harmful spaces that do not allow students to show-up as their authentic selves.

Another study conducted by Gabriele-Black & Goldberg (2021) illuminated some of these tensions in exploring student activist experiences on Christian College campuses. Gabriele-Black & Goldberg's (2021) study examined the experiences of LGBTQ students who attended Evangelical Christian colleges to understand the types of activists work they engaged in, their reasons for becoming involved (or not), and the risks of engaging in activism. The findings

underscored the risks of activism at this particular Christian college campus that often warrant reprimanding or sanctioning by administration for breaking university honor code (e.g., starting LGBTQ organizations), in addition to experiencing harassment by their fellow peers for the same reasons (Gabriele-Black & Goldberg, 2021). This fear of harassment and students experiencing targeted bullying often led them to not want to participate in initiatives to improve campus climate (Gabriele-Black & Goldberg, 2021). The bullying outweighed any potential benefits of engaging because being an advocate or an activist in this context meant a form of visibility in a sense where students' sexual/gender identities were visible and transparent which often brought punitive consequences from family and other religious communities.

Despite institutions superficially engaging in ideas of equity and social justice initiatives within higher education, it becomes more complex because of how neoliberalism permeates every aspect of these institutional systems (Museus & LePeau, 2019). With these experiences and contexts centered in conversation it is essential to recognize that many students' reasoning for not becoming involved relates to other systems of oppression and violence. Yet, there are nuances and complexities not often discussed that place students in a position to not be able to engage in ways that are safe or in ways that others (e.g. fellow student activists) would like them to; sometimes in a matter of life or death related to surviving not only the institution but also in navigating the world itself (e.g. food and housing security related to financial support from parents, mental health related to support from peers, faculty, etc.).

Neoliberal systems reward individuals and institutions for upholding these ideologies that often counter the advancement social justice initiatives (Darder, 2005) and/or only allow equity to be pursued under neoliberal conditions (Museus & LePeau, 2019). The very real fears and realities of retaliation and violence imposed by institutional structures, such as even labeling

students as “troublemakers” (Quaye & Lange, 2020, p. 6) reinforces this type of negative stereotype and assumptions that student activists are “dangerous” when they do not fit into the desired mold of expectations and behavior (Quaye & Lange, 2020) because how neoliberalism determines what is considered valid forms of knowledge and action (Museus & LePeau, 2019). This culture of fear stifles student’s ability and desire to become involved in efforts towards meaningful institutional and social change because when the power dynamics between students and institutional structures (e.g., administrators) are brought forth in this type of labeling, this can further undermine the goals of activists and institutional progress (Quaye & Lange, 2020). Labeling activities in this demeaning manner only reinforces institutional power and continues to protect privilege and maintain systems of oppression (Quaye & Lange, 2020). Museus & LePeau (2019) assert that these harmful systems were intended to be disrupted, deconstructed, and combated; and as students continue to resist (Quaye & Lange, 2020; Linder et al., 2020), it is a powerful reminder to consider the systems in place that allow these reoccurring systemic issues of oppression to persist and make it so students have to negotiate engagement and resistance in a system that was not designed for them or their communities to survive in.

Embodying a Neoactivist Praxis

In honoring historical social movements, neoactivists recognize how institutions are intertwined in these neoliberal systems and an understanding of institutional accountability. Throughout this review of the literature, there has been evidence that supports the idea of how neoliberal ideologies influence and contribute to violent experiences student activists often face when engaging in this type of transformative work. Yet, as much as we see how activists are intertwined within these systems, we may also conclude how activists are also resisting these types of neoliberal logics and moving towards embracing a neoactivist framework.

Neoactivism embodies a reflexive practice of critical consciousness (criticality) and a sense of collective responsibility to not only their communities (reciprocity), while simultaneously holding institutions accountable for the violence and injustices they continue to uphold and engage in. Characterized as new student activists by Conner (2020), there are core tenets embedded within this framework and that demonstrate how students are embracing and working towards embodying a neoactivist praxis.

One of these core tenets includes honoring histories of the activists that have come before them (Conner, 2020). Neoliberalism works to disconnect people from their histories and to ignore the realities of injustices; yet neoactivists are intentional in how they honor this history of student activism that allows them to engage in the manners they do in the present day (Conner, 2018). This includes not allowing concerns to be ignored, utilizing, and borrowing language and tools in earlier movements, and moreover, building off the work generations of activists engaged in before them (Conner, 2018). We see this embodied in Gill's (2020) article and the discussion around utilizing social media as an activist tactic with #ConcernedStudent1950 and the coalition Concerned Student 1950 (CS1950) at the University of Missouri. Historical context reveals how the University of Missouri did not start accepting Black students until 1950 (Gill, 2020). We can see how the coalition and social media tactics serve as an homage to UM's past history and the activists that set the foundation before them. Moreover, the coalition group CS1950 ultimately delivered the list of demands discussed in Gill's (2020) article, further emphasizing how these demands are not new; in fact, they were a part of the Legion of Black Collegians list of demands in 1969 (Conner, 2018). This display of honoring the past not only serves as an incessant reminder of the racial injustices that still exist, but a powerful symbol of how students are continuing to build off the previous work, and moreover, how they have not forgotten and will

not let institutions, that reinforce these harmful neoliberal ideologies, to forget the violence that has been inflicted upon them and the activists that came before them.

Schuster's (2021) qualitative study emphasized how campus climates were influenced during the 2016 Presidential Election and the nuanced experiences of undergraduate student activists during this time. Students of Color shared how the political climate impacted their campus climates in toxic manners that encouraged them to engage in activism as a way to alleviate some of the impacts experienced by racist encounters. While at the same time the majority of these activists also held administrators responsible and accountable to how this harmful environment was cultivated and sustained in the first place (Schuster, 2021). Karter et al. (2021) also discussed similar themes in their study that explored the experiences of student activists in a "corporatized" university. One specific theme outlined how participants shared a process where the university often felt like a separate or "outside" world experience (Karter, 2021). Students then began to see the university as complicit in regard to social and political struggles they had raised concerns about (Karter, 2021). Consequently, student activists focused specifically on the university itself which in turn, forced them to re-negotiate and reflect on their relationships and experiences with the university (Karter, 2021). This type of consciousness and critical awareness demonstrated in these two studies illuminates how institutions that embrace neoliberal notions continuously fail students (Conner, 2021) and how these types of cyclical violence and systemic oppression continuously force students to bear an individual responsibility in creating meaningful change within higher education.

Lastly, neoliberalism often generates a sense of hopelessness (Karter et al., 2021; The Care Manifesto, 2020). As discussed in several articles, there was a common theme of student activists feeling exhausted from the emotional and mental labor they engaged in (Anderson,

2019; Goldberg et al., 2020; Karter et al., 2021, Linder et al., 2019; Schuster, 2021). This description of “hopelessness” that many participants expressed was related to doubts they had about creating systemic and impactful change (Karter et al., 2021). Yet, students were able to find hope within each other by generating meaningful social support through relationships and friends with other activists (Karter et al., 2021). During these feelings of hopelessness and times of resistance, activists were able to cultivate a sense of solidarity with one another that allowed them to feel like they were a part of something larger; thus, contributing to their desire to be more invested in creating change within their university (Karter et al., 2021). These types of emotions and feelings of collectivism are the antithesis to what neoliberalism prescribes; yet students continue to challenge and reframe our approaches to community and understanding notions of collective power and strength.

The experiences of student activists in higher education are nuanced and complex. We continuously to see history repeat itself through student activists’ constant need to engage in work to transform higher education into a space that is truly just and equitable. Yet, as revealed through a preliminary review and analysis of the literature, we can deepen our understanding of their experiences by employing a neoliberal framework and understanding how systemic and structures in higher education continue perpetuate these notions and violent experiences of oppression; and moreover, how activists embody a neoactivist praxis that works to counter and resist neoliberal ideologies. As this dissertation study builds off the work of previous scholars and serves as an invitation for others to engage in these conversations around activist experiences, there are still implications for educators, policymakers, and practitioners to be considered as we work to collectively dream together and be intentional in our actions in

challenging systems and creating educational spaces where students can do more than simply exist and survive.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

The current study employed a critical qualitative inquiry to understand how neoliberalism shapes the experiences of Asian American student activists in higher education. Four additional questions guided this inquiry and analysis:

- 1) How, if at all, does neoliberalism catalyze Asian American students' activism on their college/university campuses?
- 2) How, if at all, does neoliberalism constrain Asian American students' activism on these campuses?
- 3) In what ways, if any, are Asian Americans navigating neoliberal ideologies in their work as student activists?
- 4) How does neoliberalism shape the outcomes of these students' activism?

In this chapter I provide the rationale for engaging in qualitative research, specifically a critical qualitative inquiry approach. Next, I explain how I collected data, including participant selection and recruitment and interview processes and protocols, followed by the data analysis, and the limitations of the current proposed study. Finally, I share how I established trustworthiness and validation within my study and how my salient social identities and experiences shape my relationship and how I engage this work as both an emerging scholar, a doctoral student embedded in the academy, and a past undergraduate student that engaged in activism and advocacy work on my college campus.

Qualitative Research Rationale

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research engages in practices that seek to create meaningful transformation in the world by studying features in their “natural settings” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It also attempts to construct meaning and make critical connections between people and these environments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011); in other words, qualitative inquiry emphasizes finding meaning within a specific context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This distinctive feature related to the primary goal of my study to understand the relationship between neoliberalism and its impact on student activism. This study intentionally works to make connections between Asian American student activists (people) and the neoliberal institutions that students navigate (environment), while simultaneously seeking to transform institutions of higher education into spaces where students have the privilege of just being students (Linder et al., 2019).

In addition, qualitative research emphasizes exploration of how people understand their experiences, construct the environments they are immersed in, and create the meaning they place on their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These characteristics of qualitative inquiry connect with some of the guiding research questions of my study in seeking to understand the experiences of Asian American students and how they navigate and understand the impacts of neoliberalism within their work as activists. Qualitative research also underlines *exploration* because of a need to study a community where voices are often not heard (Creswell, 2013). This qualitative research trait resonates deeply within my study, as Asian Americans often have their experiences dismissed or disregarded because of harmful narratives that are continuously perpetuated (e.g., model minority myth) and silence the voices of a community that has always been and continues to be excluded both historically and socially. In addition, there is still a

limited understanding of student activism and neoliberalism broadly within higher education. This study continues to add to this growing body of knowledge through conducting a more in-depth exploration on the intersections of racialized experiences, neoliberalism, and student activism.

Finally, qualitative research underscores that realities are socially constructed and there is not one specific instance that can be observed and interpreted, but rather there are multiple truths, experiences, and meanings within a singular occurrence (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This distinction is imperative because as qualitative researchers, we do not necessarily “discover” knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), but we *can* co-construct it through observations, fieldnotes, and conversations with individuals and communities. Creswell (2013) explained this idea as constructivism or interpretivism, terms that are used interchangeably (Merriam & Tisdell, 2011). Within this notion, people look to more deeply understand the world they live in while developing subjective interpretations of their experiences (Creswell, 2013). Because there are multiple truths and considerations within these experiences, qualitative researchers then work to deepen the complexity of these distinctive views through understanding historical and cultural contexts of individuals’ lives (Creswell, 2013).

These qualities connected with my approach to this study in several ways. First, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the historical and cultural contexts of Asian Americans underscore the urgency of critically understanding Asian American activist experiences and how they are often perceived and racialized within these conversations and their involvement in advocacy work. Second, there is a mutual understanding that there are multiple truths that they experience and live within while navigating a neoliberal university as student activists, all of which should be affirmed and validated. Lastly, as a researcher, I seek to complicate these conversations around

how neoliberalism shapes and informs their experiences and outcomes of student activists by co-constructing knowledge and understanding *with* this community of students. It is essential to recognize that these Asian American student activists have always possessed this knowledge; yet, as a researcher, I simply have the privilege and position to be able to translate this knowledge, something that is not taken lightly.

Critical Qualitative Inquiry

Critical Qualitative Inquiry (CQI) has emerged in academia within the past forty years (Cannella et al., 2016). Its' origins can be dated back the twentieth century human rights movement, as well historically excluded communities illuminating how power intersects with relationships that serve to both privilege and oppress individuals and groups (Cannella et al., 2016). It also has previous influences of Marx, Habermas, and Freire related socioeconomic status and structures of class, transformation, and emancipatory education and knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Currently, we see critical research drawing from various methods, theories, and fields of study, including, Critical Gender Studies (feminist and queer theory), Critical Race Theory, and Critical Ethnography (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Understanding and acceptance of critical inquiry is still emerging, but it continues to redefine our understanding of research approaches across disciplines and emphasizes issues related to diverse voices and experiences, equity, and justice in working towards societal transformation (Cannella et al., 2016). At the core, it is rooted in a social justice agenda and utilizes an ethical framework while working to dismantle inequalities, human oppression, and injustices (Denzin, 2015). CQI also pushes beyond understanding how people make meaning with the world they live in (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While qualitative research understands how knowledge is both socially and historically constructed, Creswell (2013) discussed that

critical research underscores how power shapes relationships and that, for research to be designated as “critical,” it must interrogate and address an injustice within a specific societal context (Kincheloe et al., 2011).

As academia continues to interrogate these power relations and justice within these spaces, CQI created a foundation for multi and interdisciplinary work that not only recognized and named these struggles of the voices of the individuals that came before us, but the communities and people that continued to embody notions of collectivism in working towards transformation. In doing so, Cannella et al. (2016) invites us to create opportunities in our work to (1) address how neoliberalism continues to permeate every aspect of our society (Cannella, 2014; Foucault, 2008), (2) critically understand power relations that will continue to impact the future, and (3) push beyond collective dreaming (although important) and engage in reflexive practices in working towards a more just and equitable future

Employing Critical Qualitative Research Inquiry

A general critical qualitative approach was best suited for my study. A primary objective of critical research is to critique and challenge, as well as to transform and to empower (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through this study, I seek to reveal power structures that often stagnate possibilities for transformative change (Pasque & Salazar Pérez, 2015). In addition, it aims to critique and challenge existing neoliberal structures that continue harm the students it was intended to serve through centering lived truths and personal narratives of an historically excluded community (hooks, 2000). Concurrently, CQI also invites individuals complicit within these structures (e.g., college and university personnel) to interrogate and transform higher education spaces in non-performative and sustainable ways (Pasque & Salazar Pérez, 2015) that are equitable and just for all students to thrive in. Moreover, empowering Asian American student activists to see themselves as leaders and agents of change in collectively working to

transform these institutional spaces continues to be a core component of engaging in this work and co-constructing knowledge and understanding *with* these communities that continue to be negatively impacted by neoliberal systems.

Honoring Indigenous Knowledge

Ritchie (2015) reminds us that we cannot discuss critical qualitative inquiry without acknowledgement of the Indigenous knowledge that has always existed. Indigenous scholars have constantly challenged the ways we approach and engage in research practices that do not replicate colonial harm (Ritchie, 2015). Moreover, Indigenous communities have long employed these types of practices that humanize and honor the work and knowledge of their communities and not to inform critical qualitative research. Yet, this type of Indigenous knowledge has consistently been dismissed in the past and is now co-opted by the academy because it is easier to remain complicit and ignore the realities of colonial power within academic research and Western epistemology (Ritchie, 2015).

The knowledge shared by Ritchie (2015) serves as powerful reminders to be intentional in our engagement with research, and moreover, to work towards honoring the (Indigenous) communities who have always engaged in these practices and from whom we are all fortunate to be a recipient of that knowledge. We have a responsibility as researchers engaging in CQI to not only acknowledge these realities but to be intentional in upholding these ideologies in ways that are non-performative, and to be reflexive in realizing when research should not be or is not our place to be engaged.

Data Collection

In this section, I delineate my process for collecting data. I begin with a discussion of how I recruited participants through both institutional identification and personal networks. I then outlined the participant selection criteria to ensure a diverse range of student experiences

would be captured. Finally, I conclude with my protocol for facilitating and engaging in the individual interviews and focus group processes.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were identified for this study by identifying institutions across the U.S. that had experienced or had some type of student-led activism (e.g., protest, demonstration, rally, etc.) occur on their college campus. This identification was done through three different approaches: (1) credible news sources, (2) Asian American organizations, and (3) social media and networks.

Online Media

First, I engaged in a general Google search, specifically utilizing Google News, to search for credible news articles that had covered stories and experiences of student activism on college campuses. This helped me log colleges and universities that experienced some form of activism or student movement on their campus and identify contacts to whom I reached out to for participant recruitment. Key search terms and combinations were inputted to support in the initial search (See Appendix F). In the context of this study, credible and reliable news sources included sites such as, *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, in addition to school newspapers (e.g., *The UCSD Guardian*). Sites, like the aforementioned, are relatively well-known and utilized in the field of Higher Education and student newspapers provide a unique perspective of student experiences because they are typically written by students and for students that attend that college or university.

Other news sources were determined as credible and reliable from the guidance of University of Washington's (2022) Research Guides. Utilizing the five approaches for the SMART Check (UW Research Guides, 2022) for each source identified was the primary

approach to determine how online media sources were or were not utilized in this dissertation study. First, I critically examined the source. For instance, I was mindful of how I included media pieces that tend to lean in a particular political direction such as Fox News, ABC News, and NBC News in recognizing that stories covered in “biased” manners may do so because something happened that warrants inclusion. While this guide did not explicitly name which news sources tend to lean in a particular political direction, utilizing Mitchell et al.’s (2014) research report on media sources supported in this selection process. Second, I examined the motive to gain an understanding about their reasoning for writing and saying what they did. In other words, what was the purpose of this article? (e.g., to educate, to persuade, etc.). Third, I identified who wrote the article and conducting a search to see what other pieces they also had written to gain a deeper understanding of their perspective and the work they engaged in. Fourth, I reviewed the article to see if anything stood out as possibly being untrue or inaccurate. This also included being hyperaware of any biases that could be shown by the writer or the sources. I recognized that the ability to be completely subjective is not always possible or even the goal, especially in research; however, it was essential to my search that these news articles were primarily reporting the facts and events that occurred without offering personal speculation or additional opinions. Lastly, I compared the source to another article that discussed the same topic will provide additional form of reliability (e.g., fact checking) to ensure the events being reported were consistent across sources.

Utilizing this process enabled me to identify institutions that had experienced a form of campus activism that was initiated or engaged by students. In doing so, I was then able to engage in a subsequent search to identify campus resources and individuals that were able to support in disseminating my call for participants for this dissertation study. This included Asian American

cultural and resource centers, clubs and organizations, ethnic studies centers and programs, as well faculty and staff that worked directly within these student and academic affairs.

Asian American Organizations

The list of key stakeholders included regional and national organizations that either specifically center Asian American students and Asian American issues or contained a sub-group within the larger organization dedicated to Asian Americans. Regional organizations included the Midwest Asian American Student Union (MAASU) and the East Coast Asian American Student Union (ECAASU). Both organizations are dedicated to supporting Asian American students and were formed through the unification of several universities and colleges.

National organizations included The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators' (NASPA) Asian Pacific Islander Knowledge Community (APIKC), the American College Personnel Associations' Asian Pacific American Network (APAN), and the Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS). APIKC and APAN had the potential to identify students that might have an interest and fit the proposed criteria for this study through the various higher education faculty, administrators, and student affairs practitioners affiliated within these organizations. For example, both of these organizations include individuals who may have worked in cultural centers or student involvement and leadership and directly worked with student activists.

AAAS has a publicly available directory of Asian American Studies programs and centers across the United States. Ethnic Studies programs have been supportive and often at the center of many student movements. Thus, they were utilized to identify practitioners who may have worked with or knew students for this dissertation study (See Appendix A).

Social Media and Networks

Additional recruitment occurred through advertising the Call for Participants on social media (See Appendix C), specifically Instagram and LinkedIn since those are the platforms that I, specifically as the researcher, currently utilize. Social media is a powerful tool for building community and sustaining connections (direct messages, posting, etc.) in activist circles. For instance, Facebook was utilized for to identify groups like Transracial Adoptees in Student Affairs and the public APAN and APIKC Facebook Groups. Many of these groups also consisted of members that can support in identifying students that would be interested in participating in this study or even have students in them that directly fit the study's participation criteria. I knew from being a member of various groups and engaging as a moderator/administrator, they were generally receptive to posting about research studies directly related to their communities. So, despite myself as the researcher not being on certain platforms, my community was able to share my call for participants on my behalf. I also posted on my own personal social media (Instagram and LinkedIn) and gave explicit permission for people to share with their own communities (e.g., re-posts and direct emails).

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was employed to select participants for this study. This specific technique is often utilized in qualitative research where the researcher intentionally selects participants and physical locations that will be engaged in the study to better support in understanding the guiding research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In other words, the researcher aims to discern, comprehend, and gain perspective and therefore intentionally selects individuals and sites that can best maximize what can be learned (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Patton (2015) added that the idea and power of qualitative inquiry comes from "information rich

cases” (p. 53), which offer opportunities to learn about issues related to the initial inquiry of study in in-depth and critical ways (Patton 2015). I employed a combination of criterion-based selection (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), maximum variation sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and snowball sampling (Patton 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Criterion-Based Sampling

Criterion-based sampling defined the selection criteria for who (e.g., individuals or communities) and what (e.g., physical locations, sites, etc.) would be included in the data collection process to inform the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In other words, decisions were made about what characteristics are essential to the sample for the study and finding individuals or sites that met the criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

For my study, participants were selected based on four criteria. First, participants must be engaged or previously engaged in student activism and/or a student movement group on their college/university campus. Second, this study focuses on a particular historically excluded community and therefore participants must identify as Asian American. Third, participants must be a current undergraduate student that is eighteen years or older or a recent graduate (class of 2018 or later). Undergraduate students and recent graduates were selected because their perspectives were most salient and exemplified in student activism history (Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). In addition, undergraduate students may also have had different intentions or goals when engaging in activism and their student learning outcomes, such as appreciation of differences, amplifying student voices, and connecting their experiences to larger societal contexts (Quaye, 2007). These students’ motivations may also vastly differ from that of graduate students. For instance, the COLA movements seen throughout the University of California system has been one centered around graduate and professional students and postdocs’ fight for livable wages and equitable working conditions. While the underlying cause of this problem may

be similar to those that undergraduate students are also fighting (e.g., institutional oppression), the focal issues, tactics, intentions, and outcomes can still vary across the two different student groups.

I also chose to start the age range at eighteen-years old so all participants would be classified as consenting adults and there is no need for parental/guardian permission. There was no age cap beyond the initial, minimum age in recognizing that undergraduate students and recent graduates may not have necessarily fit the “traditional” notion of a college-aged student (i.e., 18-24 years old). Fourth, participants be enrolled or previously attended a four-year college or university in the United States (public or private) and completed at least one semester or quarter as a full-time student to ensure they have had time to familiarize their selves with their institutional environments and so they can draw upon significant campus experiences. All these characteristics were identified through an initial questionnaire screening that can be accessed through the participant recruitment flier (See Appendix B).

Maximum Variation Sampling

Maximum variation sampling was utilized to achieve a diverse sample, which contributes to multiple and unique perspectives that could be applied in the analysis to understand core experiences of a particular phenomenon or setting (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In relation to my own study, I was first intentional about my recruitment of participants from a diverse range of Asian ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Southeast Asian, South Asian, multiracial individuals, transracial adoptees, etc.). I was also mindful of including other social and (often) intersecting identities, such as gender identity (beyond the paradigm of heterosexual, cisgender individuals), first-generation status, and socioeconomic status. Third, geographic location was considered to ensure a wide range of experiences and truths are captured (e.g., Southwest, Midwest, East Coast, etc.). Other factors that were also

prioritized in the sampling process included, major and class year (e.g., first-year, second year; often referred to as freshman, sophomore, etc.).

Snowball Sampling

Lastly, snowball sampling, often referred to as chain or network sampling, revolved around asking existing participants to identify or refer the researcher to individuals they know who would meet the criteria of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and could serve as information-rich cases (Patton, 2015). In considering the number of participants to be recruited for this study, Patton (2015) recommended indicating a sample size “based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study” (p. 314). Thus, I aimed to recruit thirty ($n = 20$) participants, with a minimum of fifteen ($n = 15$) participants included in the final study. Given the shorter nature of a dissertation study, recruiting a larger group of participants was not feasible that this time and a limitation to this study. However, a total of eighteen ($n = 18$) student activists expressed interest in participating in this dissertation study, with a total of sixteen ($n = 16$) ultimately choosing to participate.

Presentation of Student Activists

In this section, I briefly present the student activists that participated in this dissertation study. Eighteen ($n=18$) students initially expressed interest in participating in my dissertation study. I ultimately connected with sixteen ($n=16$) student activists who engaged in a one-on-one semi-structured interview with me. Below, I summarize the general demographic information self-identified by each participant in the initial recruitment process (See Table 1.1).

Gender

Of the sixteen activists, ten ($n=10$) identified as a woman, four ($n=4$) identified as a man, three ($n=3$) identified as non-binary/non-conforming, and two ($n=2$) identified as transgender.

Ethnicity

Six (n=6) participants identified as Southeast Asian, two (n=2) identified as South Asian, seven (n=7) identified as East Asian, and one (n=1) did not identify their ethnicity. It is also noteworthy that four (n=4) activists also explicitly identified as biracial/multiracial and/or a transracial adoptee, which will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

Year In College

Majority of the student activists were currently enrolled as a student in their college/university (n=14), however there were two (n=2) activists that graduated in 2018 or later and were classified as “recent graduate.” Many institutions determine their students class year status by the amount of course credits they have completed (e.g., less than 30 completed course credits = first year student); however, for the purposes of this study, the number of years each activist had spent enrolled at their institution determined how they were categorized. The following outlines the distribution of students and their class year status: 1) first year (n=1), 2) second year (n=5), 3) third year (n=3), 4) fourth year (n=4), and 5) fifth year and beyond (n=1).

College Major

Activists’ spanned a broad range of majors across disciplines ranging from social sciences, public health, arts and humanities, and STEM-related fields.

College/University

Geographic Location

Eight activists (n=8) attend(ed) universities/colleges on the West Coast, two participants (n=2) attend(ed) a universities/colleges in the South and Southwest, one (n=1) activist attend(ed) a university/college in the Midwest, and five (n=5) activists attend(ed) universities/colleges in the Northeast.

Institution Type

The types of institutions students attend(ed) were a combination of public and private colleges and universities, that ranged in size from medium to large and were located in suburban or urban areas. Medium sized institutions are classified as institutions that have a student enrollment of 5,000-15,000 students and large sized institutions are categorized as having more than 15,000 enrolled students (College Data, 2020)

Table 1. 1
Self-Identified Characteristics of Participants

Student Activist	Gender Identity	Ethnic Identity	Geographic Location	Institution Type	Year	Major
Courtney	Woman	Chinese	Southern California	Public Large Urban	Third Year	Urban Studies and Planning
Eleanor	Woman	Not Listed	New York	Public Medium Urban	Second Year	Computer Science
Elena	Woman	Chinese (Biracial)	Massachusetts	Private Medium Suburban	Second Year	International Relations and Sociology
Ethan	Man	Taiwanese and Mexican (Biracial)	Southern California	Public Large Urban	Fourth Year	Political Science
Jack	Man	Pakistani	Texas	Public Large Urban	Second Year	English and Literary Studies
Jane	Woman	Filipino/a/x	Southern California	Public Large Urban	Second Year	Criminal Justice
Lucy	Woman	Taiwanese	Massachusetts	Private Medium Suburban	Fourth Year	Community Health and Race, Colonialism, and Diaspora
Michael	Man	Taiwanese Han Chinese	Southern California	Public Large Urban	Third Year	Human Biology/AAP I Studies Minor
Michelle	Woman	Vietnamese	Southern California	Public Large Urban	Second Year	Human Developmental Sciences w/ Specialty in Equity and Diversity

Table 1. 2
Self-Identified Characteristics of Participants (Continued)

Student Activist	Gender Identity	Ethnic Identity	Geographic Location	Institution Type	Year	Major
Miles	Man Transgender Non-Binary/ Non- Conforming	Singaporean Chinese	Northern California	Public Large Suburban	Fourth Year	Environmental Policy, Analysis and Planning
Nora	Woman	Filipino/a/x (Biracial)	Ohio	Public Large Urban	Fifth Year+	Child and Youth Studies, specialization in language and literacy
Riley	Transgender Non-Binary/ Non- Conforming	Indian	Northern California	Public Large Suburban	First Year	Neurobiology, Physiology, and Behavior
Ryan	Non-Binary/ Non- Conforming	Vietnamese	Massachusetts	Private Medium Suburban	Recent Graduate	Comparative Literature; East Asian Studies; Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies
Sophia	Woman	Filipino/a/x and Cambodian	Southern California	Public Large Urban	Third Year	Visual Arts - Media
Taylor	Woman	Malaysian Chinese	Massachusetts	Private Medium Suburban	Fourth Year	Child Studies and Human Development, Community Health
Whitney	Woman	Filipino	Arizona	Public Large Urban	Recent Graduate	Public Health with a Concentration in Global Health

Interviews

In nearly all types of qualitative research, interviews are primary form of data collected in the process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The main intention behind an interview is to learn a unique type of information by engaging in conversation with the participant through forms of questions that relate to the main purpose of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; DeMarrais,

2004). Interviews are beneficial when we cannot observe engage in observations or for inquiring about past events (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Dexter (1970) also asserted that “interview is the preferred tactic of data collection when...it will get better data or more data or data at less cost than other tactics!” (p. 11). Moreover, sometimes interviewing may be the only way for a researcher to obtain the data necessary for the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In the case of my own research, interviews as my primary form of data collection were best suited to guide my data collection process. First, I was interested in learning with and from participants about their perspectives and experiences as Asian American student activists. Given the intended goals of this study, Asian American students and activists offered a unique perspective and insight that were more deeply understood through conversations and opportunities for storytelling. While observing them in their institutional environments could be a tool in this qualitative study, many forms of activism may not currently be happening on each respective participant’s campus during the time of this study, especially considering the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. I also assumed that many activists would be recalling and speaking about experiences with engaging in activism that occurred prior to the study. Thus, interviews were best suited for the type of inquiry. Below, I outlined the intended structure and format of my interviews, as well as how I prepared and ultimately conducted interviews with each participant.

Structure and Format

For this study, students participated in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview via Zoom videoconferencing software. Participants were only asked to engage in one interview that lasted between 45-90 minutes; however, each interview was held for a two-hour time block to ensure that the conversation did not feel rushed. I wanted to be cognizant and respectful of the time and energy that these community members are providing me. For a semi-structured interview format, a list of research questions guided the conversation; however, these questions were adaptable in

how they are asked (i.e., wording) and the order in which they are asked in (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Engaging in this format allowed the conversation to be guided in a way that the topics, issues, and questions in the study could be answered, but it also invited new ideas and enabled conversations to emerge naturally based on the participant responses and for the researcher to be able to respond accordingly (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Lastly, interviews were conducted in a synchronous, online format because it increased the ways that data could be collected for qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the context of my own study, this allowed for more participants to be able to participate in my study that may not have been geographically located in the same area in which I as the researcher was residing in, and participants would have the flexibility to choose an environment that is comfortable and safe for them to be able to talk openly about their experiences.

Interview Preparation

Prior to engaging in the interview, interested participants were first asked to fill out an interest form via Google Forms (See Appendix B). General questions asked on this form included potential participant characteristics, such as, name, pronouns, institution, ethnicity. The form also asked participants to *briefly* describe the activism work in which they have engaged or participated for purposes of pre-screening potential participants that may have been a good fit for this research study. After potential participants were pre-screened, I reached out to those who fit the study criteria via email to invite them to participate in a one-on-one interview via Zoom. Once participants confirmed that they are interested and willing to participate in an interview, a time was scheduled to connect via Zoom, and they were sent a participant consent form (see Appendix C) to review and sign prior to their interview. The interview did not occur until the consent form was signed.

During the interview, I aimed to make this a comfortable and reciprocal process. It was important to recognize that what participants shared was deeply personal and they may have been recalling and reliving traumatic or triggering events. To build rapport and earn trust in this short amount of time, I started off by introducing myself, shared a bit of my background as an undergraduate student activist, and clarified my current social location in relation to my positionality as an Asian American women researcher and PhD student. I then shared my motivation for this study, reviewed the interview protocol (e.g., reminding participants they may opt out of answering any question or stop the interview at any time), and asked them if they have any questions or anything I could clarify before the interview begins. Participants were then asked open-ended interview questions from the protocol (See Appendix E).

At the end of the interview, I asked participants if they have any questions for me or anything else they would like to add to the conversation that I did not have ask, or they did not have had the opportunity to discuss during the interview. I then explained the follow-up process, including how they will receive a copy of their interview transcript to review. With funding support from being a recipient of the EDS Diversity Fellowship, participants also received a \$10 gift card to thank them for their time as a *small* token of appreciation.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis process is one that is fluid and repetitive (Miles et al., 2014). The data analysis process is utilized to understand more deeply what is occurring in our data as we begin to make meaning and identify common themes and patterns (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2014). Ultimately, the goal of the data analysis process is to answer the research questions of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By engaging in this process, it not only supports the reflection process as researchers but allows for improvement in our methods to make them more generalizable and accessible for researchers and scholars to apply in other

contexts (Miles et al., 2014). This study followed some of the common features of qualitative analytic methods outlined by Miles et al. (2014), but with an intentional focus on co-constructing knowledge with participants and honoring their lived experiences and truths to diminish harm and exploitation for the sake of knowledge and learning.

Data Preparation and Organization

Recorded interviews with participants were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service provider (Rev.com). Interview transcripts were then uploaded to a qualitative analysis software program (MAXQDA) to begin the analysis process (Creswell, 2013).

Data Storage

Each participant was given the opportunity to select or be assigned their own pseudonym to protect their identity and confidentiality in this dissertation study. Only their pseudonym was utilized on interview documents and in the discussion of the findings when writing this dissertation study. All interview transcripts were stored in a secured and password protected file to which only the primary researcher and advisor had access to.

Data Condensation

Conversations with the Data

Each interview transcripts were read at least two times to have a general understanding of the conversation. The intention of this practice was to fully submerge myself in the data to understand the conversation as a whole before condensing it into smaller parts (Creswell, 2013). The first read through was read while taking no notes; the second read through engaged in a memoing process. Memos are typically notes taken within the margins of the interview transcripts that may include short phrases, initial ideas, or concepts from the researcher and can

serve as an essential foundation for making critical connections and arguments grounded in the theoretical and conceptual frameworks (Creswell, 2016).

Coding and Categorizing

Following these initial readings, the coding process took place. The process of coding focused on condensing the data into smaller sets of information, looking to verify the code with evidence from other data being utilized in the study, and then assigning a label to the code (Creswell, 2013). This process first began with an open coding process that involved writing down notes, comments, observations, and/or inquiries in the margins (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process enabled me to essentially have a conversation with the data in beginning to make meaning related to answering the core research questions of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Creswell (2013) encouraged researchers to think about the coding process as narrowing the data. Not all the information within the dataset will be utilized and some may be completely unnecessary in the context of the questions the researching is aiming to answer (Wilcott, 1994b); this is a natural part of the qualitative research process and a powerful reminder of the agency I hold as a researcher to make these subjective decisions.

After engaging in the initial open coding process, I conducted focused coding, or grouping the codes from this process into general categories or themes (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Categories are “conceptual elements that “cover” or span many individual examples (or bits or units of the data you previously identified) of the category” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). This process involved sorting and examining through the initial coded data to categorize similar phrase, relationships, patterns, themes, and distinct differences amongst the transcripts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles & Huberman, 2014). This type of coding pushed me to interpret the data and reflect on the meaning behind it (Richards, 2015). Constructing categories or themes allowed for common themes across all the interview transcripts to be identified (Merriam & Tisdell,

2016). These themes then informed the findings that were grounded in literature and the guiding theoretical framework in order to answer the core research questions of this study (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014).

I then engaged in axial coding (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015) or analytical coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through this coding process, I identified essential components of each theme. Axial coding answers the “when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences” questions (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60). By focusing on these questions, the researcher can explain what participants are experiencing more thoroughly (e.g., conceptualizing the data) (Charmaz, 2006). Moreover, axial coding encouraged researchers to deeply understand their data by applying an analytical frame which may help illuminate and increase initial ideas and themes from the collected data (Charmaz, 2006). In the context of this study, axial coding was engaged by generating a code list for each of the main codes (e.g., “collectivist approaches to engaging in activism”) and then coded to clarify the most essential components of it (e.g., “self-reflexivity about complicity”). By engaging in axial coding, the components of the theme correlated with subthemes in the findings section. Below, Table 2.1 summarizes how I organized the findings and themes from the analysis process.

Table 2.1
Organization of Findings and Themes

Aspects of Neoliberal Culture Experienced by Activists			
Framework Component	Open Codes	Focused Codes (Themes)	Axial Codes (Subthemes)
Declining Morality	Emphasis on STEM	Profit motives over people	Espoused but not enacted social justice values
	Espoused justice values		Superficial Engagement
	Campus culture and environment		Prioritizing STEM fields and professions
	Failure to listen		Devaluing of social justice related programs and initiatives
	Money		

Table 2.2
Organization of Findings and Themes (Continued)

Aspects of Neoliberal Culture Experienced by Activists			
Framework Component	Open Codes	Focused Codes (Themes)	Axial Codes (Subthemes)
Declining Morality	Asian American experiences	Profit motives over people	Diminishing Asian American Experiences
	Racism and discrimination		
	Model minority myth		
Precarity (faculty and staff)	Interactions between students and staff	A culture of precarity	Fear of backlash
	Perceptions of faculty		
	Tensions between students and staff		
	Faculty and staff experiences and responses to student activism		
	Student labor		Political censorship and lack of voice
	Reasons for not advocating or becoming involved in campus activism		
	Fears of retaliation		
Competitive Individualism	Reciprocity	An ethos of self-interest	The performance of care
	Performativity		Lack of capacity to care
	Administrator experiences and responses		Focus on self-preservation
	Support from others		
	Tokenism		
Consumerism	Administrator experiences and responses	Normalized exploitation of People of Color	Diversity Tokens
	Exploitation		Exploiting students and their stories for financial gain
	Racism and discrimination		
	Money		
Surveillance	Challenges engaging in activism	Advanced hyper-surveillance systems	Increased police presence

Table 2.3
Organization of Findings and Themes (Continued)

Aspects of Neoliberal Culture Experienced by Activists			
Framework Component	Open Codes	Focused Codes (Themes)	Axial Codes (Subthemes)
Surveillance	Administrator experiences and responses	Advanced hyper-surveillance systems	Disciplinary action
	Activist experiences and responses		Surveillance technology
How Neoliberal Culture Shapes the Way Students Navigate Activist Work			
Framework Component	Open Codes	Focused Codes (Themes)	Axial Codes (Subthemes)
Neoactivism	Student labor	Contextualizing students' activism and advocacy	Political and social justice movements
	Community organizing		Representation and education
	Cross community coalition building		Passive acts of engagement
	Activism tactics and actions		
	Defining activism		
Neoactivism	Defining activism	Encompassing collectivist approaches to activism	Understanding critical consciousness
	Collectivist approaches		Embracing collective action
	Reciprocity		Focus on fostering solidarity and relationships
	Cross coalition building		
	Building relationships		
Neoactivism Neoliberalism	Activism tactics and actions	Strategically engaging the university	Connecting efforts to university values
	Motivation for engaging in activism work		Using their own exploitation to be in the room
Neoactivism	Burnout	Dealing with activism pressures	Producing perfectionism
	Reciprocity		Navigating a toxic culture
	Critical self-reflexivity		Being consumed in work
	Feelings of guilt		Experiencing burnout
	Productivity		

Table 2.4
Organization of Findings and Themes (Continued)

Aspects of Neoliberal Culture Experienced by Activists			
Framework Component	Open Codes	Focused Codes (Themes)	Axial Codes (Subthemes)
Neoactivism	Permission to rest	Prioritizing refusal and rest	Embracing community as a source of support
	Building knowledge		Centering self-care as a form of refusal
	Sustaining movements		Being conscious of health and joy
	Solidarity		
	Looking forward to the future		

Data Analysis and CQI Considerations

Engaging in qualitative research processes often upholds neoliberal ideologies while simultaneously perpetuating harm. To begin countering this process, Giroux (2006) and Kuntz (2015) discussed the idea of “radical possibility” (p. 134) where we have the power to not only envision transforming research practices into ones that firmly reject neoliberal ideologies, but also reclaim how we translate knowledge related to individual challenges and truths in ways that are accessible and empower the public to consider action for transformative change. This type of radical possibility and “hopeful resistance” (p. 134) is one that must refuse “logics of extraction” (p. 189). I understood this as not just reading and analyzing data for the sake of trying to interpret it, rather we could sit in the chaos of research. We must allow ourselves as researchers and, for me, as someone connected to the community in this study, to be affected deeply and open ourselves to be changed in some capacity (Kuntz, 2015). The socialization I received as an emerging researcher was to leave our emotions out of our work; however, one of the empowering and humanizing natures of CQI that I have construed is that we can immerse ourselves in our feelings, hone in on our critical awareness and institution in order to deeply understand the truths communicated with us (Kuntz, 2015), and validate the lived experiences

that our community members have so boldly and bravely shared with us. It is through this approach that we can reconstruct how we think about meaning in the data analysis process (Ziskin, 2019).

Thinking more deeply about the analysis process, some of the meronyms of CQI discussed by Pasque and Salazar Pérez (2015) encouraged researchers to embrace having broad and several possibilities of data interpretations and challenge the hegemonic idea of “results” in qualitative research. In doing so, we could think about “results” as a photograph in a particular point in time, in which there are multiple realities that are valid and fluid. In the context of this dissertation, I worked to keep an open heart and mind as I made sense with the lived experiences my participants have shared in understanding that there are multiple truths, none of which are wrong or more important than another. In this reflexive process of challenging the idea of “results,” I worked to embrace it as translation of knowledge into language that is accessible, centered the humanity of my community, and honored the truths that have been bravely shared.

Moreover, neoliberal graduate student socialization (Na et al., 2021) has told me that I write for the academy; that this dissertation study was one that was a requirement of me to prove my knowledge, and to show I am worthy of joining the “elite” 1% of people in the world that hold a Doctor of Philosophy. Yet, CQI reminded me that it is imperative to continue grounding myself, to remember who I do this work with and for, and how the people that love me and keep me accountable served as an incessant reminder to keep my communities at the core of all that I do.

The CQI research process is one that is messy and encouraged me to embody my imperfections as researchers, but to also remember how my complicity and socialization into the neoliberal academy impacted the work in which I engage. Data analysis processes in CQI holds

us accountable as researchers to do and be better in centering collectivism and shared knowledge of communities, while being critically reflexive about the reality that research processes are ones that continue to emerge in collaboration and are ever-changing (Pasque & Salazar Pérez, 2015). I hope by embracing all aspects of CQI in the data collection and analysis process would empower my community and possibly create spaces that helped heal and instill feelings of radical hope for transformative change for a socially just future in higher education.

Trustworthiness and Validation

This dissertation engaged several strategies typically used in constructivist qualitative research to ensure trustworthiness and validity of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). First, the data was triangulated to use multiple forms of data collection, including individual interviews and research memos. By utilizing multiple forms of data, each form of data was compared, contrasted, and cross-checked to ensure these multiple perspectives were accurately captured. Engaging in this method also increased credibility and quality of the study in that any concerns around the findings being a single truth or a researcher's subjectivity, could be negated (Patton, 2015).

Another strategy that maximized trustworthiness of the study was to engage in member checks or "respondent validation" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246). This process eliminated the possibility of the researcher misinterpreting what a participant said or meant (Maxwell, 2013). It also encouraged the researcher to be reflexive about their own biases and misunderstandings of the data being analyzed (Maxwell, 2013). In the context of my own study, following the transcription of the participant's individual interview, they received a copy of their transcript to review. They were able to review the transcript on their own time and provide any feedback or adjustments based on what was provided. In doing this, participants should have

been able to recognize the experience that was shared in the interview and could offer suggestions to help better encapsulate their perspective and truth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Intentionality in considering and understanding discrepant data also served as a form of trustworthiness and validation for this study. During the data analysis process, patterns are identified in order to make contrasts across the data (Miles et al., 2014). Looking for discrepant data supported the analysis process in that it empowers the researcher to refine their concepts and/or reveals that their sample may be too limited (Miles et al., 2014). Moreover, discrepant data was not something that should necessarily be ignored or excluded because it often could tell the researcher something beneficial or pertinent about how the overall conclusion of the study may need to be reframed or reconsidered (Miles et al., 2014).

In the context of my own study, it was also essential to identify discrepant data or “exceptions” (Miles et al., 2014) where an individual’s experience may not necessarily fit within the common themes consistently recognized in other participant’s narratives. It was also noteworthy to mention that discrepant cases do not only apply to individuals and their stories, but can also encompass settings, distinctive treatment(s) of individuals or communities, or abnormal events (Miles et al., 2014). Any context or components of a participant’s interview that stood out as discrepant was highlighted and noted during the coding process. Once these were identified, I worked to embrace them as part of the fluid research process and reflect on how these lived truths, contexts, and experiences could be utilized as core pieces of knowledge, built upon, and explored further rather than attempting to explain the “outliers” away (Miles et al., 2014).

Related to the trustworthiness or integrity of the study (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), I engaged in continuous reflexivity. My positionality and social location as a researcher remained at the core of this study. My positionality as a researcher inevitably impacted the research

process through biases, inclinations, and underlying assumptions that we inherently possessed as human beings (Probst & Berenson, 2014). Constantly engaging in the fluid process of critical self-reflexivity in not only naming our biases, experiences, and views of the world can better contribute to understanding how myself as a researcher had interpreted the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is important to note that simply naming these biases did not take away from the perspectives and assumptions we hold as researchers, but it further supports in understanding how a specific researcher's values have influenced the creation and conclusion of the study (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Lastly, peer review or peer examination (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 249) was be employed through my dissertation chair reviewing my data collection processes and findings based on the data collected. This is also a common practice used in publications of articles where "peers" that have expertise around a particular subject review the manuscript and recommend it for publication, revise and resubmit, or a rejection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process allows for someone other than the researcher(s) to review the data and determine whether the findings are reasonable based on that the data collected in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Researcher Positionality

Social Location

It is essential that I share how I am positioned in such a way to approach and engage in this research. While simply writing about and naming my positionality did not completely diminish the unintentional harm that occurs in research processes, I aim to continue the fluid process of critical self-reflexivity in grappling with and addressing my complicity and how I am given access to situate myself in such a manner to have the privilege to share and translate the knowledge my community always possessed.

As an Asian American adoptee woman and PhD student studying higher education, I am engaged in the nuances of neoliberalism in being both complicit by choosing to be a part of academia and harmed by these ideologies and practices within my institution. While my position as a PhD student influences how I am able to engage in this type of work through providing me with access to resources and support, my past experiences as an undergraduate student activist at a historically white institution also continued to inform my curiosity and fueled my desire to critically examine Asian American student activist experiences. Because of my direct experiences engaging in activism work as an undergraduate student, it was essential that I was mindful of not inserting or projecting my own experiences and perceptions of activism on participants in ways that misrepresent their realities. Part of my interpretation of critical qualitative inquiry is recognizing there are multiple truths and experiences, none of which are wrong or more important than another. Although I had my own experiences and knowledge that shape this topic of inquiry, there was an excitement and energy in knowing that I would continue to complicate my understanding and conversations in activist experiences through having the privilege to be able to learn with and from my own community.

In addition, my focus on four-year institutions, especially in regard to public institutions, could not ignore the reality that majority of these institutions were built upon stolen land and unceded territory of Native Nations. Moreover, the decision to amplify Asian American student experiences does not erase the existence of harm that we are complicit in perpetuating (e.g., settler colonialism) despite Asian American communities having a history of racial subjugation and experiencing forms of violence at the hands of white supremacy; these nuances can co-exist with each other simultaneously. This fluid process of interrogating my relationship with the institution and the activist spaces (related to land) I am intertwined with remain a salient aspect

in the development of my thinking and my approach to integrating a neoliberal framework in understanding these experiences and ideologies as an emerging scholar.

Tuhiwai Smith (2012) discussed how research is related to the idea of needing to know and is produced and translated in a way that is viewed as “superior.” I do this work with and for my communities as a form of survival in working to amplify the truths of my community, yet I am constantly reflecting upon ideas of reciprocal relationships and notions of refusal in resisting the exploitation of the pain and stories of my people (Tuck & Yang, 2014) under the premise of learning and knowledge, related to notions of Western research (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). I continue to think deeply about these realities and how my approach to research is evolving (Tuhiwai Smith, 2014). I also think about Tuhiwai Smith’s (2012) discussion around this transformation (the researched becoming the researchers) where questions become framed in nuanced ways, priorities are ranked differently, the ways we understand “problems” actively challenge hegemonic notions, and people participate on different terms. While I find power in this re-framing, I am constantly reflecting and working to push beyond simply recognizing personal beliefs and assumptions, and the consequences they hold (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). I continue to feel a deep responsibility to my community to engage in work that not only intentionally works to transform spaces to have our voices and existence valued, but moreover, how it is essential to center work that humanizes my communities and firmly objects to upholding notions of power and privilege (i.e., white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, etc.) that relate to neoliberal and colonial paradigms in academic research and our everyday experiences (Tuck & Yang, 2014).

Commitment to Community

Related to my social location and positionality as both a student and emerging researcher, I wanted to be intentional with how I engaged with this work and the individuals and communities intertwined in these complex realities. In my own experiences, I think about the ways that my story, both as an Asian American and Korean adoptee, were not only exploited by the institution but the pressure I felt by my community to share deeply personal experiences and relive traumatic events just to get the administration to acknowledge our existence on campus. While this was a choice I made, I feared exploiting the pain and suffering of my own community in this study in the same ways that I have once lived. However, as the primary researcher conducting this study, I did find comfort in knowing I had agency to do better and make decisions that firmly resist harm and mistreatment of my community. I sit here and reflect deeply about how my own experiences informed my desire to amplify and center the voices of my community. While one goal of this dissertation is to contribute to holding institutions accountable through examining systems that maintain power and oppression, it is imperative to me that community members who chose to share their truths as student activists felt validated, and that the time and space we shared with one another could be utilized in such a way that is restorative, healing, and empowering.

While these goals may seem unrealistic, CQI encourages us to dream and (re)imagine new possibilities. I found power within this purpose and knowing I am afforded this freedom to cultivate and build off the work of other scholars to shape research in such a way that honors, respects, and affirms lived experiences and community histories. I know from personal experience the academy practically begs for the stories and narratives of my community's pain and trauma. Lived experiences are a valid form of knowledge, but they are not to be used to harm or replicate violence in academic spaces. It was in these moments I went back to the practice of

refusal that goes beyond simply saying “no,” but rather resists the process of objectification and interrogates power through the ways that neoliberalism is maintained throughout the academy (Na et al., 2021). There are narratives that the academy simply does not deserve; ones that are sacred and deeply personal and must not be simplified and exploited for the sake of knowledge and learning.

Finally, as I am constantly engaged with and nurtured by my community, I am reminded that my commitment is not to the academy, nor to my committee, or even to the research process itself. My commitment is to my community; to engage in research *with* and *for* them, to diminish as much harm and suffering that is within my control and capacity, and to firmly object to exploitation and objectification of their lived truths. My community includes the family, mentors, and friends who have poured unconditional love and care that allows me to even be able to negotiate these tensions and participate in this work. They are the reason and the reminders of why I engage in these notions of refusal in research – to protect the ones I love and care about most.

Limitations of Study

Despite being intentional about ensuring trustworthiness and validation in this study, there were still limitations in the current study and its design. First, I chose to focus solely on Asian American experiences and intentionally not including Pacific Islanders in this inquiry. Asian American and Pacific Islander experiences are often aggregated together despite having vastly different experiences and historical contexts. Choosing not to include Pacific Islander experiences in this study was a conscious decision in attempt to acknowledge how realities and dynamics in Asian American and Pacific Islander communities are vastly different and should not and cannot be used interchangeably (Gogue et al., 2021). In doing so, however, I recognized

this may have reinforced and further perpetuated the exclusion of Pacific Islander experiences both in the field higher education and related to student activism.

There were also no West or Central Asian Americans that participated in this study, communities within the Asian diaspora that is often forgotten or disregarded. Thus, this study did not encapsulate all aspects and ethnicities of the Asian American experience. Furthermore, focusing on Asian American activist experiences did not encompass other historically excluded communities and their experiences and therefore the findings may not reflect how other communities of color experience how their activism is shaped by neoliberalism.

Second, I only explored the experiences of undergraduate students and recent graduates, leaving out graduate student experiences. As discussed previously, there are parallels in the underlying reasons for both undergraduate and graduate students engaging in activism, but ultimately, I felt it was important to discern the two communities of students for the purposes of narrowing the scope of this study and recognizing experiences unique to each group. However, graduate students and their experiences are often disregarded or overlooked in higher education contexts (Guentzel & Nesheim, 2006), and their activist experiences provide valuable insight into institutional policies and structures. This study may have unintentionally perpetuated a narrative and praxis of exclusion around graduate student experiences.

Despite seeking maximum variation sampling in relation to ethnicity and geographic location, limiting the recruitment criteria to four-year institutions may limit the transferability of this study to other institutional types. For instance, two-year institutions (e.g., community colleges) were not captured or represented in this study. This study also did not include the perspectives of administrators, faculty, and staff, who are essential in student development and support, are often key stakeholders within university systems, and as mentioned previously, can

be deeply embedded in this neoliberal game (Na et al., 2021). Utilizing a methodological approach other than CQI, such as a case study, may have allowed for a more nuanced understanding of student activist experiences and how these institutional agents are intertwined and shape activist experiences. However, given the time constraint and relatively short nature of this dissertation study, this was an aspect I felt was not feasible that this time. Therefore, it may have also contributed to not having a complete understanding of how neoliberalism shapes Asian American activist experiences and an overall holistic understanding of organizational structures.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews conducted with 16 Asian American college students to examine how neoliberal ideologies inform their experiences as individuals engaged in activism and advocacy work. While the findings are organized in separate categories and sub-themes that could be perceived as linear, it is essential to note that they are all interconnected with each other (e.g., they build off one another or are interrelated). As such, this study aimed to address four additional sub-questions:

- 1) How, if at all, does neoliberalism catalyze Asian American students' activism on their college/university campuses?
- 2) How, if at all, does neoliberalism constrain Asian American students' activism on these campuses?
- 3) In what ways, if any, are Asian Americans navigating neoliberal ideologies in their work as student activists?
- 4) How does neoliberalism shape the outcomes of these students' activism?

I present the findings through two core categories. The first category of addressed aspects of neoliberal culture experienced by activists and included five core findings. The first theme

discussed how the institution profit motives over people through five subthemes: 1) espoused but not enacted social justice values, 2) superficial engagement, 3) prioritizing STEM fields and professions, 4) devaluing social justice related programs and initiatives, and 5) diminishing Asian American experiences. The second theme addressed how the institution cultivates a culture of precarity, specifically amongst faculty and staff through their fear of backlash and political censorship and their lack of voice within the larger academy. Next, activists shared experiences of how the institution instills an ethos of self-interest specifically related to college and university personnel, but especially administrators. This was seen through their performativity when it came to carework, the overall perception of their lack of capacity to care, and a focus on self-preservation. In addition, activists also shared their truths about the normalization of exploiting People of Color in the ways they are treated as diversity tokens and how the institution uses students and their stories for financial gain. The last theme addressed the rise of advanced hyper-surveillance systems on college and university campuses through areas such as increased police presence at student events, threatening activists with disciplinary action, using surveillance technology in student-centered spaces.

The second category focused on how neoliberal culture shapes the way Asian American students navigated their work as activists and discussed an additional five themes. I first began with contextualizing students' activism and advocacy to paint a more robust picture about the ways students are engaging in activism and advocacy work. Next, I underscored how students are encompassing collectivist approaches to activism through three core areas: 1) understanding critical consciousness, 2) embracing collective action, and 3) focusing on fostering solidarity and relationships. Next, I shared how activists are strategically engaging in the university through connecting efforts to university values and using their own exploitation to be present in certain

spaces. The fourth theme focused on some of the challenges and consequences encountered by activists, specifically with the managing activism pressures. This was discussed through four different aspects: 1) producing perfectionism, 2) toxic culture in activist circles, 3) being consumed in work, and 4) experiencing burnout. Finally, activists shared the ways they are resisting neoliberal ideologies through their prioritization of refusal and rest in how they embraced community as a source of support, centered self-care as a form of refusal, and were conscious of their health and joy. This chapter concludes with a summary of the primary findings to preface the discussion in Chapter 5.

Aspects of Neoliberal Culture Experienced by Activists

Profit Motives Over People

Discussions with activists provided insight into how institutions continue to prioritize profits over the well-being of the students it was intended to serve. Specifically, activists discussed how institutions claim to embody social justice orientations, but their actions are misaligned with this commitment. They noted that, when social justice issues are raised by students, they respond and engage in ways that are superficial. Moreover, there were several discussions related to the perceived value of STEM education and professions over other fields of study, reinforcing how social justice related programs and initiatives are not a priority to the institution.

Espoused But Not Enacted Social Justice Values

Activists in this study shared how their institutions claim to center social justice initiatives within their institutional values and mission, but how they experience this as students is vastly different from what is promoted in practice. Ethan reinforced this notion through his discussion in some of the challenges he faced when trying to advance a social justice agenda within the institution and his own work as a student activist:

*And social justice, racial justice, sometimes they feel like lip service. They're kind of touted a lot, but it feels like it's to get a lot of students to feel comfortable coming here or just because it feels like out of obligation. And that's not necessarily every individual, every single admin or a lot of faculty are this way, that's the institutional culture that I feel a lot of undergrads, or at least myself, feel at this university. But at the same time, there's this really strong undercurrent of activism as well. Heck, we have [activist] who went here, and we have this strong activism from the '60s and carrying on. **I don't think that goes away, it just kind of gets buried a little bit more.** It becomes a little bit more niche. There's little less people working on it, but it's still very strong. **So, I think that's there just beneath the surface, there's a lot of work being done, but it's not what gets touted by the spokespeople of the institution.** – Ethan*

Ethan felt that institutions market themselves as centering social and racial justice initiatives to enhance the appeal to prospective students and increase student enrollment; yet, what is promoted by institutions is ultimately empty rhetoric when it comes to reflexive practices. He also shared that paradoxically, at his university, there is a deep-rooted history of campus organizing and student activism that has continued in present day. Thus, social and racial justice work is occurring on campus, but institutional leaders do not typically share this reality with the broader public and these equity initiatives become obscured within the larger institutional agenda.

Three other activists all attending different colleges/universities across the U.S. also discussed paralleled sentiments to Ethan's experience about how their institutions present themselves as liberal, inclusive, and socially aware:

*I think my university has a **perception of being a very liberal institution** and town, which is not untrue, but it's also very liberal. You have the white hippies with peace signs on their cars and stuff like that. And there's just like, I don't know, you can tell they're really trying to be comfortable, but they're not quite comfortable. **Also, the institution has a lot of other issues...** – Miles*

Miles shared how their institution presented itself as a liberal institution, which has truth to it, but alluded to that this type of "liberal" may be rooted in aspects of whiteness through some of the hegemonic ways we often see solidarity and allyship displayed with (e.g., peace signs).

Furthermore, the perception of being “a very liberal institution” does not take away from the fact that their institution also has other issues that need to be addressed, despite having an image of an inclusive institution. While Nora did not explicitly say her institution is seemingly more progressive, she did share similar sentiments to how there are perceived values of social justice that are not actually enacted:

I think it has outwardly, it values a lot of diversity and inclusion, stuff like that. But I think the institution as a whole propagates that they do a lot of things that they don't really do, and they take credit for things that smaller departments and even student organizations do. –Nora

Nora explained how her university claimed to value diversity and inclusion, which she shared can make the institution more enticing for students to attend, especially students of color. However, this was not the reality of the institution and she attributed much of this work to enact diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives to other functional areas of the institution (e.g., academic and student affairs). Furthermore, the departments that engaged in diversity and inclusion initiatives often included cultural and resource centers and Ethnic Studies programs and centers; all of which tend to serve students from historically and racially excluded backgrounds and communities, yet the institution would capitalize on their work.

Sophia also shared her perspective how the institution is a space that values education, but this embraced value may have a different motivation behind it:

*I definitely agree with the **financial geared, business geared mindset of the institution**. I understand everything is for the student and everything is for education within the institution, but through various history classes and things that I've read about the institution as a whole, **I just see that a lot of their motivation is very financial based and a lot of it is like decisions are made with money in mind too heavily**, I believe. –Sophia*

Here, Sophia discussed her inherent understanding of how the institution operates and are supposed to keep students at the core of their decisions. However, she discussed that through the different coursework she has engaged with and what she has learned about college and university

systems, her perception is that the institution is motivated solely by finances and what will maximize profits for the institution. As a result, so much to the point that the institution centers this and relies “too heavily” on the value of money over the wellbeing and interests of the students it was intended to serve.

Lastly, Ryan talked about their experience with how the university promotes itself as an innovative and social-justice focused institution:

*My university **markets itself**, and I know, because I used to work in their marketing admissions team, as this hub for knowledge. They're like, “We are doing some exemplary stuff here, things you wouldn't even believe, because we're so small and **we can do so much with so much money.**” It's not just innovation, but **they're social justice-oriented innovation** because of their history and so their whole thing was **social rights**. But once you get there, I think you realize that **a majority of people aren't actually interested in that**. And I say that, because there were tons of people who went to my university who would not bother taking a Gender Studies class, would not bother taking an African and African American Studies class, **would not bother doing anything that has “Studies” attached to it**, which is to each their own, whatever education that you want, **but I think that people like herald it, as this liberal arts college, where everybody is motivated to do good and to do social justice for the world, and that's just not true**. It really is just any other higher education institution. **It is profit driven**. At the end of the day, they just want people to graduate, make bank, come back, give money back, and then propel this idea that our university is set apart from other institutions. –Ryan*

Ryan offered unique insight into their particular institution because of their past experience working in marketing for university admissions. Their university framed itself as a small, private institution with innovative “social justice” approaches and the ability to engage in more critical work because of the financial resources it possessed. Moreover, their institution had a rich history of social rights movements, similar to what Ethan described above. While the culture of the institution was directly discussed in a way that would outwardly appear to value diversity, equity, and inclusion, Ryan shared the harsh reality that most individuals entrenched within the university have no interest in upholding the values that the institution claimed to advance. Moreover, despite being esteemed as a liberal arts college, most individuals would not

consider taking any class related to social sciences and humanities (e.g., Ethnic Studies) or have any desire or moral obligation to engage in social justice initiatives. Ryan attributed much of this to the belief that institutions are profit driven in that their primary goal is to enroll students, gain money through financial components (i.e., tuition), and ensure their students graduate so then they can return as alumni and donate money back into the institution. Consequently, this systematic cycle continues under the premise that their university was bold and distinctive because they are engaged “innovative” work that other institutions are not, reinforcing institutional individuality and prestige.

Superficial Engagement

A salient point of conversation for more than half the activists was discussion around how college and university personnel (e.g., faculty, staff, and administrators) responded to and engaged with students when social and racial justice issues were raised and/or activism occurred on their campuses. Overall, students shared how there was a lack of response from their professors, divided stances on how college and university personnel showed-up and supported students, and superficial engagement when it came to directly addressing concerns brought forth by activists.

Eleanor stated, “*I think that there's been a **lack of response from my professors**” which underscored how it generally seemed that faculty did not know what has happening on campus to outwardly address issues or show support and/or the socialization to not discuss anything that could potentially be perceived as “controversial” in their classes. Nora also had similar experiences with her faculty not engaging with students:*

*I feel like there's **generally just not a response**. There have been a couple of times that I've reached out to my professors and been like, "Hey, I'm really impacted by this event happening right now." And **they have been kind of accommodating, but very distantly**. I feel like they didn't really give me any support, but they did allow me to turn things in late. **So, no dialogue and direct support, I guess**. But if you ask for it, I suppose, in my*

experience in the education department, which is a much, much smaller department here, they are more accommodating to things like that. –Nora

Nora discussed how it is normalized for faculty not to address activism that has occurred on their campus, but specifically in this context, she discussed how she was severely affected by the rise of anti-Asian hate and violence towards her community. Despite anti-Asian hate being a prevalent topic in national news, she had to specifically reach out to her professors and seek additional educational support. Overall, her professors were accommodating, but as she stated, “very distantly,” primarily granting her extra time to turn assignments in past the specified deadline but with no additional dialogue or intentional care. The lack of discussion and awareness around Nora’s experience with anti-Asian hate could be attributed to the pervasive misconceptions that Asian Americans do not experience racism or discrimination, which can lead to further silencing of the community and erasure of these violent experiences. Furthermore, it was noteworthy that she mentioned the education department tends to be more accommodating when students are impacted by events involving social and civil unrest. This may be attributed to how disciplines within the social sciences tend to be more student-oriented and have a more critical perspective and engagement with social and racial justice issues. This notion was further discussed by another activist who shared how they felt it was unusual that their professors did not bring up any of the activism occurring on campus, especially because much of it related or directly impacted students:

*But in classes and stuff, especially during the ***³ strike and I don't think **many of my classes talked about it**. There was only one class I was taking, it was an Ethnic Studies class, so our professor would cancel the class for that, and so that was obviously something that was apparent in that class; but I think I was taking Organic Chemistry and some other, I think I was taking another bio class, I think, and in those classes, at least in O Chem, I don't think anyone went on strike, and so it was never mentioned or brought up in that class at all. And then same thing in the other class, it wasn't brought up at all. – Michael*

³ *** denoted a redacted word/phrase to protect student confidentiality

Michael's experience underscored the drastic differences in how different professors in various disciplines chose to address activism in which students on their campus were engaged. His Ethnic Studies class and education tended to be more student-oriented and deeply engaged in work around social and racial justice issues. Thus, his professor was cognizant of the activism occurring on their campus and expressed a form of solidarity by canceling class so students could attend demonstrations and support students in choosing to not cross the picket line. Yet, in Michael's more STEM-centered courses, no one was engaged in the strike and there was no mention of the activism occurring on campus. This (lack of) engagement could be perceived as an ignorant reaction where both students and professors did not believe they were directly impacted in any capacity, did not hold the same values as their peers who were actively participating in the strike, and/or did not see the correlation and relevance of their own work in STEM to social, racial, and political issues being raised by students on campus. Other activists shared how it felt like college and university personnel were split among the concerning issues raised on their campus:

*I'd say it's **very divided**. I've met staff at protests themselves that are also passionate about the issue. There's a lot of staff here that I mentioned that are really inclusive, and **they're the type of person you'd expect to show up at a protest or a demonstration** or something. I've met a lot of staff that are like, "Oh my God, this is amazing. Go you. This is the perfect issue to be advocating against." And I've also met people on the complete other end that are totally against it. I've met people that, I guess, staff that also **just stay silent**. They don't want to take a take on the issue. And then I've met staff that are like, "**You're going to get in trouble for doing this,**" or that are **fully against it**. –Riley*

Riley shared the various reactions they encountered specifically when staff engaged with students. On one end of the spectrum, there were staff members that outwardly supported students by being vocal about their stance on an issue or physically showing up for students at protests and demonstrations. Within the middle, there were also staff that chose to stay silent,

leaving students to feel ambiguous about their values, a normalized response that Nora also mentioned previously in her interactions with faculty. Then, on the opposite end of the spectrum there were staff members that unequivocally did not agree with issues raised and even went as far to warn students they would get in trouble for their activism.

Miles shared a different experience of how staff engage in surface-level manners when it comes to enacting their espoused social justice values. Specifically, they discussed their experience working in the LGBTQ+ Resource Center on their university's campus and incident that occurred with the director of the center:

*We had a consistent problem with White people in the center taking up a lot of space. Even if technically, most of the people who come in are People of Color, the White people there are loudest and the most aggressive and the most annoying. They're saying shit that they really shouldn't be saying in public. **And actually, recently there was an issue where somebody came in and took down a poster that was advocating for queer Muslims, and our director just let them.** Apparently, there was a confrontation, where the person came in and talked to the front desk and was like, "You need to take this down." And so, we were like, "Oh, we'll get our supervisor." And they both went outside and something happened. I'm not really sure what he said. Our director said that the guy was getting more aggressive and asking to take down, and then he was like, "Oh, if you don't want to do it, I'll do it." And our director shrugged, and he went inside and took it down and ripped it apart and threw it away. And I was like, "**Why did you do that? You could have just said, no.**" And we filed a discrimination report because it was technically vandalism. But I'm like, **he literally allowed that guy to do that, and he claimed that he was scared.** And I'm like, "You're this six-foot tall, large White guy. Why are you scared of a scrawny Brown kid?" We all know what's going on here. He wasn't even that angry. I was standing right behind the door, and I couldn't hear what they were saying. So it wasn't that he was actually afraid of physical harm. But he can preach anti-racism all he wants. When he first came into the office, he was like, "Oh, I really want to be an ally to you guys. I want to stand up for this stuff. And I'm like, "Okay, whatever. **But you have to actually show it.**" And he's not. –Miles*

Miles recalled an incident where a student came to the center and confronted the student employees at the front desk and demanded they take down the poster that expressed support for queer Muslims. Addressing this type of incident and the emotional labor needed to do so are not within the scope of a student employees' responsibilities. As such, they sought support from their

director who should be trained to address this type of issue and is accountable for the well-being of the students they serve. Miles went on to share how their director spoke with the student outside, who was seemingly becoming more agitated in demanding for the removal of the poster, going as far to tell the director that, if they refused, their next action would be to take down the poster themselves. Instead of their director telling the student he would not take down the poster, he ignored the student and allowed them to tear it down.

Consequently, this created more labor for the student employees who not only had to file a discrimination report but were forced to engage in further dialogue with their director to understand what happened. Furthermore, what appeared to be one of the most frustrating parts of this entire incident was the fact their director had always outwardly encouraged anti-racist practices and expressed that he wanted to be an ally to everyone in the center. Yet, when the time came to enact these advocated values, he failed to do so in choosing to engage passively and allowing acts of violence to occur. Miles's experience underscored how college and university personnel intertwined within the system of higher education often express values related to social justice, yet do not outwardly practice them. As Miles stated, it is not enough to simply say you believe in these aspects, "you actually have to show it."

Lastly, activists shared how administrators responded to their activism and the ways they engaged with students. Sophia first shared how the work she engaged and what she has witnessed on campus is all student organized; yet the institution as a whole engages in superficial manners when it comes to responding and addressing social justice issues:

*And then as far as the institution, I think that relates to what we were talking about before, that I think it's **a very surface level engagement and response to social issues**. But in terms of all the events that I see on campus, protests that I see on campus and all these things, they're all student organized, and I know that as an institution as a whole, **maybe they can't take a firm stance on something because that represents the entire student body**. –Sophia*

Sophia also speculated about why institutions choose to not take a stance on the issues raised by students. She believed it could be related to how when an institution outwardly expresses their support and makes their stance known to the public, it could be perceived as the institution representing the beliefs, values, and interests of the entire student community. Sophia's assessment raised a further question of if institutions truly valued racial and social justice like they claimed (e.g., mission, vision, and value statements advertised online), why is there a hesitation to outwardly express this and a fear to be perceived as an institution that not only values racial and social justice but cultivates a campus culture that enacts these espoused values into reflexive practices. Sophia also went on to discuss her observations regarding how institutions engage and respond to student activists:

*One big thing that I noticed recently that I haven't really thought about in depth before is those letters that the institution puts out whenever something happens and it's kind of super streamlined and it's kind of the most vague and baseline response to an issue possible. And I feel like that kind is a common thread throughout the entire institutional engagement with these kind of social issues. I feel like it's very hands off. We make a statement and then that's kind of as far as we go in terms of engagement with the social issue. And I understand the foundations of *** as an institution and also how neoliberal the entire institution is as a whole. So, I'm not surprised, if that makes sense.*
–Sophia

Sophia shared how the automatic response to any type of “disruption” on campus is to take a disengaged approach through putting out a statement to the general institutional community. She also stated how these statements felt broad and address the bare minimum of the issues that have been raised. In her experience, there is no discussion or further action taken by administrators to engage with the social issues. Given how the institution operates within a neoliberal system, this type of response is unsurprising to her. Another activist shared a similar sentiments to Sophia's experience:

I think there's been a weekly spam. I wouldn't say spam, but emails with long messages that kind of address, "We see what's going on, we want to let you know." But there's not really much activism going on besides those essays. –Eleanor

Eleanor stated that she received weekly emails that contain a long message that casually addressed the issue; the characteristic “we see you, we hear you” response that is often utilized throughout higher education institutions in the U.S. empire. Eleanor also shared a similar experience to Eleanor in that there is typically no further action or response from administrators beyond the emails sent out to the academic community. It was also interesting to hear Eleanor intuitively frame these emails as “spam.” Although she later reframed this as “emails with long messages,” it is understandable how these types of responses and multiple emails can be perceived and feel like a type of email “junk.” When these emails become the normalized response to any type of student-led “disruption” on campus, it can begin to feel like a performative routine reaction that contains the same information (perhaps worded differently), and therefore is not worth taking the time to read. Thus, frequently receiving these types of emails, as Eleanor stated, even on a weekly basis, can feel like an unproductive consumption of their time and space.

Prioritizing STEM Fields and Professions

An intriguing pattern that emerged in nearly half the discussions with student activists was how they felt their institution was STEM-centered and prioritized STEM education and professions. For instance, while Courtney discussed her perceptions of campus culture and the educational environment it cultivated:

*I would say it's a welcoming introverted campus **that is pretty STEM-oriented**. People are very passionate about what they do, but there are also a good amount of people who I feel it's not competitive in the sense of it's you against everyone else in a rat race. At least not in my department because I'm not really in a capped major. But people are very passionate about what they do and are competitive, I would say, against themselves. – Courtney*

Courtney insinuated that given the type of institution she attended, it could be assumed that students would be competitive with one another, but in actuality it does not feel that way to her; people are more competitive against themselves within the spaces she typically inhabits and navigates. She mentioned that her reality could be largely shaped by how she is in a department that does not limit the number of students who are admitted and can pursue that major. At her particular institution, many of the STEM majors have an additional application process and restrictions around the number of students that can declare and ultimately pursue that major as a field of study in their education. And although Courtney, as an Urban Studies and Planning Major, was not classified as a traditional STEM major, it was noteworthy that she explicitly mentioned that her campus centers STEM education. Thus, it may reinforce just how prominent STEM-centered education is at her particular institution.

Sophia also shared similar sentiments to Courtney in how she classified her institution as a STEM school. While not a central component to the discussion, Courtney also made a connection to how prioritizing on STEM education can often perpetuate notions of the model minority myth:

*I feel like the school itself is definitely very welcoming to Asian American students. I do think that general, how people perceive the institution could be, I think a misconception because I know that our institution is a **STEM school, and everyone does STEM here** and then I know that lends a hand in a model minority and things like that. So, I know that those things go together, but I don't hear anybody talking about it. –Sophia*

Michael also alluded to this connection Courtney was making when he shared his experiences as a student pursuing a STEM-related field:

*I'm just another Asian American kid in pre-med in Human Bio. I'm sure if the bio department took a survey, it'd be like 30% of people in the major are Asian American men. So yes, I do feel like that sometimes, but then at the same time, I feel like I don't want to fit that, and then I don't feel like I necessarily do all the times simply just because **I feel like anytime you bring up anything related to social justice or politics with***

someone that's so entrenched in STEM, it gets into a pretty ugly conversation. – Michael

A salient point in this conversation was when Michael discussed the challenges he has encountered when trying to engage in conversations around social justice or politics with peers in his chosen major. He specifically noted that many of his peers are “so entrenched in STEM” and that attempting to engage with them around these topics typically does not bode well for him. It could be inferred that there is not only a disconnect between the relevance and pertinence of social justice and STEM, but STEM faculty are not equipped or have no desire to participate in these discussions with students. Consequently, students are then not afforded opportunities to intentionally engage deeply in social and racial justice conversations in their STEM education. In Michael’s case, declaring as an Asian Pacific American Studies minor afforded him the opportunity to deeply explore his identity as an Asian American student and critically partake and contribute to discussions around racial and social justice topics.

Ethan also shared how it appeared that the general consensus around the campus culture was that it cultivated an environment that prioritized STEM and research:

*I'll start with institutional defined as admin and the policies and that general atmosphere. I think that people say this a lot, our institution is really focused on STEM and research. And I think that carries over pretty well into just kind of a general view of how that kind of trickles down into the institutions at our university. **So, the focus, the priorities of admin at our university feel like they're around STEM; they're around raising money for research, they're around raising money in general.** –Ethan*

He went on to explain how because of this general perception and focus on STEM, it became interconnected with the values and priorities of the university. Therefore, administrators prioritized STEM and specifically raising money for research. Furthermore, it reinforced the perception that prioritizing of STEM education could bring more financial wealth to the institution broadly.

Devaluing of Social Justice Related Programs and Initiatives

Intertwined with the discussion of STEM fields and professions is how social justice related programs and initiatives are often relatively devalued by institutions. Taylor shared her story about attending one of the most expensive universities in the U.S. and how ultimately, she felt they are a business at the end of the day and the priority was to engage in behavior that would maximize the financial endowment of the institution:

*Especially administration, higher ups. And it's all because my university is like...*** is so expensive. It's \$90,000 a year. **It's one of the most expensive schools in the country. So, this is just a business at the end of the day. They're just trying to do things that will get them the most money that will increase endowment, and let's be real, people graduating with an American Studies major is probably not going to be the biggest profit makers who will donate back to the school in five years. So, they're not trying to invest in people who are going to major in those things. Rather they're going to invest in people who will be doctors and lawyers and engineers. And it's not like to blame any one individual. It's just the way that the institution is structured and what the goal of the institution is set out to be. But yeah, I don't think they do it in student interest. I think they do it to make money.** –Taylor*

Taylor's thoughts reinforced the profit-driven priorities of the institution. She also went on to share how she was cognizant of the fact that individuals who graduated with a degree in a social science or humanities related field are not perceived as people who will generate large quantities of profit in their profession and ultimately donate back to the university. From this, she concluded that people, or administrators and key stakeholders of the institutions, are going to be less likely to invest in people in these related fields. Instead, they will invest their time, money, and energy into areas that historically and socially have a discernment of generating larger salaries (e.g., medicine, law, and STEM). Taylor also demonstrated a critical understanding that this is not necessarily attributed to one individual, rather it is a natural consequence of the systemic structures higher education institutions are forced to operate within (e.g., neoliberalism and capitalism). While she made it clear she does not necessarily blame one or even a group of individuals, it was important to note that ultimately institutions are still not blameless in this

system because as she mentioned, they still do not operate in the best interest of the students they serve, but rather to generate profit and funds.

Taylor also shared her experience advocating for Asian American Studies at her institution and related challenges with administrators seeing the value in Ethnic Studies:

Yeah, it's because honestly, they just don't see the value in what we do. Because for example, with Ethnic Studies, it's not just about having a professor. It's not just about having a minor. It's about proving to people that this area of study is academic, and it is worth studying. It does have academic merit. And I don't think the deans believe that. They would much rather invest in computer science or biology because they know that those things are the hard sciences. Whereas something like Asian American Studies, they're like, "This is not really a real field of study." So, I think it just goes so much deeper than just trying to have those physical resources. It's also just about, in this case, convincing people that this is a cause worth dedicating energy and resources to. So yeah, I think they just don't... Whenever they do give us things, I'm really cynical right now. So maybe it's just in a place of like, "Okay, just give them what they want so they'll stop bothering us." I don't think it's truly because they feel like, "Oh, we should give them these things because they deserve it and because it has merit to it. It's just they're just kids and they want these things, so let's give it to them." It feels like a little bit like charity work almost. –Taylor

In advocating for Asian American Studies, it was interesting to understand how for Taylor, the challenge was not necessarily trying to create an Ethnic Studies program, having faculty to teach these courses, or ensuring some sort of academic incentive for students (e.g., a minor), rather it was demonstrating that there is academic merit to the field of Ethnic Studies. Yet, she firmly believed that administrators do not see the inherent value. She reinforced earlier discussions around the prioritization of STEM-related fields and how institutions would rather invest in those types of professions because of the perception that a discipline like Asian American Studies is “not a real field of study.” She emphasized how this advocacy is much deeper than simply acquiring those physical resources; it is about creating an undeniable case that Asian American Studies is worth the institution investing time, energy, and resources into. Taylor’s lived truth further amplified how institutions not only devalue social justice centered

programs and initiatives but have no inherent desire or moral obligation to learn and understand the history and significance of Ethnic Studies and how something like Asian American could enhance the personal and academic experiences for students enrolled in their institution.

Diminishing Asian American Experiences

Activists discussed the ways they experienced the institution diminished their experiences as Asian American activists and their communities. Taylor recalled an experience about an ethnic Studies campaign that advocated for Asian American Studies, but the responses from administrators emphasized how they do not value a program centered in social and racial justice:

*Well, another campaign that we were...it wasn't *** focused, but *** members were part of it is the Ethnic Studies *** campaign. So, a bunch of things happened my junior spring, last year, about **there were no Asian American faculty, full-time faculty**. No one was tenured because people who were there were going on sabbatical to get tenure. So basically, the Ethnic Studies department, which is called *** here, **it was in shambles**. People were like, "I don't know if I can graduate. I can't write my thesis. I don't have an advisor." Because the one woman who was there is going on sabbatical. And also, when she was there, she was advising 10 people. **But I think with that campaign especially, it was really hard for people to meet with administration because, I think they met with deans because deans have hiring power, but it was really, really hard for them to get any kind of concrete change**. And so, as a result, that working group or that campaign kind of dissolved a little bit because not only **was the dean administration pushing back so much, but also the department was not being receptive of the work that students were putting in to try and support them**. So yeah, I guess that was a little disheartening to be like, "Oh, we're just going to stop doing this campaign because no one is listening to us." And it just felt kind of like a lost battle. –Taylor*

Taylor shared how she was a part of advocating for Ethnic Studies at her university, in particular Asian American Studies, but because there were no Asian American faculty able to teach these courses, the department fell apart. This was largely due to the fact that administration would not hire faculty to fulfill the needs and consequently, this had detrimental impacts on students who were trying to graduate with this particular degree from the department. Moreover, she shared how overall it felt that administrators who had the power to hire the needed faculty were not responsive to supporting students and seeing the value of what they were advocating

for. Ultimately the campaign was unsuccessful because administrators would not listen to students.

Jane also discussed her belief that her institution does not value the Asian American community. In her particular context, this was demonstrated through the distribution of funding the Asian American cultural center received:

*That's so interesting that you asked that because I just did a post for our center about how our institution is an Asian, Pacific Islander, Native, Indigenous serving community. And I genuinely don't feel that at all. **I know our budget for the center, and we have the lowest budget out of all of them.** And all our events have been seeming to be the **most attended ones.** Which is very concerning to me, because if there seems to be the number of how much of a population we have and how many students we're serving, **even if they're not a part of the APIDA community.** I just feel like that we're riding a lot with the limited resources we have for the APIDA students on campus.*

Jane explained how her university is an AANAPISI but the response and actions from the institution did not indicate that they valued the students they claimed to serve. Specifically, she discussed how the APIDA cultural center received one of the lowest budgets despite having the most well-attended events, demonstrating that there was a need for the types of social justice and identity-centered program they provided to students. Consequently, the limited resources have made it difficult to support Asian American students at her institution. She also later added that the perception they have some of the most popular events was also reinforced by data:

*And we have the numbers to show it. And my supervisor even tried to submit a proposal, but **we were denied**, or nothing has happened, and we have still continued to stay within the same budget we have. And a lot of other centers are getting way more. We're the lowest. –Jane*

Jane shared how her community even tried to engage with the university on their terms by submitting a proposal to justify the requested funding, which was quantitatively backed by data they had collected. Yet, even with the information presented to administrators, they were still denied access to additional funding which has negatively impacted the ways they are able to

support Asian American students. She also speculated as to why she believed they received inadequate resources to support students:

*I feel like we're constantly seen...the Asian community is constantly seen as they have a higher up in everything that they do. And "they're doing well for themselves already, so why should we give them more of a head start?" But I feel like that's completely false. They constantly love to use the stereotypes and like, "Asians are so smart. They'll just be able to get whatever job they want and go wherever they want." And they're barely seen as by minority. **Which is completely untrue.** And I think it's really sad actually, because we're constantly upheld to this expectation, which we are...obviously the whole community doesn't identify or barely any of the community identifies with. **And I think we're constantly being degraded and we're constantly getting less resources because they think we have so much already.** –Jane*

Jane described the prevalence of racism and the perpetuation of the model minority myth on her college campus. She explained how she felt key stakeholders within the institution believed that Asian Americans do not face any sort of hardship and therefore do not need additional resources (e.g., funding) to be successful in the institution. As Jane stated, this is a false misconception and contributed to the dismissal and invisibility of Asian American experiences. Yet, it has been outwardly pervasive in her experiences as an Asian American student attending and working at her institution.

A Culture of Precarity

Interactions between students and college and university personnel shaped the feelings and perceptions activists held towards faculty, staff, and administrators. The responses by faculty and staff towards student activists (as a result of their advocacy work) often caused tension between the two communities. Students felt they were taking on extra labor without much support from the people they expected to show-up for them, yet they also revealed how they are critically conscious of the reasons this may have been the case. Activists described how, because of the culture of precarity the institution perpetuates, faculty and staff live in a constant state of possibly losing their jobs (which ultimately is their means to living and survival). They shared

their understanding that many of these faculty and staff have a fear of backlash should they show any type of support to student activists that administrators would deem inappropriate. Moreover, activists also shared how faculty and staff lacked a voice and there were policies put into place that quite literally censored faculty and staff from speaking about social and racial justice issues. Thus, multiple realities could be true when it came to the ways faculty and staff in this particular context responded to student activism.

To begin, college and university personnel outwardly disagreeing with student activism and/or choosing to remain neutral on the issues raised could be attributed to the values they hold as an individual and a higher education professional. Riley stated:

*There are people on both ends of the spectrum, so it's kind of strange. **It's also strange viewing staff in the more political way rather than just as teachers, as people that are at my school, because you kind of just see them on a more, not human... human is maybe the wrong phrase, but you kind of just see more of them and less of their academic side, which is strange because you're like, "Oh, yeah, this is a professional. This is who I'm being educated by, but also, these are their morals and their values," and it's just a weird comparison point, I think.** –Riley*

Riley's comment emphasized the notion of faculty positionality (e.g., the perception of educators as authority figures) in seeing these individuals beyond their professional role and recognizing that their support and stance on issues raised in class and on-campus is also a reflection of their morals and values as a person; the interconnection between these aspects can feel complex. Sophia also shared similar sentiments:

***For a lot of people, professors aren't real people, they're not people that you engage with. So, it seems like it's very vulnerable to put yourself out there as a professor to a bunch of people that you don't really know.** – Sophia*

In this particular part of the conversation, Sophia inferred that faculty may not feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions with students or raising these issues in their curriculum because of how students may be socialized to view professors —not as real people

with real political perspectives. Therefore, it may often feel difficult for faculty to demonstrate vulnerability when there is not a connection or relatability with students beyond what the course required.

Riley and Sophia's comments added a distinct and valuable perspective to the conversation around college and university personnel responses and support; however, it may also be more nuanced than a general assumption that there was a lack of care and/or perceived value of social and racial justice. Administrators and key institutional stakeholders (e.g., Board of Regents) often hold faculty and staff responsible for their students' actions or to keep them within the boundaries deemed appropriate by the institution. Consequently, this can create a culture of precarity where faculty and staff might feel the need to act in their own self-interest in order to maintain their jobs and institutional positions. Thus, they may not act or provide support for what is in the best interest of students but rather with what aligns with institutional policies. This can include discouraging students from engaging in activism work that the institution has deemed "disruptive" through outwardly expressing disagreement on social and racial justice issues or communicating to activists that their actions will result in disciplinary action as aforementioned.

Fear of Backlash

Despite some of the negative aspects of activists' experienced with college and university personnel, they were still able to critically reflect on and understand how the institution cultivates a culture of precarity that may influence the reasons college and university personnel do not support and show-up for student activists in ways they would like to and/or are expected. Sophia continued to discuss this potential reality specifically with regard to faculty:

*I also feel like a lot of it just comes from... I don't know, **fear of backlash or some sort of talk around students or other faculty members.** I also understand that, but I've never*

spoken to a faculty member about these things. I have no idea what actually goes on. – Sophia

Sophia alluded to how faculty may fear a form of retaliation (e.g., backlash) when she discussed why she believed faculty and staff do not engage with student activists. This reinforced the culture of precarity where college and university personnel may have a justified fear of repercussions (e.g., being fired) if they engage with students or incorporate issues student activists are raising and that might disrupt the power structures in the institution in their own educational environments. Moreover, Sophia displayed introspection in how she understood why this may be a reason faculty do not engage. Yet, at the same time she recognized that she has not explicitly spoken with a faculty member about these experiences and does not have a complete understanding of what occurs in these spaces.

Elena also shared similar sentiments with her interactions and experiences with staff members on her college campus:

*I think as students as well, there was also some I guess **tension** between the *** Center staff and students because the students were like, **why are we doing all this work when there's the center staff?** And then there's this tension there too, which is really hard because the *** Center is there to support us, and it felt like they weren't at times, and we were having to do that bridging repair work that our staff mentioned as students who don't know what we're doing most of the time. But it's also complicated. Because the center is also in this position where they can't move too much outside of the university's control, which is not politically radical at all. So, it's just a **precarious position for them too, which is understandable...** I think there have definitely been some faculty members and some staff members that have **really informed the work and journeys of a lot of activists** and certain students formed close relationships with professors as their advisors and through various programs. **And that's definitely very special.** –Elena*

Elena shared a pertinent truth about how often felt that students were doing the work and labor for which university staff should have been responsible and accountable for; those who are actually paid to engage in this work as part of the institutional role. She also expressed frustration that these types of staff members are believed to be supporting them as students, but

often times it felt like they did not, further contributing to the tension between the two groups. However, her reflections as to why this may be the case revealed the significance of faculty and staff's institutional positionality and how the system they are forced to operate within as employees of the university does not always allow them to show-up for students in the ways they should and that are expected. She continued to share:

*But I think overall, I think, I guess the Asian American student community as of late hasn't really felt supported by the *** Center staff and have felt like they have not provided the support needed by the community. Especially after the *** incident, for example, there was not much ... like I said, the activist community had to take on this repair work, even though the Asian American community was also having to process and work through what the incident meant. Because in the beginning, it was perceived as an anti-Asian hate crime, and the centers didn't really support students in processing what that meant and how to deal with that. And then also just with their ... **I don't know if it's in capability because of their precarious position or because they didn't want to but cop out responses to a lot of political things that have been happening that we feel like they should take a stand on in order to support us.** Yeah. So, I think there's a lot of tension there. And they've said that they want to bridge that gap, the center staff. For example, there was an event last semester that the students walked out in protest. And after that it's started some discussion **on how we can bridge this gap between the people who not only are on the same side but are in the same community.** And that has started, but we'll see how it goes. –Elena*

Although Elena's overall feelings were that there was a lack of support from staff, much of this she largely attributed to the precarious positions they are in which are often tied with their employment to the institution. And although their experiences and feelings are valid and offer an explanation, it still does not excuse their behavior and responses to students. Elena also emphasized that it was important to recognize the precarious position staff are in and the value of building relationships between students and staff. Simultaneously, she also shared that the staff she was interacting with are working intentionally to mitigate some of this tension between individuals who not only hold similar beliefs and values but are in the same community (e.g., identify as Asian American). This intentional work to re-build trust and community is imperative to sustaining this type of equity work.

The experiences shared by Sophia, Elena, and Riley further amplified how the neoliberal university and its emphasis on profit-making can lead to potential dismissal and negligence of student concerns and needs. Because of the emphasis on finances, faculty and staff are more focused on generating revenue for the institution and/or proving their professional and functional area's inherent worth to the institution. This is not only to maintain the positions they are in, but to ensure the continued presence of student-centered programs and centers that are valuable aspects of the institution (e.g., cultural and resource centers). Consequently, this can create a culture of fear when speaking and support student activists publicly. Yet, there is also some irony within these sentiments. Faculty and staff are working to keep their jobs and to ensure resources that supporting historically and racially excluded communities continue to be included in institutional priorities; yet, in yielding to neoliberal pressures as a form of survival in the academy, it has contributed to the student perception of dismissal and lack of care for their wellbeing.

Political Censorship and Lack of Voice

Interrelated with the fear of backlash, activists further contextualized how institutions proactively work to suppress the voices of faculty and staff. These outlooks shared by activists added additional nuance to how institutions cultivate cultures of precarity that may restrict how college and university personnel can engage with student activists in more meaningful ways. Lucy shared her experience being a part of an APIDA culture center that engages in social justice work and her experiences with staff that work within these spaces:

I think they feel very restricted on how they can talk to students. And then students in return feel very disconnected from these centers that they thought were supposed to be safe spaces because they aren't able to talk about these things. That's because the institutions are literally silencing the people who work here. –Lucy

Lucy had a comparable experience to what Elena shared previously about the tension and disconnect between center staff and student activists. As Lucy explicitly stated, higher education institutions are “literally silencing the people who work here.” Consequently, this has led staff to be constrained by the university in how they are able to interact with students because they are prohibited from discussing social and racial justice issues raised by students or anything that might be deemed “political” or “controversial” by the institution. This has contributed to activists feeling further disconnected from these cultural and resource centers; spaces that were intended to serve them and cultivate a sense of belonging in an institution that was ever intended for them to exist in. Moreover, it has created an intentional divide between students and staff where they often must redirect their labor and focus on rebuilding relationships and trust with each other – an adverse consequence created by the neoliberal institutional systems – instead of advocating for the issues that have been previously raised by student activists on a systemic level.

When Miles shared their situation of working in a resource center, they also reflected upon their experiences within the context of the larger university system:

*It's been actually crazy now that I think about it. And I feel like people don't really know, especially in this university system...everyone's like, "Oh, it's very progressive." *** has this history of radical organizing. And then it's like...**the regents just passed a fucking resolution telling faculty not to say anything political.** We're just the same as anybody else, **we just hide it better.** –Miles*

Miles explained how their experience within their institution feels almost unbelievable. The particular university system of which their institution is a part tended to have a reputation of being perceived as “progressive” because there was a rich history of students organizing and engaging in campus activism. Yet, majority of the individuals working at and attending this university are unaware of what occurs beyond the superficial engagement that is publicly displayed and marketed. As Miles shared, the Board of Regents passed a policy that stated

faculty were not allowed to “say anything political.” This reality reinforced activists’ feelings and discernments about why college and university personnel do not and cannot engage with students and the issues they are advocating for. Additionally, Miles made a powerful statement about how even the most seemingly “liberal” institutions still operate within an oppressive system. These types of colleges and universities are no better than others that do not present themselves or have a reputation for being advanced in their conversations and actions around social and racial justice; they simply are able to hide this truth better from most.

An Ethos of Self-Interest

Activists shared how their institutions promoted an ethos of self-interest that manifested in the ways that college and university personnel responded to their experiences and concerns. Specifically, students believed administrators pretended to care about them, but that was not the reality they experienced. They also considered how administrators overall do not have the capacity to care about their experiences and concerns as students attending their institutions, and administrators were more focused on preserving their own self-image over meaningfully engaging and working to mitigate the issues voiced by students.

The Performance of Care

For Miles, working with administrators reinforced power dynamics between students and college and university personnel. Miles first shared their experience directly interacting with administrators after they allowed a notorious homophobic speaker to come to campus and students engaged in protest:

Administrators very bad. I mean, they're just like middle management all the way. My boss' boss really doesn't like me because I called her on a couple of my friends getting arrested at the *** protest, and she was like, "That's not true, and you're being fed lies." And she basically just tried to gaslight me about what happened. I was like, "I literally have the arrest records. I can fucking show you what happened." But nobody has ever said this to my face. I've just learned about this through the back channels, which is

*even more frustrating. Because I feel like they have this very accepting diverse facade of like, "Oh, we're going to support you. We're going to give you the money." And then it's like, **you have beef with a 20-year-old.** –Miles*

Miles emphasized a sentiment that other activists also discussed about institutions gaslighting students about how certain incidences happened. Moreover, they how administrators took a “hands-off” approach or were dismissive when it came to conversing with them. In addition, administrators would not directly interact with Miles or other activists but would still act in a manner that gave students the impression that they are supported by the institution. Miles also went on to share:

*Yeah. I mean, admin is going to be admin. **They treat us like kids.** Especially this one lady that has beef⁴ with me, **she's very condescending. She tries to be equals, and she tries to use her background to justify why she's there,** which obviously I don't want to disparage that, and I respect her identity and stuff, but she just treats us like kids. –Miles*

Miles and Elena both used the statement “admin is going to be admin.” I inferred that students utilizing this phrase was an alternative way to say “it is what it is” as way to express frustrating and challenging scenarios, but ones that cannot be changed or have become so frequent that we begin to normalize and accept them. Miles went on to share how a particular administrator treats students like they are children, a dynamic often utilized (intentionally and unintentionally) to exercise power over students, even though they are adults. This was further reinforced when Miles shared that this administrator is condescending in the ways she interacts with them yet pretends to reinforce the idea that they are “equals” despite her actions demonstrating otherwise. Furthermore, it was mentioned that this administrator used her background to justify why she is in certain spaces. I derived this statement to mean that this particular administrator may have weaponized her background as someone who identifies with a

⁴ Slang term to say that someone has a disagreement, problem, or grudge with someone

historically or racially excluded community or background and used that to rationalize why she cared (e.g., she could resonate with student experiences) and justify her behavior.

Whitney also shared a paralleled experience interacting with administrators when it came to her activism work as a student. She started by sharing how these encounters with administrators in advocating for student needs and expressing concerns always have an undertone of egoism and self-interest:

*So, I guess it's just always a question of **what's in it for me?** When can I use you best for you to give me what I want? And it's interesting because obviously it's not even a matter of, "I'm really concerned because I do understand that this marginalized student population, obviously, even though they're the minority population at this university, we need to sit down and really listen to their needs because they're a huge part of this university community still." **It's not because they're concerned, or they have empathy or compassion towards the students and the student needs.** It's just I feel like at the end of the day, a lot of like, "**Well, what's in it for me?** What will this do to my reputation and the reputation of the university?" **And the action only really happens when there's bad rep.** So why can't we shift that to see more action before all that bad rep happens on social media or in the news or something? So, it's just interesting seeing that. –Whitney*

Whitney continued to explain how it would seem obvious for colleges and universities to care about students from historically and racially excluded backgrounds and communities because they are not a part of the predominant population at the institution (e.g., their support and needs are different). Furthermore, their needs and experiences still matter and are an essential component to the university community. This is often how responses are framed to students. Yet, as Whitney and majority of activists shared, caring for students is not the institution's primary focus. It is about a self-serving interest in how superficially addressing student concerns can also benefit key stakeholders (e.g., administrators) in the institution. She also stated that even this type of self-interest in engaging with students typically occurred when the college or university's reputation is at stake through media and news outlets shedding light

on issues at the institution. It is about maintaining a carefully crafted image of the institution, which historically means refusing to care for the wellbeing and addressing the needs of students.

Ethan highlighted a tactic often employed by administrators that makes it appear that they care and are working towards addressing the issues raised by students:

*It can be very draining emotionally. So, there are always opponents to the work. I think that kind of just raw backlash hasn't really occurred on campus as much, for me personally. Admin doesn't do that. **They'll just block you in other ways.** If they don't like what you're doing, **they'll just not respond or they'll draw out the process.** In fact, I'm sure they just draw out the process until we graduate, **and that's really something that they have up their sleeves there.** Not everyone there is like that, of course. There are some admin allies and whatnot, but I think that's an example of people that would prefer maybe that we didn't really get into that. – Ethan*

Ethan shared how emotionally draining this work can be because there is always someone or something to resist against when engaging in activism and advocacy work. In his experience, administrators did not outwardly discipline students or threaten to do so (e.g., through suspension) for their involvement with campus activism, rather they found alternative ways to inhibit institutional progress. One example was how administrators would simply not respond to student activists to prolong the progress. This was often seen as a strategy utilized under the premise “care” and that change can take time, which activists did not deny. However, as Ethan explained, this was intentional approach that provided students a false sense of hope and care when administrators were essentially stalling student activists in the hopes they would graduate, thereby believing their “problem(s)” would cease to exist.

Lastly, Nora alluded to how there is a false sense of care specifically towards the Asian American community by college and university personnel:

***The model minority is everywhere, and it's so ingrained into everything, and I feel like for a lot of people it is like, well, COVID is over publicly, so there's no more racism against Asian people.** And when there is, it's few and far between, and I feel like a lot of it for Asian people specifically is because so much of it comes in the form of microaggressions and things that can't as, I guess, obviously be seen as hate crimes or*

physical violence. It's just not recognized unless Asian people bring it up and then when it's only Asian people bringing it up, it's like, is it happening at all, I guess? – Nora

Nora shared how during the peak of COVID, nationally within the United States, there was a rise in anti-Asian hate. It appeared that institutions were caring about the wellbeing of Asian American students because there were visible and tangible examples of violence that were reported in the news. However, since COVID was no longer declared a state of emergency, Nora shared how that equated with Asian Americans no longer experiencing racism, but that could not be further from the truth. She also shared how much of the racism Asian Americans experienced is through microaggressions, which has often diminished the impact racism has had on the community. Furthermore, there was an erasure of Asian American experiences with racism and discrimination and would only be discussed if Asian Americans specifically brought it into conversation. But even in doing so, they were still apprehensions around whether these experiences were real or not.

Lack of Capacity to Care

Activist perceptions that administrators do not have the ability to care is interconnected with the perception that administrators demonstrated a false sense of care towards students. There was not only a disingenuous display of care, but a perception (based on experiences) that college and university personnel simply do not have the competence or desire to authentically or meaningfully care about student experiences and needs. Jane shared:

*I think administrators... **I genuinely don't feel like they have the capacity to care.** I don't feel supported in that way. And it's really hard to say, and I feel really bad, because I'm sure there are professors and admin who do care, but it just doesn't feel like that at all because of the response we get from our funding or just the response we get whenever we want to do a presentation, or just want to actively share the resources or the things that we want for our community. And yeah, **I don't feel supported by them.** –Jane*

In this conversation, I could feel Jane's hesitation when she shared this general perspective about not feeling supported, especially through her statement about how she recognized that there are some faculty and administrators who do care. I appreciated her vulnerability and honesty in sharing this and the bold ways she stood in her truth. Moreover, she displayed inherent critical self-reflexivity in recognizing that this is not applicable to *all* college and university personnel, but it is still a reality experienced by students, especially when it comes to funding and resources for the APIDA community on her college campus. Jane also shared another experience she had with a professor on her college campus and what she hoped others would know about her and her community's experience:

*That we're not invisible and we are not always going to be sufficient and be able to figure everything out on our own. **I feel like they constantly think that about us.** I've even had one professor, he hasn't been openly racist to me, but it's kind of little hints of like, "Yeah, I thought you and your community could figure it out. **You and your community are fine. Nothing bad is happening to you guys.**" Or just general stuff like that. Like Stop Asian Hate. I think one of his response to my Stop Asian Hate stuff and my presentation was like, "**It's not happening anymore. Look at what happened to all the Black Lives Matter movement and everything like that.**" And I was like, "Wow, okay. It's completely two different things, but it doesn't need to be compared at all in my opinion." But it's just a general thing like that. **I feel like they should support us more.** Even if it's just rooting us out on the sidelines. –Jane*

Jane's encounter with this professor reinforced violent narratives against the Asian American community. This professor firmly believed that Jane's work to bring awareness to anti-Asian hate was irrelevant because of his blatant misbelief that Asian Americans do not experience racism or encounter any challenges due to their racialized identities (i.e., model minority myth). This professor also attempted to diminish the experiences of the Asian American community by making a direct comparison to another historically and racially excluded community. While there might be paralleled experiences within the contexts and histories, as Jane stated, they are two different experiences, and the comparison was unwarranted. Moreover,

Jane hoped that even if there was no overt support for the Asian American community, there would still be care shown, even if it occurred in more indirect manners.

Riley also shared their perspective of why college and university personnel lack the capacity to care about students:

*I mean, it might be that **they're scared that they're going to lose their position, because I mean, they're not the only person that is qualified to take that position.** So, if they're causing so-called controversy, even if it's benefiting a certain group, **they're at risk of losing their position.** Or they just don't care. Maybe it's just not an issue that applies to them. That's typically the case in a lot of just world issues; if it doesn't apply to them, they typically don't care. But yeah, I'd say maybe it's a combination of both. – Riley*

Riley first reinforced a previous discussion around the precarious positions of college and university personnel. They offered a potential reason these individuals might not engage with students. Because college and university personnel are disposable to the institution (e.g., at risk for losing their position), it can give the perception that they do not care or do not have a desire to address student needs. In other words, there are multiple individuals qualified to fill a particular position and ultimately the institution does not necessarily care about its employees; there is always someone else waiting and willing. Riley also suggested an alternative reason for lack of engagement with activists and addressing student concerns – that college and university personnel simply do not care. Riley explained that a fundamental reason for this could be attributed to how college and university personnel simply cannot directly relate to an experience (e.g., being a student of color), therefore it does not feel applicable to their work, a paralleled experience to responses to societal issues outside postsecondary education. However, I appreciated Riley's critical approach to this reflection in recognizing that both these realities could be true, and they can simultaneously exist together.

Finally, Elena also added to the conversation around why college and university personnel lack a capacity to care, especially when it included the Asian American community:

*I think people have a perception of ... I feel like it's a little hard to tell, because I guess I'm too entrenched in the community, what other people think. I just feel like so many of my friends are also Asian American, so it's hard to tell. But I feel like people tend to, I guess, **notice how apolitical in general overall the community is here.** Which it's sucky because it also then feels like those two of us who are ... Like *** and *** have to take on this burden of all of that bridge work, solidarity work with the other groups, or you have to be extra. We have to do more work to make up for the community not doing the work, which is not a good way to look at it because we're all human. We're all we're students too but it feels like that sometimes. I think that because of the relatively large Asian population on campus, **I think that the model minority myth is also at play on the campus to some degree,** especially in the eyes of the majority group White people, I feel like they are able to ignore a lot of what goes on because they're like, oh, the Asian population is doing fine, so there must not be big of a problem. **And it's a reason for them not to also not be involved.** –Elena*

She explained how she faced challenges with overall misperceptions that the Asian American community was apolitical on her college campus. Elena said she could understand why the Asian American community is perceived this way, but she has been confronted with doing a vast majority of the labor to combat this outlook and work towards coalition building and solidarity with other racially and historically excluded communities on campus. Additional nuance was shared in Elena's opinion that the model minority myth was a contributing factor to these beliefs, especially with White people on campus. She reinforced earlier sentiments that Jane shared about misconceptions of the Asian American community. The belief that the Asian American community "is doing fine" excused college and university personnel from caring and intentionally engaging with Asian American students.

Focus on Self-Preservation

Activists also discussed how their experiences with administrators focused on preserving their own reputation and professional image instead of operating in ways that were in the best interest of students. Whitney attended a historically White institution and reflected on her experiences trying to engage with administrators:

*Interestingly enough, these are people that are **not White.** These are people who are also POC; they're also People of Color. And it's so interesting because the people who are in*

*the highest positions, again, looking at the organizational chart, for example, at the university, that we should be directing these concerns to, **these are people who are White or predominantly White, but these are people who are not present in these spaces and they're almost...well, it feels, I'm not sure if this is really the case or if this is intentional, but it almost feels as if their co-workers who are also administrators at the university, they would rather have them be their face at these conversations because they don't want to take the time to sit down and understand where Students of Color are coming from because it would be difficult for them or it would be bad rep or something like that.** So, it's interesting because these are questions and these are frustrations that should be directed at those people, **yet we're directing them to our peers, to other People of Color who understand where we're coming from but can't necessarily do a lot within their positions.** But those people who can do a lot are not present in these spaces. I forgot the term, one of my peers shared this term with us. It was her observation after that confrontation with the administrators, but it almost seems as if they were the...not the backup. There's a term that she specifically used, but it was like, "**You do that because I don't want to damage my own reputation.**" –Whitney*

Similar to Miles' experience, Whitney also had experiences to interacting with administrators that also had shared identities in backgrounds. Her reflections unveiled another layer of complexity with administrator and student interactions. She explained how White administrators would send their colleagues (who identified as People of Color) to participate in conversations and interact with student activists, rather than the White administrators showing-up themselves. It enforced a perception that their People of Color colleagues were used as a type of scapegoat but White administrators to unfairly take the blame about student feedback about institutional. Whitney shared how she felt this was an intentional strategy to make administrators better received by students. Yet, as Whitney shared, these were not the individuals that need to be in these spaces, learning, and talking with students. As people from historically and racially excluded communities, they already understood the student perspective because it was also a shared experience and one with which they resonated. In addition, the administrators that were asked to speak with students were not in positions of power to make any sort of meaningful change. Yet, the (White) administrators that did have power to enact and create institutional transformation were not present in these spaces to understand what students needed and were

requesting. Furthermore, by White administrators refusing to be physically present and invested in these spaces, participants felt that they intentionally chose not to engage so they could avoid any inclination to potentially damage their own reputation. Thus, (White) administrators sent their more “palatable” colleagues, or administrators they perceived to be more accepted by students.

Elena also shared how her institution’s response to student activists centered around preserving self and institutional image and why administrators counter in this manner:

*I think they would say that “**We can't help it. It's such a nuanced issue and we can't portray this image that we support one or the other.**” Or for example, in the Israel-Palestine conflict, we have quite a robust Jewish Hillel organization on campus, and **a lot of people who pay money** and also just, “**we don't want to risk image.**” But I think ultimately **so many administrators are White.** When you're talking about the Ethnic Studies campaign and the deans, **the dean that we consistently engaged with was White, and the deans that actually had the power were White.** And ultimately, **I think they just don't care because it doesn't affect them,** which is the problem for most of the issues in this country. **I think they just are able to block it out in their own little personal bubbles on campus, but also in the larger university bubble. And so, they block it out because it's easier for them.** –Elena*

Hearing Elena share this experience and other activists discuss institutional and professional image brought up the question of what “image” administrators may be referencing. Are they concerned of appearing too progressive (e.g., woke) to wealthy people that donate back to the institution? Or perhaps, it is intertwined with their values and desire to remain neutral and appeal to a broader community. She also brought up similar sentiments as Whitney and Riley. Elena discussed how these types of administrators cannot relate to the experiences and issues shared by student activists (e.g., why Ethnic Studies is valuable to students). Therefore, the response that created the least amount of work for them was to simply obliterate and dismiss issues elevated by student activists and remain ignorant and complicit to hegemonic institutional systems

Lastly, Riley shared a story about a protest they attended at their institution when a transphobic speaker was asked to be a featured speaker at a campus sponsored event. Student activists and community members engaged in a demonstration and the group that had brought this featured speaker to campus did everything in their power to try and suppress the group of activists. Riley mentioned it was extremely chaotic. The opposing group was trying to record activists without their consent and called the police, even though activists were in a public space. The police then barricaded the lecture hall despite activists having no intentions to go into the space, but rather sought to stand outside and exercise their right to protest. As activists started moving closer to the lecture hall, police started detaining people in Riley's group and individuals from the opposing group physically drove into the direction of the activists. As Riley said:

*They were taking **drastic** measures to get rid of us, even though it was supposed to be a **peaceful protest**. And then, that was kind of when violence escalated from both sides, and **it was just like chaos.**" –Riley*

This protest reached several news outlets, and it was a large topic of conversation in the media throughout the entire weekend. Riley went on to share:

*I remember that same protest, there were **damages made to that lecture hall** from both sides. And, I remember the next day, because I had come home that night and I told my roommates and my suite mates and stuff what had happened, and I was like, "Oh, yeah," and they were like, "We want to see what happened to the lecture hall." We went there the next day, and **everything was immediately fixed**. There was a lot of damage done there, but the administrators and staff had repaired everything; **and it was just impressive that that's what they were doing probably all night**. Because there were just several windows and doors that were broken and damaged, and things that were graffitied, and it was just... The next morning, it was just completely okay. –Riley*

Riley's comments led us into a deeper discussion about how despite it being a Friday night, when most university employees were not on working hours, the damages to the building were immediately fixed. We went on to discuss how administration responded and support for the student activists involved:

*Definitely. Because, okay, what had happened was... So, this protest was kind of late Friday night. And so, two different news outlets had reached that hall after my group had left the protest. And the speaker had also left. So, two different news outlets had reached, and then there was negative information about our school being spread that night, and **I'm sure administrators got word of that, because it's the news. And so, I'm sure they didn't want our school to have a bad reputation, so they fixed it in the morning before any other news outlets could notice or see, because the two that had come, they posted pictures of a lot of the damage done to the halls, and then they said...they kind of captioned it and they were like, "Yeah, students break out in a protest over this and this," and both groups involved were intuitional affiliated groups. And so, I think it was just the administrators prioritizing the reputation of the school over resolving the actual issue. For sure. Especially because it was an overnight fix. That was a dead giveaway.***
–Riley

Riley's experience underscored how despite the chaos and violence that ensued at this demonstration, administrators still seemed to ensure the literal and figurative image of the university was prioritized out of fear of how they might be portrayed in the media (and thus to the public) over the wellbeing of the students that were involved and affiliated with the institution. Furthermore, Riley stated that administrators gave the perception that they had no desire to understand what happened and as Riley stated, resolve the issue that contributed to this incident. Rather the preserving the image of the institution was a core concern and proven with how quickly the damages to the building were restored.

Normalized Exploitation of People of Color

Activists also experienced neoliberal culture through how they were treated and often exploited by college and university personnel. As students recalled these encounters, they did not seem surprised by the tactics used by administrators and the ways they were exploited as People of Color because it was something that had been normalized and almost expected. Most activists discussed this aspect in the context of the institution using them for their own person gain, not because they care or have the best interest of students when making institutional decisions; another paralleled experience to what several activists discussed in previous sections.

Diversity Tokens

The idea that People of Color are utilized as a diversity token is not necessarily a new concept within the context of the academy. People of Color are often perceived by their White colleagues and peers as being individuals that help colleges and universities obtain their espoused values for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Consequently, individuals may believe that People of Color are not admitted or currently enrolled in postsecondary education because of their accomplishments or merit (e.g., misconceptions of affirmative action). Simultaneously, institutions also perpetuate this notion in how they treat students of color for their own personal gain or institutional agenda rather than authentically working to understanding their lived experiences respecting and viewing their identities and cultural backgrounds as valuable assets to the academic community.

Miles discussed their frustrations with administration in leadership positions and the ways they perceive students as diversity tokens:

*There have been people who weren't moved up to leadership positions in the center because they were involved in union organizing. And I feel like that's what frustrates me most about campus, is **that it uses us as diversity tokens and it's relying on us to draw funding.** And other students who are like, "Oh, there are people like me here," **but then they don't give us the resources that we need to succeed, and they participate in our repression.** That's been very frustrating with admin. –Miles*

Miles reinforced the intersections of how the institution prioritizes profit over people and the ways students of color were used as diversity tokens to generate funding for the institution. Their identities and experiences were weaponized by the institution for their own financial gain, yet students were still not granted access to the resources to be able to succeed in pursuing a postsecondary education degree. Miles also alluded to how administrators that are participating in these oppressive practices are not solely White administrators but also People of Color. Understandably, it can be affirming to students to see individuals that look like them or have a

perceived shared experience in positions of power. It can provide a sense of hope and validation that the goals they are working towards are possible. Paradoxically, these same individuals that students may consider a part of their community and respect as educators are the same people that are complicit in suppressing students from historically and racially excluded communities and backgrounds.

Lucy also elaborated on previous conversations shared by other activists about institutional care towards students and their experiences. She reinforced a salient theme that key stakeholders in the institution only care when there is something to gain from students. In this particular context, Lucy discussed how she felt money was a driving factor for her university to care. Furthermore, she shared that her institution cared that they were “diversity”, reinforcing what Miles discussed above and how administrators treat students as a type of commodification that solely benefits the institution without any consideration for their experiences as students and individuals; a powerful testament to where institutional priorities where administrators placed priorities within the institution:

*I think they're annoyed. Whether they care, frankly, no. **I think they care about the students that pay a lot of money and that bring them a lot of money.** I don't think they care to be critiqued. **I don't feel like the institution cares.** I would not say so. I feel like there are some allies and I think those allies, I don't know. I don't know if all students feel like this, but I feel a lot for them and I get really sad thinking about them sometimes honestly because I'm like, "Oh, my God. Your job is so difficult." They're literally frontline workers. I think there are some allies, **but I don't think the institution cares... They'll care that we're diversity.** –Lucy*

Exploiting Students and their Stories for Financial Gain

In addition to treating students as diversity tokens, their stories were extracted and utilized to boost institutional image and potential financial gain, particularly with their lived truths and narratives they carried with them. Whitney recalled a donor event she was invited to speak at to share her experiences of being a student at the university she attended:

*Well, they just don't care because it's always the question of **what's in it for them? If it doesn't necessarily benefit them, then why?** It's interesting because this past semester, I was invited to speak at a *** event. So, *** is their fundraising campaign, and **this was an event specifically for the donors.** So, when you look in the room, **it's all of these White people who again, have a lot of money where again, they have this whole program where they invite faculty and students to share their experiences of how amazing the university really is.** And I'm not going to lie, it is amazing. –Whitney*

Whitney recalled how this space was predominantly White, which reflected the university she attended. The definitive goal of this hosted institutional event was to convince investors and alumni to donate back to the institution under the premise of providing further resources to students. She went on to explain how specific faculty and students were invited to share their university experiences and portray the institution in a constructive manner that would encourage individuals to donate back to the university. Whitney explained how she understood that the primary intention of her being invited into that space was for her, as an Asian American woman (e.g., Woman of Color), to be featured as a student success story; to show donors that someone “like her” could and was thriving in a postsecondary institution. However, the intrinsic motives behind this were not to validate and affirm Whitney as an Asian American student, rather exploit her lived experiences for the personal gain of the institution.

Advanced Hyper-Surveillance Systems

Systems of surveillance were often utilized as a means to monitor activity in which student activists were engaged in. It was often so institutions were able to respond accordingly but also a means to maintain power and control. Activists in this study described systems of hyper-surveillance in regard to seeing an increased police presence, experiencing or being threatened with disciplinary action for their involvement with campus activism, and even the utilization of surveillance technology (e.g., cameras) to track activist whereabouts in specific areas on campus.

Lucy shared a story about her engagement with engaging in campus activism around the Palestine liberation movement that underscored all three aspects of surveillance aforementioned above:

*I think at my university, basically what has happened in the past was there was this really big all day sit in that we planned and there was a coalition of clubs for the Palestinian liberation at my university. The night before the coalition, **because we posted on Instagram, all the clubs received an e-mail that's a threatening e-mail from the administration** that's like, "We support your right to protest, but we also would like to remind you that this space, you cannot protest or cause a disruption in classroom spaces between this time and this time. You cannot do this in this area. If you do so, we have the authority to write you up and enact disciplinary action," all that stuff. So, I think specifically for that sit in, people worked around it. We protested in the campus center so they couldn't say we were disrupting class. **Then, during protests, they'll have police officers there, but they just won't do anything.** –Lucy*

Lucy first provided context about the various clubs that collectively formed to support the Palestinian liberation movement. The coalition had posted about the movement on social media and the evening before the planned demonstration, the clubs received an email from administration that Lucy described as “threatening.”

The administrator email also further proved that they were monitoring their activity. The email began with a superficial acknowledgement of student activism, a similar response described by other activists in previous sections, that claimed to support students’ right to protest. However, there were several caveats within the email. To begin, administrators informed students about physical spaces they were not allowed to occupy. They also listed times they deemed acceptable to engage in protest and that they could not be disruptive. Furthermore, if activists did not abide by the outlined regulations set by university administration, they would face disciplinary consequences for their actions. Administrators informing students that they could not be disruptive felt rather counterintuitive to the purpose of a protest, which is disruptive by nature and not intended to make individuals feel comfortable.

Ultimately the coalition chose to protest in a more public space so administrators could not accuse students of disrupting class. This decision activists made was understandable given that disciplinary action can impact students' ability to persist in postsecondary education. She continued to share:

*But there have been other, worse examples where they were protesting for Palestine at the administrative building and that is less fair game. **Students were barricading there, and officers were, they were teasing students, and they were mocking them. A couple of times, they kneed students, physically harassed them, especially Arab students and brown students.** I think they increased campus security at one point because they were like, "There's increase in anti-Semitic sentiment, so we need more police officers." ...I would say that is how they try to control protests. They haven't defunded or SJP or anything like that, what has happened in Columbia. So, they haven't done that. I think the coalition helps a lot, but they definitely try to do some things. –Lucy*

Lucy also described how a natural response to students protesting was for administration to increase the presence of campus police. In the particular protest she participated in, the police had no purpose for being there. She speculated and this presence also be assumed to be a tactic of intimidation to preserve “peace” on campus and regulate student behavior. She also shared more disturbing encounters during these types of demonstrations where campus police verbally and physically assaulted student activists, majority of them being Arab (i.e., West Asians) other Brown students. As a positive outcome, Lucy shared that the coalition and clubs have not been defunded or banned like at other institutions, but administration is still trying to control the narrative and activist engagement:

*A lot of students have been written up for disciplinary action. For example, they have **CCTV**, so they're basically surveilling us because they have cameras around. So, if you swipe into a dining hall and then you hang up a flier for Palestine or you do that somewhere else, **they can track you through the swiping technology** and they'll track your ID and they'll e-mail you and be like, "**You did this.**" –Lucy*

Lastly, she discussed how student activists have face disciplinary consequences for their involvement with campus activism. Moreover, this is being supported by the usage of advanced surveillance technology. Lucy specifically named CCTV, or closed-circuit television. A quick

Google search revealed that this piece of technology is known as a type of video camera used for surveillance. The camera is able to transmit a signal to a specified location, can be viewed through computer and television monitors, and is used extensively by the U.S. government.

Lucy confirmed this by describing the cameras she had seen around campus. Specifically, she discussed how it is utilized in the dining hall, a common place for students to assemble and nourish their bodies (e.g., a basic need). Given that the dining hall is a place of gathering in some capacity for majority of students attending the institution, it seemed natural this would also be a space to share news across different communities. She explained that students often would hang up posters that supported the Palestinian liberation movement. However, all students must swipe their student ID card before entering the dining hall. Therefore, the institution is able to utilize both CCTV and a card swiping technology to track the ID of the student to monitor them. This surveillance has then enabled administration to contact activists to inform them they are aware of their actions and that they would face punitive consequences.

How Neoliberal Culture Shapes the Ways Students Navigate Activist Work

Contextualizing Students' Activism and Advocacy

“Activism to me takes so many forms, which I think is what's so beautiful about it.” –Taylor

Activists that participated in this study engaged in various forms of activism both currently and throughout their time as students in college. Several activists' engagement stemmed from the rise of anti-Asian hate seen in the United States during the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic. For many activists, their desire to advocate for their communities and bring awareness to issues faced by students on campus started with engaging their peers in various APIDA clubs and organizations. This was done through conversations, creating programming, workshops, and seminars for the general university community, incorporating these

topics into social justice trainings, and attending protests/demonstrations for the movement “Stop Asian Hate.”

Other forms of engagement directly related to Asian American communities that activists shared included pushing for greater Asian and Pacific Islander representation and voting equity in local city councils, educating and gaining a critical understanding of Asian American identity as a political category versus solely a cultural affiliation. This was done through collaborating with local and campus advocacy groups to create and facilitate workshops about Asian American identity that aimed to address apolitical actions often seen in cultural clubs on campus. In addition, activists also shared how they ran for student government positions at their institutions to fight and advocate for physical spaces (e.g., cultural/resource centers) and more funding for Asian American and Pacific Islander students on campus, coordinating and implementing an archival history gallery to build and document knowledge around campus advocacy, fighting for Asian American and Ethnic Studies programs on their campuses through collecting signatures, testimonies, engaging in conversations with administrators, and publishing pieces in Asian American arts and literacy journals.

Activists have also advocated for issues not directly related to their communities or own personal identities such as supporting Black Lives Matters and the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* through demonstrations, protests, and spreading awareness on social media, standing in solidarity by participating in campus marches and walkouts with graduate students at their institutions in their fight for livable wages and better working conditions, intentionally addressing the housing crisis in their university and city communities through engaging with city council members, advocating for better mental health services on college campuses, cross-coalition building with

other racial/ethnic identity groups on campus, and supporting the LGBTQIA+ community through education and resource advocacy.

Lastly, activists shared about what they deemed as other “passive acts⁵” of engagement that included serving in leadership positions for Asian American organizations that focused on Asian American experiences and collective liberation, attending Asian American Studies conferences, encouraging dialogue and creating safe spaces for Asian American students to discuss their lived truths, signing and spreading petitions, educating friends and family in close circles about U.S. and global issues (e.g., Palestine/Israel conflict, affirmative action), and posting and sharing current news and events on social media. One particular “passive act” of engagement that resonated deeply with me was feeding other activists when an individual did not personally feel they were able to be on the picket line. This act will be further discussed in the sections below.

Encompassing Collectivist Approaches to Activism

When recruiting student activists to participate this study, I defined activism as any action, effort, or initiative that intentionally worked to disrupt and challenge oppressive systems that impact historically excluded communities in order to bring about social justice and transformational change on a college/university campus. This definition was intended to be broad enough to give students an idea of how I, as a researcher, was thinking about activism in the context of higher education and this study but allow students to interpret the how they have chosen to engage in activism in their own meaningful ways. As such, activists in this study were asked to reflect upon their own engagement and how they personally understand and define activism.

⁵ Passive acts were a term utilized by several students when discussing their engagement in activism work

Some activists shared their understanding of activism which reinforced the initial definition provided as context for this study and I would argue, many of our collective epistemologies of activism. I want to be explicit in naming that I do not believe there is a correct or incorrect way these student activists defined activism in their own words especially considering they answered this question during their interview, which does not always allow much time for “deeper” thought and reflection. I appreciated the ways that these activists understood that activism can look different for each individual and the ways that we are able to (or not) engage are nuanced and complex.

My initial intention was to simply present the powerful ideologies of how these student activists were defining activism in their own reflections and actions, many of the student activists I connected with underscored the ways they reflected on how activism is more than just individual acts goes beyond a baseline understanding of simply defining this abstract action. Specifically, almost all activists that participated in this dissertation study shared definitions that discussed their engagement in activism embodied a more collectivist and community-centered approach to this advocacy work. These aspects are discussed through three core subthemes: 1) understanding critical consciousness, 2) embracing collective action, and 3) focusing on fostering solidarity and relationships. These are all components that are the antithesis to what neoliberalism prescribes.

Understanding Critical Consciousness

First, critical consciousness was engaged by nearly all the activists in reflecting on how systems of oppression work and their positionality within this structure. Moreover, activists were able to make critical connections beyond their college and university environment and developed deeper understanding of the issues raised in their work.

Whitney shared her experiences as an Asian American woman and how attending her institution did not necessarily shape it, but reinforced her identity:

*I think that didn't necessarily shape it. I think it reinforced it. Coming to ***, and again, being here in the United States for only a few years, aside from knowing what it would feel like to be the minority in a predominantly white institution, I already felt what it was like to be a minority in the United States in general. And so just seeing that being translated into the politics within a university, a huge university at that, I think it wasn't surprising. I think it was just really sad at times to see that people who are supposed to be advocating for you, people who are in these diversity, equity, inclusion related positions that are supposed to be the voice that would talk to, for example, President *** or other higher positions, that they're supposed to be your advocate, but they don't even know what's going on. –Whitney*

Whitney explained how coming to her institution and experiencing being a racial minority combined with institutional politics was not necessarily a surprise since that has always been her experience in broader U.S. society. Yet, it still felt disappointing to experience the lack of care and support from the individuals who have power to cultivate a meaningful and equitable experience for all students. Moreover, how they gave the impression that they were unaware of student experiences and used that as an excuse to not advocate for their needs. She continued to share:

*And I don't think that they want to know what's going on because that just adds to their workload. **I get that there's competing needs and wants in general within a very huge university with very diverse populations**, but taking the time to email them and schedule something with them or just talking with them one-on-one in our own confidential sit-down meetings, because I'm involved in a few other student positions on campus, there's just... Again, everything is just lost in translation. And I don't get why these conversations are lost in translation when it's supposed to be their position to sit down and understand what I'm going through and then sit down with me and other students to think about next steps on how to solve these issues one way or another. –Whitney*

Here, Whitney offered an alternative explanation as to why administrators chose to remain ignorant to student needs: it adds more work to their job. Moreover, Whitney demonstrated a critical consciousness in how she understood that there are various needs within the institution, especially when serving diverse populations. In other words, her expectations of

administrators seemed rather realistic. Neoliberal culture that discussed previously could be a contributing factor to why there was a perception that administrators felt addressing student of color's needs was an additional burden, Whitney also underscored how this is an essential part of their role as institutional leaders and it felt confusing as to why this was such a challenge to at the very least, meet with students and learn about their experiences and needs.

Lastly, Whitney ended with expressing her frustrations about the lack of organizational change within the institution:

*So, it just feels like a lot of these experiences have been reinforced year after year. And it's interesting because there are people, for example, like you or other mentors that I've had that were student mentors that were a few years older than me who would talk to me about their experiences years before I even got to the *** and it's the same case, and I still have contact with a few other students who are undergrads, and it's the same case. So, it's like these years that we've been here at this university, almost a decade, there has been no progress. And there are a lot of reasons as to why. Obviously turnover, different people, different positions, **different ways of going about with the needs of culture and resource centers and the needs of students of color in general.** And so, I would see why there's this disorganized pattern of people in charge going about with certain things on campus. –Whitney*

Whitney highlighted a salient sentiment shared by other activists in how she is outwardly cognizant of the ways these cyclical patterns have continued to manifest in relation to her advocacy work. She explained how she had mentors and connected with other students that preceded her time at the institution that encountered the same challenges and advocated for the same issues. Yet, nothing has changed in almost ten years of these issues being at the forefront of campus activism and student advocacy. She attributed some of this the constant turnover of college and university personnel and how individuals may have different priorities and different strategies for addressing the needs of students of color broadly. This underscored her mindfulness of the ways the institution is organized and structured, thus continuing to contribute

to the oppression of students from racially and historically excluded backgrounds and communities.

Ryan also discussed a form of consciousness in their approaches to this work. Their reflections reinforced both Ethan and Elena's insights on how activism is not just something that we "do," but something that becomes deeply ingrained in who we are, the choices we make, and the ways we choose to move about the world:

*For me, it is a **constant state**. It's something that you **choose**. It's kind of like the way I think about being anti-racist, right? It's not something that you do once, and you're like, "Okay." It's the way that you decide to move about the world, the way that it comes down to all of your choices, and what you have control over choosing as much as possible. And for me, **it's making those decisions on a daily basis**, what I **choose** to engage with, how I **choose** to engage with it, who I **choose** to be in community with, who I **choose** to organize and work with, whether I **choose** to do it, mutual aid, participating in those spaces and moving something forward, **even if it feels abstract** –Ryan*

For Ryan, engaging in activism is a constant state and a conscious choice in how they choose to move through the world, the choices they make, and the impact of their actions. Even if the work can feel complex and intangible, it is a deliberate choice to engage with community and participate in working towards transformative change.

The idea of disrupting hierarchies was also a common thread across many of the definitions activists shared in this study. More specifically, in the ways they became aware of systemic oppression and identities. This notion also embodied aspects like challenging authority (e.g., key institutional stakeholders) or systems within an organization (e.g., higher education) and fighting to redistribute power and resources in more equitable ways (e.g., to students). This type of activism has taken many forms such as protests and demonstrations and educational events, but also is not solely about disruption, but rather centers community and empowerment.

Lucy reflected on her journey and how it culminated to her challenging hegemonic notions around Asian American engagement in social and political movements. She began by discussing how attending her institution cultivated her racial identity as an Asian American:

*I think it's pushed me so much in really great ways where, I think the resources I was able to really develop from; the cultural center, meeting people like ***, mentors like ***, or our teacher who used to be a *** Scholar, taking classes like Asian American Studies classes; even having that opportunity, that was crazy. Or having race classes and having amazing faculty for that. That has been so life changing. That, I think, is why I have a lot of fond feelings for *** sometimes where I'm like, **the big people suck, but there's people here or experiences I've had here where, I always make a joke where I'm like, "Before I came to ***, I didn't really know I was a person of color. I just thought I was Asian."** –Lucy*

Lucy underscored how being a student at her institution and having opportunities to be connected with other Asian American mentors, having a resource like the APIDA cultural center, and being able to take classes in Asian American Studies was essential in her student development. And even despite the challenges she faced as a student activist, in particularly working with administrators (e.g., "the big people"), the other individuals and the experiences cultivated her identity and understanding of what it meant to be Asian American. She continued to explain:

*I had a very classic story of I was Asian, and I was American. In my head I was like, "They're so different. I can't reconcile these identities." I'm also very lucky, because every summer, I grew up going back to Taiwan. So, I think I had a very strong connection to my Asian culture, but it was very segregated, so it was not mixed with my American side, wasn't really brought to school other than, **I was raised to believe the model minority myth and all those things.** (I feel like all of that really came crashing down at *** in a really good way and I learned what it meant to be Asian American as a political identity. I feel like that's a really big thing at ***, like learning how oppression and marginalization acted on me growing up. So, I really stepped into that identity and I really embodied it and I felt really fulfilled that I was able to hopefully help other people on that journey, as well, and **realize being Asian American is its own political identity.** You can be both Asian and American at the same time. I think I expanded my identity to be transnational. I was like, "What does transnational liberation mean?" The U.S. is also global. Because of these resources at ***, I was able to meet so many other Asian Americans because, again, I was with so many White people all the time. I didn't even*

know this many Asian people could exist. I didn't even know so many Taiwanese people could exist, so that was really cool. –Lucy

For Lucy, many of the narratives and racialization Asian Americans still encounter was salient and reinforced in her own experiences. She mentioned how she was raised to believe in the model minority myth and how the idea of being both Asian and American was not something she could fully comprehend until she became a college student. She also underscored how essential resources and access to opportunities that allowed her to more deeply understand her racial identity were in not only her identity development, but her political and social consciousness. She concluded by sharing some final reflections:

*I didn't realize so many people were Asian American and **political because I feel like there's always that stereotype that Asian people put their head down and they don't disrupt, and they don't protest. I feel like all of that went out the window at ***.** I learned a lot about Pan Asian coalition building. We did a lot of work with our South Asian Political Action Club. I learned so, so much in a really great way. I think because so many people care and have these discussions in classrooms, outside of classrooms, in club spaces, outside of club spaces, I was able to explore so much of my Asian American identity through culture, through family, through politics, through friendship, through gender, through sexuality. **Very intersectional, too.** I feel like I grew a lot. I don't know. I think it's weird now because I'm leaving. All these things, I think, used to feel very new, but now I feel more settled to that identity. So that's very good. I feel less turbulent in my racial identity for sure. I grew a lot, **and I grew to be very proud of that political identity as well and be very loud about it.** I'm very grateful for those experiences. –Lucy*

Lucy made a powerful statement about a common, yet inaccurate narrative that Asian Americans are apolitical; that we do not challenge, and we are not civically engaged. Yet, Lucy's experiences as an activist directly disrupted this as demonstrated through her reflections of understanding what it meant to be Asian American. Moreover, she developed a critical understanding of intersectionality and being not only proud but “very loud” as an Asian American woman and student attending her institution. All direct oppositions to the narratives often prescribed to the Asian American community and what institutional hierarchy dictates.

Taylor also shared a personal way she challenged hegemonic narratives of hierarchy and power, specifically related to her consciousness of her identity as an Asian American woman.

She first reflected on her family and cultural upbringing as an Asian American:

*So, coming to *** was a really big culture shock for me, not just because it's a predominantly white institution, but the other Asian people that I met didn't have my experience growing up. A really common narrative here among the Asian community is that you grow up in a white suburb and you're the only Asian person in your class, and *** is actually the first place that you come to that has so many other Asian people. But for me, it was the opposite. I was like, "**This is nothing, guys. This is sad.**" So, I think just being around Asian people who haven't had the same experience I did growing up has taught me a lot about... I don't know, it's just taught me a lot about other people's experiences and the ways that they grew up and the ways in which they see their Asian American identity. **And I think learning from them has definitely taught me to think of my own identity in a more political and radical way.** I think growing up, since I never had to question my Asian identity or question if I belonged anywhere, I was very comfortable. –Taylor*

Taylor shared how enrolling as a student in her institution was an adjustment for her because not only was the university historically White, but she did not have a similar or shared experience to other Asian American students she connected with. For many of her peers, they had the stereotypical narrative many Asian Americans often shared about growing up in predominantly White communities, so coming to college felt significant in seeing a larger representation of Asian Americans reflected in the overall student body. For Taylor, however, she did not share this sentiments and felt the representation did not accurately reflect or affirm Asian American experiences and identities. Additionally, because of her upbringing and social location as an Asian American woman, she never questioned her sense of belonging or reflected as deeply about her identity. Yet, not having a similar experience to her peers was transformative in the ways she was reflexive of her own identity in more political and radical ways. She continued to reflect on how her institutional culture reinforced this notion:

*But coming to ***, **suddenly my identity wasn't the norm anymore.** So, it definitely made me feel like, "**Oh, me being here in and of itself is a political statement, because***

***** wasn't built for people like me." I don't think we even started admitting women until the '60s, and regardless of women of color, that's so unheard of. So, I think, "Oh, me being here, that's already such an important statement." And for me then to not only be here and be a student, but also take up space. I see *** presence on campus as also political because we not only take up space, but we fight to make sure resources are allocated for us. We're not only taking up space, but we're also fighting for more space, and we're fighting for more things. And I think that that mindset also just permeates into my personal lives and my interpersonal relationships. So how does my positionality as a woman of color come into play when I have relationships with people who maybe don't hold those identities or hold different identities? Like they're marginalized in different ways. So yeah, I think just being in ***, and especially in the identity centers too, I didn't talk about them as much. But there's a lot of overlap, which is why. But just having those conversations with people and seeing the ways in which they have internalized their own identities has made me think a lot more about what my identity means outside of myself. Sure, I'm Asian American, but I'm just one Asian American person. How do I fit into this larger identity? And yeah, I think it just gives me a lot of purpose. I'm connected to a larger thing. –Taylor**

Taylor began to understand the ways she, as an Asian American woman, was on the margins in the context of her institution. Racially, she was not a part of the majority, and in terms of traditional gender norms, her institution did not even allow women to enroll as students until the 60's. So, for Taylor being present in an institution that was not built for people like her to succeed in, let alone exist in, was a powerful statement that challenged traditional hierarchies of learning and belonging. It was not just a matter of physically being present as an Asian American woman and taking up space in that regard (which was still powerful) but advocating for additional space and resources to ensure that she and her communities would continue to be successful in spaces that were not intended for them. For Taylor, higher education was instrumental in her critical consciousness and cultivating her identity and experiences as an Asian American. It was no longer about just herself, but how her identity as an Asian American is interconnected with so many other aspects of the institution and her community. A direct disruption to the ways institutions socializes students to approach their education in an individualistic manner.

Embracing Collective Action

Elena shared her thoughts about how activism is an extensive notion, but in the context of her own work, she is grounded through her own moral obligation and the systems she values:

*It's such an expansive concept. But I think at its core, for me, it's moving both myself and my own moral compass or value system. And then also because of that splashed onto the people around me, and then even more broadly than that, my community that I'm currently reside within **towards social change that is more inclusive empathy and justice focused than it was previously.** –Elena*

Elena also went on to share how community is a central component to her activism work and in addition to encompassing working towards social change, inclusive empathy and justice are essential aspects to this advocacy work which has developed over time.

Miles also discussed the community component shared by Elena, as they emphasized being involved in the community and mutual aid as important forms of activism:

***I think it's getting involved in your community. Mutual aid feels like activism to me, even though it's not necessarily the definition of or what people might think. Protesting definitely involved in that... there's a spectrum of involvement like phone banking, canvassing, whatever, to direct action, blocking roads, all that stuff. It feels like activism. Just participating in you believe in and wanting to stand up for what you think is right.** –Miles*

Lastly, Riley shared how it is natural for people to associate protests and demonstrations with activism, but that is not necessarily their approach to the work:

*Well, I feel like a lot of people, when they hear the word activism, they're thinking literally protests or demonstrations or something totally flat out. I'm not necessarily that type of person. **I feel like activism is just like when you're trying to go against a rule or policy that's made to oppress you or a certain group.** And it doesn't mean that you actually have to go out and protest; **you could literally just be spreading a petition about it, spreading awareness about it, or doing something kind of what you would consider minor.** I used to call myself, I guess, an activist in high school even. I didn't go to any protests or anything big, because there wasn't really much in my area. **I was just the type of person to spread information, spread articles, spread petitions, and I would still define myself as an activist.** And now that I do more than that, I still associate myself with that label, I guess. So, I would say that it's not a hardcore definition. **There isn't a hardcore definition of activism. It's kind of just having your voice there and participating.** –Riley*

Riley reinforced my initial definition of activism when sharing about how activism embodies resistance against policies and regulations that have oppressed individuals or communities. The intentionality behind communicating “rules” and “policy” underscored a form of criticality by Riley in recognizing that it is not solely individuals that harm others, but rather a larger system that contributes to the oppression of historically and racially excluded individuals and communities. Moreover, Riley also emphasized how there is no one or correct way to be an activist, but having voice and finding ways to participate are essential aspects to this work.

Activists alluded to how collective power is fundamental with activism and advocacy work. This work cannot and will never be done individually. Moreover, there is power in collaboration and engaging with individuals who have shared values and implementing solidarity and reciprocity to create towards transformative and sustainable change. Whitney discussed these aspects in our conversations around how she conceptualizes activism:

*I think activism for me has been very centered on student activism and just being surrounded by students who have similar concerns and similar needs, and us **coming together to address these needs and amplifying the voices of other people** who, for them it may seem like they would need a little bit more assistance or their voices may not seem as strong. **So, with us, with students who have the positions to be able to create an impact or to be able to help others out**, how can we work with marginalized student populations and us being the marginalized students as well? How can we **all work together** to attain a certain goal, a certain mission in **a sustainable manner**? –Whitney*

For Whitney, activism has always revolved around students and their mutual concerns and needs within the institution. It also encompassed coalition building and convergence with other students in order to address these issues and uplift voices from other communities. She also mentioned how students are in unique positions to engage in this work, foster meaningful change, or at the very least, show support and engage in acts of solidarity with other communities. She emphasized these movements are about working collectively to achieve a

desired outcome, but this also needs to be done in ways that can be realistically maintained through and across communities.

Ethan also shared similar sentiments about the importance of cultivating relationships. He also reflected on how activism more than just something you simply “do” or engage in. In particular, he provided valuable insight into some of the differences between activism, mobilizing, and organizing, while making connections to the ways they are intertwined with one another. In particular, change-making was a key word that stood out in his comments and the ways that it embodied collectivist orientations related to solidarity and building relationships:

*I think activism is about change-making. I think it's about changing yourself to change the world. It's about engaging networks, **building relationships** that are key to moving forward. I also could differentiate between activism, mobilizing, and organizing. I really, really prefer organizing, even though I'm the worst at organizing out of the three, just because it's so complicated, so convoluted, but so necessary. And when we talk about neoliberalism and the structures that are in place to perpetuate and reproduce neoliberalism and reproduce late-stage capitalism. It's like I think activism is really important, **but activism is not enough in and of itself because it kind of implies you can be an activist and that's enough.** You can be an individual that's engaging in this work, or you can take individual acts of protest, of advocacy, of lobbying, but it takes one step or many steps more than that, right? **Organizing is about engaging collective action, the kind of collective power we need to combat these systems that are so entrenched that won't be changed with individuals alone.** So, I think the broadest way I can define activism, it's about change-making, it's about individual work, but also organizing is about engaging that **collective action and collective power** to move these systems a lot.
–Ethan*

Ethan discussed how engaging networks and building relationships are the crucial components to moving this work forward. In providing context about how he thinks about activism, mobilizing, and organizing, he shared about how activism is important, but it is also not enough. Individuals can perform actions that are related to activism (e.g., protest, lobbying, and advocacy) and take steps towards meaningful change, but activism also encompasses organizing. For Ethan, organizing embodied collective action, which cultivates a type of collective power that is needed to disrupt neoliberal hierarchies that are so deeply engrained in

systems that it cannot be sustained or done individually. Therefore, activism encompasses change-making through self-work and organizing, which naturally embodies collective action and collective power to make significant change within these oppressive systems.

Focusing on Fostering Solidarity and Relationships

Lastly, activists also approached and defined their advocacy work in relation to not only grounding activism in community networks, but also intentionally working to foster these relationships and solidarity. Taylor shared her reflexive approaches to engaging in activism through collectivist approaches that are not only based in community, but emphasize the importance of building interpersonal relationships and connections that keep people at the core of activism work:

*I do think another part of it is just building those, **building community, building those interpersonal relationships because, well, if you don't have those relationships, who are you mobilizing?** I think building those relationships goes a long way because you're showing people the cause is not at the center of it. **People are at the center of it.** I'm at the center of it, and if you know me, you know I'm not scary. I'm just a girl. So, people; I honestly think **building those relationships goes a lot farther** than just putting on workshops, for example. Because if you don't know people, and if you are not telling them that, first these things are happening, but also do you feel personal connection to it, then they're not going to come. And you can put on as many workshops as you want, but if people don't come, then you're not changing anyone's minds. So that's **why I really like to focus on community building and just bonding events, because I think once you show people that you're a person first, and our cause is always center people, then it becomes a little easier for them to remove this...I don't know, I think it's just easier for them to connect to it. This cause is not some nebulous thing.** Someone's face is at the center of it, someone's story is at the center of it. So that's how I like to approach activism –Taylor*

Taylor made a powerful statement about how people are at the center of this work and this notion has shaped her approaches to building community and the interpersonal relationships within them. She challenged individuals to think about who are the people that are being mobilized because ultimately it is not solely the cause or the issue at large, but it is also the people who contribute to disrupting these hierarchies. Taylor specifically discussed how educational workshops have been a core component to her activism work, but it is not

exclusively centered around informing and educating people of issues. Rather, she aimed to make critical connections between people and the issue at hand because as other activists shared above, when people feel a personal connection, they may be more likely to care about the impact. Taylor reminded us that we are people first and prompted individuals to remember who is at the center of this work. In doing so, it can make of activism and advocacy feel less abstract and community oriented.

Lucy also focused on how her understanding and view of activism was based in collective efforts that centered community:

*I think activism, to me, it's very **based in community**. I think anything that is community based and bringing communities together with a social justice lens, I would say, is activism. I think you can be aware of that or not, but whether it's fighting for more visibility of your identity or with public art and stuff like that, obviously disrupting, those are very traditional forms of activism.... I think it's **building community and lifting marginalized voices** while knowing that this is, in some way, upsetting a hierarchy that we are born into. I think that would be activism. That can take a lot of forms. Alternative healing is another one. –Lucy*

Lucy's reflection encompassed several nuanced understanding and approaches to this work. She discussed some of the more traditional forms of activism, reinforcing how those are still essential components to advocacy work. However, she also discussed the idea of resistance and disrupting "the hierarchy that we are born into" (e.g., White Supremacy) as interconnected with building community and amplifying the voices of historically and racially excluded communities. She concluded her thoughts by sharing how activism takes many forms, similar to other activists in this study, and that alternative approaches to healing were also a pertinent component to this work in fostering and maintaining relationships and solidarity in community.

Strategically Engaging in the University

Neoliberal culture shaped how students navigated their activist work, particularly in the ways they responded to tactics employed by the institution and engaged with college and

university personnel. One method was to attempt to intentionally engage with the institution in a manner that also benefited students in working towards addressing the issues raised by their communities.

Going back to the invited donor event Whitney discussed previously, she made connections to her own positionality as a student activist and what the university valued. Ultimately, she believed that the institution did not care about her beyond the ways they could exploit her for financial gain; however, she utilized this opportunity to take what the university valued (e.g., funding) and find strategic ways to leverage the occasion in a manner that could potentially benefit her community:

*I'm in the position that I'm in because I maximize the opportunities that were given to me have very amazing faculty and a faculty advisor from my college specifically. So it's interesting because I'm only saying a lot of the good things about my college specifically, **not necessarily the entire university**, but that just goes to show how you're reaching out to me because you need to milk everything out of my story so that you could milk all of these donors to fund university priorities, but what actually is a priority from the student's perspective at the time that we needed you to step up, you're not there. It's interesting because I was in the table with, I think the Chief Financial Officer, I can't even remember their name, but the Chief Financial Officer, and then I got to chat with the President for a little bit, and I'm sure he knew I was one of those people that wrote that letter. So, it was very tense, **and I wasn't going to say anything to make him happy.** I already said my piece in front of everyone on that stage. **I was there because I wanted to open opportunities for students. I was there for the same mission of, "We need your money."** But it's interesting to me because it's like I feel like ultimately though, even though I'm there advocating for those things, **I don't think that the money will still go to where I need it to be as a student.** And I think that **university priorities are completely different from what the real actual genuine student priorities look like.** –Whitney*

For Whitney, she was conscious of her position as a student leader and activist and the support she had from working with faculty in her field of study. Rather than talk with donors about her overall experience within the university, she chose to focus specifically on the college that her field of study/major was housed within. She went on to share how this approach made her even more aware of the exploitation of her as an Asian American woman because the

university needed her physically present and her story to secure funding for university priorities. Yet, Whitney also explained how what the institution classified as a priority did not align with the issues that students were bring to administrators' attention.

Additionally, Whitney had the opportunity to speak with two of the most significant administrators in that room and made an intentional choice to stand firm in her morals and values as a student activist. She raised a salient topic about the incongruity of her as a student activist and the administrators, that she and other student activists had previously called out for not supporting students from racially and historically excluded communities and backgrounds, both being in that room together. Ultimately, Whitney and the administrators were both there with the same objective: acquire funding from donors. The motivation behind their purpose, however, was vastly different. Administrators, like the President and Chief Financial Officer, were there to increase donations in order to fund what they considered relevant and pertinent to the institution.

On the other hand, Whitney made a conscious choice to be present in that space to advocate for her community. By sharing her story as an Asian American woman, she hoped to redirect some of those finances to support the issues and concerns raised by student activists that administrators were not addressing. She concluded by saying that it was ambiguous whether any of the money being raised would go to where students needed it to be, but using her own exploitation as an opportunity to be in a room with key stakeholders of the university was an alternative tactic to try and advocate for unresolved and neglected student issues and concerns.

Dealing with Activism Pressures

Students shared how engaging in activism work was an essential part of their development and higher education experience. However, the neoliberal culture reproduced by the institution had negative impacts on the ways students navigated their advocacy work.

Activists felt a heaviness to be the “perfect” activist. In other words, to engage in the right manners, to always say the right things, and to never put or think about themselves first in their work. The felt expectation of perfectionism also produce toxic cultures amongst activists circles where many activists felt shamed or guilt for not showing up in the ways other activists and they themselves expected. Ultimately these subthemes contributed to the ways that activists became consumed in their work, eventually led many activists to burnout and experience substantial exhaustion.

Producing Perfectionism

The idea of producing perfectionism emerged during conversations with students about how they are navigating some of the challenges of engaging in activism work on their college campus. Sophia spoke about how this pressure to be perfect impacted interpersonal relationships. Specifically in navigating conversations with peers and friends and how it felt “messy” in this work:

Also, not personally, but I do know a lot of people in the way of having conversations about social issues. A lot of conflict does come up between people inevitably, it's hard to have very non-biased conversations with someone without getting really emotional about it, especially if you are really passionate about the subject. So, I feel like in a lot of ways that sometimes relationships can be changed with the way that we talk about activism within our community. –Sophia

Although Sophia has not personally experienced this, she highlighted the reality that often is not discussed when engaging in racial and social justice work. Even when students are fighting for the same issues, tension and disagreements can arise. She brought up a salient point about emotions, which she prefaced as something that is not negative. Students deeply cared about the work they are engaging in, and it can be difficult to navigate these emotions and balance of maintaining personal relationships.

Lucy also shared her experience navigating relationships when they are so deeply embedded in this work as activists:

*Also, **college is very messy**, so activism gets, your friends are also your community members, who are also your activist, I don't know, comrades, I guess, your peers, sometimes your roommates. **It's just all very non-compartmentalized and very mixed together.** I think drama can go both ways. **I think there's a lot of making wrong mistakes or saying the wrong thing.** That could be a barrier sometimes. I think there's definitely a way to be leftist that people try to push sometimes. I don't know if it's changing. It goes in and out. **I think it depends on who's in those spaces.** –Lucy*

Lucy underscored how college is already a complex experience, but the lines can often feel blurred when engaging in activism because it often involves people close to you (e.g., peers, roommates, friends). For Lucy, making mistakes were inevitable parts of engaging in activism that is not typically discussed in this work; yet, it often feels like there is an expectation to be perfect, show-up in the right ways, have all the correct language when talking about issues, etc.

Moreover, the distinctions between different aspects of activists' personal and student lives were not always lucid.

Courtney reflected on her feelings imposter syndrome and how this was a core challenge in the advocacy work she participated in and the pressure she felt to fit a certain narrative:

*I'd say a big challenge for me has been imposter syndrome. I have felt very almost inexperienced in talking about these issues. **I feel a lot of the things that I had heard prior to coming to college were from just White people and from White people's perspective on Asian people rather than Asian people's perspective on White people.** And so, I felt almost like I am not fitting the expectations that people have when they see me. Physically see me, and that **I feel I need to earn a place to be included or wanted in these conversations.** And I think I know logically that's not true, and I haven't actually thankfully experienced an interaction that reinforces that, but I think it's just an insecurity I have in the back of my head –Courtney*

Courtney's reflections conveyed complex feelings that she navigated as an individual who held other identities within the Asian American diaspora. She explained how she has not always felt equipped to speak about issues because she previously was predominantly

surrounded within a White community. Because of this, she felt that she did not meet the expectations that other people have. Moreover, the pressure to be a “perfect” Asian was amplified because physically she is and was perceived as being Asian, but there was still an insecurity that she was not Asian “enough” and needed to earn the right to engage in these conversations and advocacy work.

Navigating a Toxic Culture

Activists also discussed how perfectionism led to fostering toxicity in activist spaces and the how prevalent cancel culture was in these circles. Cancel culture is a socially constructed phenomenon where individuals or communities will publicly denounce and revoke support from an individual they perceived as having done something or said something offensive or problematic. This has often been seen with significant figures (e.g., actors, politicians, social media influencers, etc.).

Elena discussed some of the challenges in engaging this work and shared how even though there was common ground in the issues students were advocating for, there were still disagreements about how to approach the work. This often led to activists forgetting how their objectives were aligned, creating more tensions within activist circles:

*But there's also a little bit of **cancel culture** and just people **shaming other people for whatever decisions they make**, even within the activist community, which can also be hard to navigate because **oftentimes we forget that we are on the same side, I think**. And I'm talking just within the Asian American community even. –Elena*

Here, Elena also elaborated on the pervasiveness of cancel culture, specifically in the ways other activists were shamed for making decisions that may not have aligned with other individuals. This “shaming” was seen in forms of public reprimanding or ostracizing activists for conversations and spaces. Elena also pointed out that the context of her experience was specifically within the Asian American community.

Lucy also described how activist spaces can become relatively negative because of the generality of cancel culture. She shared how this has been the most challenging aspects of her work and experiences and how it was also perpetuated by the institution:

*I will say, it definitely gets very negative. I think **cancel culture** is really active in campus college activism, especially at my university. That's one big thing I've struggled a lot with. That's really produced by the institution, too. It's not solely produced by the institution, **but it's helped by the institution because I think when people are tired of fighting the institution and all that stuff, they'll also get tired of each other.** Maybe I noticed that... Yeah. It's a lot, but I think my university is very active and they're able to pull a lot of people together. **There's an urgency that can become toxic, but also becomes really great things.** –Lucy*

Her comments raised an important point in that cancel culture is not only reproduced within activists spaces with the need to be the “perfect” activist, but it was also reinforced by the institution. She mentioned that her specific university had a rather dynamic activist community, which brought people together. While this was something positive in her experience, it also created a sense of urgency to “do something” (e.g., productivity), which can produce transformative outcomes but also become toxic. Lucy’s reflections about fighting the institution and how activists became tired of each other potentially raised an important conversation around if institutions, intertwined with their responses to campus activism, pit student activists and other marginalized communities against each other, which may have been a contributing factor to this idea of cancel culture amongst student activist circles.

Taylor also explained a potential contributing factor to the pressure she felt to constantly be engaged as a student activist, which may also explain some of the hesitation expressed by Elena:

***It's definitely compounded by being Asian, never putting yourself first, always putting something greater than you are first.** So yeah, also just a lot of unlearning of that. – Taylor*

Taylor touched on a cultural aspect that Asian Americans are often taught of being “selfless” and to think of others before yourself. However, Taylor’s experiences and comments demonstrated how challenging it can be to balance these cultural and familial values with taking care of oneself. She also shared her own challenges that have contributed to cultivating toxicity in activist circles while offering an additional explanation:

*And I was also thinking about, just because I've been struggling with **Asian apoliticalness** very much in the past few months, but especially from a young age, we're not even included in the race talk. **Race is very much a binary aspect.** To even include Asian people as a race is not... I think for us to even get to the baseline of where Black and White people understand their race, for example, there's so much work to even get there. And not to excuse people who are not educating themselves or doing the work, but I don't know, **I want to give people grace because it's important.** –Taylor*

Here, Taylor shared how she struggled with Asian apoliticalness both personally and in the context of other activists with whom she worked. Specifically, in feeling like she and a core group of activists often carried much of the labor of the Asian American community and coalition building at her institution. Consequently, this harbored resentment towards others in her community for not engaging in similar ways. However, not only is this idea of Asian American apoliticalness a widely held misconception of Asian American communities, but she also offered reasoning to why others may not have engaged in the ways that she hoped. Taylor explained how race is frequently discussed in such binary ways, further contributing to the exclusion of Asians from racial discourse. Understanding this racialization and historical context enabled Taylor to critically reflect on the reasons Asian Americans are perceived this way and extend grace and empathy to meet others where they were at and allow space for growth and learning as a core component that drove her activism work.

Becoming Consumed in Work

Students also discussed how activism can become consuming in their lives. Particularly in the ways that they are in a constant state of reflecting and thinking about their advocacy work.

Lucy contextualized why she was constantly thinking about the activism work she is engaged in and the reason it was difficult for her to “switch” her activist brain off:

*Oh, my gosh! My friends and I talk about this all the time. It's like, **I just want joy. That's not the time for politics. But I think because there's so much emphasis on how, as marginalized people, we embody the oppression we experienced, and we embody the resistance that we want to express, and the intersectionality runs so deep. I think we've grown such a deep understanding of these things, and we see colonialism and all those things everywhere. It's really hard to turn off. Also, we're 20-years-olds, so we're anxious and turbulent and having all these other personal things happening in our lives, too. For example, gender comes a lot in the dating world. So now I'm thinking about these things in a political way or if you date someone outside of your race, now you're thinking of things in these political ways. It's definitely hard to shut it off.** – Lucy*

She continued to expand upon her thoughts about why it was difficult for her to “shut off” off her activist brain:

*I feel like pointing out the problem has become a very developed skill, but **separating yourself from the problem is not something that students are taught how to do. We don't know how to do it. I don't think anyone really knows how to do it.** –Lucy*

Lucy’s offered a glimpse into one of the many reasons that activism work in a postsecondary education context can feel messy and is in fact rather imperfect. She shared how as much as she just wants to experience joy, as an Asian American woman, she has a deep understanding of oppression because of the ways she experienced it both within the institution and broader society. In a sense, resistance has become so deeply engrained in her understanding institutional structures and how she moved through this world as someone who comes from a community that has always been historically and racially excluded across the U.S. Empire. Furthermore, even in her personal life (e.g., dating) she was incessantly thinking about intersections of her own racial and gender identity and the impact that had on her. This related back to previous discussions about how activism is not something that is simply “done,” rather a commitment, conscious decision, and state of being, all of which become so influential and deeply embedded in these activists’ lives, both personally and professionally.

Activists also shared the challenge of sustaining the work they have done. Many talked about fears that their work might not continue after they graduate, how they can pass down knowledge, and recognizing that life continues beyond their college experiences. Consequently, the uncertainties of the future and ensuring their advocacy led to many activists to be consumed in their work to ensure this would happen. Whitney shared her thoughts around this:

*It's hard, it's difficult. And I'm glad that you understood where I'm coming from because at one point I was just like, "Is this just me or is this difficult?" But yeah, yeah, it's a lot of work and I hope that that work continues just because I think one concern that I have is I love that you all keep inviting me and a few other students in these meetings to talk about the future of what the *** would look like, **but I'm not going to be here forever.** And as much as I would love to help out, I also am focusing on, again, my job, my studies, my academics, and especially because I'm in global health, I have to do work internationally. So, at one point **I won't even be in the city physically or in the United States physically.** So just thinking **about sustainability and the continuity of these things** and some students being very willing to do activism work and some students not really wanting to do that and being more open to the social activities that we do and the programming that we do and the community building that we do, which is perfectly fine. But just thinking about it from a sustainable standpoint of when you have the staff, great. **Where will you get the student experiences and how will you build the continuity of this knowledge among Asian students on campus?** But that's probably a conversation that they're going to have. –Whitney*

Whitney highlighted an important reality that often times this type of labor can fall directly on one specific or group of students, but as she mentioned, students are not going to be at this institution forever; their lives will continue to move forward, and more importantly, they need to do so. Cultivating student leadership and supporting students' learning and understanding of the issues they were fighting for was not an easy task because, as mentioned, students want to focus more on the social components of their experiences, which was understandable. The concerns around sustaining the work that has been done was valid and furthermore, making this knowledge accessible for future activists was an essential component of the work. Lucy also discussed similar feelings:

*You're a privileged college student. **We have power as college students. We start movements.** We need to get on it. Institutional turnover is another crazy thing that we have to deal with, **so trying to pass on knowledge and having things continue after you graduate or really important people graduate is really hard.** –Lucy*

Lucy's comment underscored the power of college students and the impact of their work on college campuses. Moreover, she emphasized just how challenging it can be to pass down knowledge and the apprehensions of graduating knowing that there is still work to be done. Lucy and Whitney were able to recognize how this was not their sole responsibility to carry what felt like a burden in this work, but it often felt that this was the case.

Experiencing Burnout

Burnout was one of the prevalent topics of conversations amongst activists when talking to them about some of the challenges and outcomes of their work. Over half the activists mentioned feeling burnt out from the navigating the systemic constraints and fighting the institution. For example, Lucy continued to share about the toll engaging in this work has taken on her and other activists:

*It's especially apparent this year because I feel like the gravity of things that we're dealing with is much heavier and **that's not the students' fault.** That's the institution and that's what's happening in the world. **It definitely takes a toll. It has taken a toll.** I think mental health services is great for everybody. Unfortunately, **health insurance does not help out with that. Neither do universities. It definitely makes you get burnt out.** I think sometimes there's a **hustle culture** about it, too, to always be doing something, planning an event, doing a workshop. **It gets really tiring and I think you can give a lot of yourself away without remembering that you're also a community member and you need to take care of that community member as well.** I think it has taken a toll. I also think, though, it has taught me a lot about friendships and what it means to be in coalition with one another, conflict resolution. I feel like I have been pushed at my university in a lot of ways, where politically, and personally, and emotionally, I've grown a lot and in tandem with one another. I don't know where I was going with that. Yeah, it definitely does take a toll, though. **Also, we're students and we want to do school. We also want to have fun and eat our meals and just hang out with our friends without thinking about political things all the time.** So, it definitely takes a toll. –Lucy*

In talking with Lucy and other activists, I physically felt their exhaustion and the emotion of the weight they carried at students and activists. She emphasized an imperative point that this

is not the fault of the student, rather a reflection of the institution (system) combined with events occurring in the world and how those aspects contributed to activism burnout amongst her and her community. Furthermore, she introduced a prevalent topic of conversation of how higher education is not equipped to adequately support students when it comes to their physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing (e.g., mental health). Yet simultaneously Lucy offered a glimpse of critical self-reflexivity in the ways that she has grown from engaging in this work, but how she wished and should simply just have the ability to simply just be a college student.

Sophia also reinforced Lucy's conversation around the detriments of mental health and how it is a huge consequence of engaging in activism work. She also further discussed how it was difficult to resist the "hopeless" mentality when so much effort and energy has been put into these movements and change is not always the most outwardly apparent:

*Yeah. I think definitely what comes with engaging with these kinds of things and educating yourself comes a lot of negativity. And I know that a lot of people **experience strikers burnout** and things along that line, and obviously I have not, because I haven't been at the center of a strike before, but I definitely feel like with understanding the kinds of issues that happen in our society, **it's also really disheartening to know that these things are so prevalent and to engage with them on a day-to-day basis and maybe not experience change.** So, I feel like a lot of it is mental health related, at least for me, **because it is easy to fall down into a rabbit hole of what's the point of talking about these things if nothing ever happens, which I feel like relates to the kind of people who don't engage in politics because they don't think change will ever happen.** And it's kind of struggling with letting yourself fall into that mindset or understanding that if I do that, then so many other people also will allow themselves to do that. But yeah, **I feel like mental health is a big one in terms of consequences.** –Sophia*

Sophia discussed how hope is a driving factor in this work. For her, this advocacy work was something with which she was constantly engaged. To not experience or to be aware that change may not be obtainable was something that weighed heavily on her and impacted her mental health. She also discussed why this could be a contributing factor to others not engaging in this type of social and racial justice work; it can feel hopeless and lead to a mindset of "why

bother?” especially when it does not feel like change is possible. Moreover, the connection between perfectionism and engagement in this work became more apparent when Sophia discussed how if she let herself yield to this mindset, other activists may also give into that as well. Therefore, she tried to lead by example, but was forced to compromise her mental health.

Lastly, Ethan’s story about his experience with burnout was one that deeply resonated and connected many of the truths shared by other activists. He first discussed the moment he was given language to put what he was feeling into tangible words:

***“Definitely burnout.** I have a close family member who is a psychologist, and I went through this really, really rough time in the spring last academic year and this calendar year where I had to seek medication, seek help basically. And I was also talking to my family member about everything, and I was telling them about everything I'm feeling, and I was weeks behind on a midterm. I was sure I was going to fail a class. And taxes, oh my god, taxes, my nonprofit taxes. We had been pushed up to the next bracket of more intensive taxes, and I was just out of my mind crazy, and I still am because taxes are still ongoing. **But they said, "Oh, I think you're burnt out."** And I was like, **"No, that's a cop out answer."** It feels so much more than burnout. With how much it's thrown around and it's very valid, but it just felt like it can't be, **there has to be something more wrong with me.** I felt so dysfunctional. And they were like, "No, no, no, no. It's like **profound burnout.** You're really, really, really burnt out." –Ethan*

Ethan shared some of his struggles in balancing his activism work and being a student as a feeling that could not be described as burnout. He mentioned that he felt that calling it burnout was almost like an excuse for what he was feeling, thus downplaying what the reality he was actually experiencing. He continued to share that:

*I'm sure there might be other things too, and I still need to work on that, but I think for activists, and I don't want to speak for everyone, but **I think activist burnout when it happens is just indescribable. I feel like it's just another level because you're not just feeling for yourself, you're feeling for all of the change and all the people also who rely on you in the organization and in the movement looking to you for guidance and for help and support.** And I think that was a main struggle for me, a really big obstacle in my path. And still, of course, dealing with that to this day as well. It has not resolved in six months, but it's gotten better. I think beyond that, I think the pressure of having people rely on you in the nonprofit sense, in wages, like financial support too, is something I was really happy to provide and still trying to raise the money to provide again, but it was*

really difficult to see. And this can be applied more broadly to see people who are going through it, who are in the midst of not just talking about the problems abstractly, but are experiencing the housing crisis, that are experiencing lack of wages, that are in the midst of it. And they're your friends and they're your colleagues, and they're the people that are both pushing for the change, but also, you're pushing for the change for. I think that is a huge mental burden to be involved in this work that people don't really talk about as much, especially for youth, because a lot of people say, "Hey, you must be taken care of by your parents, and you don't really go through these struggles like other people do," but people do. People do. And that's why we're organizing and fighting. –Ethan

Ethan alluded to the pressure he felt to continuously be involved in organizing and advocating because there were other people impacted, and their basic needs were quite literally at stake. There was a responsibility to his community to keep pushing and fighting for change. Within this though, he also highlighted importance of mental health and how having access to that type of support made a significant difference in his ability to persist both as a student and community organizer. He also underscored how deeply personal and the connection to this work is because so many people are experiencing this type of profound burnout. Yet, these more “unglamorous” sides of advocacy work are often not discussed in activist spaces.

Prioritizing Refusal and Rest

This final theme emerged primary in conversations with activists about the outcomes of their activism work and how they have navigated some of the challenges they encountered as students and community leaders. The idea of refusal is grounded in how despite the challenges activists encountered, they refused to yield to institutional pressures to show up in ways deemed “acceptable” by the institution and consistently kept community at the core of their work. Rest was a salient way that activists resisted neoliberal ideologies and centered and reciprocated care in their work and communities. As such, three subthemes were identified that connected with this type of refusal and rest embodied by activists.

First activists leaned on their community to support them during difficult and tumultuous moments, especially when they were feeling the detriments of activist burnout. Next, activists demonstrated how they were taking care of themselves which ultimately benefited the community and made them a better advocate. Activists also referred to the ways they were being conscious of their health and joy, related to the ways they were experiencing burnout. Finally, activists discussed how critical hope was an essential component to sustaining this work, working towards transformative change, and collectively dreaming of new possibilities.

Embracing Community as a Source of Support

Receiving support from community was a fundamental component to sustaining activism work. To begin, Taylor shared her personal experience with burnout as a graduating fourth-year student this year:

*Oh yeah. 100%. 1,000,000%. I took a big step back as a senior because I'm like, "It's time for me to pass the torch. My time is over." Definitely junior year when we were doing all those crazy things, I felt so burnt out. But it was almost really frustrating for me because I had so much passion and I wanted these things to happen, but my physical capacity was not matching my ambition. So, I think it's really great that I, honestly, **I don't know what I would do if I didn't have such great friends in *** who are always willing to help out, always willing to step up.** So, I definitely have felt burnt out. I don't have a great solution for it yet. I still don't know. But yes, I have felt burnt out, and I've tried to mitigate it in small ways that I can, but I don't have an answer. I don't know if I ever will. –Taylor*

Taylor's passion and care for the work she has engaged in as a student activist was apparent during my conversations with her, but she also reinforced just how strenuous this work can be because there is always something that could be done. Moreover, her comment about not having solutions on how to mitigate burn out reemphasized Lucy's point about how higher education institutions are not necessarily equipped to support student activists. Despite all the challenges and the burnout Taylor experienced, she also discussed an essential component of this work in having friends to support her and that have been willing to step up when she was

physically and emotionally not able to show-up in the ways she wanted. This also underscored previous discussions students shared about how this work cannot and would never be done in isolation.

Miles also described their experience with the cultural and resource center they worked in as a student employee and how specific college and university personnel were pushing the center in a direction that they felt did not align with student values and broader purpose of this type of center. They shared how it was difficult to not feel defeated or easily burnt out, but shared what contributed to the refusal of these feelings:

*I would feel a lot more frustrated with the work I'm doing, **if it wasn't for the people that I know there and the community that...** I've made a lot of friends at this center and so, **that's what's keeping me going** is, having these tangible impacts on students. – Miles*

Miles shared how community and the connections they have created in the center contributed to mitigating some of the feelings of frustration and defeat and is a driving factor and their ability to persist through the challenges they have faced. Additionally, knowing the work they were engaged in was also having a meaningful impact on other students (e.g., keeping community at the center) added to their desire to keep advocating despite the institutional adversities.

Centering Self-Care as a Form of Refusal

Activists shared how putting themselves first came with inevitable guilt, feeling selfish, or being shamed by other activists for appearing not to be engaged in activism and advocacy work. As shared previously, this (re)produced a toxic culture in activists spaces that were paralleled experiences within the broader institution. Yet, several activists discussed how they intentionally worked to resist some of these neoliberal ideologies (e.g., sense of urgency) and center carework not only for their community, but for themselves.

Elena expanded on an earlier reflection she shared about cancel culture and activism burnout. She began by describing how there is often this perception that if you cared about the issues that student activists are advocating for, you always had to be doing something and committing and investing so much of yourself into the cause, a linear path, with no fluidity. Moreover, if you stopped, it was concluded that you simply did not care:

*Speaking on the cancel culture I mentioned earlier and **just activism burnout** I think there's this expectation that everyone, **if you care, you have to be doing things all the time. As much as you possibly can give to this, you have to give to this. And if you stop, that means that you don't care, which is not true.** I talked with a senior here who was really involved in *** for her sophomore and junior year and has taken a step back her senior year, and she was just talking to me and she's like if you need to take a step back, take a step back. And if people think that if you're missing things or you're not at everything that you don't care, then they don't know you. And if you need to take a break for a month, for a year, for even 10 years, that's okay because that means ... **Activism isn't something that you just do in college, it's a lifetime commitment. And if taking a break now will make the activism you do later better, then that's worth it. And also taking a break now doesn't negate the activism that you've done before.** And so, at some point you just need to live life. We were talking a lot about, I guess motivation and burnout and what it means to take a break. But that spoke a lot to me. I am not quite at that point yet, but sometimes I feel like that. But regardless, not really spoke to me. So, I think that's something that really helped me contextualize, I guess the work I'm doing too. **If I need to take a break, then I will take a break and that's okay to come back to it later when I feel motivated again, I guess.** –Elena*

Elena's comments underscored the interconnections previously discussed with perfectionism, toxic culture, and burnout. She raised an important point and was also able to recognize for herself something that is often not communicated to student activists, in that taking a break does not mean you do not care. This work will always be prevalent and needed and go beyond their time in higher education because as she stated, activism is not something that is just a college experience, it is a commitment that must be made throughout our lifetime. Moreover, she gave a powerful reminder that taking a break or stepping back from activist spaces was not selfish nor does it refute all the work an individual may have done or been engaged with before. It could also be argued that this type of refusal and rest was a radical act of self-love for both the

individual and their community. And although Elena admitted she struggled with this notion and implementing it in her own practice and experiences, it was still a component of this work that resonated deeply with her. She believed that leaving or stepping away from the work does not mean you can never come back and ultimately it may even help activists show-up refreshed and re-energized to sustain the work.

Taylor also shared similar sentiments and talked about the challenges of wanting to be involved but the conflicting feelings she felt of taking a step back from the work:

*Yeah. Oh my God, yeah. Definitely recently with things going on in Palestine, **I've been feeling really kind of losing faith a little bit because I'm like, people just aren't mobilizing in the ways that I want them to.** But yeah, it definitely gets to me. I'm just a girl. But I think also, I think taking a step back has helped me a lot **and remembering that the work that people do here is so great.** And I don't doubt that they're making change, but also the "end all be" will not be on this campus. One protest here is not going to end war. It'll make great change, but that's just not what's going to happen. So, I think also extending that grace to myself. It's been kind of hard because like you said, **I feel really guilty because the one thing that they always need in activism is manpower. And for me to actively deny them of my manpower feels really selfish because that's not something you can buy, and it's not something you can teach people.** It's just something that you have to inherently want to do. And here I am, someone who wants to do it, but I'm choosing not to. So yeah, it's definitely been really hard, especially lately. -Taylor*

It was interesting to hear Taylor discuss how she also fell into the narrative of the need to do more and how the ways other activists were organizing were not in the ways that she had envisioned. In listening to her share this experience, it was understandable how she felt this way because she was such a prominent leader in much the activism work that occurred on her college campus and for her community. Moreover, and as other activists discussed previously, she cared deeply about this work, and it can be hard to not let these types of challenges impact her. Taylor was able to practice critical self-reflexivity in not only reflecting on why she felt this way, but physically took a step back from the ways that she engaged in advocacy work on her university's campus. In doing, it helped her remember the core objective and that despite these challenges,

the work that she and other students were engaged in was impactful and important. She also amplified Elena's previous point about how activism extend beyond their experiences in the university, this work will continued to be needed, and what may have seemed like small actions (e.g., protest and demonstrations) are pertinent to larger systemic change.

Similar to Elena, she shared how taking a step back has been difficult, especially in navigating feelings of guilt and selfishness. This was because of her perception that power individuals and communities provide (physically, intellectually, and emotionally) is always needed and by her taking a break from engagement felt like denying her community a type of resource that was essential to creating meaningful change within the institution. She concluded by expressing that these feelings came from her awareness that she was making a conscious choice to disengage in order to protect her wellbeing; it was not a matter of not wanting to be involved. Yet, through these challenges and navigating complex feelings, she worked to extend grace to herself (and others) as a form of self-care, which ultimately led her to being a better person engaged in the activist community.

Being Conscious of Health and Joy

Through the lived truths shared by activists, it suggested that they were intentional about centering their health and joy (e.g., taking a step back, navigating complex relationships, etc.). Previously, Ethan discussed his profound burnout and how he has worked to navigate these challenges. He also expanded on the ways that he was conscious of his health. He shared that he made the decision to be a part-time student to alleviate the stress he felt from school and community organizing, but still allowed him to work deliberately towards his undergraduate degree and be involved in activism work he was passionate about it:

So, I think those are main things, for me personally, I think the workload of all of it, like I mentioned, I had to go on part-time, and that's been a really big help for me is going on part-time, so that I could still excel in my classes while also excelling in organizing...

*These last two quarters of my college experience, all of these pressures like, oh, **don't forget you're a student. Don't forget you're a community leader. Don't forget you're a nonprofit leader. Don't forget that you're a friend. Don't forget that you're a partner. Don't forget that you're a son and a brother.** All these things that so many people deal with, of course, not just in this space, but especially in this space. And that's just stuff that I personally have to balance. –Ethan*

His introspection of around his language of “don’t forget” served as reminder to other activists that there are additional and salient parts of our identities other than solely being an activist; the parts that make us whole and support our ability to feel joy. He reminded us that individuals are more than just their work and their experiences as college students and just how student activists must balance different aspects of their life. However, through all of this, it was important for Ethan to be conscious of who he was beyond being a community organizer and student activist.

Sustaining Critical Hope

Lastly, critical hope was a significant point that emerged from conversations with activists. It was inextricably intertwined with the notion of producing perfectionism and burnout because these aspects often contributed to activists’ feelings of guilt for resting. Consequently, this lead many students to engage in ways that were unhealthy and unsustainable, which lead to the experience profound burnout. Yet, through all of this and the visible and unspoken challenges they confronted, many of the activists mentioned that a driving factor in their decision to engage and remained engaged in this work was because they have hope that change is possible.

Jack underscored an important notion that is often easy to forget in that change takes time and it is something that student activists may not see or experience immediately or even by the time they graduate college:

Change doesn't just come immediately. In whatever I try to do, I tend to understand that it takes time. Sometimes the impact might not really be felt. At instance, and sometimes you try to do something and you're not getting instant feedback that is positive or that is good, and I don't have to lose interest or be discouraged. It's something that I

want to just do. I believe it's taking a better process. And I also believe that with time, probably before I get graduated, that I will see the outcome of what I'm applying for. That what I believe. And I'm not trying to be discouraged by anything because at some point we're not having the initial stage of these advocacy programs. –Jack

His comments also served as a reminder to remain optimistic in the process and to not be discouraged because this work takes time. Specifically in the context of Jack's activism experiences these movements and the advocacy program he was engaged in were not built from a pre-existing foundation; they were initiatives created by himself and other students. Moreover, he shared how much of his critical hope is grounded in his desire to want to do this work and create a more equitable place for students to exist within. Therefore, he worked to resist the desire for instantaneous outcomes and feedback and focused on the aspects he could control in the advocacy programs he was a part of.

Elena also shared her thoughts that highlighted the idea of being cautiously optimistic when engaging in this work:

*“And it feels like it doesn't come to anything even though I think ... Similarly, to get even the Asian American Studies minor here, I know it was a lot of many years of fighting too. And I'm sure the activists then were also like, this is never going to come to anything and the work we do is pointless and et cetera, et cetera. But eventually, **hopefully after work building upon itself, something will happen...maybe.**” –Elena*

Her hesitation to believe change was coming was felt when sharing this example, but she went on to share other thoughts about how her activism work contributed to shaping her outlook in what she chose to engage in:

*“I think we are as a whole, **cautiously optimistic.** I think with every new member that comes or even new person, new idea that occurs, happens or that we meet ... I guess connection that we make on campus, **that's something to celebrate.** Every [magazine] article that we publish or that the community publishes **is worth it,** I think. I guess to me, I think we are overall definitely cautiously optimistic about change, but **I think the change, rather than being in the stereotypical image of change being something that happens institutionally** or something like, oh, suddenly Black and Asian solidarity happens. I'm saying it that way because that's not something that's just going to happen overnight or in one thing. **It's going to take years of work, of course.** But I think that*

with every new friendship made or every new person that someone meets, every new event held, that's where I guess the hope comes from. It's in the people, it's in the community, and not necessarily a demand that's met or an institutional change that happens.” –Elena

Her conceptualization of change was influential and an encouragement to think about the institutional structures that can contribute or hinder this type of transformative change in higher education. Moreover, the emphasis on celebrating the small wins could be essential component to sustaining movements and keeping activists grounded and motivated in the work they are doing. Lastly, she shared similar thoughts to Jack in that this work takes time, but also added nuance to the conversation in reminding us that hope is in the people and thus, hope lies within communities that comprise of these individual people. A powerful reminder that people are at the center of this work and the ones that have the power to make impactful and long-lasting systemic change.

Summary of Findings

This study revealed nine core findings based on conversations with Asian American student activists. These findings fit broadly within two main categories: 1) Aspects of neoliberal culture experienced by activists, and 2) how neoliberal culture shapes the way students navigate their activist work.

The first category underscored how institutions prioritized profits and the desire to generate funding for the institution over the well-being of people. This included additional subthemes such as how the institutions have espoused social justice values but did not enact them, engaged superficially with students, valued STEM fields and professions, and devalued social justice related programs and initiatives. The institution also cultivated a culture of precarity particularly with faculty and staff having a fear of backlash should they show support to student activists, and in the ways they were censored by institution for discussing topics

related to social and racial justice. All these subthemes were related to how institutions also reinforced a culture of self-interest. Specifically, they expressed a false sense of care towards students and their needs, re-emphasized self-preservation, and overall students felt and particularly with administrators that they lacked the ability to care about them as people. This contributed a potential explanation as to why college and university personnel were not able to outwardly express support or show-up for student activists in the ways they may have wanted to, or students expected them to, and the increased tensions experienced between students and staff. Findings also revealed a blatant exploitation of People of Color with Asian American activists being reinforced as diversity tokens and their stories utilized for financial gain by the institution. Lastly, conversations around advance hyper-surveillance systems added nuance to the conversations that was often not seen within the literature. In particular, activists discussed the increased police presence on-campus and at demonstrations, disciplinary action they were threatened with for engaging in advocacy work that the institution deemed disruptive, and the institution's usage of surveillance technology to track and monitor students.

The second category of findings revealed how activists were engaged in collectivist approaches when it came to their work. This included the ways they disrupted hierarchies, grounded their activism in community networks, had a critical understanding the necessity of collective power, and focused primarily on fostering solidarity and relationships amongst each other. Activists also revealed ways they chose to strategically engage in the university by using their own exploitation to physically be present and advocate for additional resources for their communities. Moreover, they discussed a plethora of outcomes related to their activism work, with some positive changes seen throughout their universities. Yet, amongst these outcomes, several activists discussed the pressure they felt to prove and perform which cultivated toxic

culture in activist circle and produced a perfectionist ideology. Activists also discussed how easy it was to become consumed in this work and forget about the other parts of who they were. Together, all these factors ultimately led to activists experiencing profound burnout, which led many to take a step back from the advocacy work in which they had previously engaged. Through refusing some of these neoliberal logics, activists discussed their emphasis on rest and what encompassed it. For many of them, community was a source of support and realizing they did not have to go through these things alone. Several activists also discussed the ways they stepped back from their engagement in the work and how, although it was difficult, ultimately it made them a better community member. Lastly, activists intentionally ensured they stayed mindful of their own health and joy.

One question that emerged through the analysis process was if there was a substantial race element that contributed to shaping the experiences of Asian American student activists like I had initially anticipated. While I ultimately concluded that race was salient but not as profound in some of my discussions with activists, there was still a considerable amount discussed that I included in the findings and ultimately felt would enhance the discussion. A possible explanation for the race component could be attributed to the types of questions I asked activists. The questions were curated to focus on their experiences as Asian American activists and although I tried to emphasize and redirect conversations to think about their racial identities, it was possible this may not have been as relevant to the conversation and their experiences. Race and racism were undoubtedly prominent in their experiences, but majority of activists discussed these components in ways that did not always directly reinforce neoliberal ideologies.

The model minority myth was also a crucial point of conversation among majority of activists that I connected with. In conversations with these activists and other Asian American

community members, the frustrations of wanting to move past this topic and engage in other issues surrounding our community was understandable. There appeared to be a general consensus that this was the only means of discussing racialization of Asian American communities and does not account for other nuances, histories, and experiences. While I do not disagree with this sentiment and share similar frustrations, findings from this study underscored why we still must engage in this topic. There are still inescapable misunderstandings of Asian American experiences and in the context of this study, and there still appears to be no shared baseline understanding that Asian Americans experience racism. As long as this is the case, we cannot expect to move on and engage in topics around race and racism in more complex ways. Moreover, the prevalence of the model minority myth across the core findings, with almost every single activist that participated in this study explicitly naming or mentioning this misconception, reinforced why it is essential that researchers and communities continue to engage discussions and rigorous scholarship around this racial reality.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Researcher's Reflections

Before I share some of the major conclusions of this study, I wanted to pause and take a moment to share some of my own personal thoughts and reflections that emerged from my time spent connecting with these student activists. I first feel a deep sense of gratitude to every single student that took time out of their day to connect with me and support in bringing this research to fruition. It was humbling to receive feedback from several activists who shared their gratitude towards me for doing a study like this and how they felt it was an important topic, yet knowing how much the academy often exploits student narratives (especially those from historically and racially excluded communities) under the premise of education learning, I felt immense pressure

to share their stories in ways that respected and honored their lived truths. However, having the privilege to be trusted to share their experiences is an honor and one that I do not take lightly. I can only hope I have done their voices justice.

As I was engaging in the data analysis process, I re-experienced all their emotions and passion and there were many tears shed. My immediate reaction was anger in re-reading their narratives. Not anger towards them, but anger towards the institution and the structures that have consistently forced students to even engage in this work that does not allow them to simply just be students and experience what higher education *should* be in my opinion; a place of learning and growth that challenges student to think critically, cultivates meaningful relationships, normalizes the messiness and discomfort of learning, and encourages students to keep dreaming. My immediate thought was “what the fuck are we doing?” as individuals *choosing* to work in these institutions. As postsecondary education professionals (e.g., faculty, staff, and administrators), I understand the ways we can support students is nuanced and complex given our entanglements with neoliberal culture in the institution. While this may be true and our feelings are valid, our behavior and responses are not (always). Students are *not* okay, and they should *not* be. Students *are* angry, and they *should* be. My time in the academy has inevitably made me question my complicity in being here and this dissertation has further amplified and begged me to reconsider why I am choosing to continue to remain in a space that seemingly continues to harm students, and moreover, my own community and the people I love and care about most.

Yet, the time I was gifted in connecting with each of these student activists was invaluable and there are no words to the power of these students. They have reinvigorated the hope that I have been missing throughout my time in the academy and taught me that emotions

are not a sign of weakness, it means we deeply care (especially as someone that was deemed “sensitive” their entire life), while simultaneously serving as reminders of why I choose to engage in this work. Kuntz (2015) also reminded us as researchers that we not only should, but we *must* allow ourselves to be deeply affected and allow ourselves to be changed through engaging in this work. As someone that is deeply connected to this community, I carry the weight of their truths with me in every word I type in this dissertation, but they also serve as a relentless reminder to keep dreaming and working towards the type of world we want to live in and keep my community at the core of all that I do.

So, to whoever may be reading this dissertation, I hope that you also know transformation and meaningful change are possible. We just have to be open and ready to listen and learn from the students experiencing these injustices, reflect on our own experiences and complicities, remind ourselves that students expressing their concerns and raising issues is not a personal attack, realize that it really is not about *you* in the way you think it might be, and be willing to engage in collective dreaming. The world is ours to create, and now it is our turn to act.

(Re)Framing Contributions to the Field

I am expected to say that my dissertation study contributed to the field of higher education in many and significant ways, and perhaps it has, as these are subjective points of view based upon the reader and relationship to this work. Yet, as I reflected on the ways that I could communicate my contributions in a manner deemed acceptable by the academy, it felt ingenuine and performative. Even in just beginning to think about the framing of this section, I became frustrated, wondering if demonstrating the ways that I feel this work has made “significant” contributions would even matter to the academy.

I also wondered if proclaiming my contributions was even worth my time, knowing how much Asian American scholars are constantly fighting to demonstrate the worth of their work in the academy. My own advisor has even stated how this is one of the many challenges of engaging in work on Asian American communities. Because of misconceptions (like the model minority myth), we spend more time justifying why research on Asian American communities is needed and relevant in our field than actually being able to engage in these meaningful conversations and these types of scholarship endeavors (Museus, 2009).

Moreover, as people intertwined within the neoliberal academy, we are often socialized to believe that our work needs to be innovative and exciting for it to be considered something meaningful to our respective fields. While I do not deny that many scholars and their contributions meet these expectations that permeate the academy, I felt it was important to preface this discussion in saying, that was never my intended goal at all in conducting this study.

From the beginning, I explicitly named and wrote how my core goals were to honor and celebrate the already existing work related to my dissertation topic by amplifying this scholarship and continuing to build of this powerful body of knowledge that my communities have always possessed. Moreover, I had hoped any student activist, especially those who identify as Asian American, would feel affirmed, valued, and seen should they come across my work.

With these perspectives in mind, the following discussion provides what academia deems necessary for me to demonstrate my scholarly ability to produce a “rigorous” empirical study, my last test to prove myself worthy of earning a doctorate degree. Thus, I outlined several ways that I believe I have complicated conversations around neoliberal ideologies, Asian American student experiences, and campus activism in the field of higher education and student affairs broadly. Whether individuals reading and assessing this study view my work as a significant

contribution to the field is left up to their discretion. So, while I hope the academy will potentially embrace these “contributions” as valuable in transforming higher education into more equitable and inclusive spaces for all students, their approval does not define me nor this study. For me and at the core of this entire dissertation study, my goal has been met: to continue writing my communities into existence.

Speak Into Existence

As mentioned above, I grappled with complex feelings about making bold claims and assumptions that I have contributed meaningfully to the field of higher education. However, through the support and guidance of my advisor, I worked to (re)frame this discussion in a way that clearly acknowledges how I have attempted to challenge the field to think about neoliberalism and Asian American activist experiences in more nuanced manners while maintaining a commitment to my values and my community. In other words, I reimagined this section as a both/and versus an either/or. Below, I have outlined six major conclusions that have been drawn from this study that I hope will contribute to amplifying the voices and truths of student activists, challenge misconceptions of Asian American experiences and identities, and work to transform the neoliberal institution into a place that is truly equitable and inclusive and within which all students can thrive.

Complicating Asian American Scholarship and Discourse

First, in the literature on student activism, researchers have clarified how scholarship that examined the experiences of college student activism broadly is a relatively small but developing body of work in higher education (Biddix et al., 2009; Gaston-Gayle et al., 2004; Linder et al., 2019; Quaye & Lange, 2020). While there was some literature on Asian American activism in other social science disciplines (e.g., history, sociology, and ethnic studies) (Gersen & Lin, 1997;

Lee, 2015), a review of the literature aforementioned in Chapter 2 underscored the limited scholarship that discussed Asian American student activism and advocacy work specifically within higher education (Grim et al., 2019; Museus 2021).

Previous scholarship and literature on Asian American college students and college activists underscored how the model minority myth continues to be one of the most pervasive misconceptions about Asian American students, including their engagement activism (Grim et al., 2019), addressed panethnic identity and development (Manzano, 2018; Rhoads et al., 2002; Suyemoto et al., 2015), and explored the prevalence of consciousness, solidarity, and collectivism through a commitment to justice to name a few (Lin; 2018; Museus, 2021; Museus et al., 2021; Park & Dizon, 2021). With these contexts in mind and to the best of my knowledge, this was the first study to center a critique of neoliberalism to add nuance to knowledge about Asian American activist experiences in a postsecondary education context.

Specifically, this study extended the knowledge of student activism in postsecondary education broadly, but also contributed to growing body of scholarship on Asian American students and Asian American activist experiences. By engaging in a narrowed study that explicitly aimed to understand Asian American student experiences with engaging in advocacy and activism work, it underscored the racial realities of Asian American students and how race is a salient component of their experiences as student activists but cannot be divorced from neoliberal forces that shape these students' experiences. Consequently, creating more visibility and awareness around a community that has been deemed one of the most misunderstood (Chang, 2008) and has often been perceived as individuals and communities who do not experience racialization.

Second, a potential reason for the limited literature around Asian American communities broadly and Asian American activism in postsecondary education specifically was the prevalent misconceptions of the model minority myth (Buenavista et al., 2009; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Museus 2009; Museus, 2014). The model minority myth is one of the most predominant ways Asian Americans are racialized and has continued to be one of the biggest misconceptions surrounding this community (Buenavista, 2009; Museus, 2009, 2011; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 2002). This study reinforces existing knowledge about the salience of the myth, despite decades of work deconstructing, challenging, and invalidating it (Yi et al., 2020). Findings from this study revealed that nearly every single participant intentionally mentioned or alluded to the model minority myth when they discussed their experiences as Asian American college student activists. Scholars have previously discussed how the model minority myth contributed to Asian American communities being excluded when it came to university and college campus policies and programs (Museus & Park, 2015) and how the model minority myth stereotype reinforced a harmful narrative that Asian American students do not need resources to support their college student development (Museus, 2014). Activists in this study add to this prior knowledge through discussing how they experienced reduced funding for Asian American specific programs and events and their fight for Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies. This underscored how the continued prevalence of this violent misconception surrounding Asian American communities. Thus, this dissertation study affirmed the work of previous scholars and underscored how it is essential that the model minority myth be engaged in critical conversations surrounding the racialization of Asian American communities and its impact on the work of Asian American student activists.

Third, this study contributes to existing research by unveiling the intersections of the model minority myth and neoliberalism in the context of Asian American activism. Through a preceding review of scholarship on the model minority myth, I discovered that researchers often did not connect it to aspects of neoliberal ideologies. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this was not a critique of the literature, but an observation how neoliberalism discussions have just recently (i.e., after 2015) become more prevalent in the field of higher education. In earlier chapters, I began to make critical connections between neoliberalism and the model minority myth utilizing Museus and Kiang's (2009) five core misconceptions to demonstrate how race and neoliberalism are inextricably intertwined. Keeping these perspectives in mind through the data collection and analysis processes, this dissertation complicated conversations around Asian American racialization and contributed to the foundational literature surrounding of neoliberal racism (Davis, 2007; Linder, 2018; Rhoads, 2016) and the neoliberal racial projects (Iftikar, 2017) in higher education. Nearly every single activist in this study discussed the model minority myth and its impact on both their racial identity and activist experiences, providing nuance to the conversation around the model minority myth and directly challenged misconceptions that Asian American students are the ideal neoliberal model minority (Iftikar, 2017).

Lastly, Asian Americans have a rich history of participating and leading social and political movements, and our histories have always been interconnected with other racially and historically excluded communities (Lee, 2015). However, because of the false narratives that Asian Americans do not encounter any challenges or problems related to their racial identities and experiences, the inescapable fallacy that Asian Americans are apolitical and disinterested in advocacy work related to social and racial inequalities has remained salient in Asian American discourse (Museus, 2021; Yi et al., 2020). This type of racialization is intertwined with

neoliberal racism and has contributed to the ongoing invisibility of Asian Americans in racial discourse and the overall exclusion of their narratives in not only activism literature, but scholarly research, pedagogy, and praxis broadly (Museus, 2009).

This dissertation actively challenged stereotypes of apolitical Asian Americans by underscoring the extensive and intentional ways Asian American students are politically and socially engaged both within and outside their higher education communities. Findings indicated that Asian American students engaged in a broad range of activism and advocacy work that related to anti-Asian hate, Black Lives Matter, liberating Palestine, Roe v. Wade, LGBTQA+ issues, and livable wages (e.g., cost of living adjustment) for graduate students. Moreover, many of these students were at the center of these movements and actively participated in demonstrations and protests, created and facilitated educational workshops, worked to build cross-coalition solidarity with other communities, and documented activism history to name a few approaches. This reality, along with the experiences and lived truths activists shared, underscored not only how Asian American students are civically engaged but have a desire to create systemic and transformative change related to social and racial justice. Thus, it is imperative we continue to include and center Asian American voices and history in activism and social movements discourse.

Interconnections of Neoliberalism and Racism

Findings from this dissertation study contributed to ongoing inquiry on neoliberalism and more specifically, neoliberal racism (Iftikar, 2017; Omni & Winant, 1994). First, to my knowledge this is one of the few studies that intentionally engaged a neoliberal framework to understand Asian American experiences as student activists. Utilizing neoliberalism and neoliberal racism as a conceptual framework and engaging in discussions around the detriments of these systems has become more prominent within postsecondary education; however, this is

one of the first inquiries to apply a critique of neoliberalism and neoliberal racism to critically understand the experiences of Asian American college student activists. As such, it demonstrated the utility of such frameworks in understanding and complicating conversations around this community.

Second, I also used these frameworks to reinforce how neoliberalism and neoliberal racism are inextricably intertwined with one another and how it is essential to engage both when discussing systems of oppression. In other words, this study underscored the reality that by only engaging these ideologies as two separate entities (i.e., neoliberalism or racism), then it could generate a limited perspective about student activist experiences. In addition, these frameworks illuminated how neoliberal systems deeply impact and shape the experiences of Asian American student activists, but also how Asian American activists appear to leverage their awareness of neoliberal logics in their own advocacy work. Related to this, a question I still grapple with is are activists leveraging neoliberal ideologies or simply their awareness of it? I also continue to think deeply about questions my committee has posed about whether neoliberalism can be constructively used by activists? Or can activists only constructively leverage their awareness of it? While I do not have answers to these questions at the moment, this study pushed us to more deeply consider unpacking and exploring the aforementioned questions and how we can better support Asian American students to create systemic and sustainable change within institutions that are becoming increasingly more diverse.

Third, the current work also built off Iftikar's (2017) notion of neoliberal racial projects to deepen our collective understanding of how Asian Americans continue to not only be racialized, but invisible in conversations surrounding race, activism, and advocacy. This type of racial subject positioning reinforces colorblindness but also how Asian Americans are positioned

in relation to power structures that ultimately shape their identities and experiences (Iftikar, 2017). Specifically, findings from this study demonstrated how Asian American students are commodified and objectified as racial tokens within the institution. Activists were objectified as student success stories in order generate funding and donations to benefit the institution with none of that funding being reciprocated or put back into their communities. In doing so, administrators reinforced how Asian American students are treated as a public good that the college/university can advertise or sell while not compensating them for their labor.

Lastly, the increasing presence of activism on college campuses that has yet to diminish and continues to reinforce how Asian American students are positioned as outsiders of the academy who, despite being commodified for the own personal gain of the institution, will never be accepted, understood, or belong in higher education spaces. This underscored Iftikar's (2017) conceptualization and reframing of the "bad citizen." The perception of Asian American students as such can be seen in the ways activists discussed their racialized experiences and interactions with faculty, staff, and administrators, with many believing that students are simply "troublemakers" and "hell raisers." They are framed as ungrateful and having misguided anger towards the institution, rather than individuals who are advocating and intentionally fighting for the basic rights and needs for the survival of their communities. Yet, when White students engage in the same manners they are often praised for their solidarity and allyship. As seen in the stories shared by students above, this often leads to increases systems of surveillance (e.g., policing) and disciplinary action in order to maintain a neoliberal status quo. This contributed to student activists' overall disbelief in administrators due to how their interactions with administrators have concluded with police being called, students arrested, and/or students facing

university sanctions (e.g., hanging posters in the dining hall) as a result of their advocacy work and expressing their needs as students.

Engaging Neoliberal Ideologies

There were also four major aspects of neoliberalism that were central to the findings of this study. First, this dissertation highlighted an aspect of neoliberalism that had often not been discussed in the literature related to neoliberal culture and student activist experiences—hyper-surveillance. Surveillance is a core aspect of neoliberal ideologies that institutions utilized to monitor and observe students as a means to oversee, control, and/or police their actions as student activists (Giroux, 2009; Museus & LePeau, 2019). In the current discourse, we often see surveillance discussed in the context of policing (e.g., Museus & Park, 2015; Museus, 2019, Na et al., 2021); however, the use of cameras and advanced technology as a structural tool to advance surveillance systems has rarely been centered in higher education scholarship (outside of EdTech) and was revealed through activists sharing their experiences. This dissertation study also underscored how regulated surveillance technology has become embedded in university culture (e.g., no one questioned why there were cameras in a dining hall) and how campuses are ramping up surveillance of students activists, which is especially salient in our current societal climate, and how students are navigating it. We have often seen this implemented in broader society in the ways we hear phrases like “well the government already has all your information” when opting out of services and providing specific information.

The activists that shared their experiences with institutional surveillance seemed surprised by my reaction to them sharing this information. I was shocked, yet still unsurprised to hear about the ways institutions were monitoring student activist behavior and actions. My astounded reaction versus activists’ more nonchalant response may have disclosed an artifact (e.g., tangible, or observable components of cultural that could reveal something deeper) of this

cultural normalization of surveillance. To preface, all activists that participated in this study would be classified as a “traditional” college students (e.g., ages 18-25) and Generation Z. This is a generation that grew up with technology, and although my generation also had some technology that was a part of our childhood, it was not to the extent that we see today (e.g., we still had dial up internet). Given that technology was so prominent in their lives from birth, it could be understandable that utilizing advance systems of surveillance felt normal to them; they may not agree with it, but it also did not seem like it was something questionable to them at that time. Furthermore, this normalization of surveillance also added nuance to conversations around punitive discipline as a response to the success of surveillance technology. Part of the cultural normalization of surveillance could be attributed to the linear pathway students are treated from a young age: you do something “bad,” you face consequences. Thus, the increased usage of surveillance tactics such as increased police presence, implementation of technology, and disciplinary actions were a normalized and predictable way of responding to student activism that the institution deemed disruptive. This dissertation study has contributed to initiating conversations around this aspect of neoliberal institutional culture, but future scholarly inquiry warranted to explore this more deeply.

Second, self-interest is frequently discussed in neoliberal ideologies in relation to competitive individualism. This core tenet of neoliberalism emphasizes meritocracy and encourages individuals to act in their own self-interest, which can be tied to a form of survival (Museus & LePeau, 2019). This study underscored not only how institutional culture cultivates an ethos of self-interest among college and university personnel, but moreover how student activists are grappling with this notion. There has been some literature around the experiences of faculty and staff who support student activists (e.g., Kezar, 2010), but this literature does not

typically center how a culture of self-interest shapes this relationship from the student perspective. As such, this study complicated conversations around how activists engaged with faculty and staff and the recognition of the precarious situations that they are often forced into as a consequence of the neoliberal institution.

Third, and similar to the self-interest component of neoliberalism, how precarity of faculty and staff affects student activists has been given limited attention. Scholars who have studied the connection between educators and activists or discussed this relationship in some capacity (Linder, 2018; Na et al., 2022) often do not center how the precarity of educators shapes this relationship from the students' point of view. I want to be explicit in naming this is not a critique of their work, rather underscoring how findings from this dissertation study painted a more robust picture to what is normally discussed. Specifically, this study highlighted the experiences and interactions between students and faculty/staff. This included classroom experiences, the ways that faculty and staff have responded to students, activists' critical consciousness around the precarious positions faculty and staff are situated within, and how staff are intentionally working to repair relationships with activists that have been harmed by the lack of staff support and labor that was subsequently pushed onto students as a result of the precarious positions they were in.

Lastly dealing with the pressures of engaging in advocacy work has also not been as meticulously discussed and examined in postsecondary education activism discourse (Museus, 2019; Na et al., 2019). Activists discussed their feelings around producing perfectionism, how they are navigating toxic cultures within activist circles, and their experiences with profound burnout. I recognize these topics and feelings are not necessarily new within conversations on student activism. As educators and researchers, these we intuitively know that these are salient

aspects of academic culture; yet previous research and scholarship has often not centered these cultural elements of oppressive institutions. This dissertation highlights how prominent these notions are in the lives of students activists that illuminates the need for more nuanced conversations on how college and university personnel can support activists in navigating these tensions and feelings.

Holding Multiple Realities

Activists in this study perceived administrators as having a pervasive lack of interest or care for their needs and wellbeing. They shared their frustrations with administrators specifically, based on their personal experiences and interactions when advocating for their communities. While there is absolute truth to what students have experienced and shared, there were also complex reasons as to why administrators appear to not care and interact with students in the ways activists in this study shared. I want to be explicit in naming that this does not excuse the responses and behavior of administrators, but this discussion aims to complicate conversations in the ways neoliberalism contributes and often forces them to be complicit in their institutional roles. This complexity also directly correlated with utilizing a Critical Qualitative Inquiry approach to analyzing data by reconstructing meaning and encouraging researchers to embrace that there are multiple realities, and two truths can exist simultaneously (Ziskin, 2019; Pasque & Salazar Pérez, 2015). Multiple realities occur in that student activists and administrators can both have concurrently different experiences given their positionality and social location within the institution; co-existing truths are intertwined with multiple realities in that student activists have a perceived lack of care by administrators based on their lived experiences and interactions with them, while administrators may also not be able to show-up and support students in ways they would like due to constraints of the neoliberal systems they are forced to operate in as university employees.

While it may be true that some administrators simply did not care for the wellbeing of students and see their work within the institution as nothing more than a job and means to having a paycheck to live, it could be argued that many administrators do care, but are limited in the ways they are able to support students. For instance, activists shared that they believed institutions operated as a business and they are nothing more than a number to the institution. These reinforced neoliberal ideologies related to consumerism where students are perceived as customers being sold as public good for their own personal gain or benefit (Museus & LePeau, 2019). Thus, administrators may have chosen to not interact or get to know students and their stories on a more intricate level because how systemically higher education values profit over people. Therefore, administrators might conform to a particular type of role where they are forced to produce in order to prove their inherent worth and value to the institution (e.g., maintain their role). Such pressures do not allow time and space to meet with students and more ironically, understand their needs that would better support them in executing their roles within the institution.

Conversely, when administrators did interact with students, it was often to mitigate the outcomes of student actions (e.g., protests, demands, etc.) and preserve the image of the college and university and/or to protect the precarious positions they are in as university employees. The former was revealed in the findings through the prioritization of profit over student wellbeing, the latter guaranteed that individuals can keep their position which is often linked to a means of living and broader societal survival (e.g., a culture of precarity). An alternative reality that also existed in these interactions is when administrators had something to gain from the situation (e.g., donor money). This is inextricably linked to aspects of neoliberalism such as competitive individualism and precarity where individuals (i.e., administrators) act in their own self-interest,

reinforcing meritocracy and precarious state that university employees are constrained within as a means of survival (Museus & LePeau, 2019).

Whitney's story about speaking at a donor event was a prevalent example of how students are viewed as commodities where their stories and hardships are exploited through using their accomplishments to increase abstract notions of prestige linked to the university. Moreover, students were tokenized and objectified as something the institution can promote or market without compensating them for their time and labor, instead of treating them as holistic humans who have their own goals, needs, and desires (Iftikar, 2017). Students also discussed the institution's business-like model and an emphasis on profit-making, which reinforced the notion of a declining morality (Museus & LePeau, 2019). Administrators become narrowly focused on increasing profits for the institution and consequently there is no accountability for their actions and their commitment and responsibility to care for the students they serve (Museus & LePeau, 2019). This declining morality impedes institutional progress and transformative change because decisions are made based on what will profit the institution the most versus what is in the best interest of students and their needs.

An Invitation to Dream

The Utility of Critical Qualitative Inquiry in Postsecondary Education Activism Discourse

Critical Qualitative Inquiry and its history are deeply rooted in activism and human rights. It pays specific attention to the relationship of power between privileged and historically excluded individuals and communities (Cannella et al., 2016). While the acceptance of CQI in various fields is still developing, this dissertation contributes to redefining our approaches and understanding of research related to diverse voices and experiences and working towards equitable and sustainable change within higher education (Cannella et al., 2016). More

specifically, this dissertation critically examined and addressed the impacts of neoliberalism and neoliberal racism (injustice) on Asian American student activists (historically and racially excluded community) in higher education (specific societal context) (Kinecheloe et al., 2011). In doing so, this research has begun to 1) create opportunities to address how neoliberalism is salient in every part of our lives and society, 2) revealed how neoliberalism will continue to manifest in postsecondary education unless we work intentionally and collectively to understand every nuance and aspect of neoliberal systems, and 3) revealed how critical hope and collective dreaming are essential components in activism work (Cannella et al., 2016).

Regarding the first point listed above, it is no secret that neoliberalism is prevalent in every aspect of our society, including higher education (Museus, 2019) and I hope this study has contributed different perspectives that complicate these conversations so we may collectively work together to resist neoliberal ideologies and create authentic and sustainable change. There are many outwardly apparent critiques of neoliberalism that have been applied specifically to an institutional context (e.g., college/university personnel), yet I continuously come back to a question posed to me about if student activists are also complicit in upholding neoliberal ideologies and if so, is it an active and intentional choice they are making?

Findings revealed how student activists understand and feel a sense of responsibility to engage in this work for their communities, but there was also the notion of “you have to play the game to be in the game.” So, in answering the above question, it is of my opinion and based on the analysis of the findings in this study that, by the very premise and history that the U.S. Empire was built upon, and thus U.S. institutions of higher education, there is not a single person that is not complicit in some way in perpetuating neoliberal ideologies because of the capitalistic and neoliberal system we are all forced to operate and exist within; the very idea (and meme)

that has been circulated through social media that “there is no ethical consumption under capitalism.” In other words, we can take steps to address and mitigate our complicity (Na et al., 2019) (e.g., critical self-reflexivity), but we will always be participants in these violent systems, even if that is not our intention.

In the context of these realities, I constantly go back Na et al.’s (2019) perspective on neoliberalism and critical self-reflexivity. The current findings showed how so many of these activists understand how they are navigating an extremely complex education system, the privileges they hold just by being here and often in “elite” institutions, their positionalities, but also their desire and motivation to create a world that is truly equitable and just. So, while I do believe students do not have a choice but to adopt neoliberal logics to an extent; however, many of them also leverage it to try and implement meaningful and transformative change for their communities and others. It is essential that we are cognizant of the type of system and conditions within which we are forcing students to exist and operate. This is where CQI’s focus on carework is an essential tool, which will be further discussed below.

Second, a crucial aspect of CQI is to critique and challenge, but also to transform and empower others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through conversations with these activists, it was revealed how power structures often inhibit opportunities for change in the academy (Pasque & Salazar Pérez, 2015). Findings showed how from a student perspective, faculty’s complicity in not raising these issues in class and staff not outwardly showing their support for Asian American student activists and the work they were engaged in on campus made it challenging to create any sort of transformative change. Yet, activists’ critical understanding of faculty and staff positionality within the academy not only showed the empathy (e.g., care) they had towards

these individuals, but underscored how neoliberal systems work to maintain power and control over not only students, but educators and practitioners working within the academy.

Finally, CQI in the research process is one that is fluid and encourages us as researchers to embrace our imperfections and constantly interrogate our relationship to this work and our positionality within the academy. Specifically in data analysis, CQI works to hold researchers accountable to engage in meaningful research that centers collectivism and shared knowledge of communities while being cognizant of the current contexts that shape and change these realities (Pasque & Salazar Pérez, 2015). Through the presentation of the findings and discussion, I worked intentionally to not only center and amplify the voices of my community but make distinct interconnections between their individual and collective experiences to further underscore how my communities have always possessed this knowledge; I simply have privilege to be able to translate it into forms that the academy deems acceptable, another consequence of a neoliberal system. It is my hope that by employing a CQI framework to critically understand neoliberal systems and their interconnections with Asian American student activist experiences that it serves a reminder to these activists and our communities that they are powerful agents of change, and the radical hope they have for the present and future is one that should be embraced in every aspect of their work.

Exemplifying Neoactivism

To conclude this discussion, I will preface this last contribution by saying that I am cognizant of the critiques and mixed feelings around the term “neoactivism.” From discussions I have engaged in with other scholars, there seems to be general feelings that this ideology is not necessarily a new concept; activists have always been “neoactivists” or embodying aspects of this notion. While I do not negate or disagree with these feelings, I never believed Connor (2020) was purporting that their actions were “new.” Rather, from my perspective, I felt she was giving

language (i.e., a specific term) to support discussions that highlight the intersections of activism and the neoliberal institution. With these contexts in mind, first, this is one of the few studies that has explicitly utilized Connor's (2020) conceptualization of neoactivism as a framework in an empirical study to discuss how neoliberal culture shaped the way students navigated their work as activists and actively resist neoliberal logics. Adding to Connor's own research, the current study applied the framework in conjunction with a racial lens to examine Asian American student activists specifically. In doing so, this dissertation served as a reminder of how activism is not exclusively a critique or resistance to neoliberalism, but rather an embodiment of critical hope and cautious optimism. Neoliberalism works to diminish any hope that people may hold because it is how the systemic harm continues to be maintained; everyone plays their part to make it work, including discouraging this type of critical hope or even cautious optimism. Yet, activists in this study and beyond have demonstrated ways they are actively resisting these neoliberal logics.

Second, Connor (2020) also provided a way to explicitly name and honor this type of student refusal and resistance. She outlined how amplifying a neoactivist praxis includes reflexive practices of critical consciousness (criticality) and a reciprocal process of care and responsibility to our communities, while working intentionally to hold institutions accountable for the perpetuation of systemic violence. One of the core tenets of neoactivism was related to honoring and knowing the histories of activists that preceded them and created a foundation for their work to be built upon (Connor, 2020). Neoliberalism can erode connections across generations of activists, yet activists in this study demonstrated their consciousness in how they looked to not only honor and build off the work of previous activist but document the knowledge so it could continue to be passed down to future activists, creating institutional memory.

Third, neoliberalism centers an individualistic mindset and works to eradicate any opportunities for students to utilize community and solidarity as power (Giroux, 2014). Accordingly, it discourages all forms of collectivism which can make it more difficult to implement systemic change and advocate for student needs within postsecondary education. While some studies and other bodies of literature have highlighted the role of solidarity and collectivism in college student activism, many have not deployed a critique of neoliberalism (Museus et al., 2021; Na et al., 2022). This study documented that there is not only a continued emphasis on collectivism and solidarity implemented by student activists but framed it as a direct response to the current context of the neoliberal higher education institution.

For example, activists had a lucid understanding and implementation of strength in community and collectivism through their experiences with coalition building. This was seen through their desire to make connections to other communities, such as working and gathering with other Asian American activists from other institutions, engaging in cross-community coalition building and solidarity with other historically and racially excluded communities, and underscoring how their ability to make connections to other communities went beyond the idea that they should only act in the interest of their own community. Through these examples from the findings, it is evident that students engage in activism that takes many forms; however, their conceptualization and implementation of activism into their own lives and engagement centers a more collective and community-centered approach in working towards change that is transformative and sustainable. All these aspects a direct resistance to what neoliberalism prescribes.

Lastly, findings in this study also showed how activists desired to create transformative change, reinforcing Connor's (2020) thoughts around how engaging in critical work is

intertwined with critical hope; we cannot and would not do this work if we did not have hope for a better future. Cautious optimism and critical hope were a prominent area of discussion amongst my conversations with activists. Cautious optimism was discussed more through language (e.g., “hopefully” and “maybe”) and the hesitation to confidently and affirmatively state that after all the work they have done, something will change. Critical hope was underscored through their recognition that change does not come immediately, and activists intentionally work to remind themselves of this notion when they are engaging in advocacy work. Moreover, their emphasis to celebrate the “small wins” through making new friendships, connecting with new people, and how every event and action is a small step towards the radical change they are working towards reminds us that hope is within the people and is one of the most powerful tools we have against oppression.

CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH, PRACTICE, AND POLICY

Findings from this study inform several relevant implications for future research, policy, and praxis for individuals and communities in postsecondary education. While many these of implications are specifically related to Asian American student experiences, a majority of them are also applicable and pertinent to supporting other racially and historically excluded communities, college/university personnel, and institutional agents.

I begin with offering suggestions to advance future research around Asian American students and college student activism. This also includes research I hope to continue engaging in to further expand this work and offer a more robust understanding of college student activism. Next, I offer implications for practitioners and other college/university personnel so they may better support Asian American student activists in their own work and praxis. Both sets of implications can also serve as suggestions to policymakers who seek to be a part of transformative and systemic institutional change that advances racial equity and social justice.

Implications for Future Research

There are eight major implications for future research: 1) continuing to engage critical conversations around the model minority myth, 2) further exploration of tactics and strategies used by activists, 3) consideration of geographic region and institutional type, 4) inclusion of transracial adoptees and multiracial Asian American activists 5) intentionally centering of South, Southeast, and West Asian experiences in the Asian American diaspora, 6) further exploration of Asian American graduate student and activist experiences, 7) including perspectives of college and university personnel (e.g., administrators, faculty, and staff), and 8) challenging pervasive misconceptions of Asian American apoliticalness and the exclusion of histories.

First, from speaking with Asian American activists about their experiences, one of the prevalent themes that became apparent is that we cannot ignore the racial reality of the model minority myth in our discourse around Asian American experiences. Nearly every single activist mentioned or made a connection to the model minority myth in their experiences as Asian American college students engaging in activism and advocacy work on their campus. This further underscored how pervasive these violent narratives continue to be in the racialized experiences of Asian American students. Furthermore, it is evident that collectively, postsecondary education still does not have a baseline understanding of how Asian American college students are a racially and historically excluded community that experiences racism and discrimination. From my own personal experience, I understand the sentiment of Asian Americans wanting to move past the model minority myth and engage in other topics surrounding our community; yet the lived experiences shared by activists in this study show the unmistakable truth that we must continue to engage in discourse and scholarship around the model minority myth because of the pervasive misconceptions that continue to harm the Asian American community broadly. However, in doing so, we can also participate in research that

engages a critical perspective (e.g., examines the relationship of power) such as the interconnections of the model minority myth and neoliberalism and how the model minority myth not only shapes the experiences of Asian American college student activists but the ways that systemic violence in the academy continues to manifest itself through White supremacy by weaponizing the model minority myth against Asian Americans and other historically and racially excluded communities as well.

Second, findings also indicated that activists are engaged and participated in activism and advocacy work that took different forms (e.g., protests and demonstrations, letters, meetings with administrators, etc.). Thus, my study highlighted some of these tactics and strategies in how student activists responded and navigated the neoliberal institution; however, more work can be done around this area. To my knowledge, tactics and strategies employed by college student activists is an area that has been engaged by some scholars (Reger, 2018; Rupp & Taylor, 1987; Taylor, 1989) but is still a relatively new and developing area of inquiry. Future research should also consider more critical work to understand these tactics and strategies student activists engage. In addition, it could be beneficial for researchers to understand the range of strategies and tactics activists utilize and if this changes over time and as contexts and spaces shift (e.g., technology, generations, institutional policies, media activity, etc.). In turn, this may support college/university personnel in more deeply understanding the motivation for their actions and how to appropriately respond to college activism in manners that embody a praxis of carework (Na et al., 2022) and address issues at their root cause.

Third, future research on student activism and the utilization of a neoliberal framework might consider the salience of geographic region and institutional type. While the goal of this dissertation study was not to understand Asian American student activist experiences through a

regional context, a context dependent analysis to understand the impacts of geographic environment may be useful; however, it could be inferred that geographic regions may not vary specifically within the context of neoliberalism. Thus, deepening the analysis of activist experiences within different institutional types (e.g., community colleges, research status, size, etc.) may be more useful in providing a comprehensive understanding how student activists experience neoliberal culture and respond to it.

Fourth, nearly a third of activists in this study identified as multiracial or a transracial adoptee. Multiracial students and transracial adoptees are often aggregated together because of the paralleled experiences they share as a community (e.g., higher education communities such as ACPA's Multiracial and Transracial Adoptee Network and NASPA's Transracial Adoptee and Multiracial Knowledge Community). From my own experience as a transracial adoptee and holding a leadership position with the aforementioned communities, this can include being raised by at least one parent that has a racial identity different from their own, the idea being racially "enough" and belonging to different communities, and cultural aspects to name a few. Yet, within the Asian American diaspora, these are two communities that are often excluded or disregarded in larger discourse and scholarship surrounding racial/ethnic experiences. Future research around Asian American activism and experiences should be intentional in their inclusion of multiracial students and transracial adoptees in their work. Furthermore, future scholarship should engage research that focuses solely on understanding the unique experiences of Asian American transracial adoptee and multiracial college student activists (e.g., potential experiences with horizontal violence in community work, etc.). It is essential that scholars who are engaged in work around the Asian American diaspora are cognizant and embrace realities

and truths that go beyond the racially monolithic portrayals that are often so prominent in discussing racialized experiences.

Fifth, it is vital to consider ethnic representation across the Asian diaspora. Asian American research has largely centered East Asians, often leading to the exclusion South and Southeast Asian representation and experiences (Museus et al., 2021). While this dissertation study had decent representation of Asian ethnic identities in relation to the number of participants, future research should continue to be intentional about the inclusion of South and Southeast Asian experiences. Furthermore, Central and West Asian representation is largely absent from Asian American scholarship (including in this dissertation study), contributing to the silencing and invisibility of these communities. Future research and scholarly work must be purposeful in expanding our knowledge, understanding, and misconceptions of the Asian diaspora and incorporate Central and West Asian student experiences and histories into our research and scholarship.

Sixth, research and scholarship should also consider the experiences of Asian American graduate students who engage in activism and advocacy work at their institution. Many of the social movements we have seen across universities have been facilitated and led by graduate students (e.g., COLA, TA labor strikes, etc.), yet their experiences are also often discounted within postsecondary education contexts (Guentzel & Nesheim, 2006). While they have paralleled experiences with undergraduates who engage in this work, it is essential to recognize their unique experiences and positionalities within the institution (e.g., being both students and university employees). Including their experience would continue to amplify the voice and truths of the Asian American community broadly and provide valuable insight into institutional policies and structures in higher education.

Seventh, an area of research that should generally be considered, and an area I hope to further engage in my own work, is including educators' (administrators, faculty, and staff) perspectives about Asian American college activists and the ways they engage these students. While findings from this study indicated activists had empathy for university/college personnel and their positionalities within the institution, much of this was speculative into the reasons they choose to not or cannot engage with Asian American college student activists in the ways they should or would like to. Including the perspectives and lived realities from administrators, faculty, and staff has the potential to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the ways neoliberalism manifests within postsecondary education and how these ideologies may influence individuals restricting the progression of equity and justice in higher education because of their positionality and/or relationship to the university (e.g., precarity).

Lastly, through the review of previous literature and the analysis of this research study, this dissertation reinforced how Asian Americans have always been—and continue to be—a part of social movements and radical change both within higher education and broader society. Yet, the findings of this study revealed there are still pervasive misconceptions that Asian Americans are apolitical and an overall invisibility of this community's experiences. It is fundamental and non-negotiable that scholars include Asian American history, truths, and experiences in activism discourse, literature, and scholarship. Our histories are all inextricably intertwined with one another and the exclusion of Asian Americans from these bodies of work contributes to the misconceptions and overall erasure of a community that has always been a part of these movements. Including Asian American experiences and histories in scholarly discourse will also actively challenge notions of White supremacy and neoliberal ideologies. Furthermore, it has the potential to promote a greater sense of solidarity and collectivism amongst historically and

racially excluded communities.

Implications for Practice

When thinking about what I could offer administrators and educators (e.g., faculty, administrators, and staff) as advice, I was initially at a loss for words. I felt that I could not tell them anything that students have not already expressed; it felt frustrating. It is so outwardly apparent that student needs are not being met not only through this dissertation study, but the continued activism we see on college campuses in present day. Yet college and university personnel as a whole still do not appear to understand nor have a desire to make a change; so, what else could I possibly tell them that they do not already know? At what point do they realize that they have a moral and ethical obligation as human beings that goes beyond what is in their job description?

In the midst of these mixed feelings, I went back and reflected on my commitment to community and the acts of refusal that Tuck and Yang (2014), Ambo (2018), and so many other Indigenous scholars have discussed within their own work. They are powerful reminders of my responsibility as an emerging educator and scholar that is choosing to remain in the academy. Therefore, below, I worked to give them tangible actions to guide in not only engaging in critical self-reflexivity, but physical steps they can take to refuse and transform higher education institutions into spaces that are actually inclusive and equitable and address the needs of the students they are supposed to be serving. Moreover, I see this as accountability for all of us. For them, as administrators and educators, to know that someone (and many others) are aware of their actions and will hold them responsible for the harm they are inflicting upon their own students. And for me, as an emerging scholar and someone deeply embedded in this work to continue interrogating my own complicity and keeping my values and community at the core of

all that I do. Ultimately my responsibility is to my community, the people I love most; but advocating with them and amplifying their truths and experience also means I have an obligation to engage and be accountable to the individuals that are causing harm to not only my community, but other racially and historically excluded communities in higher education. Furthermore, I see this as an opportunity to center conversations that many of us take for granted or often do not think about or discuss all together.

With these contexts, in mind, there are six core implications that college and university personnel can implement in their own work and praxis: 1) being mindful and eliminating expectations of student labor, 2) normalizing discussions of social and racial justice topics, 3) engaging in acts of refusal, 4) creating intentional spaces for community building, 5) maximizing and ensuring funding for mental health services, and 6) collectively working to document the history of activism and social movements on college campuses.

First, as aforementioned in previous chapters and through activists lived stories and truths, it is evident student needs are not being met, which is one contributing reason to the increase and prevalence of student activism on college campuses (Cho, 2018; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). It might be argued that students do not have a lucid understanding of the ways universities operate and the role of different university personnel (e.g., faculty, staff, and administrators), which could lead to misguided emotions towards university/college personnel. Yet it was evident from our conversations that these student activists have a critical understanding of the nuances that make institutional operations complex and fluid. Some activists explicitly mentioned shared different perspectives as to why university/college personnel responded in the ways they did (e.g., precarious positions, funding, etc.) and some,

while not excusing behavior, empathized with these personnel's positionality and how they are limited in the ways they can respond and show-up for student activists.

While there was a high-level of emotional cognition and introspection student activists demonstrated, in contrast, I would also argue that is not students' job to understand these components of the institution; these activists and all students broadly should just be able to focus on being a student. While teaching and acquiring critical learning skills and developing empathy can be a part of college student development, it should not be an assumed responsibility of the student to put labor into understanding the role of an administrators and other college/university personnel and why they behave and react in the ways that they do. Linder et al. (2019) reminded us that university/college personnel already benefit directly from the labor of student activists in advocating for social and political justice issues, yet the same time, energy, and labor is not reciprocated to student activists.

College/university personnel must be cognizant of the unpaid and emotional labor they are (unintentionally) demanding of students, when their main focus should be their development as a college student and working towards their next goal to become socially and politically competent individuals in broader society. In order to begin this process, college/university personnel can engage in more self-reflexive practices to critically interrogate and understand their complicity within the institution (Na et al., 2019). This can include writing complicity statements, which challenge us to "contend with how our positionalities and social locations also serve to reify and uphold neoliberal socialization" (Na et al., 2019, p. 7), and engaging in reflexive practices to not only understand how this shows up in their own work but also how to diminish the harm they are inflicting and/or contributing to college student activists. Moreover, institutions should consider working *with* students to create change. By engaging in this

collective process, students learn how the institution operates in ways that are healthy and sustainable. In turn, this may contribute to their learning development and overall social and political competence while simultaneously affecting change.

Second, faculty and staff must normalize bringing up these social justice topics in class, rather than relying on students to raise awareness or organize on their own. While understanding this is nuanced in the precarious positions of faculty and staff, this further underscores why it is essential to ensure there are policies that allow all college/university personnel the academic freedom (beyond those who are tenured and extending to pre-tenured and non-tenure track faculty) to engage in these types of pertinent discussions with students without fear of retaliation (e.g., losing their job, academic sanctions, etc.).

Third, college and university personnel need to consider what refusal means within the context of their own work. To begin, administrators and educators should engage with readings that discuss this notion (e.g., Ambo 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Along with the reading this work, reflecting, and engaging in the act of writing complicity statements, individuals should consider the ways that they are able to refuse. For instance, thinking about the ways that administrators are or are not contributing to the more just transformation of the institution and their active participation in it. In other words, if administrators are not doing anything to meaningfully engage or transform the institution in equitable and just manners, then college and university personnel should make a conscious decision to not be a part of it.

In addition, college and university personnel may consider ways to refuse to participate in monitoring (e.g., surveillance) students and instead implement or advocate for policies and constraints to make sure students have what they need in order to do their work both as students and activists (e.g., ensuring students have safe spaces after “business” hours, providing food to

make sure students are nourished, etc.). Next, refusing neoliberal ideologies of self-interest and reflecting on the ways key stakeholders and their actions affect the culture of their organizations. If everyone—especially those with the most organizational power and influence—operates in a way where they are only caring about themselves on an individual level, this sets a particular tone for others and creates a toxic culture and university environment. For instance, when people do not care about each other, relationships can feel and become transactional. By actively refusing this notion, it centers a form of carework (Na et al., 2022) and challenges hegemonic systems of power (e.g., White supremacy, neoliberalism) into which we are all socialized.

Specifically, I encourage faculty to have hard conversations with themselves about what is the “right” way to live. Are faculty more worried about the precarious positions they are in (because yes, there is an understanding that no job is ever truly permanent), focusing on competition with their colleagues, and choosing to be a part of surveillance systems through monitoring and reporting students rather than centering the well-being and needs of the students that they intended and are supposed to be supporting? All these aspects are misaligned with the reason individuals (e.g., educators) come into the field of higher education. It is understandable in the ways faculty may compartmentalize different parts of their life because of everything else they may be balancing and have capacity for (e.g., family), but there is also some dissonance (e.g., denial and avoiding) that must be further challenged within themselves.

While these reflection questions are posed, I do want to be cognizant that these issues are complex and nuanced. Faculty (and staff) are also harmed within the neoliberal institution and even aspects like having tenure do not create the safety nets and protection. While it is important to recognize privileges and acknowledge positionalities in engaging with the institution, it is also essential that faculty see themselves as more interconnected with each other, despite what is

often prescribed for individuals to fit neatly into a certain category. It is also vital that they build meaningful relationships with each other to support in grappling with some of these notions.

They will never do this work alone and there is power in collective thought and action. Faculty should work with each other to create spaces that support and encourage each other to engage in deep reflection and intentionally think about what they are compromising by choosing to remain complicit and avoidant to needs students are advocating for through their activism. How much does this job really matter? What are their core values? And are they willing to lose your job so do not compromise those values or your moral obligation as a person beyond their faculty role?

Fourth, all educators must also create intentional spaces for community building and work to cultivate meaningful relationships with student activists. Findings from this study underscored how essential this type of support was for them. This can include being honest and transparent about university policies and how these impact both students and college and university personnel, and allowing students to make mistakes and learn from them in ways that are restorative. Cultivating these types of intentional relationships and opportunities for cross-coalition building can be vital to student success and development. Moreover, it reinforces the power of collectivism and solidarity in pushing for student needs and creating systemic change that is sustainable for the present and future.

Fifth, a salient finding that many activists discussed was the challenges of engaging in activism and advocacy work, specifically related their emotional and mental wellbeing (e.g., profound burnout). Several activists discussed how mental health services on their college campuses are not always the most accessible. For example, this support might be too expensive, or these student services do not have the capacity or are equipped to support the number of students their help. It is essential that these services become more accessible and available for all

students. In particular, higher education institutions need to prioritize mental health services by providing them with sufficient funding and staffing to adequately support students utilizing these services. Furthermore, higher education institutions must also include mental health professionals in their staffing that understand the unique experiences of Asian American students. This includes hiring Asian American psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors that come from diverse Asian ethnic backgrounds that push beyond the East Asian-centric narrative that often is at the forefront of Asian American experiences and discourse.

Lastly, both faculty and practitioners should work collaboratively to document campus activism and Asian American histories at their respective institutions. Preserving knowledge ensures that our communities, their work, and their memories continue to live on beyond the individuals involved during that particular time period. Moreover, it is a powerful tool of learning and active resistance to the neoliberal academy to ensure that these histories and events and the harm they have caused to Asian American communities is not forgotten. More specifically, it is a way for the institution to be held accountable to the violence they continue to inflict upon Asian American students and their communities by confronting the notion of a declining morality and ensures institutions and systems are responsible for what is in the best interest of the students and communities they are intended to serve (Museus & LePeau, 2019).

Project GROW (Generating and Reclaiming Our Wisdoms) at University of California, San Diego (UCSD) is an excellent example of how other institutions may model a similar practice of documenting Asian American histories, knowledge, and activism. This program engages in dreaming to (re)imagine possibilities across various disciplines to ensure the histories, cultures, advocacy, and experiences of the APIDA community are not erased (AAPI UCSD, 2024). This project collaborates with students, faculty, staff, librarians, and alumni across the

institution to document some of the unaccounted stories and histories of Asian American and Pacific Islander activism at UCSD (KNIT UCSD, 2021). GROW emphasizes a collective approach to this work, the antithesis to what neoliberalism prescribes, which is rooted in scholarship related to transnationalism, solidarity, resistance, racism, and collective liberation (AAPI UCSD, 2024). This project aims to deepen the work the Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies Program and support students in developing their academic skills and their critical consciousness related to their lived experiences, social and political issues, cultivate their connection to other individuals, and instill a sense of belonging on campus (AAPI UCSD, 2024).

Implications for Institutional Policy

Finally, there are three salient implications for institutional policy that should be considered by key stakeholders in higher education: 1) implementing equitable and guaranteed annual funding that supports programming and development of Asian American students, 2) creating policies beyond tenure that allow faculty, staff, and other educators to speak about social and racial justice topics without fear of retaliation by the institution, and 3) eliminate the usage of surveillance tactics and technology.

First, findings showed that many activists were involved in various clubs, organizations, and resource/cultural centers. As a result, much of their activism and advocacy work occurred within these spaces and organizations through programming and educational events. Moreover, these types of places and spaces (e.g., cultural and resource centers) are responsible for the retention and persistence of Asian American students and cultivate much of their development related to personal growth, identity, and engagement with social and political issues (Linder, 2019; Museus et al., 2021). It is an ironic reality that these spaces exist to provide historically and racially excluded communities with spaces where they feel a sense of belonging, yet these

spaces would not have to exist if institutions were truly equitable and just places for all students to learn and thrive in.

Institutional policymakers must prioritize and critically understand how essential these programs, centers, and services are for the success of Asian American students in higher education. Moreover, they need to ensure equitable and guaranteed annual funding for student services that directly support Asian American students. This can include Asian American clubs and organizations that focus on advancing awareness of community issues, Asian American cultural and resource centers, and APIDA heritage month celebrations. While money does not necessarily solve the issues that activists are advocating to address, it is an essential component in being able to survive in the neoliberal institution. When centers and programs have money, it enables them to generate activities and events that support the wellbeing and development of Asian American students. In turn, this leads to greater recruitment, persistence, and retention of students that the neoliberal institution so desperately craves to maintain their public image and level of prestige (e.g., rankings).

Second, key stakeholders in higher education must create policies that allow faculty and practitioners to feel and be secure in their jobs when discussing social and racial justice topics in both formal (e.g., classroom) and informal (e.g., cultural centers, programming) educational spaces. These policies must ensure that these educators can teach and engage in conversations around these topics without fear of institutional retaliation and disciplinary action, regardless of their tenure status. While I understand how this could cause issues and potentially allow leeway for additional harm to be caused within the classroom under the premise of academic freedom and freedom of speech, higher education administrators, practitioners, and faculty should

collectively work together to cultivate and (re)imagine with this policy could look like in practice.

Lastly, it would be ideal to completely eliminate the use of surveillance technology, but realistically I am cognizant that such tools can sometimes be used to ethically ensure the safety of campus community members. To begin, in an ideal world and situation – that we still need to collectively work towards– higher education institutions should divest from the utilization of campus police. In other words, there would not be any police presence on college and university campuses. Yet, at the same time we do know that there are people (e.g., counter protestors) that can become violent towards students. Communities have been able to thrive and care for the safety and well-being of one another long before police forces came into existence, and over the years they have been weaponized as a tool of fear and intimidation for students and the broader community. If there needs to be some sort of protection on campus, students and college and university personnel should engage in collective conversations to envision what that would be and what a safe campus looks like. In regard to surveillance technology, it should be utilized in a way that does not police and monitor students who are exercising their first amendment rights. This could entail universities crafting a policy on how they will and will not utilize surveillance technology (e.g., cameras, voice technology, etc.) so students do not have to worry about the ways this will be weaponized against them. Moreover, this creates transparency between students and the university, and higher education institutions are more likely to be held accountable for violating their own policies.

CONCLUSION

It is my hope that this research has contributed the powerful work already engaged by other scholars and continued to amplify the voices and lived experiences of Asian American students in postsecondary education. When I was an undergraduate, my journey as an individual

engaging in campus activism work started with a letter to university administrators, faculty, and staff. After five years, I am privileged to be able to complete my doctoral student journey and it feels only right and somewhat cathartic to close this chapter (literally and figuratively) with another letter to college and university personnel. This time, however, the letter looks a bit different. During my time connecting with my community and these activists, I asked them what they wanted us (e.g., college and university personnel) to know about their experiences as Asian American students and activists engaging in advocacy work. Inspired by the work of Quaye and Lange (2020), to summarize this dissertation, I curated a letter based on the messages and statements activists shared with them during our time together.

To anyone reading this letter, especially those who work and have a role in postsecondary education, please do so with great care and attention to detail. I understand that some of the issues raised by students are complicated and not every solution is linear. Moreover, as humans, it is natural to be reactive when we are uncomfortable or feel something does not fit within our own lived truth or experience. Your feelings are valid, but I encourage you to sit deeply with these feelings and reflect on *why* reading this letter instilled the reaction the feelings it may have. I also embolden you to reframe this as a radical act of care from our students. If students did not care, if they had no critical hope left in them, they would not be sharing what they have with us. This letter holds the hopes and dreams of the students we serve, and the burning desire for us all to do better and create spaces that are truly transformative and resist neoliberal ideologies. This letter is love and we have the collective power to be a part of the change they so desperately desire and deserve.

An Open Letter to College/University Personnel

Dear College and University Administrators, Faculty, and Staff,

We need you not to only see us, but to hear us. We are not just students, but we are also people, but all your past and current actions have made us believe you do not see us as such.

We know you see us as loud and disruptive, constantly complaining about anything we can and fighting for things that, in your eyes, do not matter. But the fact is that we do what we do for a reason. We are not just protesting to make noise or to bring attention to ourselves on campus; we are not here to cause any drama. We need you to understand that our actions have gone this far for a reason. We protest and write demands because you have left us no other possible avenues to get you to hear us, we mean *really* hear us. We beg you to actually try and look into the reason behind our activism and not just try to put an end to it immediately, even if it's "harming" the school's reputation. Quite honestly, it is much more off-putting when you try and cover up our advocacy rather than resolve the issues that spawned it. Doing so only further silences us Asian Americans and our allies, while diminishing our experiences and the very real discrimination we face at the hands of neoliberalism, colonialism, and White supremacy. Please trust us when we say that we would rather not go to these lengths to speak out unless something was truly wrong. There's an issue and there is a reason why we do what we do.

Some of you might say that we don't understand the full extent of your job and what your role is within the institution, but the reality is we do—so much more than you think we do. You are here to serve students, bottom line. But we also understand how difficult your job can be when you work for a university, and you work with students who you perceive as "fighting the university." Trust us, we understand the precarious positions that neoliberal ideologies put you in, and we empathize with you all more than you will know. But you also chose to be here for a reason, and you are also paid to do a job you are currently not doing.

People are at the center of this. We are not invisible and we as students are not always equipped to be able to sufficiently figure everything out. Please normalize bringing these discussions and issues up on your own so we do not have to take on that extra labor. Moreover, be conscious that this work takes maturity, and you must be willing to be open to growth and acquiring new knowledge. This includes committing to educating yourself and not relying on students to openly share their trauma for the sake of you being able to learn. Our stories are sacred, and our trauma is not your education.

Speaking of this type of exploitation, you must stop tokenizing us as Asian Americans. We, as students, hold no institutional or structural power, but you do. Yet, it is we who come into these spaces and are burdened with the responsibility to create our own path in a system that clearly does not want us to have any power now or ever. We have seen this happen one too many times. You make us feel special by creating positions on committees “just for students” but you do not actually want to listen to us nor care that we are present in these spaces. If you want us to be productive citizens you are sending out into this larger society and meaningfully engage in your work as college/university personnel, you have to give us some power. Tokenism is about expecting students to show up with little to no compensation or reward, or for some superficial reward that has no real benefit to us or our communities. You need to give students power in these conversations, and we mean genuine power and decision-making power to be a part of this change. Otherwise, you are all complicit in tokenizing us.

Emotional care is so important too and should not be overlooked. Please prioritize this the next time you think about responding to us. One of the best things you can do for us as students, which is sometimes even more important and valuable than the outright political support or stance, is to let us know you care about us. Care enough to establish a meaningful

relationship. It is invaluable and pertinent to us as students especially in times of strife and turbulence. We just want to be heard and feeling like we don't have to explain ourselves or convince you of our lived experiences.

To faculty and staff, more check-ins are always appreciated because so often the advocacy and work we do is so deeply personal to our identities and lived experiences. Yet, we spend so much time searching for resources and trying to navigate the obscurity of the university when that time could have been devoted to other things (e.g., studying, building relationships with other students). We also encourage you think about what it means to support organizations, student activists doing this work, and marginalized communities in general.

To administrators, we are exhausted but have critical hope and continue to pour ourselves into this work and advocate for our communities. Yet, we really do not know at this point what we can say to even make you care a little bit about us and our experiences. You have failed us on the grandest level and have cultivated these institutions into places where we do not feel safe and cannot reach our fullest potential. We just want to live our lives and not have to worry about constantly fighting for every little thing. And yes, we are well aware this may seem like it does not affect you, but it does because when your student body is in a good place, it drastically changes the dynamics and culture of your entire campus and shows us all what we are capable of doing as an entire institutional community.

If we were not so tired from constantly fighting you all just to listen to us, imagine what we could all do together. Ultimately you are just hurting yourselves by hurting others so why not move towards something that benefits everyone? If you cannot do that, then you should quit, and we mean that. We are out here just trying to live and the current economic and political system on top of dealing with your lack of care for our wellbeing makes that nearly impossible. So

really, why not just quit? Because all you do is blow up the system, take public money, take student dollars, and then you do not do anything with the power that you hold. And yes, we recognize this is not necessarily realistic for all of you to quit (right now) but you have continuously proven that you are not capable of listening to student voices. We do not trust you.

If you are not going to do anything that is humane, moral, and ethical, and you are not willing to engage with students critically then you should be ashamed. It is really hard to constantly try and work with you all and get you all to hear the things we are trying to tell you. We really cannot help but ask ourselves how you look at yourself in the mirror when you go home? How do you feel comfortable doing the things you are doing. It blows our mind and yet you all have no shame. You do not see as human, but you are the ones who have forgotten your humanity. You are not willing to meaningfully engage with us, so if that continues to be the case, then just quit.

It feels almost unreal to even have to say this, but we just want to be humanized by you. If you are an administrator, you have to realize you are denying people of things. As we mentioned before, we are not just students, we are people too. Please understand that every decision you make affects us in very person ways. We are not just some paperwork that exists on your desk. The things we are asking you for are attached to our hopes, our dreams, our visions. We know and have experienced just how easy it is for you to dismiss us, but if you would only just listen, we mean really listen, to our stories, know our faces, we really do think you would have more empathy for us. But what do we know, right? We're just students and we know that would make your jobs harder. It's a choice to be ignorant, because then your job just stays a job.

We are angry and we should be. Spend a day in our lives and we truly think you would have so much more appreciation for what we do and why we do it. When we try and talk to you

about the importance of having something like Asian American Studies or prioritizing the social sciences and humanities as much as you do STEM, we aren't just asking for "things" for the sake of asking; this is our lives. We do not undervalue the privilege of being a student here because for so many of us, we are first-generation, children of immigrants, and this is a once in a lifetime opportunity for us. For you all to deny us of something that we might never have access to again has lasting repercussions.

We know this letter seems harsh and we can only hope that you take it to heart and reflect on the ways you are complicit and hopefully how you can also do better in serving students. We exist. And know that when you are in these spaces with us, when we are expressing our frustrations about the way things are done or the spaces, it is important to us. We don't need you to be at these fancy donor or homecoming events, we need you to be mentally and physically present with us. We mean it. We want to see your faces more in our spaces and yes, it is going to be uncomfortable, but imagine how we feel navigating an institution that was never intended for us to exist in; this is just part of the work. Embrace the tensions and discomfort.

And again, please also know at the core of this, we are not mocking you as a person. It is not about you as a person or an individual; this is not a direct attack on you but rather a system we know you are forced to operate in, but you also have the power to be a part of the change. You are so powerful, and you have a lot of authority, you could make things work, you could move mountains if you really had to. We just want things to be easy for us for once. When we say "easy" we just want you to see and understand our perspective and work with us to make the world a better place. There is already so much we have to deal with outside of just the university setting, like being born into this world with this identity, the color of our skin, how we look...it is already so much to handle on top of being in school and now having to advocate for things that

we should not have to advocate for because we are only supposed to be here to do our work; to do the homework, graduate, get a job, and be excellent in whatever we want to do in the future. We should not have to fight for these things much less a learning space that we feel comfortable in and that is actually inclusive and cultivates our growth as individuals and students.

We have a voice. We exist. Being a minority doesn't mean that our needs are minor. We are here whenever you are ready to critically and meaningfully engage with us. So, we end this letter and say to you, "your move."

Sincerely,

Asian American Student Activists

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(2022 October 10). *FAQ: How do I know if my sources are credible and reliable?*

University of Washington Research Guides.

<https://guides.lib.uw.edu/research/faq/reliable>

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE KEY STAKEHOLDERS FOR PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

Institution/Organization	Name of Contact	Department/Area	Title	Contact Information
CSULA	Anh Le	API Student Resource Center	Coordinator	ale101@calstatela.edu
San Francisco State University	Mai-Nhung Le	Asian American Studies	Department Chair and Professor	mainhung@sfsu.edu
UC San Diego	Patty Ahn	AAPI Studies Program	Director	pahn@ucsd.edu
UC San Diego	Windi Sasaki	APIMEDA Programs and Service	Associate Director	wsasaki@ucsd.edu
UNC Chapel Hill	Heidi Kim	Asian American Center	Director	aac@unc.edu
University of Alabama	N/A	Asian American Student Association	N/A	aasabama@gmail.com
University of Arizona	Kenny Importante	Cultural/Resource Center (APASA)	Director of APASA	kimportante@arizona.edu
University of Minnesota	Richard Lee	Asian American Studies	Director and Professor	richlee@umn.edu
University of Missouri	N/A	Asian American Association	N/A	aaa.mizzou@gmail.com
UMass Boston	Peter Kiang	Asian American Studies Program	Director	asamst@umb.edu
ACPA	Primary Investigator (Hannah)	Asian Pacific American Network	Co-Chair	apan@acpa.nche.edu
NASPA	Andrew Hua	Asian Pacific Islander Knowledge Community	Co-Chair	naspaapikc@gmail.com
Association for Asian American Studies	N/A	Asian American Studies Programs & Centers	N/A/	https://aaastudies.org/resources/asian-american-studies-programs-centers/

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE RECRUITMENT LETTER FOR KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Dear Community,

My name is Hannah Hyun White (she/her) and I am a PhD Candidate in the Department of Education Studies at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). I am writing to you to ask if you might be willing to support is spreading the word about my dissertation study. I invite any student that meets the following eligibility requirements to participate in my research:

- 18 years or older
- Self-identify as Asian American
- Current undergraduate student OR recent college graduate (Class of 2018 or later)
- Enrolled or previously attended a four- year college or university (public or private) in the United States
- Completed at least one semester or quarter as a full-time student
- Engaged or previously engaged in student activism⁶ and/or a student movement group on their college/university campus

The purpose of this study is to understand how neoliberal systems shape the experiences of Asian American student activists. I aim to honor the work of scholars who have contributed to the growing body of knowledge surrounding student activist experiences and moreover, offer alternative approaches and complicating conversations with how we think about and discuss the experiences of Asian American student activists. It is my hope that this dissertation study can serve as an invitation to others in the field of higher education to collaborate, celebrate, participate, and dream of new possibilities together, while pushing to hold institutions accountable for the roles they play in contributing to the complicity of neoliberal systems that continue to oppress and harm the students it is intended to serve.

This dissertation study involves semi-structured interviews that will be scheduled in accordance with both the participant's availability. Each interview will be schedule for 120 minutes but is only anticipated to last between 60-90 minutes. Participants will help co-construct knowledge and understanding around the dissertation study topic through discussing questions related to racial identity, institutional/educational experiences, and engagement in activism and advocacy work on their college/university campus.

This study has been approved by UCSD's Institutional Review Board, which is responsible for human subjects research. Due to the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and geographic location, all interviews will take place over virtually utilizing Zoom. There may also be an opportunity for participant's to engage in a focus group with other student activists in this study should they choose to do so, but it is not a requirement to be selected for this study.

As a small appreciation for their time and energy, students will be offered a \$10 gift card following the participation in their interview. If eligible and interested in participating, students may fill out this [Google Interest Form](#) and the primary researcher will contact them shortly afterwards.

Should you or any of your students have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at hhwhite@ucsd.edu. Thank you for your time, consideration, and support!

Sincerely,

Hannah Hyun White, M.A.
PhD Candidate | University of California, San Diego
Department of Education Studies | Transforming Education in a Diverse Society

⁶ Any action, effort, or initiative that intentionally worked to disrupt and challenge oppressive systems that impact historically excluded communities in order to bring about social justice and transformational change on a college/university campus.

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE PARTICIPANT RECURITMENT FLYER

**PARTICIPATE IN A
DISSERTATION STUDY ABOUT
ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENT ACTIVISTS
APPENDIX D: SAMPLE PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

PRIMARY RESEARCHER: Hannah Hyun White, M.A.
UCSD IRB: #807370

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Understand how neoliberal systems shape the experiences of Asian American student activists in higher education.

STUDY DETAILS

This study involves one semi-structured interview that will be conducted virtually over Zoom. There is potential to participate in an optional focus group following the individual interview, should participants choose to do so; however, it is not a requirement to participate.

PARTICIPANT ELIGIBILITY

- 18 years or older
- Self-identify as Asian American
- Current undergraduate student OR recent college graduate (class of 2018 or later)
- Enrolled or previously attended a four-year college or university (public or private) in the United States
- Completed at least one semester or quarter as a full-time student
- Engaged or previously engaged in student activism and/or a student movement group on their college/university campus

Participants will be offered a gift card following their participation in the interview as a small appreciation for your participation. If you meet eligibility, please fill out the Google Form or email Hannah (hhwhite@ucsd.edu)

bit.ly/ASIANAMERICANACTIVISM

APPENDIX D: UCSD CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Note: In this consent the word “you” refers to the person being considered for enrollment in the study described. This may be you as the reader of this document, a person for whom you are serving as the Legally Authorized Representative (LAR) or surrogate, or your child.

Study Title and Number

Title: Troublemakers and Hell Raisers: A Critical Qualitative Inquiry of How Neoliberal Systems Shape the Experiences of Asian American Student Activists in Higher Education

Study #: 807370

2. Principal Investigator

Hannah Hyun White, M.A., PhD Candidate

University of California, San Diego, Department of Education Studies

3. Principal Investigator Phone Number, Research Team Number, and Emergency Contact Number

Phone: (602) 689-1058

Email: hhwhite@ucsd.edu

5. Study Overview

This study aims are to understand how systems of oppression contribute to the experiences of undergraduate Asian American student activists. This study is guided by one overarching research question: How do neoliberal systems shape the experiences of Asian American student activists in higher education? There is a growing body of literature that examines the experiences of student activism in higher education broadly; however, there is still little literature that centers the experiences of Asian American student activists in higher education.

We are inviting you to participate in a research study because you are 18 years or older, identify as Asian American, are a current undergraduate OR recent college graduate (class of 2018 or later), enrolled and attending a four-year college or university (public or private), completed one semester or quarter as a full-time student, and have engaged or previously engaged in student activism or a student movement group on your college campus.

This form explains the research so that you may make an informed decision about participating.

- Research is voluntary - whether or not you participate is your decision. You can discuss your decision with others (such as family, friends or another physician).
- You can say yes, but change your mind later.
- If you say no, we will not hold your decision against you.

- You can say no even if the person inviting you is part of your healthcare team.
- Your decision will not affect your health care or other benefits you may be entitled to.
- Please ask the study team questions about anything that is not clear, and feel free to ask questions and mention concerns before, during, and after the research.
- You may consult with friends, family, a personal doctor, or anyone else before deciding whether or not to be in the study.
- You will be given a copy of this consent form and the Participant’s Bill of Rights.

The purpose of this research study is to understand how neoliberal systems shape the experiences of Asian American student activists. I aim to honor the work of scholars who have contributed to the growing body of knowledge surrounding student activist experiences and moreover, offer alternative approaches and complicating conversations with how we think about and discuss the experiences of Asian American student activists. It is my hope that this dissertation study can serve as an invitation to others in the field of higher education to collaborate, celebrate, participate, and dream of new possibilities together, while pushing to hold institutions accountable for the roles they play in contributing to the complicity of neoliberal systems that continue to oppress and harm the students it is intended to serve.

You are being asked to participate in a 45–60-minute interview conducted on Zoom. The interview will be recorded on Zoom and be kept on the primary investigator’s secured Zoom account through the University of California, San Diego. You will be asked a series of open-ended questions related to your educational background, experiences as a student activist, and you may be making meaning with these experiences.

Upon the initial review and analysis of the individual interview transcriptions, there may be opportunity for you to engage in a *voluntary* focus group. You will receive a follow-up email with an invitation to participate in an optional focus group. As a reminder, this focus group is optional, but you are welcomed and encouraged to partake if you feel you have more to say around the topic, have an additional perspective to contribute following your initial individual interview, want to be in community with, continue discussing your shared experiences with, and/or offer support or additional insight to other fellow student activists. Should you choose to participate in the optional focus group, you will be asked to hold and give one-hour of your time. Similar to the individual interviews, the focus group will be recorded and uploaded to the primary investigator’s password-protected Google Drive.

Participation in this dissertation study is no more than a minimal risk for participants. Minimal risk typically encompasses the amount of harm expected exceeding no more than what is already encountered on a day-to-day basis. Psychological risks to participants may include stress or emotions of sadness or anger from recalling particular events they previously participated in. You only need to share information that they are personally comfortable disclosing, and I will uphold your rights in refusing to discuss a particular question, subject, or topic during the interview or focus group.

A complete listing of possible risks and discomforts associated with this study can be found in Section 8 of this document.

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this research. However, possible benefits to others include contributing to the growing body of knowledge surrounding the experiences of student activists, as well as the administrators, faculty, staff, and other key stakeholders interwoven in higher education. It also may further underscore how student activism as not solely a critique or active resistance of neoliberal systems, rather it can also serve as sites of critical hope, cautious optimism, and a desire for transformative and systemic change that would create authentic and non-performative spaces that are just and equitable for all students to thrive.

The alternative to being in this study is not to participate.

More detailed information about this research study is provided below.

6. Whom can I talk to if I have questions?

If during your participation in the study you have questions or concerns, or if you think the research has hurt you, contact the research team at the numbers listed in Section 3 on the first page of this form. You should not agree to participate in this study until the research team has answered any questions you have about the study, including information contained in this form.

If before or during your participation in the study you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or you want to talk to someone outside the research team, please contact: UC San Diego Office of IRB Administration at 858-246-4777 or irb@ucsd.edu

7. How many people will take part?

We plan to study 50 people here. The research will include 30 people across all locations.

8. What are the risks and possible discomforts?

Participation in this study may involve risks or discomforts.

- Psychological:
 - Stress
 - Emotions of anger, sadness, or frustration from recalling experiences

To minimize risk in this dissertation study, you will be given or may select your own pseudonym that will be utilized throughout this study. Only your pseudonym will be utilized on interview and focus group documents, the analysis process, and in the written findings of the study. In addition, and as noted previously, you may skip any question that you do not want to answer, stop the interview or take a break at any point in the interview process, and/or completely have your interview and transcript withdrawn from the study all together. All interviews, documents, and observation files will be kept in a secured Google Drive only accessible to the primary researcher and their advisor (as needed). Once the dissertation study has been completed, presented to the PI's committee, and successfully defended, all interview transcriptions, researcher notes, and audio and video files will be deleted.

9. How will information about me be protected?

While we cannot guarantee complete confidentiality, we will limit access to information about you. Only people who have a need to review your information, documents, or interviews will have access. These people might include:

- Members of the research team and other staff or representatives of UCSD whose work is related to the research or to protecting your rights and safety.

Participant information will be collected initially through the Dissertation Study Interest Form. The information collected on here will only be known to the primary researcher. This information is to support the primary researcher in determining eligibility for the study which will be utilized to achieve a diverse sample, which contributes to multiple and unique perspectives. All identifiable information collected in this interest form will either not be utilized in the write-up of this dissertation study or will be anonymized (e.g., pseudonym, removal of institution's name) to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

The results of this study may be published once the study is completed. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential. We expect this study will be completed by August 31, 2024. This is only an estimate and the actual time to complete the study may be longer or shorter depending on a number of factors.

10. Will I need to pay to participate in the research?

There will be no cost to you for participating in this study.

11. What if I agree to participate, but change my mind later?

You can stop participating at any time for any reason, and it will not be held against you. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty to you.

12. What will happen to the information collected from me?

The data we collect with your identifiable information (e.g., your name, institution, etc.) as a part of this study will be deleted and any additional information (e.g., interview transcripts) will not be included in the study all together if you withdraw.

13. Will I be compensated for participating in the research?

If you agree to take part in this research, we will provide you a \$10 gift card for your time. You will receive your gift card after the completion of your individual interview.

14. What else is important for me to know?

You will be given ample opportunity to ask any clarifying questions or address any concerns prior to the initial individual interview. Even after signing the consent form, you will then be asked to verbally consent again to engaging in the interview and the interview being recorded on Zoom. If and when you consent verbally in addition to the form being previously signed and received by the primary investigator prior to the interview, the interview will proceed and begin recording on Zoom. Following the interview, you will receive a copy of your interview transcript to review and provide feedback to the primary investigator via email, as well as a brief summary of the main takeaways interpreted by the researcher. You will also be given an opportunity to ask any final questions and reminded that you can withdraw from the study at any point

15. What are my rights when providing electronic consent?

California law provides specific rights when you are asked to provide electronic consent:

- You have the right to obtain a copy of the consent document in a non-electronic format.
- You have the right to provide consent in a non-electronic format.
- If you change your mind about electronic consent, you have the right to request your electronic consent to be withdrawn and you can then provide consent in a non-electronic format; however, a copy of your electronic consent will be maintained for regulatory purposes. If you wish to withdraw your electronic consent please tell the study team.

This agreement for electronic consent applies only to your consent to participate in this research study.

Signature Block for Adults Able to Provide Consent

Participant	
<i>I have received a copy of this consent document and a copy of the “Experimental Participant’s Bill of Rights” to keep. I agree to participate in the research described in this form.</i>	

Printed Name of Participant	

Signature of Participant	Date
Person Obtaining Consent	
<i>I document that:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>I (or another member of the research team) have fully explained this research to the participant.</i>• <i>I have personally evaluated the participant’s understanding of the research and obtained their voluntary agreement.</i>	

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent	

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Date
Witness (if applicable)	

I document that the information in this form (and any other written information) was accurately explained to the participant. The participant appears to have understood and freely given consent to join the research.

Printed Name of Witness

Signature of Witness Date

Experimental Participant's Bill of Rights

Every individual asked to participate in a research study has the right to be:

Informed about the nature and purpose of the study.

Provided an explanation of the procedures to be followed in the research study, and whether any of the drugs, devices, or procedures is different from what would be used in standard practice.

Given a description of any side effects, discomforts, or risks that you can reasonably expect to occur during the study.

Informed about any benefits that would reasonably be expected from the participation in the study, if applicable.

Informed about of any alternative procedures, drugs, or devices that might be helpful, and their risks and benefits compared to the proposed procedures, drugs or devices.

Told of the types of medical treatment, if any, available if complications should arise.

Provided an opportunity to ask any questions concerning the research study both before agreeing to participate and at any time during the course of the study.

Informed that individuals can refuse to participate in the research study. Participation is voluntary. Research participants may refuse to answer any question or discontinue their involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they might otherwise be entitled. Their decision will not affect their right to receive the care they would receive if they were not in the experiment.

Provided a copy of the signed and dated written consent form and a copy of this form.

Given the opportunity to freely decide whether or not to consent to the research study without any force, coercion, or undue influence.

If you have any concerns or questions regarding the research study, contact the researchers listed at the top of the consent form.

If you are unable to reach a member of the research team and have general questions, or you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact:

UC San Diego Office of IRB Administration at irb@ucsd.edu or 858-246-4777

APENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Could you tell me a bit about yourself – your educational background, why you chose to attend your college/university, and your educational goals for the future?
2. In what ways are you engaged or involved on your college campus? (Clubs, organizations, leadership positions, jobs, etc.)
3. What is the environment and institutional culture and community like at the university/college you attend?
 1. How has this environment shaped your experiences as an Asian American student?
4. In your own words, how do you define activism?
5. Tell a little bit about the type of activism work you have been involved in at your institution.
6. Can you tell me a story about a time you felt empowered?
7. What prompted or inspired you to become involved participating in activism and advocacy work on your college campus?
8. What has your experience been engaging in activism work? (e.g., interactions with peers, faculty, staff, administrators, etc.)
 1. Overall, how has the campus community responded to the activism work you are engaged in?
9. Were there any particular tactics you (and your peers) utilized in your work as college student activists? (Demands, demonstrations, withholding labor, etc.)
10. What have been some of the outcomes of your activism work?
 1. Have there been any changes in the campus culture, environments, and/or your personal experiences?
11. What are some of the challenges you have encountered engaging in this work?
12. What would like other educators, administrators, and practitioners that work on college campuses and universities to know about your experience as an Asian American student activist/community organizer?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share or would like me to know?

APPENDIX F: KEY SEARCH TERMS

- List of Key Search Terms
 - College Activism
 - College / University
 - Demand
 - Equity
 - Higher Education
 - Justice
 - Protest
 - Sit-In
 - Social Change
 - Social Movement
 - Social Justice
 - Solidarity
 - Student Activism
 - Student Movement
 - Undergraduate
 - United States
 - 2015-2022 [Date Range]

- Combinations of Key Search Terms
 - (Student Activism + College Campus/Higher Education + Date)
 - (Protest + University/College + Date)
 - (“student activism” “higher education” AND “United States”)
 - (“student activism” AND “campus activism” AND “movement” AND “protest” AND “higher education”)
 - (“student activism in higher education” AND “university” AND “student movement” “demands”)