

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

Sense of Belonging of Asian American College Students at a Diverse University

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

by

Min Y. Yoo

June 2020

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Tanya Nieri, Chairperson

Dr. Adalberto Aguirre

Dr. Victoria Reyes

Copyright by  
Min Y. Yoo  
2020

The Dissertation of Min Y. Yoo is approved:

---

---

---

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Sense of Belonging of Asian American College Students at a Diverse University

by

Min Y. Yoo

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Sociology  
University of California, Riverside, June 2020  
Dr. Tanya Nieri, Chairperson

Research on sense of belonging among Asian Americans in higher education, particularly in institutions with a racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body (i.e., diverse institution), is scarce. Prior research on sense of belonging primarily focused on underrepresented minorities (URMs) and used quantitative methods, thereby not giving attention to the lived experiences of Asian Americans in higher education. As a result, there is a need to examine the various concerns and needs of Asian subgroups which are highly diverse. To fill the gaps in the scholarship, this research employs qualitative methods and Asian Critical Theory to center Asian Americans' voices. Using three focus groups with diverse Asian Americans and 20 in-depth individual interviews with Korean Americans and Filipino Americans, this study adds to the empirical knowledge on Asian Americans' sense of belonging in a diverse university and perceptions of the institutional and individual factors that shape it.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Chapter 1: Background and Significance.....	1
Chapter 2: Methodology .....	30
Chapter 3: How Definitions and the Student Body Composition Shape Asian American Students' Perception of Sense of Belonging at a Diverse University in Southern California.....	38
Chapter 4: Asian American Students' Understandings of How Institutional and Individual Factors that Shape Sense of Belonging at a Diverse University in Southern California.....	72
Chapter 5: Sense of Belonging among Korean and Filipino Students in a Diverse American University.....	102
Chapter 6: Discussion.....	137
Appendix A.....	159
Appendix B.....	162
Appendix C.....	166
Appendix D.....	169

## **Chapter 1: Background & Significance**

### **The need for research on Asian American experiences**

*Asian Americans are a large and diverse group.* The Asian population is one of the fastest growing racial/ethnic groups in the United States. As of 2016, there are approximately 21.4 Asian American residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). By 2060, this group will double to 48.6 million people, and is projected to become the nation's largest immigrant group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Asian Americans fall into three regional subgroups and within those three groups, there are more than 20 national subgroups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). East Asians include Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Okinawans, Taiwanese, and Tibetans. South Asians include Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Nepalese, Bhutanese, Maldivians, and Sri Lankans. Southeast Asians include Filipinos, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Hmong, Thai, Laotians, Burmese, Indonesians, Malaysians, Bruneians, Mien, Papua New Guineans, Singaporeans, and Timorese. Each of these subgroups have unique histories, cultures, and languages (API, 2019). The largest Asian ethnic groups in the U.S. are Chinese (approximately 5 million), Indian (approximately 4.4 million), Filipino (approximately 4 million), Vietnamese (approximately 2.1 million), Korean (approximately 1.9 million), and Japanese (approximately 1.5 million) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

This study focuses on Asian Americans and excludes Pacific Islanders because they have unique and distinct histories from Asian Americans (Perez, 2002). As a racial/ethnic group, Asians in the United States continue to lead in household income, have high rates of educational attainment, and have contributed substantially to the

economy as consumers, entrepreneurs, and workers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016; Asian American Pacific Islander, 2014). The median income of households for Asian Americans is approximately at \$83,456 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). 54% of the Asian population age 25 and older have a bachelor's degree or higher level of education (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). They own 550,000 businesses (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Research has found that Asians, as a group, on average earn higher incomes (Pew Research Center, 2017), invest more in higher education (Sakamoto, Goyette, & Kim, 2009), and have higher academic achievements (Peng & Wright, 1994; Hsin & Xie, 2014) than other racial/ethnic groups. However, there is huge variation in the range of income and educational attainment among Asian subgroups. While South Asians and East Asians tend to have high income levels, Southeast Asians tend to live in poverty. For example, Cambodians have poverty rates at 20%; the Hmong have poverty rates at 28% (Her, 2014). Southeast Asians hold bachelor's degrees lower than the national average of 28% (e.g., Vietnamese is at 25%; Hmong is at 14%, Cambodian is at 13%, and Laotian is at 12%) (Musues, 2013).

With respect to higher education, Chou, Lee, and Ho (2015) highlight that Asian Americans occupy a unique position in the university context. While Asian Americans make up only 5% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), they have a high rate of enrollment (63%), and are concentrated in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education, 2018). While domestic Asian American students are the fastest

growing racial/ethnic groups in higher education, they are often overlooked in campus programming and services (Museus, 2014).

*Prior research on Asian American experiences has limitations.* Despite Asian Americans' large presence, diversity, and contributions in higher education and to society, they are one of the most understudied and misunderstood populations (An, 2017; Chou, Lee, & Ho, 2015; Museus, 2014; Museus & Park, 2015). Prior research has operated under the Black-White racial paradigm, which primarily views and studies race-relations among two racial groups: Black and Whites (Chang, 1993; Perea, 1998). This binary does not take into account Asian Americans' experiences, thereby excluding them in racial discourse (Chang, 1993). The exclusion of Asian Americans in academic research is due, in part, to the pervasiveness of the model minority myth (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Lee, 2015; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Museus, 2014) and because they are not underrepresented minorities (URMs) in higher education. The model minority myth is the belief that among minority groups in the U.S., Asian Americans are a model group, one that other minority groups should emulate. The myth is premised on the incorrect depiction of Asian Americans as a racial group that has a genetic predisposition to success, uniquely values hard work, is free of discrimination, and is a monolithic group. However, as its title, the belief is a myth (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Lee, 2015; Museus, 2014; Museus & Kiang, 2009). Previous research has demonstrated how the myth is consistent with colorblind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2017), which aims to minimize racism among people of color, thereby benefitting the dominant group (i.e., Whites).

Labeling Asian Americans as a model is problematic for a number of reasons. First, as noted above, Asian Americans overall may be succeeding socioeconomically. However, failure to disaggregate the group ignores the variation in labor market outcomes by Asian subgroup. Some subgroups may be doing exceptionally well, but the performance of those subgroups may mask the challenges faced by other Asian subgroups. Prior research has found that East Asians tend to have higher socioeconomic status, while Southeast Asians face issues of serious health problems, poverty, unemployment, and labor market discrimination (Ponce et al., 2009).

A second problem with the model minority myth is that reducing Asian Americans' hard work to their culture and race essentializes "Asianness," when in reality a lot of factors (e.g., immigration history and country-of-origin political relationship with the U.S.) influence the struggles and successes of the various subgroups. Third, prior research has dispelled the idea that Asian Americans are free from racism and discrimination in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Asian Americans experience discrimination in various settings, such as elementary and high school (Chou & Feagin, 2015), higher education settings (Museus & Park, 2015), the workplace (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Woo, 2000), public spaces (Chou & Feagin, 2015), dating (Chou, Lee, & Ho, 2015), and cyberspace (Museus & Truong, 2013), which indicates that Asian Americans experience discrimination comparable to that experienced by other U.S. minority racial/ethnic groups.

Research has also shown that the model minority myth has negative consequences for Asian Americans. When Asian Americans experience pressures from mainstream

society to embody the stereotypes associated with the myth, it results in negative mental health outcomes (Zhou & Xiong, 2005). Treating Asian Americans as a homogenous, monolithic group is problematic because the subgroups that fall under the Asian label are highly diverse and heterogeneous. In sum, the model minority myth is one of the most pervasive stereotypes for Asian-heritage people in contemporary society, and it operates to marginalize and silence them (Lee, 2015; Museus & Kiang, 2009).

*Contributions and limitations of sociological research on Asian American experiences.* Sociologists have explored the ways in which race/ethnicity shape the experiences of Asian Americans (Byun, 2011; Chou & Feagin, 2015; Chou, Lee, & Ho, 2015; Irwin et al., 2017; Lee & Zhou, 2014, 2015, 2017; Ocampo & Soodjinda, 2016; Okamoto, 2003, 2006, 2014; Spencer et al., 2009). Prior research has documented how race, identity, and pan-ethnicity are constructed by Asian Americans (Lee & Zhou, 2004; Okomoto, 2014; Park, 2008). For instance, Okomoto (2014) argues that the “Asian American” identity, which emerged during the civil rights movement, is complex. The origins of the Asian American movement can be traced to late 1960s, which brought various Asian ethnic groups together for racial justice (Maeda, 2016). While there are issues with the Asian and model minority labels, in that they homogenize the experiences of the diverse Asian subgroups, findings suggest that collective action based on pan-ethnicity and recognition of diversity within ethnic organizations provided solidarity for the diverse Asian subgroups that shared the experiences of racism and exclusion. While Okomoto’s (2014) work does not specifically focus on the experiences of Asian

Americans in higher education, it highlights the importance of pan-ethnicity, which may play a role in sense of belonging for Asian American college students.

*What we know about sense of belonging in college*

Sense of belonging refers to the process of feeling connected to others (i.e., peers, faculty) and feeling included and supported in the institution (i.e., “fitting in”) (Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn (2012) emphasizes that sense of belonging is a basic need for all humans, which is especially important for students’ success and development in college. Sense of belonging is associated with positive outcomes, such as student success in college (Anderman, 2002; Freeman, 2007; Hausmann, Schofield & Woods, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012), retention (Thomas, Herbert & Teras, 2014; O’Keeffe, 2013), and less substance use (Napoli, Marsiglia & Kulis, 2003).

The opposite of a sense of belonging is exclusion and alienation (Strayhorn, 2012). When URMs are treated like outsiders and not respected, they have lower self-efficacy and are more likely to overwork or underperform because they perceive themselves as not belonging (Ramsey & Brown, 2018; Zambrana et al., 2018). Imposter syndrome, a person’s sense that they are a fraud and may be discovered as such, impedes sense of belonging (Ramsey & Brown, 2018). A sense of not belonging is associated with negative health outcomes, such as emotional and physical distress (Anderman, 2002; Stebleton, Soria, & Huesman 2014).

Scholars have used three theoretical frameworks to examine sense of belong among students: concept of perceived cohesion (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990), model of integration (Tinto, 1987) and concept of sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

The concept of perceived cohesion is defined as “an individual’s sense of belonging to a particular group and his/her feeling of morale associated with membership in a group” (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990: 482). The perceived cohesion scale (PCS) has two major elements: sense of belonging and feelings of morale. Sense of belonging is quantitatively measured as: “I feel a sense of belonging to \_\_\_\_\_”; “I feel that I am a member of the \_\_\_\_\_ community”; “I see myself as part of \_\_\_\_\_ community.” Feelings of morale is measured as: “I am enthusiastic about \_\_\_\_\_”; “I am happy to be at [live in] \_\_\_\_\_”; “\_\_\_\_\_ is one of the best schools [cities] in the nation.” The Likert scales range from 0 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). However, this theoretical framework is limited in that the measures do not specifically focus on higher education settings.

Tinto (1987) proposed a model of integration to examine higher education settings, specifically examining why people decide to remain in an institution. He argues that when students are academically and socially integrated in an institution, they are more likely to stay in the institution. The model has three quantitative variables: pre-college characteristics (e.g., family background), college integration (e.g., student-faculty interaction, academic performance), and social integration (e.g., student-student interaction, participation in extracurricular activities). While Tinto’s theory is the most widely cited theory for understanding retention, it has been criticized for not taking into account the institution’s role and responsibility to provide an inclusive environment and for not fully considering the perceived sense of belonging among students of color (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

In efforts to address the limitations of the traditional student success framework, such as Tinto's theory of integration (1987), scholars have started to move away from students' behaviors and toward the campus environment's role in student success. Notably, Hurtado and Carter (1997) argue for the need to measure sense of belonging as distinct from integration. Sense of belonging is defined as "the individual's view of whether he or she feels included in the college community" (Hurtado & Carter, 1997: 327). This theoretical framework aims to understand how the institution, such as the campus racial climate (e.g., perception of racial climate, experiences of discrimination, exclusion), plays a role in creating a sense of belonging for the student. Hurtado and Carter (1997) draw from Bollen and Hoyle (1990)'s concept of perceived cohesion and elaborate on the concept of sense of belonging. As noted previously, sense of belonging is quantitatively measured as being part of a campus community (i.e., "I see myself as part of campus community"), being a member of campus community (i.e., "I feel that I am a member of the campus community"), and having sense of belonging to campus community (i.e., "I feel a sense of belonging to the campus community"). While their concept of sense of belonging has been applied to better understand the experiences of URMs, it is limited in that it relies on quantitative data and the measures do not examine how sense of belonging may operate for specific racial/ethnic groups, such as for Asian Americans.

Given the lack of a culturally relevant framework to understand student success among racially/ethnically diverse students, Museus (2014) recently proposed a new theoretical model of student success, namely the culturally engaging campus environment

(CECE) model. It considers how external influences (e.g., family influences, employment, financial factors), precollege characteristics (e.g., demographic, academic preparation, academic disposition) shape college success outcomes (e.g., performance, success, degree completion). In addition, the model argues that access to culturally engaging campus environments are associated positively with sense of belonging. Culturally engaging campus environments consist of two elements: cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness. The first element, cultural relevance, refers to the extent to which the campus is consistent with the students' cultural backgrounds and identities and has five indicators: cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, cultural community service, meaningful cross-cultural engagement, and culturally validating environments. The second element, cultural responsiveness, refers to the extent to which campus programs and practices effectively address the concerns and needs of racially/ethnically diverse students and has four indicators: collectivist cultural orientations, humanized educational environments, proactive philosophies, and holistic support.

There are several limitations of the CECE model. First, while the model suggests that culturally engaging environments lead to behaviors conducive to student success, it does not specifically outline how they do so. Second, it does not take into account contextual variables (e.g., living on campus, near campus, off campus) and how they indirectly shape student outcomes (Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017). Third, this model is designed for racially/ethnically diverse student population and not specifically for Asian American students. Asian Critical Theory, which explains the lived experiences of Asian

Americans, has yet to be applied to examine sense of belonging among Asian Americans in higher education, particularly in a diverse university.

*Existing Body of Sociological Literature on the Asian American Experience in Higher Education Settings*

With the exception of few studies (e.g., Chou, 2015; Chou & Feagin, 2015; Chou, Lee, & Ho, 2012, 2015; Lee & Zhou, 2014, 2015, 2017; Ocampo, 2013; Ocampo & Soodjinda, 2016), there is a gap in research in sociology that focus on the experiences of Asian American college students. The existing research in sociology has focused on explaining Asian Americans' academic success and academic achievement (Byun, 2011; Lee & Zhou 2014, 2015, 2017). Lee and Zhou (2014, 2015, 2017) made contributions to the race scholarship, debunking the model minority myth by showing how immigration laws, institutions, and ethnic communities play a role in providing academic advantages for children of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants, despite the fact that they have distinct histories and huge variations in educational attainment. While this research has documented the advantages (e.g., access to higher education), costs of the academic achievement paradox (i.e., Asian Americans who cannot meet the expectations of the model minority are treated as the "other"), and the role of panethnic identification (e.g., Ocampo, 2013), it is limited in that it lacks a discussion of the extent to which Asian Americans feel they belong in a university, particularly a diverse one. As discussed above, more research that focuses on the experiences of Asian American college students, specifically their sense of belonging, is needed to better understand the theoretical implications of institutions that are diverse.

Sociological research has investigated how a particular space, specifically historically white college universities (HWCUs), shapes the experiences of Asian American college students. Prior research has documented how Asian Americans perceive White institutionalized spaces as hostile (Chou & Feagin 2015; Chou, Lee, & Ho, 2012, 2015). In addition, research has found that when Whiteness is normalized, Asian Americans adopt a White racial frame and therefore, may internalize negative attitudes about other racial/ethnic groups (Chou & Feagin, 2015). Other research has examined how race may intersect with other social identities, such as gender and sexual orientation, to oppress Asian American women and LGBT Asian American college students (Ocampo & Soodjinda, 2016; Chou, Lee, & Ho, 2012, 2015; Chou, 2012).

The sociological literature has shown the various ways in which race operates for Asian Americans in contemporary society. However, there are shortcomings in sociological literature with regard to understanding Asian American college students' experiences. The literature is limited in that it tends to focus on Asian Americans' academic achievement and their experiences at HWCUs. There is virtually no research in sociology that specifically addresses the issues of belonging and examines their experiences in other types of colleges and universities, such as a diverse university (i.e., racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body). To make up for the gaps in the sociological literature, this study draws on the literature from other disciplines, such as that by scholars of education, because it has well documented the experiences of belonging for students of color.

*The need for research on Asian American students' experiences in higher education*

Relatively little is known about the role of higher education institutions that have racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student bodies, including their role for Asian American college students. Even though institutions with diverse study bodies are designed to enhance student learning and prepare students after graduating (Umbach & Kuh, 2006), prior research has found that diverse institutions tend to practice colorblind ideologies and practices which misrepresent the experiences of students of color (Lewis, Chesler & Forman, 2000). In other words, diverse settings may appear on the surface as inclusive, when in reality they do not practice cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. In addition, while the student body may be diverse, it does not necessarily mean that the faculty and culture of the institution (e.g., mascot, distribution of resources) is diverse. The proposed research responds to Wells and Horn's (2015) call by examining Asian Americans' experiences in higher education institutions that have racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student populations. With the exception of a few studies (e.g., Museus & Truong, 2009; Samura, 2016), the existing research on sense of belonging among Asian American students in higher education has employed quantitative methods. Relying on quantitative data is limited for several reasons. First, while quantitative studies show how some variables are related, more qualitative data is needed to better understand the complex interactions and relationships in higher education (Museus & Truong, 2009). Second, prior research has found that perceptions of sense of belonging vary significantly within a racial group, and race can intersect with gender (Museus & Truong, 2009; Maramba & Museus, 2011). For example, Maramba and Museus (2011)

found that before participating in student organizations to foster a sense of belonging, Filipino women commonly reported how they felt before they participated in the student organization (e.g., feelings of isolation and the need to dropout) whereas Filipino men commonly reported what they needed to do in order to feel that they belong (e.g., I do belong here, I just need to find it). This research highlights that the need to examine variations within Asian Americans. Qualitative methods can get at the nuances of experience associated with subgroup variations. Therefore, this proposed research employs qualitative methods to capture and validate the diversity of experiences within Asian American undergraduate students.

*Prior research on higher education.* With respect to the higher education literature, most research focuses on the experiences of URMs, that is, Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans, given that they face unique barriers, which may include more limited access to higher education and many experiences of marginalization in predominantly White institutions (PWIs). PWI are institutions that have a high enrollment rate of White college students. Minority-serving institutions (MSIs) aim to serve minority student population. They are official designations for institutions have significant enrollment of racial/ethnic minority population. Students of color report higher levels of satisfaction in historically minority-serving institutions (MSIs) than in PWIs (Constantine & Watt, 2002; Gasman, Baez, & Turner, 2008). MSIs include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs). Students of color may

experience hostile environments in PWIs while they experience MSIs to be more welcoming and inclusive (Gasman, Baez, & Turner, 2008). Wells and Horn (2015) call for more research on sense of belonging among students, particularly Asian American students, at institutions with diverse student bodies because a majority of the existing research on sense of belonging has focused on URMs in PWIs and MSIs (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007). Relatively little research explores MSIs, such as HSIs that have a racially/ethnically/socioeconomically diverse student body (hereafter a diverse university). This research will address the gap in research by examining Asian American college experiences in a particular context, HSIs that have a diverse student body.

An emerging body of research examines Asian Americans in higher education. It shows that they experience unique challenges associated with the model minority myth and various types of racism (e.g., interpersonal, institutional, vicarious racism) (Museus & Park, 2015; Kotori & Malaney, 2003), which may affect their sense of belonging. Recently, efforts to better understand Asian American students' experiences in higher education have focused on their satisfaction on campus (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Kotori and Malaney, 2003; Museus 2008b; Museus & Truong, 2009; Wells & Horn, 2015) and their sense of belonging (Museus & Maramba, 2011; Wells & Horn, 2015; Rainey et al., 2018; Slaten et al., 2016). While some research has found that Asian American college students are more satisfied than other students of color (Harper & Hurtado, 2007), other research has found that Asian Americans are less satisfied. For example, one study found that Asian Americans are more likely than other students of

color to socially isolate themselves, and they do this because they feel like they do not belong (Chou & Feagin, 2015). Another study found that Asian Americans report the lowest rates of satisfaction relative to other racial/ethnic groups (Museus, Nichols & Lambert, 2008). Consistent with Chou and Feagin (2015)'s findings, other research has found that Asian Americans face unique challenges in PWIs, such as pressures to assimilate into White institutions (Cress & Ikeda, 2003) and unique consequences of dissatisfaction with the campus climate, including negative health outcomes, such as depression (Cress & Ikeda, 2003). The discrepancies in findings on Asian American experiences suggest that more research is needed, specifically research that employs qualitative methods to better understand the mixed results (Museus & Truong, 2009).

Asian Americans are not considered URMs in higher education because as a racial group, they have higher rates of educational attainment. However, the proposed research moves beyond the focus on educational outcomes, which have been heavily studied through a quantitative approach in higher education research. Specifically, this present study argues that while Asian Americans are privileged in that they have access to higher education, Asian Americans, like other people of color, are treated like outsiders in higher education (Musues & Maramba, 2010). Prior research has consistently shown that Asian Americans, even those born in the United States, are treated like perpetual foreigners (i.e., seen as the "other" in mainstream, dominant society) (Huynh, 2012; Kim et al. 2011; Lee, Lee, 2012; Lee, Park, & Wong 2017; Museus & Park, 2015). This treatment leads to a lower sense of belonging and less life satisfaction (Huynh, Devos, & Smalarz, 2011). In all, despite their large representation in higher education

(U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), relatively little research has given explicit attention to Asian Americans' university experiences (An, 2016; Chou, Lee, & Ho, 2015; Museus, 2014; Museus & Park, 2015).

This gap in knowledge has serious consequences. First, the lack of research on the diversity within Asian Americans means that the challenges of some Asian subgroups are overlooked or ignored. The needs and concerns of the largest subgroups (i.e., East Asians and South Asians) drive what Asian Americans receive and may marginalize other Asian subgroups, such as Southeast Asians. Second, the lack of research leaves Asian Americans vulnerable to racism and discrimination, rendering them invisible and silencing them. Therefore, to fill these gaps, the present study will use qualitative methods and Asian Critical Theory (a branch of Critical Race Theory) (for a detailed look refer to Chapter 2: Methodology), to examine the sense of belonging among undergraduate, domestic Asian American students in a socially diverse, public university.

*Institutional factors affecting sense of belonging.* Research shows that institutional factors (e.g., campus climate, interpersonal interactions/relationships, cultural integrity) play a significant role in influencing the experiences and outcomes of students of color (Ancis, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000; Cheng, 2004; Gonzalez, 2003; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Quayle, 2007; Museus, Nichols & Lambert, 2008; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Museus, 2008a; Museus, 2008b; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Wells & Horn, 2015). For example, prior research has shown that negative perceptions of campus climate and experiences of interpersonal discrimination are associated with lower levels of institutional attachment, retention, and belonging

(Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Museus, 2008a; Zambrana, 2018). Campus climate refers to the overall racial environment of the institution (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000), which includes current attitudes, expectations, and perceptions of the campus environment (Maramba & Museus, 2011). As such, studies have consistently shown that students of color report less satisfaction in college and perceive the racial climate to be more hostile than their White peers (Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr 2000; Hurtado & Carter 1997; Museus, Nichols & Lambert, 2008; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Rankin & Reason, 2005). For instance, Black students reported experiencing racial microaggressions (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Williams and Nichols, 2012), and Latino students perceived their campus climate as unwelcoming and reported a lower sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter 1997). Prior research has found that stereotype threat, which refers to the risk of confirming negative stereotypes of one's group, harms academic performance (Steel & Aronson, 1996), which may be related to sense of belonging. In addition, while we know that interactions among faculty and peers within institutions are related to sense of belonging, little is known about how sense of belonging varies based on social identities, such as race, gender, sexual orientation (Strayhorn, 2012) and documentation status, especially among Asian Americans because prior research has commonly excluded Asian Americans and/or focused exclusively on the social identity of race.

Cultural integrity, defined as the programs and practices offered at the institution that affirm the students' cultural identity and heritage, is associated with student success in higher education (Gonzalez, 2003; Harper & Quayle, 2007; Museus & Maramba, 2008;

Museus, 2008b). The model of cultural integrity rejects Tinto's (1987) theory of integration because the latter suggests that students of color must assimilate into the dominant, mainstream culture in order to succeed. While we know that cultural integrity is important for students of color, such as participation in ethnic student organizations (Harper & Quaye 2007; Guiffrida 2008; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Museus 2008b), research on the relationship between cultural integrity and Asian American students' experiences remains sparse (Musues & Maramba, 2011). Museus and Maramba (2011) found that Filipino American students face unique cultural challenges in PWIs because they experience dissonance from the mainstream culture and their own culture. However, this research is limited in that it did not examine variation among Asian subgroups and only focused on Filipinos at PWIs. Museus and Maramba (2011) call for more research on the relationship between cultural integrity and Asian American student success in higher education. The present study responds to Museus and Maramba (2011)'s call by examining how students' perceptions of a university's programs and practices relate to their sense of belonging.

*Individual factors that affect sense of belonging.* Research shows that various individual factors affect sense of belonging among college students (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, attended predominately white high schools versus predominately minority school, involvement in ethnic organizations) (Dortch & Patel, 2017; Guiffrida, 2003; Johnson, 2012; Leath & Chavou, 2018, Museus & Truong 2009; Rainey et al., 2018; Sax & Newhouse., 2018; Strayhorn, 2012). Recent research examines sense of belonging among students of color in STEM fields (Dortch & Patel, 2017; Johnson, 2012; Leath &

Chavou, 2018, Strayhorn, 2012; Rainey et al., 2018; Sax and Newhouse, 2018). For example, Rainey et al. (2018) qualitatively investigated why women and students of color are underrepresented in STEM fields and found that women of color were the least likely, and White men were most likely, to report a sense of belonging, which may play a role in retention in STEM field. In addition, this study found that Asian American students' experiences were more consistent with those of URMs than those of White students. Other research highlights differences within racial groups (i.e., racial heterogeneity) (Guiffrida, 2003; Museus & Truong 2009). Notably, Museus and Truong (2009) qualitatively examined how satisfaction with the campus racial climate, importance of racial prejudice and discrimination, and reactions to racial stereotypes varied among Asian American students at a PWI by whether they attended predominantly white high schools (WHSs) or predominantly minority high schools (MHSs). Asian American students from WHSs downplayed the significance of race and racism while students from MHSs reported more incidents of racial prejudice and discrimination. Museus and Truong (2009) note that this research only scratched the surface for disaggregating qualitative data and calls for more research that employs qualitative methods.

The existing research shows that involvement in ethnic organizations is associated with a greater sense of belonging at PWIs because it was perceived to provide a space where they can interact with members from their racial/ethnic groups in meaningful ways (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye 2007; Maramba, Museus 2013; Museus, 2008). Museus (2008) qualitatively shows that Asian American and Black students choose to be involved in ethnic organizations because they describe them as a places where they can

express their cultural heritage, receive validation for their cultural identity, and become more involved in advocacy and contribute back to their cultural community with members of similar racial/ethnic backgrounds. While Museus (2008) has found that involvement in ethnic organizations facilitates membership at PWIs, he does not take into account pre-college characteristics and how they shape their motivations to be involved in ethnic organizations in college. In addition, prior research has focused on the experiences of students of color at PWIs. This proposed research will consider characteristics before attending college and examine how involvement in ethnic organizations shape Asian American students' belonging at a diverse institution.

#### *Theoretical framework*

Most research on sense of belonging has applied the theoretical framework of perceived cohesion (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990), model of integration (Tinto, 1987) and concept of sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). This research is limited in that it did not use the appropriate conceptual tools that may help to explain the lived experiences of Asian Americans. Therefore, the proposed research applies Asian Critical Theory (hereafter AsianCrit) (Chang, 1993; Museus, 2014; Museus & Iftikar, 2013), a branch of Critical Race Theory (CRT), as its theoretical framework. This framework pushes the lived experiences of Asian Americans to the forefront.

Prior to identifying the tenets of AsianCrit, the origins and development of CRT are discussed below. CRT emerged in the late 1970s in legal scholarship as a response to the exclusion of scholars of color in academia and the lack of research centering the experiences of racial/ethnic groups. This theoretical tradition highlights that narratives

are powerful methodological tool because it has the potential to address the issue of exclusion by incorporating the authentic voices of marginalized groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). While CRT has its origins in legal studies, it is increasingly being applied to various fields, such as education (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso et al., 2009) and sociology (e.g., Aguirre 2000, 2010), to examine the ways in which race and racism function to oppress people of color.

*5 Major Tenets of Critical Race Theory.* First, this scholarship views racism as ordinary and embedded in our social structures because it serves material (i.e., White elites) and psychic purpose (i.e., working class Whites) for the dominant group. Because racism serves benefits for Whites, there is little incentive to eradicate it. Critical race theorists argue that racism is hard to address because it is often taken for granted because the dominant group employs colorblind strategies (i.e., enacting conceptions of equality and insisting that treatment is same across the board) (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Scholars have found that racism has changed from overt to covert forms in contemporary society (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Omi & Winant, 2014), making remedy even more difficult because only the most explicit forms of discrimination (e.g., mortgage redlining) are acknowledged.

The second tenet underscores the concept of interest convergence (i.e., material determinism) proposed by Derrick Bell. Interest convergence refers to the idea that remedies or racial justice do not emerge from altruism, but rather racial progress is the result of circumstances when it benefits the interests of the dominant group. To demonstrate this concept, Bell (1978) offers a critical examination of *Brown v. Board*,

which is often regarded as a progressive and huge historical landmark in U.S. history. Bell argues that desegregation of schools was not rooted from altruism, but rather served to fulfill the purpose of interest convergence. Due to the Cold War Era, America could not afford to institutionalize racism and have segregated schools anymore. Consistent with Bell's argument, archival research showed that U.S. Department of Justice was on the side of the NAACP for the first time in a major school-desegregation case because it needed to improve their image (Dudziak, 2004). Since, Bell's thesis, scholars have increasingly applied interest convergence to examine policies in teacher education (Milner, 2008) and educational reforms (Bell, 2004).

Third, critical race theorists argue that race is a social construct in which society creates and manipulates in order to maintain the racial hierarchy. While it is a social construct, they emphasize that race has real life consequences. Therefore, critical race scholars focus on issues related to racial attitudes and discrimination.<sup>1</sup>

Fourth, CRT advocates for anti-essentialism and intersectionality in efforts to dispel the notion of a single, unitary identity. Kimberly Crenshaw (1990) argues women of color face different forms of discrimination rooted from their race, gender, class and/or sexual orientation. Therefore, this theoretical tradition views that people of color may experience multiple forms of oppression rooted from their various social positions.

Fifth, CRT utilizes methods that represent and reflect the experiences among people of color. This theoretical tradition underscores the voice of color thesis. The voice of color thesis argues that having a minority status provides the experiential knowledge

---

<sup>1</sup> This tenet, however, is not limited to critical race theorists.

and competence in order to talk about race and racism. It encourages scholars of color to use their voice to break free from their silence and oppression. This had major influences in methodologies used in CRT, which have developed into the use of parables, autobiographies, storytelling, testimonio, and counternarratives.

Although, CRT has made contributions in incorporating the experiences of marginalized groups, it faced criticism due to the fact that it operated under the Black-White binary in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In efforts to better address the needs and experiences of various racial/ethnic groups living in the U.S., CRT has branched off into various subgroups, such as LatCrit (Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001), TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005; Writer, 2008), FemCrit (Rhode, 1990), QueerCrit (Mitsawa, 2012), DisCrit (Annamma, Conner, & Ferri, 2013), and AsianCrit (Chang, 1993; Museus, 2014).

While some scholars have applied CRT to studies of Asian Americans (Buena Vista, 2009; Liu 2009; Teranishi, 2002), others have argued for the need for an alternative framework that will specifically address the concerns of and center the racial reality of Asian Americans. Chang (1993) set forth the AsianCrit perspective, arguing that traditional civil rights work and critical race scholarship are limited because most of the discussion on race and law have focused primarily on African Americans. As a result, it has overlooked the complex racial relations and racial hierarchy of the United States. Specifically, he provides a critique on the Black-White racial paradigm because it excludes and obscures the experiences of Asian Americans. Through a post-structuralism approach, he started to sketch the goals of and future research for Asian American legal scholarship by emphasizing the importance of personal narratives and the use of counter

narratives of Asian Americans in efforts to challenge the image of model minorities. Since the introduction of AsianCrit framework by Chang (1993), Museus (2014) has extended it by introducing 7 major tenets to better explain how race and racism operate for Asian Americans in contemporary society.

*7 Major Tenets of AsianCrit by Museus (2014).* The first tenet, *Asianization*, refers to the mechanism by which society racializes Asian Americans. AsianCrit refines the original CRT tenet of viewing racism as normal by focusing on the ways in which society lumps Asian Americans together into one monolithic group and racializes them in various ways, such as by portraying them as overachieving model minorities (Lee, 1994, 2015, & Museus & Park, 2015; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Wu, 2002), perpetual foreigners (Huynh, 2012; Kim et al. 2011; Lee, 2012; Lee, Park, & Wong 2017; Museus & Park, 2015), and yellow perils (Saito, 1997; Kawai 2005). It also highlights the gendered racialization of Asian Americans. Research has found that while Asian American men are racialized as asexual and effeminate, Asian American women are racialized as submissive objects (Museus, 2014; Museus & Truong, 2013).

The second tenet, *transactional context*, highlights the historical and current political, economic, and social processes that affect Asian Americans (e.g., imperialism, international war, migration). For instance, the U.S. changed its immigration laws in the 1960s to deliberately bring in the U.S. of certain groups of Asians, such as South Asians, to participate and fill in the roles of the globalized and technological economy (Takaki, 1998). Other research has documented mental health issues among Southeast Asians who

have experienced the historical legacy of colonization and U.S. military intervention (Yang et al., 1989).

The third tenet, *re(constructive) history*, emphasizes the use of narratives to represent the diverse voices of Asian Americans. It not only revisits the history of racism, but also highlights that because Asian Americans have been excluded from American history, their narratives have not become sufficiently visible. Therefore, by incorporating the diverse voices of Asian Americans, the tenet aims to create a pan-ethnic identity and sense of community, while acknowledging that there are distinct experiences among Asian subgroups.

The fourth tenet, *strategic anti(essentialism)*, views race as a social construction and emphasizes how Asian Americans are racially categorized. AsianCrit highlights that scholars should be cautious when examining the experiences of Asian Americans. In particular, they caution scholars that when including certain Asian subgroups in the analysis, scholars should have the goal to better represent and understand their racial reality.

The fifth tenet, *AsianCrit intersectionality*, keeps the original tenet of intersectionality in CRT and rejects the idea that one form of oppression is more salient than others. Intersectionality refers to the idea that racism can intersect with other systems of oppression (e.g., heteronormativity, sexism) and social identities (e.g., gender, class, sexual orientation). For example, prior research has found that queer Asian American men experience “double oppression” in mainstream society (Kumashiro, 1999), which makes it difficult for them to find romantic partners (Phua, 2007).

The sixth tenet, *state theory praxis*, refers to the power of stories from Asian Americans. It highlights that stories inform theory, theory guides practice, and practice can be used for transformative purposes to liberate Asian Americans who experience racism and oppression. It also underscores the value of work by Asian scholars who can inform theory and guide practice to better represent the Asian American community.

The seventh tenet, *commitment to social justice*, argues that research should be employed with the intent for social activism and transformation. It highlights the importance of ethics in research. The purpose of the research should be transparent to the subject, and research should be employed with the goal to eradicate oppression and racism for Asian Americans.

While Musues (2014) has proposed and talked about merits of AsianCrit, relatively little research has applied the AsianCrit perspective (e.g., An, 2016; Chae 2013). More empirical research that tests and applies this theoretical framework is needed. Therefore, the proposed research will consider all the various tenets in AsianCrit to better understand Asian Americans' sense of belonging in a diverse university.

*Application of AsianCrit to the proposed study.* The present study is an application of AsianCrit Theory,<sup>2</sup> which centers the Asian American voices. In addition, because there is no theory in AsianCrit that explains sense of belonging among Asian American college students at a diverse university, this study will contribute in theory building by explaining what sense of belonging means in this specific context with the participants' words. The present study reflects the seven tenets of AsianCrit in the

---

<sup>2</sup> Critical Race theorists are skeptical of empiricism- that is, testing a theory.

following ways. This study reflects the tenet of *Asianization* by examining whether Asian Americans students feel they are treated as perpetual foreigners in the university setting and if so, how that experience shapes their sense of belonging. It reflects the tenet of *transactional context* by examining how certain Asian subgroups, such as Southeast Asians, may experience more challenges in higher education than other subgroups, given their specific history. The study reflects the tenet of *re(constructive) history* by employing multiple qualitative methods (e.g., focus groups and individual interviews) to elicit participants' perspectives. The focus groups will examine how students perceive Asian Americans' sense of belonging as it relates to the pan-ethnic identity and address subgroup issues. The individual interviews will examine sense of belonging among individual students from two specific subgroups: Koreans and Filipinos. The study reflects the tenet of *anti(essentialism)* by recruiting a diverse sample of Asian Americans to show that they are not a monolithic group. It reflects the tenet of *AsianCrit intersectionality* by examining how other identities, such as gender, class, sexual orientation, and documentation status, may intersect with race and how they relate to the sense of belonging. It reflects the tenet of *state theory praxis* by developing theory from Asian American participants' words as opposed to testing pre-existing theories used in higher education (e.g., Tinto's model of integration [1987], Hurtado and Carter's sense of belonging [1997]), which were developed for other racial/ethnic groups. Lastly, this study reflects the tenet of *commitment to social justice* by employing ethical research methods and presenting findings to inform campus programming and policy for Asian Americans to improve their experience in higher education.

### *Contributions of the current study*

This research explores the extent to which Asian Americans' access to higher education translates to their inclusion in it. It gives Asian Americans full consideration as students of color and examines their experiences in higher education, particularly their sense of belonging. The present study makes empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions. Regarding empirical contribution, this study fills in the gap in literature by investigating sense of belonging among Asian American college students at their diverse university and identifying the various concerns of Asian subgroups. Regarding methodological contribution, this study employs multiple methods, such as focus group and interviews, to better understand the diverse experience of sense of belonging among Asian American college students at their diverse university. Regarding policy contribution, the findings of this research can inform action to respond to the needs of Asian American students in diverse institutions. First, this study can inform the development of programs that aim to promote inclusion and cultural sensitivity in higher education settings. Second, it can inform the identification of high-risk students, such as those in specific Asian subgroups, and the tailoring of programs to specific subgroups to better cultivate their sense of belonging. Third, the study may identify training needs for higher education faculty and staff to enable them to better cultivate a sense of belonging among Asian American students. Ultimately, the study results stand to reinforce the idea that a sense of belonging is a basic human right, one to which Asian American students are entitled as much as any other student. In an effort to fill in the gaps in research, the proposed research aims to answer the following research questions:

1) To what extent do Asian American students in a university with a racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body feel a sense of belonging?

2) What institutional and individual factors do Asian American college students believe affect their sense of belonging at their diverse university?

3) What are the similarities and differences regarding sense of belonging among Korean and Filipino students at their diverse university?

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

### *Design*

This cross-sectional, qualitative study was conducted in English by the author as the primary investigator, with assistance from two self-identified Asian American, undergraduate research assistants. This study employed two methods: in-person focus groups and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Focus groups involved a discussion on the topic of sense of belonging. It provided an opportunity for participants to speak about Asian Americans' sense of belonging at the university and whether these experiences vary by Asian subgroup. The individual interviews occurred after the focus groups and provided an opportunity to obtain rich, nuanced data on individual experiences of sense of belonging within two specific Asian subgroups: Koreans and Filipinos. This study was funded by the University of California, Riverside (UCR) Dissertation Research Grant, which provided funds for research-related expenses, including participant incentives.

### *Setting*

This study was conducted at a public university that is designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), one that has a racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body. The institution is located in Southern California, United States and is a member of University Innovation Alliance, which is the leading national coalition of public research universities that aim to increase the number and diversity of college graduates in the U.S. The institution's student body is diverse: it is racially/ethnically diverse, it includes high rates of Pell Grant (i.e., low income) students, and a majority (60%) of the undergraduate students are first generational college. The demographics for

undergraduate student enrollment as of Fall, 2018, are as follows: 41.5% Latinos, 33.8% Asian, 11% White, 5.6% Two or More Races, 3.3% Blacks, 3.4% international, and 1.4% unknown. 45.4% are males and 54.6% are females (University of California, Riverside, 2019).

The Asian Pacific Students Programs (APSP) office at the university includes the Inter-Asian Club Council, the Chinese Students Association, the Japanese Students Association, the Asian Indian Students Association, and the Filipino Student Union. Its mission is to provide a safe, inclusive, culturally sensitive community to all Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students. APSP hosts and funds programs, events, and social activities that are dedicated to preserve and promote cultural heritage at the university. This study aimed to examine whether student organizations, such as APSP, play a role in fostering sense of belonging among Asian Americans at the university.

### *Sample*

People who identified as Asian American and who are enrolled at the diverse university as full-time domestic, undergraduate students in Summer or Fall 2019, were eligible for the study. Domestic, in-state students include people who are native U.S. born, naturalized U.S. citizens, foreign born with legal status (e.g., permanent residents), or have undocumented status that are California residents. Domestic, out-of-state students include people who are native U.S. born, naturalized U.S. citizens, or foreign born with legal status (e.g., permanent residents) that are not California residents. Pacific Islanders were excluded from the study because they have unique histories and experiences from

Asian Americans (Perez, 2002), and more research that focuses on Asian Americans is needed. The specific eligibility for the focus groups and individual interviews is provided below.

The target number of focus groups was three, which meets the number of focus groups required to reach saturation (Guest, Namey, & McKenna, 2017). To be eligible for the focus groups, the participant needed to identify as either Asian American, Asian, any Asian ethnic group, or bi-racial/multiracial Asian. Each group consisted of six-seven Asian Americans, the typical number of people involved in a focus group (Maxfield & Babbie, 2014).

The target sample size for the individual interviews was 20 participants: 10 Korean and 10 Filipino. I recruited members who have participated in the focus groups, but also recruited additional members to participate in the interviews. The final sample size was determined by reaching saturation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The two subgroups were chosen for several reasons. First, the focus on two subgroups enabled me to make meaningful statements about each subgroup and compare the experiences of Koreans and Filipinos. The Korean subgroup was chosen due to my own affiliation being Korean. The Filipino subgroup was chosen to contrast with the experiences with Koreans because prior research has found that Southeast Asians significantly have different experience and outcomes than East Asians (Reyes, 2017; Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Ponce et al., 2009) and since their experiences are especially overlooked in research (Maramba & Museus, 2013). Second, the two specific subgroups were chosen because they are among the largest subgroups in the U.S. and at the university (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2017). In order to capture diversity within the Asian American population, this study recognizes the intersection of race and other identities such as gender, class, sexual orientation, and/or documentation status. Therefore, recruitment aimed to ensure the inclusion of people who identify as female, low-income, Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Queer Asexual (LBTQA), and/or with undocumented status. While I actively recruited members from these marginalized populations, I did not aim to seek representativeness. It is important to have some representation of these groups in the sample, but they were not the analytic focus.

### *Recruitment*

After the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board, I began the study by recruiting focus group participants. Participants were recruited by two methods (See recruitment scripts in Appendix D). First, participants were recruited via emails made to the following university email listservs: Asian Pacific Students Programs (APSP), Undocumented Students Program Office, LGBT Resource Center, 15 Asian American ethnic student organizations, and Asian American Christian Fellowship. The aforementioned listservs were chosen to recruit a diverse sample of Asian American college students at the institution and because they have the potential to recruit many participants. Second, we recruited potential participants from our personal networks. Compensation for focus group participation included a catered lunch and \$5 gift card. At the time that students signed up for the focus groups, they were given an opportunity to sign up to participate in the individual interviews. I monitored recruitment to ensure that

the selected groups were represented in the sample prior to ending recruitment.

Compensation for interview participation included a \$20 gift card.

#### *Data collection*

Each focus group lasted approximately 1.5 hours. Participants completed a brief paper-and-pencil demographic survey at the beginning of the focus group (See Appendix A). The focus group questions covered participants' perceptions of Asian Americans' sense of belonging in a diverse university, institutional factors that shape Asian Americans' sense of belonging, personal factors that shape Asian Americans' sense of belonging, and addressed variations by Asian subgroup (See focus group protocol in Appendix B). The focus groups took place on campus in a private, reserved room at the library. The focus groups were audio recorded for transcription purposes.

Each individual interview lasted approximately 1.5 hours. If the participant did not participate in the focus group, he/she completed the demographic survey at the beginning of the interview. The interview questions covered the participant's sense of belonging at the university, and perceptions of how institutional and individual factors affect their sense of belonging (See interview protocol in Appendix C). The individual interviews took place on campus in a private, reserved room at the library. Interviews were audio recorded for transcription purposes.

#### *Analysis and reporting*

The data from the focus groups and individual interviews were analyzed together to produce a rich perspective of sense of belonging among Asian American undergraduate students. I used inductive analysis, line-by-line coding, and axial coding.

Dedoose for Mac, was used to organize, code, and highlight findings in the data. Coding and recoding were done systemically according to what the participants emphasized during the interviews (Ryan & Bernard, 2005). The tenets and concepts introduced in AsianCrit informed which themes to look for in the focus groups and individual interviews. Names and identifying makers were removed in the research report to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms were chosen by the participants, and they were used in the research report. In the focus groups, the analysis involved comparing East Asians to Southeast Asians. In the interviews, the analysis involved comparing the two subgroups: Korean and Filipino. In addition, I probed to see if race intersects with other social identities, such as gender, class, sexual orientation, and immigration/documentation status. Before finalizing the results, I engaged in member checking (Given, 2008) by sending preliminary results to participants to get their feedback and modified analyses and results accordingly.

### *Positionality*

As a female, Asian American, Korean, graduate student at a diverse university, my identities and position as a researcher shaped the research process. I am an insider to the study population because I had access to the study population, and to some extent share the lived experiences as an Asian American, Korean domestic student. However, as a female, Korean, domestic, heterosexual, social science graduate student, I am outsider to at least some of the study population: other genders, members of other Asian ethnic groups, students of other academic disciplines, people who identify as LGBTQA, and/or people with undocumented status. Therefore, in order to provide a more accurate

depiction of their diverse experiences, I considered my positionality as a researcher, was reflexive throughout the research process, and built rapport with the participants by reflecting on my background, visible tools, and invisible tools (Reyes, 2018). For instance, drawing on Reyes (2018)'s work, I built rapport with my participants by discussing my own background and experiences of sense of belonging by sharing what I experienced in my undergraduate career at a diverse university. Furthermore, I collected data with the intention of learning and practiced ethical research by being transparent with the goal of my research.

#### *Human Subjects Issues*

Participation in the study was voluntary. The consent form indicated that the 1) participants can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, 2) if the participant wishes to withdraw before participating in the focus group, the investigator will remove his/her name from the recruitment records, 3) if the participant withdraws during or after the focus group, the data up until that point will be retained because it cannot be deleted from the audio-recording without altering the rest of the data, 3) to withdraw the participant should contact the investigator if he/she wishes to stop participating, and 4) participants will experience minimal risks when they participate in the study.

None of the participants reported to feel discomfort during the interview, nor expressed the need to take a break during the focus group, nor expressed the need to stop participating in the study. To ensure confidentiality, identifying markers and names were removed from the research report. The participants were asked to choose their own

pseudonym as mentioned previously. Participants were asked to consent to 1) study participation and 2) audio recording for transcription purposes.

### **Chapter 3: How Definitions and the Student Body Composition Shape Asian American Students' Perception of Sense of Belonging at a Diverse University in Southern California**

#### **Abstract**

Using a sample of 39 Asian American college students in a large university in Southern California with a racially, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body, this qualitative study examined the extent to which students perceive a sense of belonging at their university. Informed by Asian Critical Theory, the study centers the voices of Asian Americans. Results from three focus groups with a cross-section of Asian Americans and 20 interviews with Korean Americans and Filipino Americans showed that a person's definition of sense of belonging shaped their perception of belonging. All participants described socio-cultural belonging as primary to their sense of belonging; academic and institutional support were secondary. Furthermore, they varied in the extent to which between-group versus within-group differences influenced their sense of social belonging. Specifically, a majority of the participants (n = 36) defined sense of belonging as determined by the extent to which Asian Americans, relative to other racial/ethnic groups, are represented in the student population. They reported a strong sense of belonging because the student body includes many Asian Americans. A minority of participants (n = 3) defined sense of belonging as determined by the extent to which subgroups of Asian Americans are represented in the student population. They reported a weak sense of belonging and described a need at the university for greater recognition of diversity within Asian Americans. Despite the primacy of social belonging, 33 of the 36

in the majority group reported a need for institutional changes to strengthen their sense of belonging in terms of academic and institutional support.

## **Introduction**

Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing racial/ethnic groups in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Yet, they remain an invisible and misunderstood population (An, 2017; Chou, Lee, & Ho, 2015; Museus, 2014; Museus & Park, 2015). Scholars tend to view Asian Americans as problem free, and therefore tend to overlook their experiences in academic research. As a result, their experiences are overlooked in academic research. This study argues that we need more research that centers the diverse voices of Asian Americans, particularly exploring sense of belonging among Asian American college students in higher education with diverse student bodies.

Sense of belonging, in the education context, refers to the process of feeling included and supported by peer, other students, faculty, and staff in the school (Strayhorn, 2012). Given that sense of belonging is associated with various outcomes, such as student success, academic progress, development in college (Anderman, 2002; 2003; Freeman, 2007; Hausmann, Schofield & Woods, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012) and retention (Thomas, Herbert, & Teras, 2014; O’Keeffe, 2013), we need more research that investigates sense of belonging among students, particularly Asian American students, in higher education.

With regard to the higher education literature, research on Asian American college students remain sparse because they are not considered to be underrepresented minorities (URMs) due to the fact that as a racial group, they tend to have higher rates of access to higher education and greater educational attainment than other racial/ethnic groups. Despite their large presence in higher education (U.S. Department of Education,

National Center for Education, 2018), they are often overlooked in campus programming and services (Museus, 2014). This study moves beyond the focus on educational outcomes, which have been heavily studied, especially quantitatively. Wells and Horn (2015) call for more research on sense of belonging among Asian American students at diverse institutions because a majority of the existing research on sense of belonging has focused on URMs in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and historically minority-serving institutions (MSIs). The present study responds to Wells and Horn (2015)'s call by centering the diverse voices of Asian American college students and exploring the extent to which they feel like they belong in a diverse institution. Specifically, this study examines the extent to which the student body composition plays a role in fostering a sense of belonging among Asian Americans at their diverse university.

### **Research on the Experiences of Students of Color in Higher Education**

#### *Sociological Literature*

The existing literature in sociology demonstrates how race continues to be a significant in contemporary society. Some scholars have documented the experiences of Asian American college students in historically White college/universities (HWCUs) (Chou & Feagin 2015; Chou, Lee, & Ho, 2015; Chou, 2012). Other sociologists have focused on unraveling the model minority myth and identified the factors that contribute to Asian Americans' academic achievement in the U.S. (Byun, 2011; Lee & Zhou 2014, 2015, 2017). While there is some research that investigates how Asian Americans perceive HWCUs as unwelcoming spaces (Chou & Feagin 2015; Chou, Lee, & Ho, 2012, 2015), sociological research that explores how a diverse sample of Asian American

college students perceive their sense of belonging within other types of higher education settings, such as one with a diverse student body, is virtually nonexistent. In efforts to better understand Asian American college students' sense of belonging, this study draws from the education literature because they have studied sense of belonging.

### *Higher Education Literature*

The growing literature in higher education focuses on the experiences of URMs (i.e., Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans) because they experience limited access to higher education and marginalization in PWIs. Findings suggest that URMs report higher levels of satisfaction in MSIs than in PWIs (Constantine & Watt, 2002) because they experience MSIs to be more inclusive and responsive to their needs (Gasman, Baez, & Turner, 2008). Prior research tends to employ quantitative methods (e.g., surveys) to capture sense of belonging. There has been a shift in theoretical framework in examining sense of belonging among students. Scholars have moved away from Tinto's (1987) model of integration, arguing that it fails to consider the role of higher education institutions in providing a supportive, inclusive environment for students of color (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Therefore, scholars have started to use Hurtado and Carter (1997)'s definition of sense of belonging, which is defined as the "the individual's view of whether he or she feels included in the college community" (Hurtado & Carter, 1997: 327). However, prior measures of sense of belonging tend to only capture the social context, which may potentially mask issues related to academic belonging and perceived institutional support (Ingram, 2012).

### *Prior Definitions of Sense of Belonging*

Prior definitions of sense of belonging among college students have been defined in broad terms without differentiating whether it is capturing sense of belonging regarding social, academic, or institutional contexts (Ingram, 2012). For example, the three items from Hurtado and Carter (1997)'s study (e.g., "I feel a sense of belonging at this college; "I feel like a member of this college community"; "I see myself as part of this college,") have been used in many studies that examine sense of belonging. Notably, Ingram (2012) argues that prior research has only captured "general belonging," and calls for more nuanced definition and specific measures of belonging to better understand what factors shape sense of belonging among college students. According to Ingram (2012), an undifferentiated general belonging is defined as "feeling like a part of college community." Ingram (2012) provides three differentiated measures: social belonging, academic belonging, and perceived institutional support. First, social belonging is defined as "feeling socially comfortable and connected with peers as a member of the college community" (Ingram, 2012: 25). Second, academic belonging is defined as "feeling respected and supported to do well academically. More specifically: a). believing that professors are caring, supportive, and respectful, and b). feeling comfortable sharing comments and questions in classes" (Ingram, 2012: 25). Third, perceived institutional support is defined as "feeling that institutional supports and student services (e.g., tutoring, counseling, health) are accessible on campus" (Ingram, 2012: 25). Consistent with Ingram (2012)'s study, other research has argued for the need for empirical research that examines how faculty-student interactions, namely faculty validation, (e.g., students are known and valued, faculty provide caring instruction and mentoring and appreciate

diversity) play a role in their decisions to stay in a college (Barnett, 2011). Furthermore, prior measures of sense of belonging has been only tested with quantitative data and the measures do not examine how sense of belonging may operate for racial/ethnic groups other than URMs, such as for Asian Americans.

In efforts to address the limitations of prior research, this present research responds to Ingram (2012)'s call by providing a more nuanced definition of sense of belonging for Asian American college students and which belonging they emphasize, whether it be social, academic, or institutional contexts. By drawing from the diverse voices of Asian American college students, this study will explore how they make sense of their belonging.

#### *Asian American Students' Experiences in Higher Education*

In recent years, some scholars have started to pay attention to Asian American students' experiences in higher education. Scholars found that Asian American students experience racism and challenges associated with the model minority myth (Museus & Park, 2015; Kotori & Malaney, 2003), which may shape their sense of belonging. Regarding Asian American students' satisfaction on campus, there have been mixed findings (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Kotori and Malaney, 2003; Museus 2008b; Museus & Truong, 2009; Wells & Horn, 2015). Some studies have found that Asian Americans, as a racial group, are more satisfied than other students of color (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). In contrast, other studies have found that Asian Americans are less satisfied and therefore, more likely than other students of color to socially isolate themselves because they feel like they do not belong (Chou & Feagin, 2015). Unlike

Harper and Hurtado (2007)'s study, Museus and his colleagues (2008) found that Asian American students report the lowest rates of satisfaction relative to other racial/ethnic groups. These discrepancies in findings may be due to the fact that they have not differentiated sense of belonging, whether it is social, academic, or institutional contexts. This suggest that more research is needed, specifically research that employs qualitative methods to better make sense of the mixed results.

A few studies have explored Asian American students' sense of belonging (Museus & Maramba, 2011; Wells & Horn, 2015; Rainey et al., 2018; Slaten et al., 2016). With the exception of a few studies (e.g., Museus & Truong, 2009; Samura, 2016), the studies have been quantitative. Museus and Truong (2009) contend that, compared to quantitative data, qualitative data is better at capturing the complex interactions and relationships in higher education because it can shed light on the details about differences within groups. For instance, prior research has found that perceptions of sense of belonging vary significantly within a racial group, and race can intersect with other social identities, such as gender (Museus & Truong, 2009; Maramba & Museus, 2011). Therefore, this proposed research addresses the need for qualitative research and will examine the within-group diversity among Asian American students.

### *Student Body Composition*

Student body composition may play a role in fostering a sense of belonging among Asian American college, especially for social belonging. The existing literature on school composition highlights that school context matters because peers play a major role in shaping youth's school experiences and learning outcomes (Harker & Tymss, 2004;

Nieri, 2012). Despite the substantial amount of research on school composition, Thrupp, Lauder, and Robinson (2002) argue that there is little consensus over the compositional effects. They highlight the difficulty of assessing compositional effects in the extant quantitative studies because modeling techniques in these studies have varied widely. Therefore, they call for qualitative research on school composition, so that we can learn more about the complex processes of student body composition and peer effects. This study uses qualitative methods to assess the effects of school composition in higher education settings.

An emerging body of literature focuses on the role of student body composition in higher education settings, particularly examining whether a diverse student body, namely structural diversity, produces educational benefits. Prior research has found that diverse student body composition is associated with positive student outcomes, such as increased cultural competence and cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions (Chang, 1999, Chang, Astin, and Kim, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2006; Pike, Kuh, and Gonyea, 2007; Gubrin, Hurtado, and Gurin, 2002; Saha, Guiton, Wimmers, and Wilkerson, 2008). These empirical findings have provided support for the diversity rationale – the argument that a heterogeneous student body in higher education yields positive educational outcomes and prepares students to work in an increasingly diverse society (Jones, 2013). This research will examine how the student body, not only a diverse student body but also a student body with a high presence of Asian Americans, shape Asian American students' sense of belonging as it relates to the social context.

## Theoretical Framework

### *AsianCrit as the Theoretical Framework*

This present study makes contribution in sociological literature by applying Asian Critical Theory (hereafter AsianCrit) (Chang, 1993; Museus, 2014; Museus & Iftikar, 2013), a branch of Critical Race Theory, a theoretical framework that has not yet been used in sociology, to better understand how a diverse sample of Asian American college students perceive their sense of belonging. AsianCrit is used as the theoretical framework because it has the appropriate conceptual tools to be able to center the diverse voices of Asian Americans.

This study reflects on several tenets of AsianCrit: *state theory praxis*, *re(constructive) history*, *anti(essentialism)*, AsianCrit intersectionality, and commitment to social justice. First, this study reflects on the *state theory praxis* by not test existing measures of sense of belonging (e.g., Tinto's model of integration [1987], Hurtado and Carter's sense of belonging [1997]), and rather creating theory from their own words. Second, the present study reflects the tenet of *re(constructive) history* by employing multiple qualitative methods (e.g., focus groups and individual interviews) to elicit the diverse Asian Americans' perspective regarding their sense of belonging at a diverse university. Third, the present study reflects the tenet of *anti(essentialism)* by recruiting a diverse sample of Asian Americans to show that they are not a monolithic group. Fourth, it reflects the tenet of *AsianCrit intersectionality* by examining how other identities, such as gender, class, sexual orientation, immigration status, or documentation status may intersect with race and how they relate to the sense of belonging. Fifth, this study reflects

the tenet of *commitment to social justice* by employing ethical research methods and presenting findings to inform campus programming and policy for Asian Americans to improve their experience in higher education.

To fill the gaps in research, the present study explored the following research questions:

1) How do Asian American students in a university with a racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body define sense of belonging?

2) To what extent do the student perceive a sense of belonging in terms of social belonging, academic support, and institutional support?

## **Methods**

This qualitative study was conducted by the author as the primary investigator. Two undergraduate research assistants, both of whom identified as Asian American, assisted with the research process, particularly with the recruitment and transcription. This study was funded by the University of California, Riverside (UCR) Dissertation Research Grant, which provided funds for research-related expenses, including participant incentives. This present study is part of a larger research project that explores sense of belonging among Asian American students at a diverse university. In this manuscript, I present the set of results that focuses on how the student body composition shapes their perception of belonging at their diverse university.

Mixed methods, specifically 3 focus groups that consisted of 6-7 Asian Americans college students and 20 individual interviews that consisted of 10 Koreans and 10 Filipinos, were determined to be the best method for illuminating a diverse perspective

on how Asian American define and experience a sense of belonging at their diverse university. The focus groups examined how a diverse sample of Asian American college students perceive their sense of belonging collectively as a pan-ethnicity. The individual interviews provided in-depth information on individual experiences of sense of belonging among two specific subgroups: Koreans and Filipinos.

### *Setting*

I collected data at a large, public, diverse university in Southern California. This university is considered a diverse university because the undergraduate student body is racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. As of Fall 2018, the undergraduate population at this university was 41.5% Latino, 33.8% Asian, 11% non-Latino White, 5.6% Two or More Races, 3.3% Blacks, 3.4% international, 1.4% unknown race/ethnicity; there were 45.4% male and 54.6% female; with regard to socioeconomic status, the university has a high rate of Pell Grant (i.e., low income) students, and a majority (60%) of the students are the first in their families to attend college (University of California, Riverside, 2019). In terms of faculty demographics, as of Summer 2019, the faculty were 55.7% non-Latino White, 22.2% Asian/Native Hawaiian, 8.1% Unknown, 7.7% Latino, 4.1% Black/African/African American, 2.6% American Indian, and 1.4% two or more races (Infocenter, UC Office of the President, 2019).

### *Sample*

The sample includes 39 people, 20 females and 19 males. The sample size is consistent with the median sample size in qualitative studies using focus groups and interviews (Mason, 2010), and sampling ceased when thematic saturation was achieved

(Miles & Huberman, 1994). Eligible participants included people who self-identified as Asian American, were enrolled full time in an undergraduate program of study in Summer 2019 or Fall 2019 and were domestic students. Domestic, in-state students included people who were California residents and who were native U.S. born, naturalized U.S. citizens, foreign born with legal status (e.g., permanent residents), or undocumented. Pacific Islanders were excluded from the study because they have unique histories and experiences from Asian Americans (Perez, 2002), and more research that focuses on Asian Americans is needed. Beyond these criteria, there were specific eligibility criteria for the focus groups and individual interviews.

Eligibility for the focus groups was limited to people who identify as Asian American, Asian, a member of any Asian ethnic group, or bi-racial/multiracial and were enrolled at the university in Summer 2019. Each focus group consisted of 6-7 Asian Americans, the typical number of people involved in a focus group and saturation was met with 3 focus groups (Maxfield & Babbie, 2014). Within the focus groups, the sample consisted of people in the following Asian subgroups: Chinese (n = 2), Taiwanese (n = 1), Hong Kongese (n = 1), Korean (n = 1), Vietnamese (n = 9), Filipino (n = 1), Pakistani (n = 1), Laotian and Thai (n = 1), Chinese and Vietnamese (n = 1), and Korean and Vietnamese (n = 1). Regarding gender, there were 10 females and 9 males. Regarding sexual orientation, 15 individuals identified as heterosexual, 1 individual identified as asexual, 1 identified as gay/lesbian, 1 individual identified as bi-sexual, and 1 individual identified as “aromatic.”

Eligibility for the individual interviews was limited to people who identify as either Korean or Filipino and were enrolled at the university in Fall 2019. Data collection ceased when saturation was met (Miles & Huberman, 1994) after interviewing a total of 20 participants: 10 Korean and 10 Filipinos. Regarding gender, there were 10 females and 10 males. Regarding sexual orientation, 16 individuals identified as heterosexual, 2 individuals as asexual, 1 identified as gay/lesbian, and 1 individual identified as pansexual. This study focused on the two subgroups for several reasons. First, focusing on Koreans and Filipinos enabled me to make meaningful, rich statements about each subgroup and compare the experiences of Koreans and Filipinos. The Korean subgroup is chosen due to my own affiliation being Korean, and more research is needed to better understand the Korean experience. Prior research has found that Southeast Asians significantly have different experience and outcomes than East Asians (Reyes, 2017; Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Ponce et al., 2009). Therefore, the Filipino subgroup (Southeast Asian) is chosen to contrast with the experiences with Koreans (East Asian). Moreover, since the experiences of Filipinos are especially overlooked in research (Maramba & Museus, 2013), more research needs to focus on this national subgroup. Second, the two specific subgroups were chosen because they are among the largest subgroups in the U.S. and at the diverse university (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). In order to capture diversity within the Asian American population, this study aimed to recruit participants from less studied Asian American subgroups (e.g., female, low-income, Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Queer Asexual [LBTQA], undocumented). That said, this study did not aim for a sample representative of each of these groups.

### *Recruitment*

For the focus group, there were 2 methods of recruitment. First, participants were recruited via emails made to the following university email listservs: Asian Pacific Students Programs (APSP), Undocumented Students Program Office, LGBT Resource Center, 15 Asian American ethnic student organizations, and Asian American Christian Fellowship. The aforementioned listservs were chosen in efforts to recruit a diverse sample of Asian American college students. Second, the research team recruited potential participants from their own personal networks. Eligible people had the opportunity to participate in a focus group, interview, or both. Focus group participants were compensated with a catered lunch and \$10 Starbucks gift card. After each focus group, they were given the opportunity to sign up to participate in the individual interviews. Individual interview participants were compensated with a \$20 Starbucks gift card.

### *Data collection*

The 3 focus groups were conducted in Summer 2019, on the university campus in a private, reserved room in the library. Each focus group lasted approximately 1-1.5 hours. All participants completed a brief paper-and-pencil demographic survey at the beginning of the focus group (See demographic survey in Appendix A). The focus group questions covered the following topics: participants' perceptions of Asian Americans' sense of belonging in a diverse university, definitions of sense of belonging, and how student body composition shapes their sense of belonging (See focus group protocol in Appendix B). The focus groups were audio recorded for transcription.

The 20 interviews (10 with Koreans and 10 with Filipinos) were conducted in Summer 2019 and Fall 2019, on the university campus in a private, reserved room in the library. The individual interviews lasted approximately 1-1.5 hours. If the participant did not participate in the focus group, he/she completed a demographic survey at the beginning of the interview. The interview questions focused on the participants' individual experience of sense of belonging, definitions of sense of belonging, and how student body composition shapes their sense of belonging (See interview protocol in Appendix C). Interviews were audio recorded for transcription.

### *Analysis*

The data from focus groups and interviews were analyzed together in order to provide a rich, diverse perspective on their sense of belonging. This study used inductive analysis, line-by-line coding, and axial coding. Dedoose for Mac, was used to organize, code, and highlight findings in the data. Coding and recoding were done systemically according to what the participants emphasized during the interviews (Ryan & Bernard, 2005). Names and identifying markers were removed in this report to ensure confidentiality. Participants were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms in the demographic survey. The names used in this report are those pseudonyms. First, I analyzed for themes in the sample as a whole. Then, I analyzed in terms of other sociodemographic statuses, such as gender and sexual orientation. However, there were no major differences across gender and sexual orientation. Therefore, the results in this report focuses on the themes in the sample as a whole.

### *Positionality*

This research considers my positionality as a researcher who identifies as a female, Asian American, Korean, graduate student at a diverse university. I am an insider to the study population because I have access to the study population, and to some extent share the lived experiences as an Asian American, Korean domestic student. However, as a female, Korean, domestic, heterosexual, social science graduate student, I am outsider to some of the sample population: other genders, members of other Asian ethnic groups, students of other academic disciplines, and/or people who identify as LGBTQA. Therefore, I have reflected on my positionality as a researcher, built rapport with the participants by maintaining relationships with them after data was collected, and was reflexive throughout the research process. Lastly, I collected data with the intention of learning and was transparent with the goal of my research.

## **Results**

*Definitions of sense of belonging.* Participants defined sense of belonging in two different ways: sense of belonging as an Asian American compared to other races (between group) (n = 35) and sense of belonging as an Asian American subgroup member compared to other Asian American subgroups (within group) (n = 4).

Socio-cultural belonging was reported to be more prominent in participants' definitions than academic support and institutional support. Furthermore, participants varied in the extent to which between-group versus within-group differences influenced their sense of belonging. With regard to socio-cultural belonging, a majority of the participants (n = 35) defined it as determined by the extent to which Asian Americans, relative to other racial/ethnic groups, are represented in the student population. They

reported a strong socio-cultural belonging because the student body includes many Asian Americans.

*Socio-cultural belonging.* For the participants who defined socio-cultural belonging for Asian Americans compared to other races (between group) (n = 35), they emphasized the social context -- that is, the opportunities to develop relationships, especially friendships, with Asian American peers. For example, in the focus group, Jean (Vietnamese, female) stated:

“Belonging is about being supported and being able to find friends that are Asian Americans.... It’s nice to see that people around you look like you and have similar upbringings and backgrounds.... But I think for Black students they may not have the same opportunity to make Black friends like we do because they are underrepresented here.”

Similarly, Nicco in the individual interview (Filipino, male) shared:

“Belonging at our school is about finding a home and family away from home. Friends that support you.... It’s nice to have friends that are not just Filipino but also be able to have other Asian American friends.... like I have friends that are Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese.”

These narratives reflect how the diverse student body, specifically the Asian American student body composition, plays a role in cultivating stronger socio-cultural belonging among Asian American college students at their diverse university.

*Institutional belonging.* A few participants (n = 4) emphasized the level of institutional support for Asian American students, compared to the level of institutional support for Black students. For example, in the focus group, Kai (Chinese, male) stated:

“I think Asian Americans as a group belong at our school compared to other racial groups.... I think Asian Americans are to some extent privileged here at this school compared to other groups like Blacks. There’s antiblackness on campus, and we need to address that because everyone should belong.”

Similarly, in another focus group Judie (Vietnamese, Female) added:

“Asian American presence on campus is very prevalent and we’re definitely acknowledged by the campus. But I think for other racial groups and their experience here, it’s not as welcoming as Asian Americans.... For example, Black students on campus, I’ve heard that UCPD has an ongoing issue with racially profiling Black students on campus and even around the campus. For example, they’ll get into their own car and then police reports are made about them.... But I’ve never heard anything negative about Asian American experience here.... I feel like being Asian American at our university is a privilege because we’re not really racially profiled against and we don’t have to go through the same struggles as the Black student population.... I would simply say that Asian Americans are privileged because we are the majority on this campus.”

*A strong sense of belonging.* A majority of the participants reported a strong sense of belonging, emphasizing socio-cultural belonging (n = 36). Participants who reported a strong socio-cultural belonging defined it terms of the existing quantitative measures of

general sense of belonging (e.g., “I feel a sense of belonging at this college”, or “I feel comfortable at college”). Participants who espoused the first definition of sense of belonging reported a strong sense of belonging and they attributed their sense of belonging to the school’s diverse student body, particularly in terms of its racial/ethnic composition, which includes a high percentage of Asian Americans. They reported that this general and specific diversity helps them feel that they belong to the institution. For instance, in the focus group, Karen (Chinese/Vietnamese, female) shared:

“Our university is definitely diverse. There’s a high percentage of Latinos here and Asians. It’s a unique space.... Because there’s so many Asian Americans here, there are different ethnic clubs you can get involved in and learn about each other’s culture.... Asian Americans belong here. I’ve never seen anyone excluded or have barriers because they are Asian.... But, after you graduate, you never really know what the majority will look like. So, I think it’s really important to cherish these times here at our school.”

The narratives above reveal the importance of student body composition, specifically as it relates to representation of Asian American undergraduate students.

*The need for better academic and institutional support.* Despite their reported strong sense of belonging, when asked what changes would improve their sense of belonging, many participants (n = 33) discussed the need for more Asian American representation in the curriculum and among the faculty. With regard to the curriculum, for example, in the interview, Tati (Filipino, female) shared:

“Overall, I would say I belong at our university because I am in my Filipino ethnic organization. But when it comes to the classroom like what we learn in class, not really. It would be nice if Filipino history and culture were more mainstream and not just at my ethnic organization.”

In the focus group, Sam (Korean/Vietnamese, female) echoed this perspective:

“We only learn about Asian American history if there’s courses that focus on it like Ethnic Studies course. In general, for other classes, they don’t really include anything about Asian Americans or from their perspective.... We tend to learn more about American or British history in our education.”

Other participants raised the issue of inadequate Asian American representation among faculty. In the interview, Ken (Filipino, male) stated:

“It’s nice to see that there’s so many Asian American students at this university. But when it comes to faculty, I rarely see Filipino faculty on campus other than the one professor that is teaching the language class in Tagalog. Or even Asian American faculty.... It would be nice to see them as faculties because it shows us that Filipinos can make it in higher education.... We can see them as role models.... Also, it would also make me feel a better connection knowing that we share similarities in our culture and experiences.”

Similarly, in the interview, Claire (Korean, female) shared:

“I feel like Koreans and all Asian Americans belong at this school.... but it would be nice if there was more faculty that was Korean or from Asian American background because they’ve had a similar background as you, but they achieved

something that you could possibly emulate in ways. It can encourage yourself and think to yourself, ‘Oh I can achieve that too.’ Seeing them like role models.”

The contradictions within the narratives suggest that there is some degree of settling. While these participants report that they personally and Asian American students generally belong at the university, they report a desire for greater representation of Asian Americans in the curriculum and among the faculty. They perceive that changes in these two areas would improve their sense of belonging.

*A weak sense of belonging.* Participants who espoused the second definition of sense of belonging, in terms of within-group diversity, reported a weaker sense of belonging, relative to the first group. Because they defined their sense of belonging in terms of within-group diversity, and they perceived the university more focused on the school’s between-group diversity, they reported less of a sense of belonging. All three participants in this group identified as being members of the LGBTQ community. Thus, they were interested in not only national and ethnic subgroup diversity, but other types of diversity, such as sexual orientation. For example, in the focus group, Bill (Laos/Thai, male) shared:

“When I think about belonging, I’m thinking about belonging for all Asian Americans.... not just the majority at this university.... I’m talking about Asians that are not the majority like Southeast Asians. Like Laos, Thai, Cambodians. Bi-racial or even Asian Americans who may identify as LGBTQ.... I know that this school has a diverse campus, but I’m talking about whether the school cares for diverse Asian Americans. Yes, this school invites people and have spaces like

student or ethnic organizations, but I feel like no one like the faculty/staff directly cares or checks the needs of diverse Asian Americans.... There is this sense that a lot of the time, if you're the only queer person in the group, then you're the gay friend and you're not one of them, you're not in the collective Asian identity and you get treated differently.”

In a similar vein, in the focus group, Kai (Chinese, male) shared:

“Belonging at this school means belonging for all different types of Asian, not just East Asians.... I think this university loves to brag about how ‘diverse’ they are. With all the brochure, flyers, and orientation it always talks about diversity. But for example, at APSP (Asian Pacific Student Programs), they don’t do the best at accommodating to all Asians- I’m talking about different groups like Southeast Asians like Laos, Thai, Filipinos, LGBTQ Asians, low-income Asians. It’s mostly catered towards East Asians- the Chinese, Japanese, Koreans.... If you look at the social, music events on campus, they’re generally for East Asians.... Japanese culture like anime used to be popular couple years ago. Now it’s K-pop and Korean culture, but other Asian cultures are never trendy... Another example is ethnic organizations. VSA [Vietnamese Student Organization] says they are inclusive for all Asians Americans. Like they say *all* Asian Americans- whether you are Vietnamese or not or identify as LGBTQ- are welcome, but not really. The people who have leadership positions say, ‘That’s so gay’ casually.... Race/ethnicity always comes first, and other identities like being gay does not matter. I get the sense that we shouldn’t talk about it.”

These participants highlighted the difficulty associated with raising awareness about subgroup diversity when the institution appears on the surface as diverse, at least between racial/ethnic groups. Because the participants believed that the university did not recognize sub-racial/ethnic-group diversity, they reported that they felt like they did not belong. These findings suggest that the university may not be experienced as inclusive for all Asian Americans, especially for Asian Americans who identify as part of the LGBTQ community.

*Possibility of other Asian students who may not experience belonging.*

Furthermore, a handful of participants (n = 2) raised the issue that while they, as Asian American college students belong, international Chinese students may not belong as much as them in the social context. For instance, in the interview, Richard (Filipino, male) stated:

“Based on my experience, I think Chinese international students are not that welcomed here.... I think they are labeled with stereotypes of like international student, that they are wealthy, kind of like stuck up, prissy.... so some Asian Americans are not that fond of them.”

Sarah (Korean, Female) echoed a similar concern that international Chinese students may not belong compared to Asian American college students:

“I think for international Asian American students in general, it’s really hard for them to be adapt here at this university because they’re coming to a new country.... The way I see it is that they (international students) like to stay with their own group because they’re more comfortable with themselves.... There are

negative stereotypes against them from the internet, like international students and people overseas. This makes it harder to feel like they could belong at our school.... Stereotypes like they very rich, very wealthy, they like flaunt their wealth, they have designer bags and clothes.... In comparison, Asian American college students are more seen as like working class and struggling.”

These narratives reveal that while Asian Americans may belong socially, perhaps Asian immigrants may not experience belonging as much, according to these participants. Specifically, international students may have more difficulties in social belonging among other Asian American students due to the perception that they are “different” from them.

## **Discussion**

By centering the diverse voices of Asian American college students, this qualitative study applied AsianCrit (Chang, 1993; Museus, 2014; Museus & Iftikar, 2013) to investigate how they make sense of their belonging at a diverse university. Specifically, it examined the extent to which the student body composition played a role shaping their sense of belonging. The narratives reveal that a person’s definition of sense of belonging relates to the degree of their sense of belonging. This present study contributed to the sparse research on sense of belonging among Asian American college students (Museus & Truong, 2009; Maramba & Museus, 2011) and addressed the need to employ qualitative methods on sense of belonging among Asian American college students in diverse universities (Wells & Horns, 2015) by employing both focus groups and individual interviews. This research also contributes to the definition of sense of belonging: socio-cultural belonging and institutional belonging.

*Lessons learned about definitions of sense of belonging.* Two major definitions for sense of belonging emerged in the data: sense of belonging as a collective group as Asian Americans compared to other races (between group) and sense of belonging in terms of Asian American subgroup compared to other Asian American subgroups (within group). A majority of the participants described their sense of belonging in terms of the first definition, emphasizing the benefits associated with having a higher percentage of Asian American undergraduate students at their university. Few participants defined sense of belonging with the latter definition.

The participants who reported a strong sense of belonging at their university used existing definitions of a general sense of belonging (e.g., “I feel a sense of belonging at this college”, or “I feel comfortable at college”), which is consistent with prior research (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). However, the results in this study suggest that definitions of sense of belonging may vary, and these variations play a role in shaping a sense of belonging. For example, social belonging was reported to be more common in participants’ definitions than other types of belonging, such as academic support and institutional support. This finding lends support to Ingram (2012)’s argument for the need to differentiate general sense of belonging from more specific types of belonging, such as social, academic, or institutional sense of belonging (Ingram, 2012). Furthermore, this finding suggests that future research on sense of belonging should continue to employ qualitative methods to better capture how individuals define sense of belonging in various ways and how definitions play a role in shaping their belonging. Perhaps the reason for mixed results in prior research on sense of belonging and Asian American college

students' satisfaction in higher education is that quantitative measures may have masked the different definitions of sense of belonging operating in students' minds. The findings in this study show the possibility of effects of student body racial-ethnic composition.

A majority of the sample reported a strong sense of belonging at their diverse university. Despite the fact that a majority of the participants reported a strong sense of belonging in terms of social relations, they reported that there could be changes to further improve their sense of belonging and specifically identified a need for improvements in academic and institutional support. These findings suggest that while students may have social support from their peers, they may be lacking support in other ways, such as in the curriculum or mentorship from faculty of color who can validate their experiences as Asian Americans. For instance, Tati's narrative was notable in that while she received cultural validation from her ethnic organization, which is consistent with students' experiences reported in prior research (Maramba & Museus, 2011). Tati expressed a desire for more Asian American perspectives to be represented in mainstream classes, suggesting that it would strengthen her sense of belonging. Ken's narrative revealed a similar desire for more Asian American representation, but specifically regarding Asian American faculty who can provide mentorship and connect with students' cultural experiences. This finding raises a question regarding the extent to which a university is "diverse," and how we should define an institution as a "diverse university." Perhaps we should distinguish between diversity in the undergraduate student body, diversity in the curriculum, and diversity in the faculty. Each may contribute to a sense of belonging. Furthermore, this finding highlights that we may be able to increase the sense of

belonging among Asian American students if universities invest in providing more Asian American perspectives in the curriculum and hiring more Asian American faculty who are willing to mentor Asian American college students. If these two areas are strengthened, then perhaps we could further increase students' sense of belonging.

*Lessons learned about a weak sense of belonging.* Results were that participants who endorsed the second definition of sense of belonging (i.e., within-group diversity) reported a weaker sense of belonging, relative to the first group. All the participants in this group identified as LGBTQ. Kai's narrative was notable because he raised the issue that the concerns about Asian Americans as a racial group may come before other concerns with Asian Americans, such as the experiences of sexual minorities.

*Lessons learned about Asian students who may not experience a sense of belonging.* This study found that other identities, such as immigration status, may intersect with race and play a role in students' sense of belonging. A few participants highlighted that perhaps Asian immigrants may not experience as strong a sense of belonging as Asian Americans. This "othering" process may be happening due to the assumption of who belongs as "Asian Americans" in the college setting. Future research should further explore sense of belonging among LGBTQ Asian Americans and international Asian American students to better understand their experiences of a diverse university.

*Limitations.* This study is limited in the following ways. First, it focused on a sample of diverse Asian Americans undergraduates enrolled in diverse university in Southern California. Therefore, findings cannot be generalized to Asian American

college students at other diverse universities. Second, this study only collected data at one point in time. Future research should further examine how a sample of diverse Asian Americans make sense of their belonging in diverse university in other geographical areas, such as in the Mid-West because their experiences may be different than in Southern California. Different results may emerge in those geographical areas because there is a possibility of lack of diversity and Asian American representation outside the college setting. In addition, future research can investigate how sense of belonging changes over time by employing longitudinal methods.

## References

- An, S. (2017). AsianCrit perspective on social studies. *The Journal of Social Studies Research, 41*(2), 131-139.
- Anderman, E. M. (2002). School effects on psychological outcomes during adolescence. *Journal of educational psychology, 94*(4), 795.
- Anderman, L. H. (2003). Academic and social perceptions as predictors of change in middle school students' sense of school belonging. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 72*(1), 5-22.
- Byun, S. Y., & Park, H. (2012). The academic success of East Asian American youth: The role of shadow education. *Sociology of education, 85*(1), 40-60.
- Chang, M. J. (1999). Does racial diversity matter?: The educational impact of a racially diverse undergraduate population. *Journal of College Student Development.*
- Chang, M. J., Astin, A. W., & Kim, D. (2004). Cross-racial interaction among undergraduates: Some consequences, causes, and patterns. *Research in Higher Education, 45*(5), 529-553.
- Chang, R. S. (1993). Toward an Asian American legal scholarship: Critical race theory, poststructuralism, and narrative space. *California Law Review, 19*, 1243–1323.
- Chou, R. S. (2012). *Asian American sexual politics: The construction of race, gender, and sexuality*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Chou, R. S., & Feagin, J. R. (2015). *Myth of the model minority: Asian Americans facing racism*. Routledge.
- Chou, R., Lee, K., & Ho, S. (2015). Love Is (Color) blind: Asian Americans and White Institutional Space at the Elite University. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, 1*(2), 302-316.
- Constantine, M. G., & Watt, S. K. (2002). Cultural congruity, womanist identity attitudes, and life satisfaction among African American college women attending historically Black and predominantly White institutions. *Journal of College Student Development.*
- Cress, C. M., & Ikeda, E. K. (2003). Distress under duress: The relationship between campus climate and depression in Asian American college students. *NASPA Journal, 40*(2), 74-97.

- Freeman, T. M., Anderman, L. H., & Jensen, J. M. (2007). Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 75*(3), 203-220.
- Gasman, M., Baez, B., & Turner, C. S. V. (Eds.). (2008). *Understanding minority serving institutions*. SUNY Press.
- Gurin, P., Dey, E., Hurtado, S., & Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes. *Harvard educational review, 72*(3), 330-367.
- Harper, S. R., & Hurtado, S. (2007). Nine themes in campus racial climates and implications for institutional transformation. *New Directions for Student Services, 2007*(120), 7-24.
- Harker, R., & Tymms, P. (2004). The effects of student composition on school outcomes. *School effectiveness and school improvement, 15*(2), 177-199.
- Hausmann, L. R. M., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among African American and White first-year college students. *Research in Higher Education, 48*(7), 803–839.
- Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of education, 324*-345.
- Ingram, D. C. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: dimensions and correlates* (Doctoral dissertation, Stanford University).
- Jones, W. A. (2013). The relationship between student body racial composition and the normative environment toward diversity at community colleges. *Community College Review, 41*(3), 249-265.
- Kotori, C., & Malaney, G. D. (2003). Asian American students' perceptions of racism, reporting behaviors, and awareness of legal rights and procedures. *NASPA Journal, 40*(3), 56-76.
- Lee, J., & Zhou, M. (2017). Why class matters less for Asian-American academic achievement. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 43*(14), 2316-2330.
- Lee, J., & Zhou, M. (2015). *The Asian American Achievement Paradox*. Russell Sage Foundation.

- Lee, J., & Zhou, M. (2014). The success frame and achievement paradox: The costs and consequences for Asian Americans. *Race and Social Problems*, 6(13), 38-55.
- Maramba, D. C., & Museus, S. D. (2013). Examining the effects of campus climate, ethnic group cohesion, and cross-cultural interaction on Filipino American students' sense of belonging in college. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 14(4), 495-522.
- Maxfield, M. G., & Babbie, E. R. (2014). *Research methods for criminal justice and criminology*. Cengage Learning.
- Maramba, D. C., & Palmer, R. T. (2014). The impact of cultural validation on the college experiences of Southeast Asian American students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55(6), 515-530.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. A. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Sage.
- Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. In *Forum qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: qualitative social research* (Vol. 11, No.3).
- Museus, S. D. (2014). *Asian American students in higher education*. Routledge.
- Museus, S. D. (2014). The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model: A new theory of college success among racially diverse student populations. In M. B. Paulsen (Ed.) *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*. New York: Springer.
- Museus, S. D., & Park, J. J. (2015). The continuing significance of racism in the lives of Asian American college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 56(6), 551-569.
- Museus, S. D. (2008b). The role of ethnic student organizations in fostering African American and Asian American students' cultural adjustment and membership at predominantly White institutions. *Journal of College Student Development* 49(6), 568-586.
- Museus, S. D., & Iftikar, J. (2013). An Asian critical theory (AsianCrit) framework. *Asian American students in higher education*, 18-29.
- Museus, S. D., & Maramba, D. C. (2011). The impact of culture on Filipino American students' sense of belonging. *The Review of Higher Education*, 34(2), 231-258.
- Museus, S. D., & Truong, K. A. (2009). Disaggregating qualitative data from Asian

- American college students in campus racial climate research and assessment. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2009(142), 17-26.
- Nieri, T. (2012). School context and individual acculturation: How school composition affects Latino students' acculturation. *Sociological inquiry*, 82(3), 460-484.
- O'Keeffe, P. (2013). A sense of belonging: Improving student retention. *College Student Journal*, 47(4), 605-613.
- Perez, M. P. (2002). Pacific identities beyond US racial formations: The case of Chamorro ambivalence and flux. *Social Identities*, 8(3), 457-479.
- Pike, G. R., & Kuh, G. D. (2006). Relationships among structural diversity, informal peer interactions and perceptions of the campus environment. *The Review of Higher Education*, 29(4), 425-450.
- Pike, G. R., Kuh, G. D., & Gonyea, R. M. (2007). Evaluating the rationale for affirmative action in college admissions: Direct and indirect relationships between campus diversity and gains in understanding diverse groups. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(2), 166-182.
- Ponce, N. A., Tseng, W., Ong, P., Shek, Y. L., Ortiz, S., & Gatchell, M. (2009). The state of Asian American, native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander health in California report.
- Rainey, K., Dancy, M., Mickelson, R., Stearns, E., & Moller, S. (2018). Race and gender differences in how sense of belonging influences decisions to major in STEM. *International journal of STEM education*, 5(1), 1-14.
- Reyes, A. (2017). *Language, identity, and stereotype among Southeast Asian American youth: The other Asian*. Routledge.
- Ryan, G. Y., & H. Bernard, R. 2005. Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1), 85-109.
- Saha, S., Guiton, G., Wimmers, P. F., & Wilkerson, L. (2008). Student body racial and ethnic composition and diversity-related outcomes in US medical schools. *Jama*, 300(10), 1135-1145.
- Samura, M. (2016). Remaking Selves, Repositioning Selves, or Remaking Space: An Examination of Asian American College Students' Processes of "Belonging". *Journal of College Student Development*, 57(2), 135-150.
- Slaten, C. D., Elison, Z. M., Lee, J. Y., Yough, M., & Scalise, D. (2016). Belonging on campus: A qualitative inquiry of Asian international students. *The Counseling*

- Psychologist*, 44(3), 383-410.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Thomas, L., Herbert, J., & Teras, M. (2014). A sense of belonging to enhance participation, success and retention in online programs. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 5(2), 69-80.
- Thrupp, M., Lauder, H., & Robinson, T. (2002). School composition and peer effects. *International journal of educational research*, 37(5), 483-504.
- Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. University of Chicago Press, 5801 S. Ellis Avenue, Chicago, IL 60637.
- University of California, Riverside. N.d. "Facts." Retrieved March 9, 2019. (<https://www.ucr.edu/about/facts.html>).
- U.S. Census Bureau (2017). *Asian alone or in any combination by selected groups. American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2013). *Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Race Alone or in Combination, and Hispanic Origin for the United States, States, and Counties: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2013*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Wells, A. V., & Horn, C. (2015). The Asian American college experience at a diverse institution: Campus climate as a predictor of sense of belonging. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 52(2), 149-163.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **Asian American Students' Understandings of How Institutional and Individual Factors that Shape Sense of Belonging at a Diverse University in Southern California**

#### **Abstract**

While a substantial amount of research demonstrates how institutional and individual factors shape sense of belonging among students of color in predominately White institutions (PWIs), there is little research on Asian American students' perceptions of how institutional and individual factors shape their sense of belonging in other higher education settings, such as a diverse institution, one with a racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body. This qualitative study aims to fill in that gap in literature by employing a mixed-methods approach, specifically drawing from three focus groups and 20 individual interviews with a diverse group of Asian Americans, to better understand how Asian Americans (N = 39) make sense of the factors that shape their belonging at a diverse university. The present study is an empirical application of Asian Critical Theory which centers the diverse voices of Asian Americans. Participants' narratives reveal that institutional factors, defined as the extent to which the institution invests in Asian ethnic student organizations and the university's official pan-ethnic program (Asian American Pacific Student Program), fosters students' sense of belonging by making them feel to be valuable members of the school. They also reveal that individual factors, defined as active participation in Asian student organizations and/or the university's pan-ethnic program, fosters students' sense of

belonging by validating their cultural identity, promoting friendships with co-ethnics, and strengthening a pan-ethnic identity.

## **Introduction**

Asian Americans, relative to other racial and ethnic groups, occupy a unique position in the university context (Chou, Lee, & Ho, 2015). Asian Americans have a high rate of enrollment in higher education (63%), are concentrated in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education, 2018), and have high rates of degree completion. However, Asian American subgroups are highly diverse with more than 20 national subgroups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017; API, 2019). Some Asian subgroups have rates of bachelor's degree completion that are lower than the national average of 28% (e.g., Vietnamese: 25%; Hmong: 14%, Cambodian: 13%, and Laotian: 12%) (Museus, 2013). These within-group differences show that story of educational achievement told by the data between racial/ethnic groups is misleading. Some Asian subgroups are doing exceptionally well in education, while other Asian subgroups are not. These findings indicate a need for research to identify factors that can promote Asian Americans' success in higher education.

Sense of belonging refers to a person's feeling of being an accepted member of an institution and being supported by their peers (Strayhorn, 2012). It is positively associated with success in higher education, including students' intention to persist (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007), retention (Thomas, Herbert & Teras, 2014; O'Keeffe, 2013), and academic progress and success (Anderman, 2002; Freeman, 2007; Hausmann, Schofield & Woods, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). This study addresses the need for research to better understand how institutional and individual factors can be modified

to cultivate a sense of belonging and, in turn, promote students' persistence and degree completion in higher education.

The existing research on sense of belonging in higher education tends to use quantitative methods, especially surveys, and focus on underrepresented minorities (i.e., URMs) in specific spaces, such as historically White college universities (HWCUs), or minority-serving institutions (MSIs). Less is known about sense of belonging among other students of color, such as Asian Americans, and students in other types of colleges and universities, such as institutions with a racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body (Wells and Horn, 2015) -- hereafter, a diverse university. Therefore, the present study qualitatively examines Asian American college students' understandings of how institutional and individual factors shape their sense of belonging in a diverse university.

### **Factors that Shape Sense of Belonging among Students of Color**

*Institutional factors affecting sense of belonging.* Prior research shows that institutional factors (e.g., campus climate, interpersonal interactions/relationships, cultural integrity) play a significant role in shaping the experiences of students of color (Ancis, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000; Cheng, 2004; Gonzalez, 2003; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus, Nichols & Lambert, 2008; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Museus, 2008a; Museus, 2008b; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Wells & Horn, 2015). For instance, negative perceptions of campus climate and experiences of interpersonal discrimination are associated with lower levels of institutional attachment, retention, and belonging (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado &

Carter, 1997; Museus, 2008a; Zambrana, 2018). Campus climate refers to the overall racial environment of an institution (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000), which includes current attitudes, expectations, and perceptions of the campus environment (Maramba & Museus, 2011). This prior research focuses on the experiences of URM students and does not provide information on Asian Americans.

*Individual Factors that Shape Sense of Belonging among Students of Color.* In addition to institutional factors, individual factors affect sense of belonging among college students (Dortch & Patel, 2017; Guiffrida, 2003; Johnson, 2012; Leath & Chavou, 2018, Museus & Truong 2009; Rainey et al., 2018; Sax & Newhouse., 2018; Strayhorn, 2012). Scholars in this area have focused on students' demographic characteristics (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender), pre-college characteristics (i.e., attending predominately White high schools versus predominately minority schools), and personal involvement in ethnic organizations.

An emerging body of literature investigates sense of belonging among women and students of color in STEM fields, aiming to understand why certain groups have lower retention rates (Dortch & Patel, 2017; Johnson, 2012; Leath & Chavou, 2018, Strayhorn, 2012; Rainey et al., 2018; Sax and Newhouse, 2018). Women and URM students report lower sense of belonging than White men which may partly explain their lower retention rates (Rainey et al., 2018). This finding highlights the need for more empirical research exploring group differences. Other research has focused on differences within racial groups (i.e., racial heterogeneity) (Guiffrida, 2003; Museus & Truong 2009). Museus and Truong (2009), using qualitative methods, found that satisfaction with the

campus racial climate and the importance of racial prejudice and experiences of discrimination varied among Asian American students in a predominately White institution, depending on whether they attended predominantly White high schools (WHSs) or predominantly minority high schools (MHSs). Museus and Truong (2009) noted that this research only superficially disaggregated the qualitative data, and they called for more qualitative research in this area. The present study responds to this need by qualitatively examining individual factors related to sense of belonging among Asian American college students.

The existing research shows that personal involvement in ethnic organizations is associated with a greater sense of belonging at predominately White institutions because students of color perceived it to provide opportunities for meaningful interaction with co-ethnics (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye 2007; Maramba & Museus, 2013; Museus, 2008b). Museus (2008b) qualitatively showed that Asian American and Black students chose to be involved in ethnic organizations because there, they could express their cultural heritage, receive validation for their cultural identity, and give back to their ethnic community alongside racial/ethnic peers. However, this research focused on the experiences of students of color at predominately White institutions. More research, especially qualitative research, is needed to better understand how Asian Americans create a sense of belonging through their involvement in Asian ethnic student organizations in diverse universities.

## **Institutional and Individual Factors that Shape Sense of Belonging among Asian American College Students**

In recent years scholars have started to examine factors that relate to Asian American college students' sense of belonging. Institutional factors, such as cultural integrity, have shown to strengthen sense of belonging among Asian American college students. Cultural integrity, a concept introduced by Tierney (1999), is defined as the programs and practices offered at the institution that affirm the students' cultural identity and heritage. Prior research has found that cultural integrity is associated with student success in higher education (Museus & Maramba, 2011; Museus, 2008b). The model of cultural integrity rejects Tinto's (1987) theory of integration because the latter suggests that students of color must assimilate into the dominant, mainstream culture to succeed. While we know that cultural integrity is important for Asian Americans, such as participation in ethnic student organizations (Museus & Maramba, 2011; Museus 2008b), research on the relationship between cultural integrity and Asian American students' experiences remains sparse (Musues & Maramba, 2011). Furthermore, relatively little research explores how Asian ethnic student organizations could provide benefits other than validating students' cultural identity and heritage, such as positively impacting sense of belonging among Asian Americans college students. Furthermore, while we know that there are pan-ethnic programs available for Asian Americans, little is known about the role they may serve for Asian Americans. Overall, the existing literature suggests that both institutional and individual factors shape sense of belonging for Asian Americans in higher education. However, there seems to be an overlap between the two – that is, Asian

ethnic student organizations and pan-ethnic programs created by the institution (i.e., institutional factors) and the individual's decision to be personally engaged in these organizations and programs (i.e., individual factors). The present study aims to clarify the distinctions between the two factors by investigating students' reasons for being involved in ethnic organizations and/or pan-ethnic programs.

*Current study.* To contribute to the sparse research on factors relating to sense of belonging among Asian American college students at a diverse institution, this study investigates the following research questions:

1) What institutional factors do Asian American college students believe affect their sense of belonging?

2) What individual factors do Asian American college students believe affect their sense of belonging?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is an empirical application of Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit) (Chang, 1993; Museus, 2014; Museus & Iftikar, 2013). AsianCrit is a branch of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). It aims to highlight and explain the specific experiences of Asian Americans which are distinct from those of other racial/ethnic minorities.

This research focuses on the four major tenets of AsianCrit: re(constructive) history, anti(essentialism), state theory praxis, and commitment to social justice. First, it reflects the tenet of re(constructive) history by using a mixed-methods approach (i.e., focus groups and individual interviews) to illuminate the diverse perspectives of Asian

Americans on the factors that shape their higher education experiences, especially their sense of belonging. Second, it reflects the tenet of anti(essentialism) by recruiting a diverse sample of Asian Americans (South Asians, East Asians, and Southeast Asians) to better understand the Asian American experience. Third, it reflects the tenet of state theory praxis by not testing pre-existing theories on sense of belonging among other students of color (e.g., Tinto's theory of integration). Rather, this study aims to develop theory from the collected data. Fourth, it reflects the tenet of commitment to social justice by employing ethical methods, specifically with the larger goal of improving the experiences and sense of belonging for Asian Americans in diverse universities.

## **Methods**

This qualitative study uses mixed methods, specifically three focus groups and 20 in-depth individual interviews, to identify the factors that Asian American college students believe shape their sense of belonging. This study is part of a larger research project that investigates sense of belonging among Asian American students at a diverse university. In this paper, I present the set of results that focuses on factors that shape sense of belonging. As the primary investigator, I collected the data, with the assistance of two undergraduate research assistants, both of whom identified as Asian American. The assistants also helped by recruiting participants and transcribing recordings of the focus groups and interview. This study was funded by the University of California, Riverside (UCR) Dissertation Research Grant, which provided funds for research-related expenses, including participant incentives.

A mixed-methods approach was determined to be the best method for eliciting diverse perspectives on what institutional and individual factors affect sense of belonging. The focus groups provided data on Asian Americans as a pan-ethnic group whereas the interviews provided data on individual Asian Americans – specifically, individual Koreans and Filipinos.

### *Setting*

The data were collected in Southern California at a public university whose undergraduate population is racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. As of Fall 2018, the undergraduate population at this university was 41.5% Latino, 33.8% Asian, 11% non-Latino White, 5.6% Two or More Races, 3.3% Blacks, 3.4% international, 1.4% unknown race/ethnicity (University of California, Riverside, 2019). In terms of gender, it was 45.4% male and 54.6% female. In terms of socioeconomic status, the university has a high rate of Pell Grant (i.e., low income) students, and a majority (60%) of the students are the first in their families to attend college (University of California, Riverside, 2019). In terms of faculty demographics, as of Summer 2019, the faculty were 55.7% non-Latino White, 22.2% Asian/Native Hawaiian, 8.1% Unknown, 7.7% Latino, 4.1% Black/African/African American, 2.6% American Indian, and 1.4% two or more races (Infocenter, UC Office of the President, 2019).

### *Sample*

The sample consisted of 39 people: 20 females and 19 males. Data collection ceased when thematic saturation was achieved (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To be eligible to participate, participants had to self-identify as Asian American, be enrolled full time in

an undergraduate program of study in Summer or Fall of 2019 and be domestic students. Domestic students included U.S. residents who were native U.S. born, naturalized U.S. citizens, foreign born with legal status (e.g., permanent residents), or undocumented. Pacific Islanders were excluded from the study given that they have distinct histories and experiences from Asian Americans (Perez, 2002). The specific eligibility criteria for the focus groups and individual interviews are provided below.

To participate in the focus groups, the participant had to 1) identify as Asian American, Asian, a member of any Asian ethnic group, or bi-racial/multiracial Asian American, and 2) be enrolled at the university in Summer 2019. Each focus group consisted of six to seven participants, which is the typical number of participants involved in a focus group. Saturation was met with 3 focus groups and a total sample of 39 participants (20 females and 19 males). (Maxfield & Babbie, 2014). The focus group sample consisted of the following: Chinese (n = 2), Taiwanese (n = 1), Hong Kongese (n = 1), Korean (n = 1), Vietnamese (n = 9), Filipino (n = 1), Pakistani (n = 1), Laotian and Thai (n = 1), Chinese and Vietnamese (n = 1), and Korean and Vietnamese (n = 1). Regarding gender, there was 10 females and 9 males. Regarding sexual orientation, 15 individuals identified as heterosexual, 1 individual identified as asexual, 1 identified as gay/lesbian, 1 individual identified as bi-sexual, and 1 individual identified as “aromatic.”

To participate in the interviews, the participant had to 1) identify as either Korean or Filipino and 2) be enrolled at the university in Fall 2019. Participants who identified as both Korean and Filipino (i.e., bi-racial) were excluded from this study. Saturation was met after 20 interviews; therefore, data collection ceased (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The

individual interview sample consisted of the following: Korean (n = 10) and Filipino (n = 10). There were 10 females, and 10 males. Regarding sexual orientation, 16 individuals identified as heterosexual, 2 individuals as asexual, 1 identified as gay/lesbian, and 1 individual identified as pansexual.

### *Recruitment*

For the focus group, there were two methods of recruitment. First, participants were recruited via emails to the following university listservs in aims to recruit a diverse sample of Asian Americans: Asian Pacific Students Programs (APSP), Undocumented Students Program Office, LGBT Resource Center, 15 Asian American ethnic student organizations, and Asian American Christian Fellowship. The listservs were chosen to facilitate recruitment of a diverse sample. Second, the research team members recruited participants from their personal networks. Eligible people had the opportunity to participate in a focus group, interview, or both. Focus group participants were compensated with a catered lunch and \$10 Starbucks gift card. After each focus group, eligible participants were given the opportunity to sign up to participate in the individual interviews. Interview participants were compensated with a \$20 Starbucks gift card.

### *Data collection*

In Summer 2019, I conducted the focus groups. They were held in a private, reserved room in the university library. Each focus group lasted between one to one-half hours. All participants completed a brief paper-and-pencil demographic survey at the beginning of the focus group (see Appendix A). The focus group questions covered the following topics: Asian Americans' perceptions of institutional and individual factors that

shape their belonging (see focus group protocol in Appendix B). The focus groups were audio recorded for transcription purposes.

In Summer 2019 and Fall 2019, I conducted the one-on-one interviews. The interviews were held in a private, reserved room in the university library. They lasted one to one and one-half hours. If the participant had not participated in a focus group, he/she completed a demographic survey at the beginning of the interview. The interview questions focused on the participants' own experience of sense of belonging and their perceptions of how institutional and individual factors shape their own sense of belonging at their university (See interview protocol in Appendix C). Interviews were audio recorded for transcription purposes.

### *Analysis*

I analyzed the focus group data and interview data together in order to develop a rich understanding of how Asian Americans, as a collective group, perceive how factors shape their belonging. This study used inductive analysis, line-by-line coding, and axial coding. Dedoose for Mac, was used to organize, code, and highlight findings in the data. Coding and recoding were done systemically according to what the participants emphasized during the focus groups and interviews (Ryan & Bernard, 2005). Participants chose their own pseudonyms via the demographic survey, and those pseudonyms are used in this report.

First, I analyzed for themes in the sample as a whole. Then, I analyzed in terms of other sociodemographic statuses, such as gender and sexual orientation. However, there

were no differences by gender and sexual orientation. Therefore, the results focus on the themes found in the sample as a whole.

### *Positionality*

I have reflected on my positionality as a researcher and how it shaped the research process. As a female, Asian American, Korean, graduate student at a diverse university, I am an insider to the sample because I have access to the study population, and to some extent share participants' lived experiences as an Asian American, Korean, domestic student. However, I am an outsider to some of the sample: other genders, members of other Asian ethnic groups, students of other academic disciplines, and/or people who identify as LGBTQA. In order to provide a more accurate depiction of their lived experiences, I maintained my relationship and build rapport with the participants throughout the research process. Furthermore, I conducted the study with the intention of learning and practiced ethical research by being transparent with the goal of my research, which is to better understand the experiences of Asian American students in a diverse university.

### **Results**

Findings are drawn from both the focus groups and interviews to richly describe participants' understandings of the factors that shape sense of belonging among Asian Americans college students at a diverse university. Regarding institutional factors, the participants highlighted the appreciation for the institutions' commitment to providing opportunities for Asian Americans to belong, such as through the existence of a pan-ethnic program called Asian Pacific Student Program (APSP), and multiple Asian ethnic

student organizations. Regarding individual factors, the participants reported that their sense of belonging was strengthened through their active personal involvement in the aforementioned university program and/or student organizations.

*Institutional factors that shape sense of belonging.* All of the participants (n = 39) reported that the existence of the Asian-oriented university program and ethnic student organizations shaped their sense of belonging, even if they did not personally participate in the program's and organizations' activities. Participants perceived that the resources provided multiple opportunities for involvement, validated their identity as Asian Americans, and in turn, fostered their sense of belonging at their institution. For instance, in a focus group, Lisa (Vietnamese, female) shared:

“The existence of ethnic programs and organizations helps us to belong at our school like the feeling of being important and valued.... Our university lets us do tabling in the first few months of the academic quarter where we can further recruit Asian Americans and show other new students that we have resources and a community here for them.... They're great because we can meet diverse Asian Americans (whom) we can relate to. It's easier to make friends in those programs or organizations than just putting yourself out there in a random group of people.”

In the same focus group, Sam (Vietnamese/Chinese, female) said,

“Yeah, I agree [with Lisa]. Our school makes it clear that there's lot of clubs and organizations that focus on the needs of Asian Americans.... Our school is nice because there were so many orgs. to join, like VSA [i.e., Vietnamese Student Organization], CSA [i.e., Chinese Student Organization].”

In another focus group, the participants reported their perception that the institution's provision of organizational spaces for Asian Americans was unique. For instance, Karen (Chinese/Korean, female) shared:

“Our university does invest in a lot for Asian Americans to belong.... Like we have the APSP, and it has a strong presence here, which helps us belong.... But I've heard from my friends that go to UC Santa Barbara [UCSB] or UC Santa Cruz that their experiences as Asian Americans are very different than what we experience here. My friend told me that she finds herself surrounding herself with more White people than Asian to belong at her school.”

Sam (Korean/Vietnamese, female) responded in the same focus group:

“I've heard that too. My friend also goes to UCSB. She also says that her school is predominantly White, and she has a hard time fitting in, which is not what we experience here. I wonder if they don't have a lot of ethnic organizations that's provided by the school? I feel like all schools should have the responsibility to provide resources that focus on Asian Americans, whether they are a minority or majority at their school.... So, I know we have it lucky here at our university.”

A similar theme was found in the interviews. For example, John (Korean, male) stated:

“Our university is definitely known for its diversity and welcoming all Asian Americans. For example, we have APSP and so many different ethnic organizations offered here.... I'm currently not involved in any of them, but I know that those programs and orgs will always be always available for me to join

if I ever wanted to. So, yes, the school does make me feel like I belong as an Asian American.”

Similarly, in her interview Camille (Filipino, female) shared:

“I think it’s really important that Asian Americans have spaces to belong because the campus is so big. It’s hard to make friends just in passing, in classes, or if you just go to the HUB (student union) to eat.... I’m glad and really appreciate that we have a lot of types of organizations here, especially ethnic organizations for Asian Americans because it definitely allows us to feel like, ‘Wow, we belong somewhere’, and the school wants us to be here.”

The narratives above reveal that the participants interpret the existence of Asian-oriented programs and student organizations as a message from the institution that Asian Americans are welcome. They perceive that when the institution invests in organizational resources for Asian Americans, the school sees them as valuable members of the university community, thereby positively cultivating a sense of belonging. Karen’s and Sam’s narratives demonstrate that their interpretation of their university as welcoming and, in turn, their sense of belonging is informed by a comparison of their own institution to other institutions, particularly those of their friends.

*Individual factors that shape of sense of belonging.* A majority of the participants (n = 31) reported their active involvement in Asian ethnic student organization was the only individual factor that shaped their sense of belonging. While other individual factors (e.g., differences by gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, documentation/immigration status, prior attendance at predominately White high schools

versus predominately minority schools) were examined, a majority of participants (n = 34) did not describe these other factors as influential. Only a few (n = 3) reported that there may be differences for individuals who identify as a sexual minority or an international student.

The participants perceived that their personal participation in Asian ethnic student organizations strengthens their sense of belonging because the organizations promote their ethnic heritage and cultivate their ethnic identity. They viewed the organizations as spaces where their cultural identity, history, and language were validated. They reported that they were spaces in which the students could learn more about their history and preserve their ethnic and cultural traditions. These opportunities were appreciated, they said, because they, and especially Filipino participants, did not have many opportunities in preserving and promoting ethnic heritage and identity prior to coming to college. For instance, in her interview, Camille (Filipino, female) shared her experience with the Filipino student organization, which helped her to find a community and fostered her sense of belonging.

“Being involved in the Filipino ethnic organization definitely helps me belong at this university. In our general meetings, I love that we can learn about the history of Philippines. We can also talk about our own Filipino history as well. How and why our parents immigrated from which region, province, or village they came from.... Also, Filipino Culture Night is *major*. In the Fall of every year, we start getting ready for it with cultural performances, traditional dances, skits, and more to perform for an audience in the Spring, which is called Filipino Culture Night.

We put in a lot of time and energy practicing and preparing for it.... For example, we sing the national Anthem of the Philippines in the beginning of our show.... Or when we get to do the folk dances, where there's even acting involved. In the skits, we also incorporate like what it's like to be part of a Filipino family, how the relatives are.... It helps with Filipino pride, and it's feeling like our ancestors are with us on the stage. It also is a chance to show our family and friends who are Filipino, and even friends that aren't even Filipino, to show that we are trying to embrace our culture. We're trying to make our ancestors proud, so that this legacy doesn't die, you know, the Filipino heritage.”

Francisco (Filipino, male) echoed Camille's view in his interview:

“Filipino Culture Night is one of the main reasons why I'm an active member in the Filipino ethnic organization. For several months, we learn the history of our ancestors, such as the folk dances, to get ready for the culture night. We also have time where we can talk about similar struggles as Filipinos, like how our parents immigrated.... We sometimes share our frustration about how some of us never learned about Tagalog or Filipino history from our parents or even the classes at this university. So being in the Filipino ethnic organization is great. I've never learned these opportunities to learn about our heritage before. So, yes it definitely helped me have a stronger Filipino identity and root.”

Paige (Vietnamese, female), a focus group participant, shared a similar perspective, but about the Vietnamese Student Association (VSA):

“I and my other Vietnamese friends joined VSA because it helped us create a sense of belonging and community at this university. These organizations encourage us to think about our culture and to be proud of it. So yes, they have shaped me into who I am today and shaped my sense of belonging here.”

The narratives reflect Tierney and Jun’s concept of cultural integrity (1991) and reveal that the participants relate cultural integrity to their sense of belonging. They described their involvement in ethnic organizations, especially for Asian Americans who had limited prior cultural involvement (i.e., the Filipino participants), as strengthening their cultural identity and, in turn, their sense of belonging.

Second, the narratives also reveal that participants perceived that in addition to fostering a sense of belonging by validating their ethnic heritage and strengthening their ethnic identity, participation in ethnic student organizations fosters social connections with co-ethnic peers. They highlighted the importance of social bonding within students from their own ethnic group. For example, Francisco (Filipino, Male) shared:

“The reason I’m involved in the Filipino ethnic organization is for the social aspect.... I made a lot of Filipino friends from the org, and I never had a lot of Filipino friends before coming here. So it’s great.... We don’t feel like a minority.”

Social bonding within co-ethnics was strengthened when they provided other support, such as academic and financial support. Karen (Chinese/Vietnamese, Female):

“I heard that the Filipino ethnic organization helps with unique, financial issues that Filipinos may be going through that maybe other Asians may not

experience.... I had a Filipino friend who was struggling financially at home, and she was scared that she wasn't going to be able to attend the university her second year. It was affected her learning as well. Her grades were declining.... She told me that the org tried to help her with her academics with tutors and mentors.”

Camille (Filipino, female) responded in the same focus group:

“I actually have a similar story. We also had someone who was going through something financially as well. The president of our organization organized it, and we anonymously donated a lot of money to help him financially. As an organization, we always try to look out for other Filipinos who are going through those difficult times. Because we have a resource like this in our org, he was able to attend and graduate.... We were all happy to see that we could help, and it made us stronger community.”

Other participants emphasized the importance of social bonding as it relates to their pan-ethnicity. They reported that it is important that other Asian Americans join and are involved in their ethnic student organization. For instance, in one focus group, Judie (Chinese/Vietnamese, female) shared:

“Coming to a new place in general is difficult. So as first years, we tried to go to different Asian ethnic organizations to make friends.... In our experiences, they're all welcoming. So different Asian Americans will join the Vietnamese student organization, Chinese student organization, Filipino student organization, and that's where they meet their different kinds of Asian friends.... We go to our own ethnic organization, but also attend other Asian organizations so that we can

learn more about other Asian cultures... It's nice because I've only had Chinese friends before coming here. Now, I have different kinds of Asian American friends and realized that while we have different cultures, we still share similar upbringings and challenges.”

In his interview Daniel (Filipino, male) shared a similar perspective.

“The Filipino ethnic organization is welcoming not just for Filipinos, but for different Asian Americans. Like we have Chinese, Vietnamese, and other Asian ethnicities that have joined our organization.... When different Asian Americans join, it makes us feel valued that we have their support and that they are interested in learning more about us, which is the ultimate goal of the Filipino ethnic organization: to show other non-Filipinos about our culture and identity.”

These narratives show that participants perceived that social connections with other Asians, within a student's own subgroup as well as in other Asian subgroups, fosters a sense of belonging.

*Differences by demographic characteristics.* Other individual factors (e.g., differences by gender, class, ethnicity, documentation/immigration status, prior attendance at predominately White high schools versus predominately minority high schools) were examined. However, in this study, the majority of the sample reported that there were no differences by these factors. A minority of the sample reported that there were differences for Asian Americans who identify as LGBTQ or international students. For example, Kai (Chinese, male) shared in the focus group:

“I don’t think there’s differences for gender, class necessarily.... But I do think that Asians who identify as gay do not get represented or their interests are not valued in the ethnic organizations because there’s only a few of us.”

Other participants highlighted that there were differences for individuals who identify as international students. For instance, Richard (Filipino, male) shared:

“Yes, there’s plenty of ways that we [Asian American college students] can belong here by joining different kinds of orgs.... But I think the ethnic orgs are not that accommodating to Chinese international students.... It’s centered around Asian *American* students. I don’t think it’s intentional, but they tend to separate themselves from us.... And maybe we do as well.”

These narratives above show the need for more recognition of and support for the diversity among Asian American college students. It suggests the possibility that some Asian college students, such as those identifying as LGBTQ and international students, may have a lower sense of belonging than Asian American college students due to the perception that there is less support for them from the organizations.

## **Conclusion**

This study employed qualitative interviews and focus groups to describe the understandings of Asian American college students at a diverse university of the factors shaping their sense of belonging. The findings contribute to the sparse research on sense of belonging among Asian American college students (Wells and Horn, 2015).

Specifically, the narratives revealed that both institutional and individual factors were perceived to play significant roles in cultivating a sense of belonging at their university.

*Lessons learned about institutional factors that shape sense of belonging.* Every participant in the sample reported that institutional factors (i.e., the extent to which the institution provides resources for Asian ethnic student organizations and the university's official pan-ethnic program [Asian American Pacific Student Program]), increased their sense of belonging by making them feel like valued members of the school. Consistent with prior research on how institutional factors foster a sense of belonging among students of color (Ancis, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000; Cheng, 2004; Gonzalez, 2003; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus, Nichols & Lambert, 2008; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Museus, 2008a; Museus, 2008b; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Wells & Horn, 2015s), the findings in this study provided further evidence that institutional investments in resources geared toward specific racial/ethnic subgroups of students are valuable.

Regarding institutional factors, the narratives revealed that the participants make sense of the availability of ethnic student organizations as an example of institutional support, despite the fact that ethnic organization are initiated by students, not by the institution itself. Although the institution authorizes the existence of the student organization and can limit its ability to operate, ultimately, the students run the organizations. Yet, participants still credit the university administration for this resource.

Another notable finding was that participants perceive their diverse university as more welcoming than less diverse universities, including PWIs. They defined diversity in terms of the representation of Asian Americans students in the school. They associated the high percentage of Asian American students at their university with the existence of

Asian ethnic organizations on campus. Future research should compare how institutional factors shape sense of belonging among Asian American college students in diverse university versus Asian American college students in PWIs.

*Lessons learned about individual factors that shape of sense of belonging.* Adding to prior research that found demographic factors shape individuals' sense of belonging (Dortch & Patel, 2017; Guiffrida, 2003; Johnson, 2012; Leath & Chavou, 2018, Museus & Truong 2009; Rainey et al., 2018; Sax & Newhouse., 2018; Strayhorn, 2012), this study identified other individual factors that shape of sense of belonging -- that is, active personal involvement in Asian ethnic student organizations. This finding, new in this study, highlights the need to separately acknowledge the influence of the institutional factor of providing ethnic or pan-ethnic organizational resources and the individual factor of personal involvement in campus ethnic or pan-ethnic organizations. Consistent with prior research (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quayle 2007; Maramba, Museus 2013; Museus, 2008; Museus & Maramba, 2008; Museus, 2008b), the findings suggest that individual involvement in ethnic organizations can increase a student's sense of belonging because it promotes cultural pride and co-ethnic interactions. In particular, this finding is consistent with prior research that found that Filipinos participate in different spaces (Bonus, 2000), in this case ethnic student organizations, to learn about the ways in which they have been historically silenced, excluded, and racialized, and therefore find a community. Another new finding is that ethnic organization involvement may function to strengthen the Asian American pan-ethnic identity. This finding suggests that perhaps institutions should do more to cultivate and encourage students to join ethnic

organizations. For example, the institution can encourage faculty involvement with the ethnic organizations. Their involvement can promote perceived support, which can encourage students to be personally involved, thereby increasing their sense of belonging.

This study identified two individual factors that may differentiate students' experiences of belonging: identifying as LGBTQ or as an international student. These findings suggest that ethnic organizations need to attend to these individual identities and assess the extent to which their resources and activities include these subgroups and respond to their needs. Future research should explore the ways in which sexual orientation and international student status may shape university experiences and, in turn, a sense of belonging and how universities can cultivate a sense of belonging in these groups.

*Limitations.* This study is limited in that it employed a cross sectional research design. Future research should explore how perceived institutional and individual factors shape Asian Americans' sense of belonging at a diverse university over time using longitudinal methods. For instance, future research can investigate the extent to which personal involvement in ethnic organizations can increase their sense of belonging over time.

## References

- Ancis, J. R., Sedlacek, W. E., & Mohr, J. J. (2000). Student perceptions of campus cultural climate by race. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 78*(2), 180-185.
- Anderman, E. M. (2002). School effects on psychological outcomes during adolescence. *Journal of educational psychology, 94*(4), 795-809.
- API. (2018). *Census data & API identities*. Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence. Retrieved Feb 28, 2019 (<https://www.api-gbv.org/resources/census-data-api-identities/>).
- Chang, R. S. (1993). Toward an Asian American legal scholarship: Critical race theory, poststructuralism, and narrative space. *California Law Review, 19*, 1243–1323.
- Cheng, D. X. (2004). Students' sense of campus community: What it means, and what to do about it. *NASPA journal, 41*(2), 216-234.
- Chou, R., Lee, K., & Ho, S. (2015). Love Is (Color) blind: Asian Americans and White Institutional Space at the Elite University. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, 1*(2), 302-316.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (Vol. 20). NYU Press.
- Dortch, D., & Patel, C. (2017). Black undergraduate women and their sense of belonging in STEM at predominantly White institutions. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education, 10*(2), 202-215.
- Freeman, T. M., Anderman, L. H., & Jensen, J. M. (2007). Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 75*(3), 203-220.
- Gonzalez, K. P. (2003). Campus culture and the experiences of Chicano students in a predominantly White university. *Urban Education, 37*(2), 193-218.
- Guiffrida, D. A. (2003). African American student organizations as agents of social integration. *Journal of College Student Development, 44*(3), 304-319.
- Harper, S. R., & Hurtado, S. (2007). Nine themes in campus racial climates and implications for institutional transformation. *New Directions for Student Services, 2007*(120), 7-24.

- Harper, S. R., & Quaye, S. J. (2007). Student organizations as venues for Black identity expression and development among African American male student leaders. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(2), 127-144.
- Hausmann, L. R. M., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among African American and White first-year college students. *Research in Higher Education, 48*(7), 803–839.
- Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of education, 324*-345.
- Johnson, D. R. (2012). Campus racial climate perceptions and overall sense of belonging among racially diverse women in STEM majors. *Journal of College Student Development, 53*(2), 336-346.
- Leath, S., & Chavous, T. (2018). Black Women’s Experiences of Campus Racial Climate and Stigma at Predominantly White Institutions: Insights from a Comparative and Within Group Approach for STEM and Non-STEM Majors. *The Journal of Negro Education, 87*(2), 125-139.
- Maramba, D. C., & Museus, S. D. (2013). Examining the effects of campus climate, ethnic group cohesion, and cross-cultural interaction on Filipino American students' sense of belonging in college. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 14*(4), 495-522.
- Maxfield, M. G., & Babbie, E. R. (2014). *Research methods for criminal justice and criminology*. Cengage Learning.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. A. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Sage.
- Museus, S. D. (2014). *Asian American students in higher education*. Routledge.
- Museus, S. D. (2013). Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders: A national portrait of growth, diversity, and inequality. In S. D. Museus, D. C. Maramba, & R. T. Tera-nishi (Eds.), *The misrepresented minority: New insights on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and their implications for higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Museus, S. D. (2008a). Focusing on institutional fabric: Using campus culture assessments to enhance cross-cultural engagement. In S. R. Harper (Ed.), *Creating inclusive environments for cross-cultural learning and engagement in higher education*. Washington, DC: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

- Museus, S. D. (2008b). The role of ethnic student organizations in fostering African American and Asian American students' cultural adjustment and membership at predominantly White institutions. *Journal of College Student Development* 49(6), 568–586.
- Museus, S. D., & Iftikar, J. (2013). An Asian critical theory (AsianCrit) framework. *Asian American students in higher education*, 18-29.
- Museus, S. D., & Maramba, D. C. (2011). The impact of culture on Filipino American students' sense of belonging. *The Review of Higher Education*, 34(2), 231-258.
- Museus, S. D., Nichols, A. H., & Lambert, A. D. (2008). Racial differences in the effects of campus racial climate on degree completion: A structural equation model. *The Review of Higher Education*, 32(1), 107-134.
- Museus, S. D., & Truong, K. A. (2009). Disaggregating qualitative data from Asian American college students in campus racial climate research and assessment. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2009(142), 17-26.
- O’Keeffe, P. (2013). A sense of belonging: Improving student retention. *College Student Journal*, 47(4), 605-613.
- Perez, M. P. (2002). Pacific identities beyond US racial formations: The case of Chamorro ambivalence and flux. *Social Identities*, 8(3), 457-479.
- Rainey, K., Dancy, M., Mickelson, R., Stearns, E., & Moller, S. (2018). Race and gender differences in how sense of belonging influences decisions to major in STEM. *International journal of STEM education*, 5(1), 10.
- Ryan, G. Y., & Bernard, R. 2005. Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1), 85-109.
- Sax, L. J., & Newhouse, K. N. (2018). Disciplinary field specificity and variation in the STEM gender gap. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2018(179), 45-71.
- Solórzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro education*, 60-73.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Thomas, L., Herbert, J., & Teras, M. (2014). A sense of belonging to enhance participation, success and retention in online programs.

- Tierney, W. G. (1999). Models of minority college-going and retention: Cultural integrity versus cultural suicide. *Journal of Negro education*, 80-91.
- Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. University of Chicago Press, 5801 S. Ellis Avenue, Chicago, IL 60637.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2017). *Asian alone or in any combination by selected groups. American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2018). Undergraduate Enrollment. Retrieved Feb 8, 2019 ([https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cha.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cha.asp)).
- Wells, A. V., & Horn, C. (2015). The Asian American college experience at a diverse institution: Campus climate as a predictor of sense of belonging. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 52(2), 149-163.
- Zambrana, R. (2018). *Toxic Ivory Towers: The Health Consequences of Work Stress on the Health of Underrepresented Minority Faculty*. Rutgers University Press.

## **Chapter 5: Sense of Belonging among Korean and Filipino Students in a Diverse American University**

### **Abstract**

Informed by Asian Critical Theory, this cross-sectional, qualitative study explored how Korean American and Filipino American students experience a sense of belonging at a large, Southern Californian university whose student enrollment is racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. Results were based on in-depth interviews of 10 Korean Americans and 10 Filipino Americans (N = 20). With the exception of one Filipino American participant, all participants reported having a strong sense of belonging due to the existence of an official university program office called Asian American Pacific Student Programs (APSP) dedicated to Asian American students and an ethnic student organization catering to Filipino students. The exception involved a Filipino immigrant. There were similarities and differences between Koreans and Filipinos in the perceived factors that shaped a sense of belonging. Three similarities were: 1) the importance of the concentration of Asian American students in their college classes, 2) the importance of having Asian American faculty and Asian American perspectives represented in their classes, and 3) the need for more mentorship from Asian American faculty. Two differences were: 1) issues related to skin tone and 2) the role of ethnic identity.

## **Introduction**

Asian Americans are diverse and heterogeneous with regard to ethnicity, language, culture, immigration, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017; API, 2019). Despite this diversity (API, 2019), prior research in higher education tends to present Asian American experiences as monolithic, homogenizing Asian Americans' diverse experiences. In response to this limitation, scholars have started to employ samples with a single Asian American subgroup, such as Filipino college students (Maramba & Museus, 2011, 2013; Museus & Maramba, 2013; Maramba & Bonus, 2013). However, there is no research that examines subgroup variation among Asian Americans as it regards to sense of belonging in higher education. To better capture the nuanced experiences of diverse Asian Americans in higher education, the present study compares and contrasts two Asian subgroups: Koreans and Filipinos in the context of a diverse university, one with a racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body.

### *Differences among Asian Americans in Higher Education*

With regard to the Asian American experience in higher education, research continues to demonstrate that East Asians (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Koreans) have different experiences than Southeast Asians (e.g., Vietnamese, Filipinos, Cambodians). In contrast to East Asians, the percentage of Southeast Asians who hold bachelor's degrees is lower than the national average of 28% (Musues, 2013). In 2016, the average college enrollment rate for Asian Americans was 67 percent (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education, 2017). The rates for Filipinos were lower than the overall

Asian rate (56%), whereas Koreans were at 70% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Koreans have higher rates of educational attainment than other Asian subgroups. The lower rates of achievement among Filipinos may suggest that Filipinos experience more limited access to higher education and unique challenges associated with their ethnicity (e.g., skin tone) when they attend college. In addition, Filipinos are more underrepresented at four-year institutions than other Asian subgroups, especially in more selective colleges and universities (Museus, 2011). A comparison of Filipino and Korean students may reveal differences in their college experiences, particularly their sense of belonging in college.

One distinction between Koreans and Filipinos that may play a role in shaping their sense of belonging is skin tone. East Asians, such as Koreans, tend to have lighter skin tone whereas Southeast Asians, such as Filipinos, tend to have darker skin tone. Within the Asian American community there is a status hierarchy based on colorism between and within subgroups: lighter skinned Asians are perceived more positively than darker skinned Asians (Rondilla, Spickard, & Spickard, 2007). Filipinos may internalize the negative self-perceptions associated with darker skin which may, in turn, negatively affect their college experiences (David 2008, 2013; Kiang & Takeuchi, 2009; Ryabov, 2016). Recent research shows that there is a strong relationship between educational attainment and lightness of skin tone, such as for Filipinos (Ryabov, 2016). Other research has linked phenotype (e.g., skin tone and physical characteristics) to mental health outcomes and found ethnic identity to be a protective moderator of phenotypic bias among Filipino female adults. This finding is consistent with other, prior research

showing that ethnic identity buffers against phenotypic stress and negative self-perceptions associated with darker skin tone among racial/ethnic minorities (Hunter, 2007; López & Neal-Barnett, 2004; Telzer & Garcia, 2009). The present study examines how skin tone and ethnic identity relate to sense of belonging among Koreans and Filipinos.

Another distinction between Koreans and Filipinos that may relate to their experiences in higher education is the 50-year history of U.S. colonization of the Philippines and its legacy for Filipino identity (Le Espiritu, 1996). Filipinos experience a colonial mentality (i.e., internalized colonialism), which refers to the internalized feelings of oppression as it relates to the perception of ethnic inferiority as a consequence of colonialism (David & Okazaki, 2006, David, 2008; David, 2010; David and Nadal 2014). This colonial mentality negatively affects well-being and mental health among Filipino Americans (David & Okazaki, 2006). Recently, scholars have discussed the need to develop decolonizing curricula and pedagogy to educate Filipino students about their historical legacy and, in turn, ignite social change (Halagao, 2010).

Research by Bonilla-Silva (2004) highlights the emergence in the United States of a tri-racial system which consists of “Whites” (i.e., traditional Whites, new Whites) at the top, “Honorary Whites” (i.e., racial/ethnic minorities that have lighter skin tone) in the middle, the “Collective Black” (i.e., non-White group) at the bottom. According to this system, Koreans are “Honorary Whites” and Filipinos are part of the “Collective Black.” “Honorary Whites” may classify themselves as “White” by emphasizing their “Americanness,” adopt White-like racial attitudes, and distance themselves from the

“Collective Black.” As such, while some Asian Americans may be seen as “perpetual foreigners,” other Asian Americans may also be seen as “Honorary Whites.” Those with “Honorary White” status may be more likely to endorse and employ a colorblind discourse (Tuan, 1999), a discourse that functions to reduce the significance of race and racism in contemporary society (Burke, 2017). Other research has shown that Asian American students in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) resort to colorblind discourse, which makes it difficult for them to prepare for and process their racialized experiences (Chou, Lee, & Ho, 2015). This research argues that we know less about Asian American students in diverse institutions. Therefore, this present study considers whether Korean and Filipino students’ narratives of belonging in a diverse university reflect colorblind discourse.

It is unclear if, in a diverse institution, Koreans and/or Filipinos will face pressures to assimilate (e.g., Chou & Feagin, 2015), which may include the use of colorblind discourse, or they will identify strongly with their ethnic identity and resist pressures to assimilate. Scholars have called for research using qualitative methods to examine these possibilities and, in so doing, to disaggregate Asian American subgroups (Chou & Feagin, 2015). Koreans and Filipinos may identify as “Americans” or with their ethnic group, both of which may shape the sense of belonging. The present study explores, through in-depth interviews, the extent to which Koreans and Filipinos experience a sense of belonging in their diverse university.

### *Prior Research on Sense of Belonging among Asian Americans in Higher Education*

Sense of belonging refers to the perceived feeling of being supported by other individuals, such as by peers and faculty, and feeling like one is a member in the institution (Strayhorn, 2012). It is linked to student well-being, performance, persistence, and retention (Anderman, 2002; Freeman, 2007; Hausmann, Schofield & Woods, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012; Thomas, Herbert & Teras, 2014; O’Keeffe, 2013). However, the existing research on sense of belonging tends to focus on underrepresented minorities (URMs) and employ quantitative methods, such as surveys. Scholars in this area focus less on Asian Americans because as a racial group, they tend to have higher rates of enrollment in higher education and due to the pervasiveness of model minority myth (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Lee, 2015; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Museus, 2014), which is premised on the misconception that Asian Americans are all successful and treated equally in higher education.

The present study contends that while Asian Americans may have some privileges with regard to access into higher education relative to other racial/ethnic groups, Asian Americans should be viewed like other people of color. They may be treated like outsiders and experience exclusion in higher education (Musues & Maramba, 2010). Research has shown that Asian Americans, even those born in the United States, are seen as outsiders, (e.g., treated like perpetual foreigners) (Huynh, 2012; Kim et al. 2011; Lee, 2012; Lee, Park, & Wong 2017; Museus & Park, 2015). This othering process may lead to a lower sense of belonging and negatively impact on mental health (Huynh, Devos, & Smalarz, 2011). In all, despite Asian Americans large representation in higher education

(U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), little research has given explicit attention to Asian Americans' experiences in higher education, with the exception of few studies (e.g., An, 2016; Chou, Lee, & Ho, 2015; Museus, 2014; Museus & Park, 2015). Moreover, research specifically on sense of belonging in higher education is even more limited. Only a few studies (e.g., Museus & Museus, 2011) focus on sense of belonging among Filipinos using qualitative methods (e.g., Museus & Truong, 2009; Samura, 2016). Furthermore, we identified no research that examines Koreans or compares sense of belonging among Koreans and Filipinos in a diverse university.

Although some scholars have started to pay attention to Asian Americans' sense of belonging in higher education settings, such as in predominately White institutions, there are shortcomings in the existing research. First, as mentioned previously, prior research has employed quantitative methods, with the exception of few studies (e.g., Museus & Truong, 2009; Samura, 2016). Notably, Museus and Truong (2009) contend that quantitative methods, specifically interviews, are better at capturing students' lived experience and understandings of those experiences in higher education. For example, a qualitative study showed that perceptions of sense of belonging vary significantly within a racial group (Museus & Truong, 2009; Maramba & Museus, 2011), which suggests that more research needs to explore the variations within Asian Americans. Qualitative methods can get at the nuances of experience associated with subgroup variations. Second, the majority of the existing research on sense of belonging has focused on underrepresented minorities in predominately White institutions (PWIs) and minority-

serving institutions (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007). The present research explores sense of belonging among Filipinos and Koreans in a different university setting, specifically a university with a racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body. On the one hand, experiences may be more positive in such an institution, relative to those in a PWI, due to the student body diversity. On the other hand, experiences may be similar to those in PWIs, if other aspects of the institution (e.g., the faculty) are predominately White, despite the diverse student body. This study will also take it account how a diverse student body (i.e., structural diversity) produces educational benefits. Prior research has found that diverse student body composition, known as structural diversity, is associated with positive student outcomes, such as increased cultural competence and cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions (Chang, 1999, Chang, Astin, and Kim, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2006; Pike, Kuh, and Gonyea, 2007; Gurin, Hurtado, and Gurin, 2002; Saha et al., 2008). Recently, there is an emerging body of research that shows that mentorship and mentorship programs affect students' experiences and sense of belonging in higher education settings (Crisp, 2010; Holloway-Friesen, 2019; Hillier et al., 2019). However, these studies did not focus on mentorship for Asian American college students. Therefore, this present study will explore whether mentorship plays a role in shaping their sense of belonging.

*The need to examine sense of belonging among Koreans and Filipinos.* The current study employs qualitative methods to capture the diversity of experiences among two Asian American subgroups. It contributes to the limited research on how Koreans and Filipinos perceive their sense of belonging in institutions other than PWIs. It

responds to Wells and Horn's (2015) call for research on sense of belonging among Asian American students at institutions with diverse student bodies. It answers the following research questions:

1) To what extent do Korean students feel like they belong at their diverse university?

2) To what extent do Filipino students feel like they belong at their diverse university?

3) What are the major similarities and differences regarding sense of belonging among Korean and Filipino students in a diverse university?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is informed by Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit) (Chang, 1993; Museus, 2014; Museus & Iftikar, 2013), a branch of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). It reflects several tenets of AsianCrit: state theory praxis, re(constructive) history, anti(essentialism), AsianCrit intersectionality, and commitment to social justice. First, this study reflects state theory praxis by creating theory from participants' own words and not testing existing measures of sense of belonging (e.g., Tinto's [1987] model of integration, Hurtado and Carter's [1997] sense of belonging). Second, the present study reflects the tenet of re(constructive) history by employing interviews to shed light on Koreans' and Filipinos' perspectives regarding their sense of belonging at a diverse university. Third, the present study reflects the tenet of anti(essentialism) by examining two Asian American subgroups (Koreans and Filipinos) to reject the myth that Asian Americans are a monolithic group. Fourth, it reflects the

tenet of AsianCrit intersectionality by recruiting a diverse sample within the two subgroups, enabling an examination of how other identities, such as gender, class, sexual orientation, documentation status, or immigration status, may intersect with race and how they relate to the sense of belonging. Fifth, this study reflects the tenet of commitment to social justice by employing ethical research methods and presenting findings to inform campus programming to improve the experiences of Korean and Filipino students in higher education.

## **Methods**

### *Design*

The present study is part of a larger, multi-method research project that examined Asian Americans' experiences in a diverse university. The research team consisted of the primary investigator and two Asian American undergraduate research assistants (RAs). The RAs assisted with the recruitment process and transcription of the interviews. This study was funded by the University of California, Riverside (UCR) Dissertation Research Grant, which provided funds for research-related expenses, including participant incentives. This manuscript presents the results that come from the interview data and focus on similarities and differences in sense of belonging among Korean and Filipino college students.

### *Setting*

I conducted the individual interviews at a large, public university in Southern California, whose student population is diverse in terms of race and socioeconomics. As of Fall 2018, the undergraduate population at this university was 41.5% Latino, 33.8%

Asian, 11% non-Latino White, 5.6% Two or More Races, 3.3% Black, 3.4% international, 1.4% unknown race/ethnicity (University of California, Riverside, 2019). In terms of gender, it was 45.4% male and 54.6% female. In terms of socioeconomic status, the university has a high rate of Pell Grant (i.e., low income) students, and a majority (60%) of the students are the first in their families to attend college (University of California, Riverside, 2019). In terms of faculty demographics, as of Summer 2019, the faculty were 55.7% non-Latino White, 22.2% Asian/Native Hawaiian, 8.1% Unknown, 7.7% Latino, 4.1% Black/African/African American, 2.6% American Indian, and 1.4% two or more races (Infocenter, UC Office of the President, 2019).

This university offers the Asian Pacific Students Programs (APSP), which consists of the Inter-Asian Club Council, Chinese Students Association, Japanese Students Association, Asian Indian Students Association, and Filipino Student Union. Its major goal is to provide an inclusive, culturally responsive community to all students that identify as Asian American, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander. APSP hosts and funds programs, events, and social activities that are dedicated to preserve and promote cultural heritage at the university. In addition to the programs supported formally by the university through APSP, a student-run organization exists that caters to Filipino students. Its major goal is to foster awareness of and promote Pilipino and Pilipino-American culture through educational and social activities. Although the organization targets Filipino students, other students, especially other Asian students, may participate in the organization's activities. The present study will examine whether these organizations play a role in fostering sense of belonging.

### *Sample*

To be eligible to participate, participants had to self-identify as Korean or Filipino, be aged 18 or older, and be enrolled full time as undergraduate students in the university in Fall 2019. This study focused on Koreans and Filipinos for several reasons. First, it aimed to produce meaningful, rich statements about each subgroup and compare and contrast the experiences of Koreans and Filipinos. The Korean subgroup was chosen due to the author's own affiliation as a Korean and the need for more on the Korean experience. Prior research has found that Southeast Asians have different experiences and outcomes than East Asians (Reyes, 2017; Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Ponce et al., 2009). Therefore, the Filipino subgroup (Southeast Asian) is chosen to contrast with the experiences with Koreans (East Asian). Moreover, since the experiences of Filipinos are especially overlooked in research (Maramba & Museus, 2013), more research needs to focus on this national subgroup. Second, the two specific subgroups were chosen because they are among the largest subgroups in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017) and at the diverse university.

We recruited the sample using several methods. First, we recruited by announcing the study via in-person announcements and email through the Asian American Pacific Student Programs (APSP) and four student organizations on campus: the Asian American Christian Fellowship, Korean Student Association Han Noo Ri, Korean American Campus Mission, and KATI. Second, members of the research team recruited members from their own personal networks. Third, we employed snowball sampling, inviting

participants to refer to us potential participants. Sampling ceased when thematic saturation was achieved (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The sample included 10 Koreans and 10 Filipinos. Half were female, and half were male. Regarding sexual orientation, 16 individuals identified as heterosexual, 2 individuals as asexual, 1 identified as gay/lesbian, and 1 individual identified as pansexual.

#### *Data Collection*

The author conducted the in-person, in-depth interviews in Summer 2019 and Fall 2019. Respondents were interviewed in a private, reserved room in a library on campus. The interviews lasted 60-90 minutes, focused the individuals' experience of a sense of belonging (See interview protocol in Appendix C), and were audio recorded for transcription. Respondents completed a demographic survey prior to the interview (see Appendix A).

#### *Analysis and reporting*

Analysis included axial and line-by-line coding, which are systematic methods in qualitative studies (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Several rounds of analyses were conducted, and several sets of codes were produced according to what the respondents highlighted in the interviews and based on prior research (Ryan & Bernard, 2005). First, I analyzed for themes in the sample as a whole. Then, I analyzed for subgroup variation – first in terms of Filipino versus Korean, and second, in terms of other sociodemographic statuses, such as gender and sexual orientation. However, there were no major differences for gender and sexual orientation. Therefore, the results in this manuscript focuses on the themes

found in the sample as a whole and in the national subgroups. The order of analysis included: 1) to what extent did they feel a sense of belonging, 2) how were the subgroups were similar to each other, and 3) how were they were different from each other. Respondents were ensured confidentiality, so names and identifying markers are removed in this report. The names used in this report are the pseudonyms chosen by the participants.

### *Positionality*

I am a researcher who identifies as female, Asian American, Korean, graduate student at a diverse university. While I am an insider of the sample to some extent, I am also an outsider in some regards. Specifically, I am an outsider on the basis of other genders, members of Filipinos, undergraduates, and/or people who identify as LGBTQA. To present a rich, lived experience, I have reflected on my positionality as a researcher with the goal of building rapport with the respondents. Due to my identity as Korean, I recognize that there could be potential biases that are present. In an effort to mitigate potential biases, I employed member checks (Given, 2008) at the end of each interview.

### **Results**

There were similarities and differences between Koreans and Filipinos in their perceptions of the factors that relate to sense of belonging in a diverse university. Three major similarities included 1) the role of concentration of Asian Americans in classes, 2) the need for more Asian American faculty and perspective in the course materials, and 3) the need for more mentorship from Asian American faculty. Two major differences

between Koreans and Filipinos included 1) issues related to skin tone, and 2) the role of ethnic identity.

*Koreans' sense of belonging at a diverse university.* The Korean students reported a strong sense of belonging. All ten participants reported that they belonged at their diverse university. For instance, John (Korean, male) stated:

“I would say that I strongly belong here, such as with my professors, teachers, peers.... When it comes to class, race has no place there. We are all students and treated equally.... I never really felt like I was different from other people or excluded because I am Korean American.”

Similarly, Claire (Korean, female) reported a strong sense of belonging and attributed it to her affiliation with the university's Asian Pacific Student Programs (APSP).

“I would say I belong here. I never had a class or had an experience where I felt excluded at our university, at least racially. I think everyone belongs here equally. This school is known for its inclusive programs like APSP.... I felt like I belonged here more when I joined APSP and found an Asian American mentor during my first year.... He guided me in the right path by looking over my coursework and provided advice too.”

The narratives above reveal that Koreans report having a strong sense of belonging, and in part, this is due to the existence of an official university resource dedicated to Asian American students, even though it is a pan-ethnic organization.

*Filipinos' sense of belonging at their diverse university.* Nine out of 10 Filipino participants reported a strong sense of belonging at the university. For example, Francisco (Filipino, male) stated:

“I belong here at my university.... I definitely think it’s important to belong because it gives you peace.... No microaggressions, and I don’t have to worry about defending who I am.... Before coming to this school, my experiences were so different. When I lived on the East Coast, I was definitely reminded that I was Filipino throughout my elementary to high school.... Honestly, they always just said, ‘What’s up Asian kid’ or ‘Hey, do my homework because you are good at math....’ So, it’s nice that there’s a lot of people that look like you here. I’ve never had a huge Filipino community before coming here.... The Filipino organization is also huge here on campus.”

Like Francisco, Tati (Filipino, female) expressed a strong sense of belonging:

“I do belong here and feel supported. I’m comfortable. I don’t wake up dreading going to school because I have my Filipino friends to rely on. Belonging here is very important because in high school I just kind of put up with it. It wasn’t the best experience because no one really looked like me and there were no Filipinos back in my high school.... So, joining the Filipino organization was big and helped to belong here more.... I’m very thankful for that.”

As with Koreans, the nine Filipino participants who reported a great sense of belonging attributed it, at least in part, to the existence of an ethnic-subgroup specific resource on campus. Also notable in these narratives was the contrast that the participants made

between their current setting (the university) and other settings that they have experienced. They experienced the current setting to be more inclusive of Asians generally and Filipinos specifically, and this was, in part, due to the greater concentration of Asians and Filipinos in the setting.

One Filipino participant reported that she did not feel a sense of belonging. Fer (Filipino, female), who is an immigrant with legal status, explained:

“I would say I don’t belong here much. I think Filipino Americans belong here but not Filipino, underserved immigrants. I think we need more representation.... I’ve experienced microaggressions many times. For example, when I introduce my name with a Filipino accent, with my Filipino last name, then Professors say my name with an American accent.... No, that’s not my name and it’s exhausting to keep correcting them.... I feel like I have to internalize that, people here will pronounce your name not way the way it is pronounced the way it is at home.”

Fer’s narrative reveals that not all Filipinos experience a strong sense of belonging. Filipino immigrants, in particular, may feel a weaker sense of belonging.

*Similarities between Korean and Filipino students.* The Korean and Filipino students both expressed that the high concentration of Asian Americans in their classes, specifically those in their academic major, positively influenced their sense of belonging. For example, Sarah (Korean, female) shared:

“First, I wanted to be a Psych major because I love learning how the mind works and about people’s behaviors.... But I think it fell through quickly because I was one the few Asian Americans in the class. I didn’t really feel comfortable....

When I was in the humanities, I feel like there weren't as many Asian Americans.... I think it was definitely harder for me to make friends and make social groups. And so yeah, I don't really recall at making that many friends when I was a Psych major. Then, I wanted to pursue Biology and go into a STEM field, realized that there's more Asian American students. It felt good that I was able to make good friends in those classes, and the majority of them being Asian helped because we come from similar backgrounds and cultures.”

Camille (Filipino, Female) provides a similar view but also shares other ways of belonging:

“I think in majors like Sociology, I don't see a lot of Asian Americans, but I still belong.... I would agree that I would feel more belonging or welcomed if there were more Asian Americans in my class.... But because there is one professor that is Filipino and in Soc classes, I'm assigned Asian American readings and perspectives, it helps me to belong in my major and in the class.”

The narratives above reveal that the perception regarding pan-ethnic Asian American representation, whether through students in courses, the faculty of the courses, and/or the course material, plays a role in fostering a sense of belonging. When participants take courses in fields that are perceived to have a high concentration of Asian American students, the presence in those courses of co-ethnics, including from Asian American subgroups other than their own, contributes to a sense of belonging. However, even participants who take courses in fields that are perceived to have a low

concentration of Asian American students can feel a sense of belonging if other aspects of the course provide Asian American representation.

Another similarity among the Korean and Filipino narratives was that they expressed the need for more mentorship from Asian American faculty. For example, Claire (Korean, female) expressed:

“Even though I belong here, I think it would be even greater if I could have an Asian American faculty that can mentor and support me.... Someone that can relate to the experiences and challenges that Asian Americans face with the pressures from family, culture.... Like feeling safe that I can share these things. I don’t have that at the moment.”

Nicco (Filipino, male) discussed the need for support from Asian American faculty:

“I had an Asian staff as a mentor from Asian American Pacific Student Organization. He helped a lot with my classes to see what major I would decide on and with other academic support, but I only had him for my first year.... It’s been tough on my own trying to figure it all out after first year. So, I think it would be helpful if we had an Asian American faculty that truly cared and mentored us.... It doesn’t have to be Filipino, but as long as it is Asian American, one that we can culturally identify with. That would make a huge difference because I think we really lack that in this university.”

The narrative above reveals that even though all but one participant expressed a strong sense of belonging, they perceived that mentorship from Asian American faculty would enhance their sense of belonging. The narratives do not make clear, however, the

perceived causes of the need for more mentorship. While this university has a diverse student population, its faculty population does not match the student population in terms of Asian American representation; the proportion of Asian American faculty is smaller than the proportion of Asian American students. Therefore, it may be that there are not enough Asian American faculty to meet the mentoring needs of the Asian American students.

*Differences between Korean and Filipino students.* Two major differences between Koreans and Filipinos were 1) issues related to skin tone and 2) the role of ethnic identity. Filipinos expressed issues related to skin tone, especially challenges associated with darker skin tone, and reported a strong ethnic identity as Filipino-Americans. In contrast to Filipinos, no one in the Korean sample reported issues with skin tone. The Korean sample also reported a weak Korean ethnic identity and regarded themselves more as “Americans.”

All the Filipino participants identified as Filipino or Filipino American and expressed a strong Filipino ethnic identity. Nine of the ten Filipinos in the sample, eight of whom were female, reported that skin tone used to be a major source of stress for them prior to coming to the university. However, their involvement in a Filipino student organization, strengthened their ethnic identity and reduced their negative perceptions of skin tone. For instance, Cris (Filipino, female) explained:

“Skin tone is a huge controversy in Filipino community.... Before coming to this school, I had pressures to whiten my skin, but if you don’t your family says to you, ‘Oh, why are you so dark?’ I know that there’s that Eurocentric pressure for

all Asian Americans, but I think it's especially for Filipinos because having lighter skin is associated with wealth and beauty, especially for girls.... Girls are taught and pressured to use papaya soap, which is really bad for you.... But my experience here has been very different. I found that there's so many Filipino students who looked like me, and because of the Filipino organization, I've learned to be proud of my beautiful dark skin and embrace my heritage, which helped me to belong."

Similarly, Tati (Filipino, female) stated:

"Before coming here, I felt like I had to hide who I was and my ethnicity as Filipino. But after coming to this school and joining the Filipino organization, it's been super empowering. To talk about our history and the accomplishments we have done as Filipinos... To not whiten your skin and to be proud of your brown skin."

The issue with skin tone was also expressed by male Filipinos, even though they reported less personal experience of skin-tone discrimination than the female participants did.

Nicco (Filipino, male) shared:

"I haven't personally experienced the pressure to whiten my skin because I'm on the lighter side than other Filipinos. So I know I'm privileged in that way. I learned about this privilege when I joined the Filipino organization, and in the general meetings we talked about issues with skin tone, bleaching and having discussion around how every skin tone is beautiful and that we need to stop also within our own community to tell negative things about our dark skin.... I think

it's hard because there are still old generations, and they believe that having lighter skin is more beautiful, like there's a beauty standard for that.... But after graduating, I do worry about my skin tone because I can't control what the work environment would look like and probably, we will not be represented. So that definitely is something I worry about.... I think my experience at this school is special. I know it's not going to be like this everywhere after I graduate."

The narratives demonstrate how participants believe that the in-group support from the Filipino organization enabled them to avoid and/or better manage intra-group and inter-group skin-tone discrimination.

Regarding ethnic identity, Filipinos reported a strong ethnic identity. Nine out of ten participants identified as "Filipino-American." However, they reported having a strong Filipino identity due to being involved in the Filipino organization. For instance, Francisco (Filipino, male) shared:

"Joining the Filipino organization helped me to be proud of my Filipino heritage and learn about the history that my parents never really shared with me growing up."

Similarly, Francisco (Filipino, male) said:

"[In the Filipino organization], we share our frustration about how some of us never learned about Tagalog or Filipino history from our parents or even the classes at this university. So being in the Filipino organization is great. I've never learned these opportunities to learn about our heritage before; so it definitely helped me have a stronger Filipino identity and root."

The narratives reveal how the Filipino organization operates to interrupt the colonial legacy of internalized oppression and foster a sense of ethnic pride. In turn, it contributes to Filipinos' sense of belonging.

None of the Korean sample identified issues with skin tone. However, they talked about how their ethnic identity shaped their university experiences. All the Korean participants identified as Korean American but expressed that they were more "Americanized" than "Korean." For example, Quince (Korean, male) stated:

"I identify as Korean-American. I haven't considered myself full Korean.... I think I'm one of those people where you call it, like white-washed Asians. I mean my parent's background is very Korean. I don't think they really enforced Korean culture in my life.... My Korean identity didn't become stronger when I came here. Instead, I've found more Korean American friends that are like me.... Belonging at this school, I never thought of it in terms of race. I think of myself as just a student here with everyone with equal chances and opportunities.... Everyone is treated the same."

Similarly, John (Korean, male) stated:

"I identify myself as an American, Asian American, but not really just Korean. I was born in the U.S. and my first language is English.... I would say my Korean American identity became stronger, not really my Korean identity because I was able to make more Korean American friends. I don't really have many friends that immigrated from Korea.... For sense of belonging, I belong like how every other student belongs here How could a diverse school like this school get away with

treating students unequally or with discrimination, right? I've never heard of students getting different treatment because of their race. So yes, this school treats everyone equally.”

The narratives above show that, relative to Filipinos, Koreans endorsed a weaker ethnic identity, identifying more with the American side of their Korean American heritage. Also, in contrast with Filipinos, ethnic identity played less of a role in their sense of belonging. Koreans found the presence pan-ethnic organizations and the student body ethnic diversity to be indicative of inclusion which, in turn, promoted a sense of belonging among them. Lastly, their narratives reflected a discourse of colorblindness.

### **Conclusion**

In contrast to prior studies that focused on single Asian American subgroups, such as Filipino college students (Maramba & Museus, 2011, 2012; Museus 2011; Maramba & Bonus, 2013; Nadal, 2013, Chan, 2017), this study examined subgroup variation among Asian Americans, specifically focusing on sense of belonging among two Asian subgroups: Koreans and Filipinos in the context of a diverse university. To examine subgroup variation among Asian Americans, this qualitative study applied AsianCrit (Chang, 1993; Museus, 2014; Museus & Iftikar, 2013). The results were that all but one participant reported having a strong sense of belonging. Three similarities and two differences between Koreans and Filipinos regarding sense of belonging were found. This study did not find within-group differences (i.e., gender, sexual orientation) other than by national subgroup. This result is probably due to the fact that the sample defined sense of

their belonging primarily in terms of their ethnicity. Gender and sexual orientation were not the analytical focus.

Four out of the 20 participants identified as immigrants. This study found that one immigrant reported to have a weak sense of belonging, while the three other immigrants reported a strong sense of belonging. Rather than immigrant status playing a role in shaping their sense of belonging, perhaps accent may play a role in shaping how they are treated and, in turn, their sense of belonging. Future research should further explore how other factors, such as accent, may play a role in sense of belonging.

*Lesson learned about sense of belonging among Korean and Filipinos.* All but one participant reported having a strong sense of belonging and attributed that belonging to the existence of Asian-specific programs and organizations at the university. This finding is consistent with prior research that demonstrates how institutional factors relate to sense of belonging among students of color (Ancis, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000; Cheng, 2004; Gonzalez, 2003; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Quayle, 2007; Museus, Nichols & Lambert, 2008; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Museus, 2008a; Museus, 2008b; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Wells & Horn, 2015). However, the finding about the positive benefits of ethnic-specific campus resources, even for Asian subgroups not specifically targeted by them, is a new finding. The Koreans in the sample did not have access to a Korean organization on campus but expressed that the pan-ethnic Asian American programs positively contributed to their sense of belonging. This finding lends support for the need to continue to invest in these programs, especially when an ethnic-subgroup-specific organization is not available.

*Lessons learned about similarities between Korean and Filipino students.* Both groups reported that a strong presence of Asian Americans in the classroom fosters a sense of belonging in the classroom. While other studies documented the benefits of student body diversity for promoting cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions (Chang, 1999, Chang, Astin, and Kim, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2006; Pike, Kuh, and Gonyea, 2007; Gubrin, Hurtado, and Gurin, 2002; Saha, Guiton, Wimmers, and Wilkerson, 2008), this study documented the benefits of having Asian Americans in students' classes. Camille shared other ways that Asian American college students can feel a sense of belonging. She suggested that even in the case that there are few Asian American peers in the classroom, Asian American representation among the faculty and course materials could cultivate a sense of belonging in the classroom. This finding has implications for other types of higher education institutions. Perhaps other institutions, such as those of PWIs, with predominately White or non-Asian student bodies can foster Asian American students' sense of belonging by investing in the representation of Asian Americans among the faculty and course materials.

Both Koreans and Filipinos in the sample expressed a desire for more mentorship specifically by Asian American faculty. This finding contributes to the recent, emerging research that shows the significant impact of mentorship on students (Crisp, 2010; Holloway-Friesen, 2019; Hillier et al., 2019). While the findings suggest that mentorship can shape a sense of belonging, it is not clear if the participants are suggesting that there is not enough Asian American faculty available on campus to provide mentorship (i.e., mentorship from within their subgroup or within the broader ethnic group) or whether

there is enough Asian American faculty on campus. Given this uncertainty, future research should investigate the role that Asian American faculty mentorship can have on sense of belonging among Korean and Filipino students.

*Lessons learned about differences between Korean and Filipino students.* The finding of differences between Koreans and Filipinos supports the idea that we should study ethnic subgroups and account for within-group diversity in efforts to promote sense of belonging among students. Consistent with prior research on skin tone among Filipinos (David 2008; Kiang & Takeuchi, 2009; Ryabov, 2016), the narratives revealed that Filipinos face challenges associated with darker skin tone within their ethnic community and in the university and society more broadly. Findings indicated that participants manage these challenges with the support of an ethnic-subgroup-specific organization, thus avoiding internalization of the negative perceptions associated with darker skin tone (David 2008; Kiang & Takeuchi, 2009; Ryabov, 2016). Consistent with prior research (Rondilla, Spickard, & Spickard, 2007), the Korean sample did not report issues with skin tone.

Regarding ethnic identity, Filipinos reported a strong ethnic identity, which they perceived to be fostered by the Filipino-specific student organization, the Filipino organization. A new finding is that this ethnic-subgroup-specific organization was perceived to challenge a colonial mentality. Perhaps this is why the Filipino organization is so strongly associated with a strong sense of belonging among Filipinos. It is unclear the extent to which APSP, the pan-ethnic program, challenged a colonial mentality. To better interpret these findings, future research can examine whether student organization

challenges the colonial mentality as an expressed organizational goal and what determines whether an organization or program will pursue that goal. Furthermore, given the positive benefits associated with decolonization, these findings suggest that incorporating a decolonization framework in college courses, especially those not explicitly about Asian Americans, may contribute to cultivating a stronger ethnic identity among Koreans, and, in turn, a greater sense of belonging. Future research can explore this possibility.

Regarding the role of ethnic identity (i.e., the extent to which the student identified with their ethnic identity), the findings, consistent with prior research (e.g., Burke, 2017), suggest that colorblind discourse continues to be pervasive. A new finding is that colorblindness may be stronger among Koreans than Filipinos. Perhaps the Korean sample emphasized their “Americanness” and adopted colorblind discourse (Burke, 2017; Tuan, 1999) because Koreans are regarded as the “Honorary Whites” in the tri-racial system according to Bonilla-Silva (2004). On the other hand, perhaps their ethnic identity was not salient due to the lack of an ethnic student organization catering to Korean Americans. Future research should further explore how ethnic identity and colorblind ideology shape students’ sense of belonging.

*Implications for practice.* The findings in this study have implications for practice, specifically for ethnic student organizations and ethnic university programs. To promote a sense of belonging on campus and strengthen ethnic identity, these organizations and programs should consider adopting a decolonial framework to educate Asian Americans about the historical legacies that affect their lived experiences. This

approach could raise awareness of and educate students about the history of and challenges faced by Asian Americans, and it could strengthen community among Asian American college students, thereby promoting pan-ethnicity.

*Limitations and future research.* This study is limited in that it was cross sectional and examined sense of belonging in one large public, diverse university. Future research could explore how sense of belonging changes over time through a longitudinal approach. We can also further focus on the extent to which the presence or absence of ethnic student organizations play a role in the salience of ethnic identity, and how that shapes students' sense of belonging. This study is also limited in that it lacks the data regarding how many participants were student organization members. Future research should further explore how active involvement and membership in student organizations play a role in fostering a sense of belonging in their university. Given the finding that one immigrant in this study reported a low sense of belonging, future research can compare sense of belonging among immigrants compared to nonimmigrants and further explore how and why immigrants have a lower sense of belonging and how higher education institutions can act to cultivate a sense of belonging in this group.

## References

- An, S. (2016). Asian Americans in American history: An AsianCrit perspective on Asian American inclusion in state US history curriculum standards. *Theory & Research in Social Education, 44*(2), 244-276.
- Anderman, E. M. (2002). School effects on psychological outcomes during adolescence. *Journal of educational psychology, 94*(4), 795.
- API. (2018). *Census data & API identities*. Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence. Retrieved Feb 28, 2019 (<https://www.api-gbv.org/resources/census-data-api-identities/>).
- Bonus, R. (2000). *Locating Filipino Americans: Ethnicity and the Cultural Politics of Space*. Temple University Press.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2004). From bi-racial to tri-racial: Towards a new system of racial stratification in the USA. *Ethnic and racial studies, 27*(6), 931-950.
- Burke, M. A. (2017). Colorblind racism: Identities, ideologies, and shifting subjectivities. *Sociological Perspectives, 60*(5), 857-865.
- Chang, M. J. (1999). Does racial diversity matter?: The educational impact of a racially diverse undergraduate population. *Journal of College Student Development*.
- Chang, M. J., Astin, A. W., & Kim, D. (2004). Cross-racial interaction among undergraduates: Some consequences, causes, and patterns. *Research in Higher Education, 45*(5), 529-553.
- Chang, R. S. (1993). Toward an Asian American legal scholarship: Critical race theory, poststructuralism, and narrative space. *California Law Review, 19*, 1243-1323.
- Chou, R. S., & Feagin, J. R. (2015). *Myth of the model minority: Asian Americans facing racism*. Routledge.
- Chou, R., Lee, K., & Ho, S. (2015). Love Is (Color) blind: Asian Americans and White Institutional Space at the Elite University. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, 1*(2), 302-316.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (pp. 181-223). Thousand Oaks.
- Crisp, G. (2010). The impact of mentoring on the success of community college students. *The Review of Higher Education, 34*(1), 39-60.

- David, E. J. R. (2013). *Brown skin, white minds: Filipino/American postcolonial psychology*. IAP.
- David, E. J. R. (2010). Testing the validity of the colonial mentality implicit association test and the interactive effects of covert and overt colonial mentality on Filipino American mental health. *Asian American Journal of Psychology, 1*(1), 31.
- David, E. J. R. (2008). A colonial mentality model of depression for Filipino Americans. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 14*(2), 118.
- David, E. J. R., & Okazaki, S. (2006). The Colonial Mentality Scale (CMS) for Filipino Americans: Scale construction and psychological implications. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 53*(2), 241.
- David, E. J. R., & Nadal, K. L. (2013). The colonial context of Filipino American immigrants' psychological experiences. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 19*(3), 298.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (Vol. 20). NYU Press.
- Freeman, T. M., Anderman, L. H., & Jensen, J. M. (2007). Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 75*(3), 203-220.
- Given, L. M. (2008). *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (Vols. 1 -0). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Gurin, P., Dey, E., Hurtado, S., & Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes. *Harvard educational review, 72*(3), 330-367.
- Halagao, P. E. (2010). Liberating Filipino Americans through decolonizing curriculum. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 13*(4), 495-512.
- Hausmann, L. R. M., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among African American and White first-year college students. *Research in Higher Education, 48*(7), 803-839.
- Hillier, A., Goldstein, J., Tornatore, L., Byrne, E., & Johnson, H. M. (2019). Outcomes of a peer mentoring program for university students with disabilities. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 27*(5), 487-508.

- Holloway-Friesen, H. (2019). The role of mentoring on Hispanic graduate students' sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 1538192718823716.
- Hunter, M. (2007). The persistent problem of colorism: Skin tone, status, and inequality. *Sociology compass*, 1(1), 237-254.
- Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of education*, 324-345.
- Huynh, Q. L., Devos, T., & Smalarz, L. (2011). Perpetual foreigner in one's own land: Potential implications for identity and psychological adjustment. *Journal of social and clinical psychology*, 30(2), 133-162.
- Huynh, V. W. (2012). Ethnic microaggressions and the depressive and somatic symptoms of Latino and Asian American adolescents. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 41(7), 831-846.
- Infocenter, UC Office of the President, 2019. Retrieved February 1, 2020. (<https://diversity.ucr.edu/staff-diversity-statistics>).
- Johnson, D. R. (2012). Campus racial climate perceptions and overall sense of belonging among racially diverse women in STEM majors. *Journal of College Student Development*, 53(2), 336-346.
- Kiang, L., & Takeuchi, D. T. (2009). Phenotypic bias and ethnic identity in Filipino Americans. *Social Science Quarterly*, 90(2), 428-445.
- Kim, S. Y., Wang, Y., Deng, S., Alvarez, R., & Li, J. (2011). Accent, perpetual foreigner stereotype, and perceived discrimination as indirect links between English proficiency and depressive symptoms in Chinese American adolescents. *Developmental Psychology*, 47(1), 289.
- Le Espiritu, Y. (1996). Colonial oppression, labor importation, and group formation: Filipinos in the United States. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 19(1), 29-48.
- Lee, S. J. (2015). *Unraveling the "model minority" stereotype: Listening to Asian American youth*. Teachers College Press.
- Lee, S. J. (2012). The Model Minority and the Perpetual Foreigner: Stereotypes of Asian Americans. In *Asian American Psychology* (pp. 119-134). Psychology Press.

- Lee, S. J., Park, E., & Wong, J. H. S. (2017). Racialization, schooling, and becoming American: Asian American experiences. *Educational Studies, 53*(5), 492-510.
- Lopez, Irene R., and Angela Neal-Barnett. 2004 “‘I Feel Pretty, Oh So Pretty.’ Phenotype, Ethnic Identity, and Adjustment in Puerto Rican Women.” Poster presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association. Honolulu, HI.
- Maramba, D. C., & Bonus, R. (Eds.). (2012). *The 'Other' Students: Filipino Americans, Education, and Power*. IAP.
- Maramba, D. C., & Palmer, R. T. (2014). The impact of cultural validation on the college experiences of Southeast Asian American students. *Journal of College Student Development, 55*(6), 515-530.
- Maramba, D. C., & Museus, S. D. (2013). Examining the effects of campus climate, ethnic group cohesion, and cross-cultural interaction on Filipino American students' sense of belonging in college. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 14*(4), 495-522.
- Maramba, D. C., & Museus, S. D. (2011). The utility of using mixed-methods and intersectionality approaches in conducting research on Filipino American students' experiences with the campus climate and on sense of belonging. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 2011*(151), 93-101.
- Museus, S. D. (2014). *Asian American students in higher education*. Routledge.
- Museus, S. D. (2013). Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders: A national portrait of growth, diversity, and inequality. In S. D. Museus, D. C. Maramba, & R. T. Tera-nishi (Eds.), *The misrepresented minority: New insights on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and their implications for higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Museus, S. D. (2011). An introductory mixed-methods intersectionality analysis of college access and equity: An examination of first-generation Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 2011*(151), 63-75.
- Museus, S. D., & Park, J. J. (2015). The continuing significance of racism in the lives of Asian American college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 56*(6), 551-569.
- Museus, S. D. (2014). *Asian American students in higher education*. Routledge.

- Museus, S. D., & Kiang, P. N. (2009). Deconstructing the model minority myth and how it contributes to the invisible minority reality in higher education research. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2009(142), 5-15.
- Museus, S. D., & Iftikar, J. (2013). An Asian critical theory (AsianCrit) framework. *Asian American students in higher education*, 18-29.
- Museus, S. D., & Maramba, D. C. (2011). The impact of culture on Filipino American students' sense of belonging. *The Review of Higher Education*, 34(2), 231-258.
- Museus, S. D., & Truong, K. A. (2009). Disaggregating qualitative data from Asian American college students in campus racial climate research and assessment. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2009(142), 17-26.
- O'Keeffe, P. (2013). A sense of belonging: Improving student retention. *College Student Journal*, 47(4), 605-613.
- Pike, G. R., & Kuh, G. D. (2006). Relationships among structural diversity, informal peer interactions and perceptions of the campus environment. *The Review of Higher Education*, 29(4), 425-450.
- Pike, G. R., Kuh, G. D., & Gonyea, R. M. (2007). Evaluating the rationale for affirmative action in college admissions: Direct and indirect relationships between campus diversity and gains in understanding diverse groups. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(2), 166-182.
- Ponce, N. A., Tseng, W., Ong, P., Shek, Y. L., Ortiz, S., & Gatchell, M. (2009). The state of Asian American, native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander health in California report.
- Reyes, A. (2017). *Language, identity, and stereotype among Southeast Asian American youth: The other Asian*. Routledge.
- Rondilla, J. L., Spickard, P. R., & Spickard, P. (2007). *Is lighter better?: Skin-tone discrimination among Asian Americans*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ryabov, I. (2016). Educational outcomes of Asian and Hispanic Americans: The significance of skin color. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 44, 1-9.
- Ryan, G. Y., & H. Bernard, R. 2005. Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1), 85-109.

- Saha, S., Guiton, G., Wimmers, P. F., & Wilkerson, L. (2008). Student body racial and ethnic composition and diversity-related outcomes in US medical schools. *Jama*, *300*(10), 1135-1145.
- Samura, M. (2016). Remaking Selves, Repositioning Selves, or Remaking Space: An Examination of Asian American College Students' Processes of "Belonging". *Journal of College Student Development*, *57*(2), 135-150.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Telzer, E. H., & Vazquez Garcia, H. A. (2009). Skin color and self-perceptions of immigrant and US-born Latinas: The moderating role of racial socialization and ethnic identity. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, *31*(3), 357-374.
- Thomas, L., Herbert, J., & Teras, M. (2014). A sense of belonging to enhance participation, success and retention in online programs.
- Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. University of Chicago Press, 5801 S. Ellis Avenue, Chicago, IL 60637.
- University of California, Riverside. N.d. "Facts." Retrieved March 9, 2019. (<https://www.ucr.edu/about/facts.html>).
- U.S. Census Bureau (2017). *Asian alone or in any combination by selected groups. American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2018). Undergraduate Enrollment. Retrieved Feb 8, 2019 ([https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cha.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cha.asp)).
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2017). Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2018. Retrieved Feb 10, 2019. (<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019038.pdf>).
- Wells, A. V., & Horn, C. (2015). The Asian American college experience at a diverse institution: Campus climate as a predictor of sense of belonging. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, *52*(2), 149-163.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

This study sought to qualitatively examine how a diverse group of Asian American students' experience and explain their sense of the belonging at a university with a racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body. Using focus groups and individual interviews, I explored these three research questions:

1) To what extent do Asian American students in a university with a racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body feel a sense of belonging?

2) What institutional and individual factors do Asian American college students believe affect their sense of belonging at their diverse university?

3) What are the similarities and differences regarding sense of belonging among Korean and Filipino students at their diverse university?

This chapter presents a discussion of the lessons learned from the research and my personal reflections on the experience of conducting this study. It also presents a discussion of the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

### **Lessons Learned**

This study contributed to the sociology and higher education literatures. It used AsianCrit (Chang, 1993; Museus, 2014; Museus & Iftikar, 2013) as the theoretical framework which had heretofore not been used to understand Asian Americans' university experiences. The study also broke new ground by examining sense of belonging in a diverse university. Moreover, by moving away from the traditional approaches used by higher education scholars, such as those of surveys, this study made methodological contributions by employing focus group and individual interviews to

produce qualitative data that enabled us to learn about the complex, nuanced understandings of sense of belonging among a diverse group of Asian American college students and the similarities and differences found for Korean and Filipino students. Consistent with prior research (Okotmoto, 2014), this study shows the continuing significance of pan-ethnicity and importance of diversity among Asian Americans as it relates to sense of belonging. Furthermore, this study shows that narratives play a role in theory building under the framework of AsianCrit.

### **Overall Empirical Findings**

This study found that nearly all Asian American students in the sample reported having a strong sense of belonging at their diverse university. Specifically, the composition of Asian American undergraduate students at the university played a significant role in shaping the sense of belonging. There were four major findings. First, the ways in which the participants defined sense of belonging was related to their sense of belonging. Second, participants' interpretation of institutionally provided resources (i.e., an office that provides ethnic programming) and student-initiated ethnic organizations as communicating the institution's welcoming of Asian American students was positively related to their sense of belonging. Third, participants associated their active engagement in ethnic campus programming and organizations with a greater sense of belonging. Fourth, understandings of the factors affecting sense of belonging differed for Korean students and Filipino students, despite a large majority of both groups reporting a strong sense of belonging.

### **Implications for Theory and Methods**

*Implications for Theory.* Prior literature has focused on predominately White institutions (PWIs) and minority serving institutions (MSIs), including HSIs, and in the case of literature on HSIs, it largely focuses on the experiences of Hispanic students. Little is known about the students other than Hispanics at HSIs.

Despite the fact that the university in this study is an HSI, the sample in my study did not frame their sense of belonging as it relates to a HSI. In other words, the sample did not make sense of their belonging in the context of HSI to be more inclusive or exclusive (i.e., whether attending a HSI as an Asian American made their sense of belonging more positive/negative). What was more salient was the Asian context - that is, the importance of the high percentage of Asian Americans at their diversity. It is important to note that Asian Americans are the second largest group (33.8%) after Latinos (41.5%) at this university. The findings in this study suggest that Asian American college students will likely belonging in institutions that have high percentages of Asian Americans (e.g., Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions [AANAPISIs]), and Asian American students who attend a HSIs, one with a diverse student body with a high percentage of Asian American college students, could still feel a sense of belonging at their university. However, because it did not specifically focus on their experiences as it relates to attending a HSI, future research could further explore how attending a HSI shapes their sense of belonging and potentially confirm whether it makes a difference.

*Implications for Methods.* The use of multiple methods in the study is consistent with the tenet of *re(constructive) history*, which emphasizes the use of narratives to

represent the diverse voices of Asian Americans (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). The narratives demonstrated the significance of how definitions shape sense of belonging. The sample in this study defined sense of belonging especially in terms of socio-cultural belonging with other Asian American students. Academic and institutional support was reported to be secondary. This finding supports the idea that there are benefits from understanding sense of belonging from participants' words, by focusing on their own definitions, rather than testing traditional measures of belonging used in higher education (e.g., Tinto's model of integration [1987], Hurtado and Carter's sense of belonging [1997]). Therefore, this study added depth to our current understanding of sense of belonging. These findings have implications for future research. Relying on pre-existing measures of sense of belonging may limit our understanding of sense of belonging because it has the possibility to mask different types of belonging (e.g., social belonging, academic support, and institutional support). Future research should continue to elicit and develop theory from the participants' words by employing qualitative methods, such as that of focus group and interviews. While using multiple definitions of sense of belonging may pose a challenge for developing a coherent discourse in research on sense of belonging, I argue that we need to give Asian Americans the opportunity to talk about and make sense of their experiences. This argument is consistent with the tenet of *state theory praxis*, which highlights the importance of how narratives can inform theory and practice (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). The implications for practice are further elaborated in the next section. Notably, this study lends support for AsianCrit as the appropriate theoretical framework

that enables researchers to make sense of the diverse experiences of Asian Americans in contemporary society, particularly regarding sense of belonging in a diverse university.

Despite the strengths in AsianCrit, one limitation is that it does not address which specific method should be employed. This study showed that employing multiple methods was helpful in capturing diverse perspectives within groups and subgroups. This study found similarities and differences regarding sense of belonging among the Korean and Filipino sample. This suggests that while there are benefits in capturing a diverse perspective of Asian Americans regarding their sense of belonging (see Chapters 3 and 4), focusing on either one Asian subgroup or exploring subgroup variation among Asian Americans could yield different results (for a detailed look refer to Chapter 5 of the dissertation). The different results regarding sense of belonging particularly among Korean and Filipino contribute to the tenet of *anti(essentialism)* and tenet of *transactional context*. These nuanced results regarding sense of belonging for Asian subgroups contribute to the debate on the methodological approach for studying Asian Americans (Museus & Truong, 2009; Chou & Feagin, 2015). This research argues that we should study sense of belonging by focusing on subgroups and/or employ subgroup variation, so that we do not mask meaningful differences. Most of all, the nuanced findings found in this study further supports the idea that Asian Americans are not a monolithic group and should not be treated as one in research.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings in this research have implications for practice in higher education settings. This study found that despite reporting a strong sense of social belonging, many

participants reported a need for institutional changes to strengthen their sense of belonging in terms of academic and institutional support. Informed by this study, people involved in campus programming and policy can identify ways in which academic and institutional support can be increased to better support Asian American college students.

To promote a stronger sense of belonging among Asian American students, institutions need to continue investing and perhaps increase their investment in ethnic programs and student organizations, whether they are pan-ethnic or ethnic-subgroup-specific. They can encourage Asian American faculty and staff (i.e., who have expertise on Asian Americans) to be actively involved in these programs, thereby increasing perceived support. They can also hire more Asian American faculty and provide more opportunities in the curriculum for Asian Americans to learn about their history and contemporary experiences. Finally, universities can examine ways to better support groups of students with intersectional identities, such as Asian American LGBTQ, immigrant, and international students.

### **Reflections on the Research Process**

I learned several lessons about the research process. Despite having an ambitious timeline, I completed my dissertation due to the strong support of my dissertation chair, committee members, and research assistants. I employed several methods to successfully finish my dissertation. First, my dissertation chair and I worked very closely together. Specifically, we met at least once a month to discuss the research, created a feasible timeline to complete the dissertation, divided the dissertation into manageable pieces, and revised each chapter multiple times.

Second, I met and communicated with my committee members frequently to gather feedback and learn from their expertise. Dr. Reyes supported me by identifying sociological literature that I could incorporate into my dissertation which helped me to better articulate the contributions of my study. Dr. Aguirre supported me by identifying higher education literature which helped me better make sense of the data.

Third, I had a strong research team. My research assistants and I met weekly. We communicated through texts and phone calls and had meals together to discuss ideas and strategies on how to recruit potential participants. I knew that recruiting participants in Summer 2019 would be difficult, considering that many students go home during the break. Therefore, we had to be thoughtful about how to reach out and encourage participation in a limited period of time. My research assistants and I had a great network of people that we knew that would be eligible and interested in participating in the study which helped with the recruitment process. The assistants' support made a huge difference in regard to the success and completion of data collection. I am very thankful and grateful to Dr. Nieri, Dr. Reyes, Dr. Aguirre, Derek, and Michelle. They have contributed to the dissertation immensely by making time for me, valuing my perspectives and ideas, supporting the work that interests me, and providing valuable feedback. In sum, I learned that the key to having a successful dissertation requires not only the individuals' commitment and effort, but it also requires strong support from the committee members and research assistants.

Regarding data collection, I faced unexpected challenges, specifically with the focus groups. While I had prior experience conducting individual interviews, this was my

first time conducting focus groups. To conduct focus groups successfully, I employed several strategies. First, I read a lot about the method prior to conducting the focus groups. Second, I asked advice from faculty and peers who have previously conducted focus groups. Third, I conducted mock focus groups with my peers to practice ice breakers and probing questions in the focus groups. Despite my preparation for conducting the focus groups, I encountered unexpected challenges. I learned that focus groups require multiple individuals to gather at a single scheduled time. For Focus Group 1, a few participants cancelled at the last moment. To minimize this possibility going forward, I employed several methods to ensure attendance from the participants for the scheduled focus groups: 1) send out friendly reminders about the scheduled focus group, 2) highlight the purpose and benefit of participating in the study, 3) express thanks to participants for their consideration and willingness to participate in the study, 4) fill up the focus group with the maximum amount of participants, and 5) identify additional participants available in case someone cancels at the last minute. While I experienced challenges getting participants together for the scheduled focus groups, conducting the focus groups was surprisingly a smooth process. To elicit honest responses and reduce feelings of anxiety, we completed an ice breaker in the beginning of each focus group. I asked participants why they were interested in participating in the study and what their plans were for the summer so that they could get to know each other better and feel more comfortable prior to the start of the focus group. Furthermore, I employed warm language by validating their experiences, asked probing questions throughout the focus group, and made sure that every individual was given an opportunity to talk. Despite the success of

conducting three focus groups in two months, there is one minor thing I would do differently. Ideally, I would have started data collection in Fall 2019 rather than Summer 2019, so that the advertisement for my study could have reached a bigger audience. This would have enabled me to be able to capture more diversity among Asian American college students.

Overall, this research affected me personally by validating the importance of my research topic and goals of wanting to know more about the diverse Asian American experience, particularly the experience of sense of belonging in a diverse university. The excitement and passion from my participants further validated my goals of pursuing this research project. For instance, in many of my focus groups and interviews, the participants thanked me for taking the time to listen to their experiences and voiced that they did not have many opportunities to engage in research that centers their lived experiences. Their degree of gratitude supports the idea that Asian Americans' diverse stories and experiences still have yet to be fully told. The success of data collection and completion of this dissertation has encouraged me to continue my research on the Asian American experience in the future.

### **Limitations of The Study**

This study is limited in the following ways. First, I collected data from a diverse group of Asian Americans in one large, public diverse university. Specifically, data was collected at a specific kind of diverse institution, one with a racially-ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body that had a high percentage of Asian American undergraduates. Given the continuing significance of the composition of Asian American

peers that shape their sense of belonging, perhaps sense of belonging for Asian Americans at different institutions (e.g., PWIs or MSIs) would look differently if an institution has a lower percentage of Asian American undergraduates.

While the sample was diverse in terms of ethnic subgroups and gender, I was unable to recruit participants that identified as undocumented. This university is unique in that it has a high percentage of undocumented Asian Americans. Given the high percentage of undocumented Asian Americans at this institution, this study could have been strengthened if I was able to explicitly recruit participants that identified as undocumented. While this was not the analytical focus of the study, it may have yielded different findings for sense of belonging and better captured the diversity of their experiences.

### **Future Research**

To capture the diversity of Asian Americans, future research needs to consider the experiences of undocumented Asian Americans who remain an understudied population in academic research (Museus, 2014). Future research should also further explore the experiences of Asian Americans who identify as LGBTQ, Asian Americans who identify as immigrant, and Asians who identify as international students as the analytical focus to further address issues of belonging. Furthermore, future research can investigate sense of belonging among Asian American college students at multiple institutions, allowing for a comparison of students at diverse institutions and students at less or differently diverse institutions, such as PWIs or MSIs. Lastly, future research could also explore how sense of belonging in college affect outcomes after college.

## References

- Aguirre Jr, A. (2000). Academic storytelling: A critical race theory story of affirmative action. *Sociological Perspectives*, 43(2), 319-339.
- Aguirre Jr, A. (2010). Diversity as interest-convergence in academia: A critical race theory story. *Social Identities*, 16(6), 763-774.
- Ancis, J. R., Sedlacek, W. E., & Mohr, J. J. (2000). Student perceptions of campus cultural climate by race. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 78(2), 180-185.
- Anderman, E. M. (2002). School effects on psychological outcomes during adolescence. *Journal of educational psychology*, 94(4), 795.
- Anderman, L. H. (2003). Academic and social perceptions as predictors of change in middle school students' sense of school belonging. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 72(1), 5-22.
- API. (2018). *Census data & API identities*. Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence. Retrieved Feb 28, 2019 (<https://www.api-gbv.org/resources/census-data-api-identities/>).
- An, S. (2017). AsianCrit perspective on social studies. *The Journal of Social Studies Research*, 41(2), 131-139.
- An, S. (2016). Asian Americans in American history: An AsianCrit perspective on Asian American inclusion in state US history curriculum standards. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 44(2), 244-276.
- Asian American Pacific Islander. (2014). Retrieved Feb 28, 2019 (<http://aapidata.com/stateaapisconsumer-power-business-ownership-2014/>).
- Annamma, S. A., Connor, D., & Ferri, B. (2013). Dis/ability critical race studies (DisCrit): Theorizing at the intersections of race and dis/ability. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 16(1), 1-31.
- Bell, D. (2004). *Silent covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the unfulfilled hopes for racial reform*. Oxford University Press.
- Bernal, D. D. (2002). Critical race theory, Latino critical theory, and critical raced gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative inquiry*, 8(1), 105-126.

- Bollen, K. A., & Hoyle, R. H. (1990). Perceived cohesion: A conceptual and empirical examination. *Social forces*, 69(2), 479-504.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2017). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Brayboy, B. M. J. (2005). Toward a tribal critical race theory in education. *The Urban Review*, 37(5), 425-446.
- Buenavista, T. L., Jayakumar, U. M., & Misa-Escalante, K. (2009). Contextualizing Asian American education through critical race theory: An example of US Pilipino college student experiences.
- Byun, S. Y., & Park, H. (2012). The academic success of East Asian American youth: The role of shadow education. *Sociology of education*, 85(1), 40-60.
- Chae, H. S. (2013). *Using Critical Asian Theory (AsianCrit) to explore Korean-origin, working class/poor youth's experiences in high school* (Doctoral dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University).
- Chang, R. S. (1993). Toward an Asian American legal scholarship: Critical race theory, poststructuralism, and narrative space. *California Law Review*, 19, 1243–1323.
- Cheng, D. X. (2004). Students' sense of campus community: What it means, and what to do about it. *NASPA journal*, 41(2), 216-234.
- Chou, R. S. (2012). *Asian American sexual politics: The construction of race, gender, and sexuality*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Chou, R. S., & Feagin, J. R. (2015). *Myth of the model minority: Asian Americans facing racism*. Routledge.
- Chou, R., Lee, K., & Ho, S. (2015). Love Is (Color) blind: Asian Americans and White Institutional Space at the Elite University. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 1(2), 302 -316.
- Chou, R. S., Lee, K., & Ho, S. (2015). *Asian Americans on campus: Racialized space and white power*. Routledge.
- Chou, R. S., Lee, K., & Ho, S. (2012). The White Habitus and Hegemonic Masculinity at the Elite Southern University: Asian Americans and the Need for. *Sociation Today*, 10(2).

- Constantine, M. G., & Watt, S. K. (2002). Cultural congruity, womanist identity attitudes, and life satisfaction among African American college women attending historically Black and predominantly White institutions. *Journal of College Student Development*.
- Crenshaw, K. (1990). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stan. L. Rev.*, *43*, 1241.
- Cress, C. M., & Ikeda, E. K. (2003). Distress under duress: The relationship between campus climate and depression in Asian American college students. *NASPA Journal*, *40*(2), 74-97.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. NYU Press.
- Dortch, D., & Patel, C. (2017). Black undergraduate women and their sense of belonging in STEM at predominantly White institutions. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education*, *10*(2), 202-215.
- Dudziak, M. L. (2004). Brown as a Cold War case. *The Journal of American History*, *91*(1), 32 -42.
- Freeman, T. M., Anderman, L. H., & Jensen, J. M. (2007). Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, *75*(3), 203-220.
- Gasman, M., Baez, B., & Turner, C. S. V. (Eds.). (2008). *Understanding minority-serving institutions*. SUNY Press.
- Given, L. M. (2008). *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (Vols. 1 -0). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Gonzalez, K. P. (2003). Campus culture and the experiences of Chicano students in a predominantly White university. *Urban Education*, *37*(2), 193-218.
- Guest, G., Namey, E., & McKenna, K. (2017). How many focus groups are enough? Building an evidence base for nonprobability sample sizes. *Field methods*, *29*(1), 3-22.
- Guiffrida, D. A. (2003). African American student organizations as agents of social integration. *Journal of College Student Development*, *44*(3), 304-319.
- Harper, S. R., & Hurtado, S. (2007). Nine themes in campus racial climates and implications for institutional transformation. *New Directions for Student Services*, *2007*(120), 7-24.

- Harper, S. R., & Quaye, S. J. (2007). Student organizations as venues for Black identity expression and development among African American male student leaders. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(2), 127-144.
- Hausmann, L. R. M., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among African American and White first-year college students. *Research in Higher Education, 48*(7), 803-839.
- Her, C. S. (2014). Ready or not: The academic college readiness of Southeast Asian Americans. *Multicultural Perspectives, 16*(1), 35-42.
- Hsin, A., & Xie, Y. (2014). Explaining Asian Americans' academic advantage over whites. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 111*(23), 8416-8421.
- Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of education, 324*-345.
- Huynh, V. W. (2012). Ethnic microaggressions and the depressive and somatic symptoms of Latino and Asian American adolescents. *Journal of youth and adolescence, 41*(7), 831-846.
- Irwin, K., Mossakowski, K., Spencer, J. H., Umemoto, K. N., Hishinuma, E. S., Garcia-Santiago, O., ... & Choi-Misailidis, S. (2017). Do different dimensions of ethnic identity reduce the risk of violence among Asian American and Pacific Islander adolescents in Hawaii? *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 27*(3), 151-164.
- Johnson, D. R. (2012). Campus racial climate perceptions and overall sense of belonging among racially diverse women in STEM majors. *Journal of College Student Development, 53*(2), 336-346.
- Kawai, Y. (2005). Stereotyping Asian Americans: The dialectic of the model minority and the yellow peril. *The Howard Journal of Communications, 16*(2), 109-130.
- Kim, S. Y., Wang, Y., Deng, S., Alvarez, R., & Li, J. (2011). Accent, perpetual foreigner stereotype, and perceived discrimination as indirect links between English proficiency and depressive symptoms in Chinese American adolescents. *Developmental Psychology, 47*(1), 289.
- Kotori, C., & Malaney, G. D. (2003). Asian American students' perceptions of racism, reporting behaviors, and awareness of legal rights and procedures. *NASPA Journal, 40*(3), 56-76.

- Kumashiro, K. K. (1999). Supplementing normalcy and otherness: Queer Asian American men reflect on stereotypes, identity, and oppression. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 12(5), 491-508.
- Leath, S., & Chavous, T. (2018). Black Women's Experiences of Campus Racial Climate and Stigma at Predominantly White Institutions: Insights from a Comparative and Within Group Approach for STEM and Non-STEM Majors. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 87(2), 125-139.
- Lee, J., & Zhou, M. (2017). Why class matters less for Asian-American academic achievement. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(14), 2316-2330.
- Lee, J., & Zhou, M. (2015). *The Asian American Achievement Paradox*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Lee, J., & Zhou, M. (2014). The success frame and achievement paradox: The costs and consequences for Asian Americans. *Race and Social Problems*, 6(13), 38-55.
- Lee, J., & Zhou, M. (Eds.). (2004). *Asian American youth: Culture, identity and ethnicity*. Routledge.
- Lee, S. J. (2015). *Unraveling the "model minority" stereotype: Listening to Asian American youth*. Teachers College Press.
- Lee, S. J. (2012). The Model Minority and the Perpetual Foreigner: Stereotypes of Asian Americans. In *Asian American Psychology* (pp. 119-134). Psychology Press.
- Lee, S. J. (1994). Behind the model-minority stereotype: Voices of high-and low achieving Asian American students. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 25,(4), 413-429.
- Lee, S. J., Park, E., & Wong, J. H. S. (2017). Racialization, schooling, and becoming American: Asian American experiences. *Educational Studies*, 53(5), 492-510.
- Lewis, A. E., Chesler, M., & Forman, T. A. (2000). The impact of "colorblind" ideologies on students of color: Intergroup relations at a predominantly White university. *Journal of Negro Education*, 74-91.
- Liu, A. (2009). Critical race theory, Asian Americans, and higher education: A review of research. *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 5(2).
- Huynh, Q. L., Devos, T., & Smalarz, L. (2011). Perpetual foreigner in one's own land: Potential implications for identity and psychological adjustment. *Journal of social and clinical psychology*, 30(2), 133-162.

- Maeda, D. J. 2016. "The Asian American Movement." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia*. Retrieved June 13, 2019. (<https://oxfordre.com/americanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-21>).
- Maramba, D. C., & Museus, S. D. (2011). The utility of using mixed-methods and intersectionality approaches in conducting research on Filipino American students' experiences with the campus climate and on sense of belonging. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2011(151), 93-101.
- Maramba, D. C., & Museus, S. D. (2013). Examining the effects of campus climate, ethnic group cohesion, and cross-cultural interaction on Filipino American students' sense of belonging in college. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 14(4), 495-522.
- Maramba, D. C., & Palmer, R. T. (2014). The impact of cultural validation on the college experiences of Southeast Asian American students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55(6), 515-530.
- Maxfield, M. G., & Babbie, E. R. (2014). *Research methods for criminal justice and criminology*. Cengage Learning.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. A. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Sage.
- Milner IV, H. R. (2008). Critical race theory and interest convergence as analytic tools in teacher education policies and practices. *Journal of teacher education*, 59(4), 332-346.
- Museus, S. D. (2014). *Asian American students in higher education*. Routledge.
- Museus, S. D. (2014). The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model: A new theory of college success among racially diverse student populations. In M. B. Paulsen (Ed.) *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*. New York: Springer.
- Misawa, M. (2012). Social justice narrative inquiry: A queer crit perspective.
- Moore, L., & Popadiuk, N. (2011). Positive aspects of international student transitions: A qualitative inquiry. *Journal of College Student Development*, 52(3), 291-306.
- Museus, S. D. (2008a). Focusing on institutional fabric: Using campus culture assessments to enhance cross-cultural engagement. In S. R. Harper (Ed.), *Creating inclusive environments for cross-cultural learning and engagement in higher education*. Washington, DC: National Association of Student Personnel

Administrators.

- Museus, S. D. (2008b). The role of ethnic student organizations in fostering African American and Asian American students' cultural adjustment and membership at predominantly White institutions. *Journal of College Student Development* 49(6), 568–586.
- Museus, S. D. (2013). Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders: A national portrait of growth, diversity, and inequality. In S. D. Museus, D. C. Maramba, & R. T. Teranishi (Eds.), *The misrepresented minority: New insights on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and their implications for higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Museus, S. D., & Iftikar, J. (2013). An Asian critical theory (AsianCrit) framework. *Asian American students in higher education*, 18-29.
- Museus, S. D., & Kiang, P. N. (2009). Deconstructing the model minority myth and how it contributes to the invisible minority reality in higher education research. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2009(142), 5-15.
- Museus, S. D., & Maramba, D. C. (2011). The impact of culture on Filipino American students' sense of belonging. *The Review of Higher Education*, 34(2), 231-258.
- Museus, S. D., Nichols, A. H., & Lambert, A. D. (2008). Racial differences in the effects of campus racial climate on degree completion: A structural equation model. *The Review of Higher Education*, 32(1), 107-134.
- Museus, S. D., & Park, J. J. (2015). The continuing significance of racism in the lives of Asian American college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 56(6), 551-569.
- Museus, S. D., & Truong, K. A. (2013). Racism and sexism in cyberspace: Engaging stereotypes of Asian American women and men to facilitate student learning and development. *About Campus*, 18(4), 14-21.
- Museus, S. D., & Truong, K. A. (2009). Disaggregating qualitative data from Asian American college students in campus racial climate research and assessment. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2009(142), 17-26.
- Napoli, M., Marsiglia, F. F., & Kulis, S. (2003). Sense of belonging in school as a protective factor against drug abuse among Native American urban adolescents. *Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions*, 3(2), 25-41.
- Ngo, B., & Lee, S. J. (2007). Complicating the image of model minority success: A

- review of Southeast Asian American education. *Review of educational research*, 77(4), 415-453.
- Ocampo, A. C. (2013). "Am I Really Asian?": Educational Experiences and Panethnic Identification among Second-Generation Filipino Americans. *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 16(3), 295-324.
- Ocampo, A. C., & Soodjinda, D. (2016). Invisible Asian Americans: the intersection of sexuality, race, and education among gay Asian Americans. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 19(3), 480-499.
- Okamoto, D. G. (2014). *Redefining race: Asian American panethnicity and shifting ethnic boundaries*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Okamoto, D. G. (2006). Institutional panethnicity: Boundary formation in Asian American organizing. *Social Forces*, 85(1), 1-25.
- Okamoto, D. G. (2003). Toward a theory of panethnicity: Explaining Asian American collective action. *American Sociological Review*, 811-842.
- O’Keeffe, P. (2013). A sense of belonging: Improving student retention. *College Student Journal*, 47(4), 605-613.
- Omi, M., & Winant, H. (2014). *Racial formation in the United States*. Routledge.
- Peng, S. S., & Wright, D. (1994). Explanation of academic achievement of Asian American students. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 87(6), 346-352.
- Park, J. Z. (2008). Second-generation Asian American pan-ethnic identity: Pluralized meanings of a racial label. *Sociological Perspectives*, 51(3), 541-561.
- Perea, J. F. (1998). The Black/White binary paradigm of race: The normal science of American racial thought. *La Raza LJ*, 10, 127.
- Perez, M. P. (2002). Pacific identities beyond US racial formations: The case of Chamorro ambivalence and flux. *Social Identities*, 8(3), 457-479.
- Pew Research. (2017). Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population. Retrieved Feb 8, 2019 (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/08/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>).
- Phua, V. C. (2007). Contesting and maintaining hegemonic masculinities: Gay Asian American men in mate selection. *Sex Roles*, 57(11-12), 909-918.

- Ponce, N. A., Tseng, W., Ong, P., Shek, Y. L., Ortiz, S., & Gatchell, M. (2009). The state of Asian American, native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander health in California report.
- Rainey, K., Dancy, M., Mickelson, R., Stearns, E., & Moller, S. (2018). Race and gender differences in how sense of belonging influences decisions to major in STEM. *International journal of STEM education*, 5(1), 10.
- Ramsey, E., & Brown, D. (2018). Feeling like a fraud: Helping students renegotiate their academic identities. *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 25(1), 86-90.
- Rankin, S. R., & Reason, R. D. (2005). Differing perceptions: How students of color and White students perceive campus climate for underrepresented groups. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(1), 43-61.
- Reyes, A. (2017). *Language, identity, and stereotype among Southeast Asian American youth: The other Asian*. Routledge.
- Reyes, V. (2018). Ethnographic toolkit: Strategic positionality and researchers' visible and invisible tools in field research. *Ethnography*, 1-21.
- Rhode, D. L. (1990). Feminist critical theories. *Stanford Law Review*, 617-638.
- Ryan, G. Y., & H. Bernard, R. 2005. Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1), 85-109.
- Sakamoto, A., Goyette, K. A., & Kim, C. (2009). Socioeconomic attainments of Asian Americans. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 35, 255-276.
- Saito, N. T. (1997). Model minority, yellow peril: Functions of foreignness in the construction of Asian American legal identity. *Asian LJ*, 4, 71.
- Samura, M. (2016). Remaking Selves, Repositioning Selves, or Remaking Space: An Examination of Asian American College Students' Processes of "Belonging". *Journal of College Student Development*, 57(2), 135-150.
- Sax, L. J., & Newhouse, K. N. (2018). Disciplinary field specificity and variation in the STEM gender gap. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2018(179), 45-71.
- Slaten, C. D., Elison, Z. M., Lee, J. Y., Yough, M., & Scalise, D. (2016). Belonging on campus: A qualitative inquiry of Asian international students. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 44(3), 383-410.
- Solórzano, D. G., & Bernal, D. D. (2001). Examining transformational resistance through

- a critical race and LatCrit theory framework: Chicana and Chicano students in an urban context. *Urban education*, 36(3), 308-342.
- Solórzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro education*, 60-73.
- Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative inquiry*, 8(1), 23-44.
- Spencer, J. H., Irwin, K., Umemoto, K. N., Garcia-Santiago, O., Nishimura, S. T., Hishinuma, E. S., & Choi-Misailidis, S. (2009). Exploring the hypothesis of ethnic practice as social capital: Violence among Asian/Pacific Islander youth in Hawaii. *International journal of social psychiatry*, 55(6), 506-524.
- Stebbleton, M. J., Soria, K. M., & Huesman Jr, R. L. (2014). First-generation students' sense of belonging, mental health, and use of counseling services at public research universities. *Journal of College Counseling*, 17(1), 6-20.
- Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(5), 797-811.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Takaki, R. (1998). *Strangers from a different shore: A history of Asian Americans*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company.
- Teranishi, R. T., Behringer, L. B., Grey, E. A., & Parker, T. L. (2009). Critical race theory and research on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in higher education. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2009(142), 57-6.
- Thomas, L., Herbert, J., & Teras, M. (2014). A sense of belonging to enhance participation, success and retention in online programs.
- Tierney, W. G. (1999). Models of minority college-going and retention: Cultural integrity versus cultural suicide. *Journal of Negro education*, 80-91.
- Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. University of Chicago Press, 5801 S. Ellis Avenue, Chicago, IL 60637.

- Umbach, P. D., & Kuh, G. D. (2006). Student experiences with diversity at liberal arts colleges: Another claim for distinctiveness. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 77(1), 169-192.
- University of California, Riverside. N.d. "Facts." Retrieved March 9, 2019. (<https://www.ucr.edu/about/facts.html>).
- U.S. Census Bureau (2017). *Asian alone or in any combination by selected groups. American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2016). *Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Race Alone or in Combination, and Hispanic Origin for the United States, States, and Counties: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2016*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2016). *Statistics for U.S. employer firms by sector, gender, ethnicity, race, and veteran status for the U.S., states, and top 50 MSAs: 2016. 2016 Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2016). *Selected population profile in the united states. 2016 American community survey 1-year estimates*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2013). *Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Race Alone or in Combination, and Hispanic Origin for the United States, States, and Counties: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2013*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2018). Undergraduate Enrollment. Retrieved Feb 8, 2019 ([https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cha.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cha.asp)).
- Wells, A. V., & Horn, C. (2015). The Asian American college experience at a diverse institution: Campus climate as a predictor of sense of belonging. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 52(2), 149-163.
- Woo, D. (2000). *Glass ceilings and Asian Americans: The new face of workplace barriers*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Writer, J. H. (2008). Unmasking, exposing, and confronting: Critical race theory, tribal critical race theory and multicultural education. *International journal of multicultural education*, 10(2).

- Wu, F. H. (2002). *Yellow: Race in America beyond black and white* (p. 39). New York: Basic Books.
- Yosso, T., Smith, W., Ceja, M., & Solórzano, D. (2009). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate for Latina/o undergraduates. *Harvard Educational Review, 79*(4), 659-691.
- Yang, M., Chan, S., Vang, T., Nguyen, T., Ly, M., Phommasouvanh, B., Nyugen, Vang, N., Souvannasoth, L., & Cabugao, R. (1989). Depression and posttraumatic stress disorder in Southeast Asian refugees. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 146*(12), 1592-1597.
- Zambrana, R. (2018). *Toxic Ivory Towers: The Health Consequences of Work Stress on the Health of Underrepresented Minority Faculty*. Rutgers University Press.
- Zhou, M., & Xiong, Y. S. (2005). The multifaceted American experiences of the children of Asian immigrants: Lessons for segmented assimilation. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 28*(6), 1119-1152.

## Appendix A: Brief Demographic Survey for Focus Group Participants

Please provide the following information about yourself.

1. What is your Asian American heritage? Check all that apply.

East Asian. Please specify country(ies):

Southeast Asian. Please specify country(ies):

South Asian. Please specify country(ies):

2. How would you describe yourself?

Female/Woman

Male/Man

Nonbinary

Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming

Trans Female/Trans Woman

Trans Male/Trans Male

3. Do you consider yourself to be:

Asexual

Bisexual

Gay or Lesbian

Heterosexual or Straight

Pansexual

Queer

Questioning

Not listed above. Please specify:

4. Are you a Pell grant recipient at UCR?

Yes

No

5. What is the highest level of education completed by your parents?

(If your parents have different education levels, report the highest level).

Less than 8<sup>th</sup> grade

Completed 8<sup>th</sup> grade

Completed high school

Completed associate's degree or vocational program

Completed bachelor's degree

Completed advanced degree

6. Where were you born?

United States

Other country: Please specify:

How many years have you been living in the U.S.?

7. Where was your mother born?

United States

Other country: Please specify:

8. Where was your father born?

United States

Other country: Please specify:

9. What kind of domestic student are you?

\_\_\_\_ domestic in-state student

\_\_\_\_ domestic out-of-state student

10. Where do you live?

\_\_\_\_ On Campus

\_\_\_\_ Near Campus

\_\_\_\_ Off Campus

11. What was the racial/ethnic composition of your neighborhood?

\_\_\_\_ Predominately White students

\_\_\_\_ Predominately racial/ethnic minority students

\_\_\_\_ Racially/ethnically diverse

12. In lieu of using your real name when presenting study results, what pseudonym (i.e., made-up name) would you like used?

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol**

Thank you for participating in this study of Asian American students' experiences at a diverse university.

### **Sense of Belonging**

Let's first talk about Asian Americans' experience at a diverse university like UCR.

1. What is it like to be an Asian American student at UCR?
  - 1a. Tell me about a time you felt like you belonged at UCR.
  - 1b. Tell me about a time you felt like you didn't belong at UCR.
  - 1c. Are Asian Americans ever treated like outsiders at UCR? In what ways?
  - 1d. Does Asian culture fit within UCR? In what ways?

Probes:

Differences by Asian subgroup?

Differences by gender?

Differences by class?

What about LGBTQA Asian American students?

Immigration or documentation status?

### **Institutional Factors**

Let's talk about what institutional factors influence Asian Americans' sense of belonging at UCR. First, let's talk about times when you felt like you were treated differently here at UCR because you were Asian American.

2. Do people at UCR treat you differently because you are Asian Americans at UCR? If so, who and how? Can you give examples? What impact do those experiences have on Asian American students' sense of belonging at UCR?

Probes:

Differences by Asian subgroup?

Differences by gender?

Differences by class?

What about LGBTQA Asian American students?

Immigration or documentation status?

Up until now, we have talked about interpersonal relationships and interactions. Can we now talk about the ways in which the education is offered at UCR?

3. When you take classes here at UCR, have you ever learned about Asian Americans and their history and experiences in the U.S.? How does this representation in UCR's education affect Asian American students' sense of belonging at UCR?

Probes:

Differences by Asian subgroup?

Differences by gender?

Differences by class?

What about LGBTQA Asian American students?

Immigration or documentation status?

4. How about extracurricular activities at UCR? Are there student groups and activities at UCR related to Asian Americans? How does this representation in UCR's extracurricular activities affect Asian American students' sense of belonging at UCR?

Probes:

Differences by Asian subgroup?

Differences by gender?

Differences by class?

What about LGBTQA Asian American students?

Immigration or documentation status?

5. How about UCR's institutional resources (e.g., LGBT resource center, undocumented student programs, counseling and psychology services (CAPS), student disability resource center, women resource center, the office of diversity, equity, and inclusion)? How well do they represent Asian American students at UCR? How does this representation in UCR's institutional resources affect Asian American students' sense of belonging at UCR?

Probes:

Differences by Asian subgroup?

Differences by gender?

Differences by class?

What about LGBTQA Asian American students?

Immigration or documentation status?

6. What changes could reduce discrimination of Asian American students at UCR, increase their representation on campus, and improve their sense of belonging at UCR?

**Individual factors**

7. Are there individual factors – that is, characteristics of individuals – that affect Asian American students’ sense of belonging at UCR? In other words, are certain Asian American students more likely than others to experience a sense of belonging at UCR? What are the individual factors and how do they affect sense of belonging?
8. Are there other factors that affect Asian American students’ sense of belonging at UCR? What and how?
9. Is there anything else you think I need know to understand these issues?

## **Appendix C: Individual Interview Questionnaire**

This interview is an opportunity for you to provide more detail on your own individual experiences at UCR, in contrast to talking about Asian American students as a group, like we did in the focus group.

### **Ethnic Identity**

1. How do you identify yourself in terms of race/ethnicity and why?
2. Have you always identified that way or did you change after coming to UCR?

### **Sense of belonging**

3. This study is about sense of belonging. What does “belonging” at UCR mean to you?

How important to you is belonging at UCR?

4. To what extent do you, as an Asian American, feel like you belong at UCR? What about as a (insert subgroup)?

5. Have you, as an Asian American, ever felt like an outsider at UCR? What about as a (insert subgroup)?

### **Individual factors**

6. How do other identities, other than being Asian American or [insert subgroup], shape your sense of belonging at UCR?

Probes:

Differences by Asian subgroup?

Differences by gender?

Differences by class?

What about LGBTQA Asian American students?

Immigration or documentation status?

7. You wrote on the demographic survey that the racial/ethnic composition of your neighborhood was [insert survey answer]. What was it like being Asian American before coming to UCR? Did you feel like you belonged in your neighborhood? How about your high school? How does your neighborhood/high school experience relate to your sense of belonging at UCR?
8. Before coming to college, some people have expectations about college generally, and UCR specifically, which relate to their sense of belonging. Is that true for you? What were your expectations? Were they met?
9. How does your involvement at UCR relate to your sense of belonging at UCR?

Probes:

Participation in Asian American Pacific organizations?

Participation in student organizations, such as Asian sororities/frats?

Developing relationships with subgroup co-ethnics?

Developing relationships with non-subgroup co-ethnics?

Holding campus leadership positions?

### **Institutional Factors**

Can we now talk about positive interactions or experiences that shape your sense of belonging?

10. What kind of opportunities are you given as an (insert subgroup) to foster a sense of belonging? Can you provide examples?

11. In the focus group, we talked how UCR treat you differently because you are Asian American. Have you, as an Asian American or [insert subgroup], ever experienced discrimination at UCR? If so, can you provide examples?

Probes:

Faculty?

Staff?

Peers?

12. If you have participated in the focus group, we talked about the ways in which the education is offered at UCR. Can we talk about how that shapes your sense of belonging? To what extent does the education you are receiving at UCR shape your sense of belonging to UCR? Can you provide examples?

13. If you have participated in the focus group, we talked about the ways in which extracurricular activities are offered at UCR. To what extent does the extracurricular activities offered at UCR shape your sense of belonging to UCR? Can you provide examples?

14. If you have participated in the focus group, we talked about the ways in which various resources are offered at UCR. To what extent do the resources offered at UCR shape your sense of belonging to UCR?

Can you provide examples?

15. What changes could UCR make to increase your sense of belonging at UCR?

16. Is there anything else you think I need know to understand these issues?

## **Appendix D: Recruitment Materials**

### **D1: Initial recruitment email for focus group**

Dear Asian American students,

I am writing to encourage you to participate in a study that will help to better understand the Asian American experience at UCR. This study aims to improve health and belonging among Asian American students. The findings in the study will inform the development of current and future programs to foster an inclusive environment for all students. Your input is important and this will be your opportunity to share your experience!

Min Yoo, a Sociology graduate student, will conduct the research that explores sense of belonging among Asian Americans at UCR. I encourage you to consider participating in the study. Participation in the study occurs on campus and involves participating in one focus group with 6-8 UCR Asian American students. The total time involved is 1.5 hours. You will receive a catered lunch and a \$5 gift card for your participation. Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

The following is a list of the planned focus group dates. Please note the specific eligibility for each of the scheduled focus groups below. If you decide to participate, please email me which focus group you choose to participate at [myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), and I will confirm your participation with a return email. Please respond by 5pm, Friday, August 2.

#### **Undergraduate Level**

\*eligibility: Asian American undergraduate, domestic student

Focus Group 1: Tues, 8/06/2019, 1130am-1pm

\*eligibility: Asian American undergraduate, domestic student

Focus Group 2: Tues, 8/13/2019, 1130am-1pm

\*eligibility: Asian American undergraduate, domestic student

Focus Group 3: Tues, 8/20/2019, 1130am-1pm

If you are interested in participating but the above dates do not work for you, please let us know and I will contact you in the event that an alternative date is set. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Min Yoo ([myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), 818-653-9913).

Thank you for your consideration!

Best,

Min Yoo

**D2: Second recruitment email for focus group**

Dear Asian American students,

If you haven't yet responded to the email below and are interested in participating, I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,

Min Yoo

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Asian American students,

I am writing to encourage you to participate in a study that will help to better understand the Asian American experience at UCR. This study aims to improve health

and belonging among Asian American students. The findings in the study will inform the development of current and future programs to foster an inclusive environment for all students. Your input is important and this will be your opportunity to share your experience!

Min Yoo, a Sociology graduate student, will conduct the research that explores sense of belonging among Asian Americans at UCR. I encourage you to consider participating in the study. Participation in the study occurs on campus and involves participating in one focus group with 6-8 UCR Asian American students. The total time involved is 1.5 hours. You will receive a catered lunch and a \$5 gift card for your participation. Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

The following is a list of the planned focus group dates. Please note the specific eligibility for each of the scheduled focus groups below. If you decide to participate, please email me which focus group you choose to participate at [myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), and I will confirm your participation with a return email. Please respond by 5pm, Friday, August 2.

### **Undergraduate Level**

\*eligibility: Asian American undergraduate, domestic student

Focus Group 1: Tues, 8/06/2019, 1130am-1pm

\*eligibility: Asian American undergraduate, domestic student

Focus Group 2: Tues, 8/13/2019, 1130am-1pm

\*eligibility: Asian American undergraduate, domestic student

Focus Group 3: Tues, 8/20/2019, 1130am-1pm

If you are interested in participating but the above dates do not work for you, please let us know and I will contact you in the event that an alternative date is set. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Min Yoo ([myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), 818-653-9913).

Thank you for your consideration!

Best,

Min Yoo

**D3: Third recruitment email for focus group**

Dear Asian American students,

If you haven't yet responded to the email below and are interested in participating, I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,

Min Yoo

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Asian American students,

I am writing to encourage you to participate in a study that will help to better understand the Asian American experience at UCR. This study aims to improve health and belonging among Asian American students. The findings in the study will inform the development of current and future programs to foster an inclusive environment for all students. Your input is important and this will be your opportunity to share your experience!

Min Yoo, a Sociology graduate student, will conduct the research that explores sense of belonging among Asian Americans at UCR. I encourage you to consider participating in the study. Participation in the study occurs on campus and involves participating in one focus group with 6-8 UCR Asian American students. The total time involved is 1.5 hours. You will receive a catered lunch and a \$5 gift card for your participation. Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

The following is a list of the planned focus group dates. Please note the specific eligibility for each of the scheduled focus groups below. If you decide to participate, please email me which focus group you choose to participate at [myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), and I will confirm your participation with a return email. Please respond by 5pm, Friday, August 2.

### **Undergraduate Level**

\*eligibility: Asian American undergraduate, domestic student

Focus Group 1: Tues, 8/06/2019, 1130am-1pm

\*eligibility: Asian American undergraduate, domestic student

Focus Group 2: Tues, 8/13/2019, 1130am-1pm

\*eligibility: Asian American undergraduate, domestic student

Focus Group 3: Tues, 8/20/2019, 1130am-1pm

If you are interested in participating but the above dates do not work for you, please let us know and I will contact you in the event that an alternative date is set. If you have any

questions about the study, please contact Min Yoo ([myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), 818-653-9913).

Thank you for your consideration!

Best,

Min Yoo

**D4: Participation confirmation email for focus group**

Thank you for your willingness to participate in a study that explores sense of belonging among Asian Americans at UCR. This email confirms your appointment to participate in the focus group on XX/XX/19, TIME, ROOM. In return for your participation, you will receive a catered lunch and a \$5 gift card. If you have any special dietary needs for lunch, have any questions about the study, or need to change your appointment, please contact Min Yoo ([myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), 818-653-9913).

**D5: Focus group reminder email**

Reminder:

You are scheduled to participate in the focus group on sense of belonging among Asian Americans at UCR on XX/XX/19, TIME, ROOM. Please arrive on time. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Min Yoo ([myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), 818-653-9913).

Thank you, and I look forward to seeing you soon!

**D6: Initial recruitment email for individual interview**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for participating in the focus group. I am writing to encourage you to participate in a follow-up, individual interview that will explore your sense of belonging. This study aims to improve health and belonging among Asian American students. The

findings in the study will inform the development of current and future programs to foster an inclusive environment for all students. Your input is important and this will be your opportunity to share your experience!

Min Yoo, a Sociology graduate student, will conduct the research that explores your sense of belonging at UCR, and how you believe personal factors shape your sense of belonging. I encourage you to consider participating in the study. Participation in the study occurs on campus and involves participating in one individual in-depth interview. The total time involved is 1.5 hours. You will receive \$20 gift card for your participation. Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

The eligibility criteria are: 1). You must have participated in the focus group, 2). You must identify as either Korean or Filipino, 3). You must be enrolled as a full-time student at UCR. If you decide to participate, please email me at [myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), and I will confirm your participation with a return email. Please respond by 5pm, Friday, August 30.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Min Yoo ([myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), 818-653-9913). Thank you for your consideration.

**D7: Second recruitment email for individual interview**

Dear Korean or Filipino students,

If you haven't yet responded to the email below and are interested in participating, we look forward to hearing from you!

Best,

Min Yoo

\*\*\*\*\*

Thank you for participating in the focus group. I am writing to encourage you to participate in a follow-up, individual interview that will explore your sense of belonging. This study aims to improve health and belonging among Asian American students. The findings in the study will inform the development of current and future programs to foster an inclusive environment for all students. Your input is important and this will be your opportunity to share your experience!

Min Yoo, a Sociology graduate student, will conduct the research that explores your sense of belonging at UCR, and how you believe personal factors shape your sense of belonging. I encourage you to consider participating in the study. Participation in the study occurs on campus and involves participating in one individual in-depth interview. The total time involved is 1.5 hours. You will receive \$20 gift card for your participation. Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

The eligibility criteria are: 1). You must have participated in the focus group, 2). You must identify as either Korean or Filipino, 3). You must be enrolled as a full-time student at UCR. If you decide to participate, please email me at [myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), and I will confirm your participation with a return email. Please respond by 5pm, Friday, August 30. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Min Yoo ([myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), 818-653-9913). Thank you for your consideration.

**D8: Third recruitment email for individual interview**

Dear Korean or Filipino students,

If you haven't yet responded to the email below and are interested in participating, we look forward to hearing from you!

Best,

Min Yoo

\*\*\*\*\*

Thank you for participating in the focus group. I am writing to encourage you to participate in a follow-up, individual interview that will explore your sense of belonging. This study aims to improve health and belonging among Asian American students. The findings in the study will inform the development of current and future programs to foster an inclusive environment for all students. Your input is important and this will be your opportunity to share your experience!

Min Yoo, a Sociology graduate student, will conduct the research that explores your sense of belonging at UCR, and how you believe personal factors shape your sense of belonging. I encourage you to consider participating in the study. Participation in the study occurs on campus and involves participating in one individual in-depth interview. The total time involved is 1.5 hours. You will receive \$20 gift card for your participation. Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

The eligibility criteria are: 1). You must have participated in the focus group, 2). You must identify as either Korean or Filipino, 3). You must be enrolled as a full-time student at UCR. If you decide to participate, please email me at [myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), and I

will confirm your participation with a return email. Please respond by 5pm, Friday, August 30.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Min Yoo ([myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), 818-653-9913). Thank you for your consideration.

**D9: Participation confirmation email for individual interview**

Thank you for your willingness to participate in a study that explores your sense of belonging at UCR. This email confirms your appointment to participate in the individual interview on XX/XX/19, TIME, ROOM. In return for your participation, you will receive \$20 gift card. If you have any questions about the study, or need to change your appointment, please contact Min Yoo ([myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), 818-653-9913).

**D10: Individual interview reminder email**

Reminder: you are scheduled to participate in the individual interview your sense of belonging at UCR on XX/XX/19, TIME, ROOM. Please arrive on time. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Min Yoo ([myoo007@ucr.edu](mailto:myoo007@ucr.edu), 818-653-9913).

Thank you.