



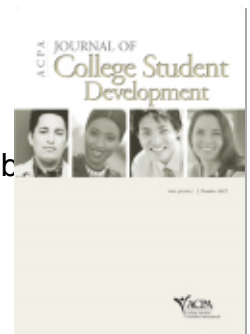
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In Search of a “Good College”: Decisions and Determinations Behind Asian American Students’ College Choice

Jessica K. Kim Marybeth Gasman

Through in-depth interviews, 14 Asian American college students at an elite, private Northeastern US university were asked to describe their experiences and relationships with family, friends, teachers, and counselors during their college-choice process. The results suggest that students considered their social networks, especially family and peers, to be most important in making decisions about where to apply and attend. The type of support students received from high school guidance counselors mainly depended on the kind of secondary school they attended. Students also relied on external sources of information provided by various media outlets. Implications of the findings for conceptualizing access and choice in higher education for Asian American students are discussed and recommendations for future research and practice are offered.

Asian Americans are the second-fastest growing racial group in the United States. Comprised of over 50 ethnicities, more than 100 different languages, and numerous religious beliefs, this group is expected to increase from 15.5 million to 40.6 million, or from 5.1% to 9.2% of the population, by the year 2050 (Bernstein & Edwards, 2008). Despite the growth in numbers and diversity among Asian Americans, the unique and important challenges that affect their educational experiences, opportunities, and outcomes are often buried under commonly held myths and stereotypes. One of these widely held misconceptions is that Asian Americans have

no trouble getting into the most highly selective institutions in the United States and that they are overrepresented on many college campuses across the nation (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education [CARE], 2008). In turn, the hard work and accomplishments of some Asian American students and their families are easily dismissed or discounted. Through in-depth interviews with recently admitted Asian American college students, this study sheds light on the decisions and determinations behind the choices that Asian American students make in regard to college application and matriculation processes.

STUDY OF COLLEGE CHOICE FOR ASIAN AMERICANS

The college-choice process has generally been studied using three basic approaches: (a) socio psychological studies, (b) economic studies, and (c) sociological status attainment studies (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 1997; McDonough & Antonio, 1996). These studies have helped explain the processes secondary school students employ to make decisions about which colleges to attend (see Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Manski, 1993; Paulsen, 1990; Perna, 2006). As college-bound student populations have grown increasingly diverse in the past several decades, more research has been undertaken to explain the differences in college choice among various racial and ethnic

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groups (Freeman, 1999, 2005; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Litten, 1982; Perna, 2000; Reay, David, & Ball, 2005) and socioeconomic statuses (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Reay et al.; Walpole, 2003). With a few exceptions (Hurtado et al.; Kim, 2004), Asian Americans have rarely been included in studies on the college-choice processes of secondary school students. Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, and McDonough (2004) attribute this lack of attention to a common assumption that Asian Americans are a successful racial minority group, even “outwhiting the Whites” (p. 528). Several researchers in the last decade, however, have demonstrated that Asian Americans are not only diverse in terms of culture, language, socioeconomic status, and immigration history, but also diverse in terms of learning style preferences (Park, 2000), academic achievement, and academic opportunities (Endo, Park, & Tsuchida, 1998; Lee, 1994; Lew, 2006). These variances may, in turn, result in a wide range of outcomes for postsecondary education.

Previous studies examining the college-choice process specifically for Asian Americans have used data from large national samples to explore the educational trends and achievements unique to this group. Analyzing data from the National Education Longitudinal Study and the Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study, Hurtado et al. (1997) found that compared to students of other racial and ethnic groups, Asian American students had the highest expectations for degree attainment, were better prepared to apply to colleges in terms of completing standardized tests on time, were most likely to apply to several colleges to increase their choices, and were less likely to attend their first-choice colleges compared to their White counterparts.

Using data from the Freshman Survey of 1994 by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at

Los Angeles, Kim (2004) analyzed the impact of financial aid on students’ college choice with a particular focus on racial differences. Compared to Latino and African American students, whose college choices were not influenced by financial aid, he found that Asian American students were strongly influenced by having loans or a combination of grants and loans when choosing to attend their first-choice colleges. The probability of attending first-choice institutions was 38% higher for Asian American students who received loans in comparison to Asian American students who did not receive any financial aid. Teranishi et al. (2004) employed data from the 1997 version of the same survey and found that Asian American students from various ethnic subpopulations and socioeconomic backgrounds attended college at different rates from each other. Also, larger proportions of Chinese American and Korean American students attended highly selective institutions, private institutions, and 4-year universities than Filipino American and Southeast Asian American students. Filipino, Japanese, and Southeast Asian American students had their highest representation at public institutions with less stringent admission requirements.

In a recent report on the status of Asian Americans in higher education (CARE, 2008), three dominant fictions that permeate practice and research in higher education were identified. Drawing from 2006 data primarily provided by the U.S. Department of Education and The College Board, the report refuted the following notions about Asian Americans in higher education: (a) Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are “taking over” higher education in the United States; (b) AAPIs are concentrated only in selective 4-year universities; and (c) AAPIs are a homogenous racial group with uniformity in educational and financial attainment, culture, religion, and histories. The report indicated

that AAPIs are evenly distributed in 2-year and 4-year institutions with the majority attending public institutions. AAPIs achieve a wide range of scores on standardized tests, which results in different levels of eligibility and competitiveness in selective admissions. Furthermore, the enrollment of AAPIs is increasing at a faster rate in public 2-year community colleges than in 4-year colleges, especially in the Midwest and the South.

While the aforementioned quantitative studies and reports help distinguish some of the differences that are unique to Asian American student populations and how these differences affect their access to and choice of higher education institutions, these studies still leave some areas to be explored. Very little is published about the factors that contribute to the diversity of college-choice behaviors among college-bound Asian American students, nor about how students' sociocultural backgrounds—such as family and school socialization, generational status, immigration history, and communities from which they were raised—shape their college-choice processes. To conceptualize the college-choice processes of Asian American students this study draws from two bodies of literature: studies of academic achievement of Asian Americans and theories of college choice.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Academic Achievement of Asian Americans

During the early 1960s, the media was captivated with the high academic achievement of some Asian American students and thus the image of the model minority was born (Osajima, 1988). Asian Americans were perceived as achieving parity with or even outperforming Whites in terms of professional and academic achievement. Since this time, researchers have found that the image of

model minority may negatively shape the psychological well-being of some Asian Americans (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000; Sue & Okazaki, 1990; B. H. Suzuki, 2002). From their study of Asian American female students' performance on a quantitative test, for instance, Cheryan and Bodenhausen found that "positive" stereotypes about Asians' mathematical skills can create the potential for "choking" under the pressure of high expectations.

While examining harmful effects of this model minority myth, however, researchers have been concurrently curious to discover the possible explanations for high academic achievements of some Asian Americans (Sue & Okazaki, 1990). Researchers have attributed the high achievement to genetics (Lynn, 1977; Sowell, 1978; Vernon, 1982), though these claims have been contested by some (Flynn, 1982, 1987; Stevenson et al., 1985). Selective immigration, a product of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that discerningly allowed the entrance of immigrants based on their education and occupational background, has also been used to explain the academic achievement (Wong & Hirschman, 1983) and economic attainment of Asian Americans (Suzuki, 2002). In the past two decades, the sociocultural contexts of family (Fuligni, 1997), school (Gibson, 1988; Ogbu, 1987), and peers have been most widely accepted as influential factors in the academic achievement of Asian Americans. Researchers have also found a combination of these sociocultural factors to be influential in the academic achievement of Asian Americans (Peng & Wright, 1994).

Analyzing data from the base-year survey of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Peng and Wright (1994) found that Asian American students are more likely to be raised in intact two-parent family units, to spend more time doing homework, and

to engage in more outside-of-school activities compared to students of other racial and ethnic groups. Asian American parents also held higher educational expectations for their children compared to parents of other racial and ethnic groups. Differences in home environments and educational activities also accounted for a large part of the achievement differences between Asian Americans and other minority students. Mau (1997) also found Asian American parents' influences on their high school children's academic achievement to be significant factors in their academic success. Moreover, the literature on Asian American students reveals that these students feel pressure to meet their parents' expectations to succeed academically; often this success equates to attending what the parents deem a "good college" (Yeh et al., 2005).

College Choice

The literature on college choice reveals three basic theoretical perspectives for understanding the college-choice process: (a) socio psychological studies, (b) economic studies, and (c) sociological status attainment studies (Hossler, et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997; McDonough & Antonio, 1996). Social psychological studies have examined the effects of academic programs, campus social climate, cost, location, and the influence of others on students' college choices; students' assessment of their fit with their chosen college; and the cognitive stages of college choice (McDonough). An extensive, yet dated, body of literature emphasizes the effect of high schools on students' college aspirations and intentions (Alwin & Otto, 1977; Boyle, 1966; Meyer, 1970). Stage and Hossler (1989) and Flint (1992) have found that families greatly influence students' college choice and attendance. Hossler and Stage (1992) later investigated the influence of families in tandem with high school experiences on students'

choices of postsecondary institutions.

More recently, McDonough (1997) examined the everyday experiences of 24 high school female seniors as they chose their colleges and demonstrated, using a qualitative approach, that college choice is a more complex social and organizational reality than has been previously understood. The author addressed access and equity issues by documenting how students' college-choice decisions can be greatly influenced by colleges, high schools, parents, friends, and the media. In particular, the study shed light on how socioeconomic factors and other underlying factors in the college-choice process can affect the college decisions students make. For example, students in the study who attended more elite high schools were more likely to attend selective colleges because they were more likely to be positioned to do so, first by their parents' guidance and later by the resources their high schools afforded them (McDonough).

Institutional characteristics, or *habiti* (Reay et al., 2005), and state policies have also been found to influence students' college-choice processes. *Habiti*, the plural of *habitus*, is a term borrowed from Bourdieu (1977) that describes a set of beliefs or dispositions acquired through experiences of an individual or a group. Reay and colleagues use the term *institutional habitus* to describe "an intervening, providing a semi-autonomous means by which classed, raced, and gendered processes are played out in the lives of students and their higher education choices" (p. 35). Perna and Titus (2004) found that four kinds of state public policies influence college choice: (a) direct appropriations to higher education institutions, (b) financial aid to students, (c) tuition, and (d) policies related to academic preparation at the K-12 level.

Economic studies have regarded college choice as a rational decision of investment and assumed that students maximize perceived cost-benefits in their college choices (Jackson

1978; Manski & Wise, 1983). According to this perspective, students make decisions about college attendance according to what they perceive to gain from their college experience in terms of their desired occupation, advancement of their educational goals, or professional and social networks as weighted against the costs. These costs may extend beyond the financial burdens associated with paying for tuition and fees and may include forgone wages and lapsed time during college enrollment, separation from family and friends, and the inability to reap the social and economic benefits from obtaining a college degree.

Social status attainment studies have analyzed the impact of individuals' social status on the development of educational aspirations and measure inequalities in college access (McDonough, 1997). Walpole (2003) found that students' socioeconomic status (SES) continues to affect students' college experiences and outcomes. Compared to their high-SES peers, low-SES college students invest more heavily in economic capital than social or cultural capital, most likely out of necessity. This difference may have important consequences during college and after graduation. The type of profession pursued upon graduation may be influenced by how students spend their out-of-classroom time during college. For instance, a student who worked for a professor as a research or teaching assistant may be able to accumulate economic, social, and cultural capital through interaction with faculty that may be converted in several ways after graduation. Alternately, a student who spent more time working and less time studying or participating in student organizations on campus may acquire a different set of skills or contacts that may lead to jobs that require work experience. Walpole's findings support Bourdieu's (1977, 1990, 1994) notion that students from low-SES backgrounds possess different cultural

capital and habits than do high-SES students, and that attending college does not necessarily indicate that a student has risen economically or socially to a level similar to that of their peers. Consequently, although many low-SES students are upwardly mobile compared to their parents, students from higher SES backgrounds continue to have economic, social, and cultural advantages.

College Choice Models

Several models explain the various stages of the college-choice process for prospective college students. Kotler (1976) described the college selection process from the student's perspective as consisting of seven stages:

1. decision to attend,
2. information seeking and receiving,
3. specific college inquiries,
4. application,
5. admission,
6. college choice, and
7. registration.

Ihlanfeldt (1980) described the process in terms of a funnel metaphor in which students pass through the categories of prospects, candidates, applicants, admitted students, matriculants, and alumni. Chapman's (1981) three-stage model included (a) the decision to go to college, (b) investigation of colleges, and (c) application, admission, and matriculation. This particular model suggests that a student's college choice is influenced by a set of personal characteristics combined with a series of external influences including the impact of significant persons, fixed characteristics of the institution, and the institution's own efforts to communicate with prospective students. In his adaptation of the three-stage model, Litten (1982) used a detailed causal framework to create a more comprehensive

and expanded version of Chapman's model with environmental characteristics added to student and institutional factors.

The college choice model proposed by Hossler et al. (1989) has been the most widely referenced in the literature. Their model describes a three-stage process by which secondary-level students develop predispositions to attend college, search for information about college, and make choices ultimately leading them to enroll at a particular institution of higher education. The types of interview questions generated for this study were based on the stages proposed in this model, since they were most likely to yield responses addressing the study's guiding questions. Given what we know about the differences in students' educational experiences and outcomes based on race, class, and gender, the framework of Hossler et al. might not be the most appropriate tool by which to examine the college-choice processes of students outside the dominant culture. In the past decade, knowledge about the college-choice processes of students of color, for instance, has been expanding. Freeman's work (1999, 2005) involving African American students and their college-choice processes, for instance, highlights the importance of culture and the role of family in the decisions African American students make during their college search process. Contending that Hossler et al.'s model reinforces the notion of individualism—that academically able students are educationally engaged and self-motivated and inclined to seek information about college—Freeman (2005) proposes a model that reflects the important influences of family and culture. In addition, Smith (2009) found that low-SES African American families are highly involved in the process towards high school completion, but are not equipped with the appropriate maps to charter their children from high school to college completion. Muhammad (2008) found that African Amer-

ican students' understanding of their high school counselors' expectations for their future education positively influenced college predisposition at a magnitude comparable to fatherly support.

While the literature on African American students' college-choice processes has been growing, there is very little about how Asian American students and their families navigate the processes. This study addresses this knowledge gap and offers ways to conceptualize this phenomenon in practice and research. Using a qualitative approach, this study draws on informal conversations and interviews with first-year Asian American undergraduates enrolled at an elite private university in the Northeast to describe the experiences and stories that helped shape their college-choice processes. The purpose of this study is to understand how first- and second-generation Asian American students explain their own college-choice processes and who or what they perceive to have the most influence on their decisions to apply and ultimately attend the college of their choice. The following research questions guided the study: How do Asian American students understand their college-choice processes? What individuals or factors did Asian American students consider important as they attempted to make decisions about where to apply and ultimately attend? To what extent and how were these individuals and factors influential?

METHODS

A qualitative method of inquiry was used for this study to gain richer information about the participants' experiences (Merriam, 1998; Weiss, 1994). Qualitative methods employ various knowledge claims, strategies of inquiry, and methods of data collection and analysis to understand the meanings participants make of their experiences, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture,

and to discover rather than test variables (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This type of method allowed students to provide concrete examples and to elaborate on events and occurrences that were important in their college-choice processes. The site and participants in this study are not intended to represent all Asian American students and elite universities in the US. Students were invited to participate in the research through *purposive sampling*, a qualitative research method commonly used to intentionally seek and select participants who are best suited to provide a full description of the research topic (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Salkind, 2000).

Data Collection

The two factors that guided the selection of the site and participants were heuristic potential and accessibility (Vierra, Pollock, & Golez, 1998). A site and its members have *heuristic potential* when they have the aptitude to provide useful information in answering the research questions set forth by the researcher. Upon identifying a site with good heuristic potential, gaining access to the site is equally important. Practical considerations involve issues such as the site's willingness to accept researchers and their collection of data, its openness to the publication of findings, and the feasibility of the researcher to travel to and from the site. The proper names of the site and participants are disguised under pseudonyms in this article.

Site Selection

For several reasons, we chose a highly selective, private university located in an urban area of the Northeastern region of the United States. First, the university has a significant population of first-year Asian Americans. One fourth (24%) of the class of 2010 from which the participants were selected were students of Asian ancestry, though the data did not

distinguish exactly what percentages of this population were Asian and Asian American. Since only 103 (18%) out of 564 Asian students were from Asia, there was a high probability that the majority of Asian students were Asian American. Second, the university had more than a dozen Asian-affiliated undergraduate student organizations that served the interests and needs of several ethnic subpopulations. This meant that we would be able to find a sample of Asian Americans from multiple ethnic subpopulations. Lastly, accessibility to and our knowledge about the institution and its student body allowed us to seek participants who met the criteria for this study.

Participant Selection

We selected 14 participants using the following criteria: students had to be (a) US citizens of Asian ancestry, (b) enrolled full time in their first year of undergraduate studies, and (c) at least 18 years old. Asian students were required to be US citizens in order to participate because the study was interested in the experiences of Asian American students rather than international students or those whose experiences in the States were limited, hence coming into the study with very different educational experiences and aspirations (Chiswick, 1988). The study was limited to first-year students because their college-choice processes were most recent in comparison to students of more advanced years. Students were required to be at least 18 years old for the purpose of obtaining consent without parental approval.

We sought participants from a predominantly freshman residence hall on campus, visiting common rooms during days and times that we knew many students were likely to be present. This proved difficult as we found very few willing participants. As a secondary strategy, we used Facebook to locate

all first-year Asian students living in the hall and sent messages to each person, explaining the nature of the study and our request for their participation. Facebook allows searches based on residence hall within a particular university. As a result, 14 students replied to our message within 2 days with willingness to participate in the study. All participants were full-time students and 18 years old at the time of the interviews. There was an even number of females and males and first- and second-generation Asian Americans in the sample. All of the first-generation Asian Americans identified themselves as *1.5 generation*, meaning they were born outside the United States but immigrated to the US at an age early enough to be educated and raised here. Determining the adequate amount of time in the US to use this label was entirely dependent on the students' perspectives. Students self-reported their generation status. The first-generation group was comprised of those students who immigrated to the United States during their childhood and attended schools in the US for most of their K-12 education; and the second-generation group was comprised of those students born and raised in the United States. The majority of the students were East Asians: there were 7 Chinese, 3 Taiwanese, 2 Korean, 1 Indian, and 1 Chinese/Vietnamese students. All from two-parent families, students grew up in various parts of the United States and attended a variety of different types of high schools including public and private suburban and urban schools (see Table 1).

Informal Conversations and Interviews

Upon receiving the participants' consent, we started to conduct the interviews. The interviews lasted approximately 1 to 2 hours with the exception of one that lasted 20 minutes. All interviews took place at a mutually convenient location, either in the residence hall

in which the student lived or another location on campus. We recorded and transcribed the interviews. Interview questions focused on students' beliefs and knowledge about their high school experiences; how these beliefs may or may not have affected their college-choice processes; how the students made decisions about their college opportunities; and how factors such as student achievement and aspirations, parental educational levels, expectation, encouragement, and high school academic and social experiences may have influenced their decision-making processes. With some flexibility, we adhered to a set of interview questions to address the research questions (see Appendix A).

Data Analysis

The method of constant comparison was used to compare entries within and across categories (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). We generated constructs, themes, and patterns from the categorical data and then developed hypotheses to explain the observed relationships between these ideas. As researchers, we are responsible for exercising ethical practices throughout all steps of the research process. Respecting the rights of the participants, honoring the research site, and reporting the research completely and truthfully are all important considerations that we kept in mind throughout the execution of the study. Pseudonyms were used in the transcriptions and in all reporting and presenting of the data in order to protect the identity and privacy of each participant. We followed the guidelines set forth by the Institutional Review Board of the university from which we gained approval for the study, as well as referred to published ethical standards by professional associations such as the American Educational Research Association, the American Anthropological Association, and the American Psychological Association.

We attempted to validate the findings throughout all steps of the research process by

TABLE 1.
Profile of Students

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Generation*	Hometown	Type of High School Attended	Mother's Highest Education / Career	Father's Highest Education / Career
Shara	F	Indian	1.5	Norristown, PA	public	bachelor's / occupational therapist	MD / psychiatrist
Ji-Young	F	Korean	1.5	Los Angeles, CA	public magnet	bachelor's / nurse	bachelor's / pastor
Kelly	F	Korean	1.5	Seattle, WA	public	bachelor's / businessman	bachelor's / restaurant owner
Gretchen	F	Taiwanese	2nd	San Marino, CA	private	high school / stay-at-home mother	master's / engineer
Wenling	F	Chinese	1.5	Memphis, TN	public	bachelor's / accountant	bachelor's / computer programmer
Jade	F	Chinese	2nd	Birmingham, AL	public magnet	MD / rheumatologist	MD / businessman
Susan	F	Taiwanese	2nd	Milpitas, CA	private	master's / business management	master's / software engineer
Daniel	M	Taiwanese	2nd	Los Angeles, CA	public magnet	bachelor's / accountant	MBA / company manager
Bolin	M	Chinese	1.5	East Amherst, NY	public	PhD / researcher	PhD / researcher
Jason	M	Chinese	2nd	Naperville, IL	boarding school	master's / stay-at-home mother	MBA / marketing analyst
Shen	M	Chinese	1.5	Berwyn, PA	public	master's / computer engineer	master's / computer engineer
Ming	M	Chinese	1.5	San Diego, CA	public	MBA / stay-at-home mother	PhD / assistant professor
John	M	Chinese	2nd	Yardley, PA	public	master's / software engineer	master's / software engineer
Luan	M	Chinese/ Vietnamese	2nd	Willow Grove, PA	public	some elementary / machinist	some high school / machinist

* Asian American students sometimes identify themselves as 1.5 generation if they were born outside the United States but immigrated to the US at an age early enough to be educated and raised here. Determining the adequate amount of time in the US to use this label is dependent on the students' perspectives.

using strategies outlined in Creswell (2003). We first clarified the bias that we brought to this study as researchers and made conscious efforts to be aware of the implications of these biases. Once the data were analyzed, interpreted, and recorded, we practiced member-checking: we reviewed the findings with each participant for verification. We explained the major categories that emerged from the study and then inquired whether and to what extent these categories fit each participant's experience. If the participant offered insipid agreement with our analysis, we concluded that the categories did not truly capture the participant's experience. We then engaged the participant in a discussion to generate new properties of a category or a set of categories. We utilized participants' feedback to make amendments, shared the results again with the participants, and repeated the process until participants affirmed the findings without any hesitation. Lastly, to enhance the accuracy of the account we used *peer debriefing*, "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308).

FINDINGS

Our findings are presented in two major sections. The first section presents information on how students explained their progression through their college-choice process. We discuss how students described college or the act of going to college, how they made their decisions during high school that prepared them for college, and what determinations motivated them to succeed academically in high school and attend one of the most prestigious schools in the US. In the second section we discuss the key players who influenced the students' college-choice processes, which included family members such as parents and older

siblings, school administrators such as high school counselors and teachers, and peers. We also discuss the concept of self-management for those who independently navigated the college-choice process.

Descriptions, Decisions, and Determinations

Students' Descriptions of College. Most students described their decision to attend college as a nondecision: they were simply living out what Du Bois-Reymond (1998) calls "normal biographies . . . linear, anticipated and predictable, unreflexive transitions, often gender and class specific, rooted in well-established life-worlds" (p. 33). When asked to describe how she decided to attend college, an Indian American student named Shara replied, "Actually, it never really was a decision to make. It was always taken [for granted] that I would go to college. . . . I never had the idea of not going to college." Wenling, a Chinese American student similarly stated, "I think [deciding to go to college] was never a decision, . . . I just expected that of myself and my parents expected that of me. . . . I just assumed I was going to college. I never considered other options."

The expectation to attend college or the assumption that college was the next step after graduating from high school, whether held by the students or their parents, often surfaced in the data. Bolin, whose parents are highly educated, stated:

I've always wanted to go to college, and it's kind of expected of me because my parents are both like really well-educated from China and then really well-educated here, so it hasn't . . . it's never become an issue.

Similarly, Kelly, a Korean American student noted, "It was a given from when I was young that I would go to college." And John,

another Chinese American student stated, “I guess it was always just assumed that I was going to college.”

Students’ Decisions Throughout the Process.

Students considered several criteria when deciding to apply to colleges and universities. They took into consideration institutional characteristics and whether they saw a good fit between the schools and themselves. Some students thought about their parents’ opinions and values and what they considered to be “acceptable” or “good schools” based on national rankings. The institutional characteristics that seemed most important to the students included the institution’s reputation and prestige compared to other schools of similar caliber. Additionally, of importance were specific programs and degrees they wished to pursue. Students also considered proximity to or distance from home. Some expressed having “strong family values” and therefore wished to be close to home, whereas others wanted to be as far away from home as possible, not necessarily because they lacked family ties, but to gain new and different experiences. Students considered their future social activities and thought about the location of the institution and what prospects living in an urban area or large city, for instance, would offer them. They also thought about the academic and professional opportunities that they perceived the institutions would afford them during and after college.

Only one student expressed the importance of peer groups as he decided which colleges he would apply to. Shen, who graduated from high school with an academically strong and competitive group of students, considered a “good school” to consist of “a solid competitive peer group with a good reputation of good academics and how much weight that reputation will carry after you graduate . . . whether it [was] respected in the workplace.” Since he attended high school with what

his principal, administrators, and guidance counselors considered to be “the best class that has come through this school probably ever in terms of AP scores, PSAT scores, National Merit Scholar accommodations and finalists, [and] PSSA state-mandated testing,” Shen sought to study with a similar peer group that would challenge him and motivate him to study harder.

Whether students came from financially modest or well-to-do backgrounds, the cost of attending the institution did not appear to be an influential factor in deciding where to apply or even ultimately attend. A few students described their parents’ willingness to do “whatever it takes” for their child to attend a “good school,” even if that would mean taking out several loans. Shen stated, “Money didn’t matter because my parents were willing to pay for it, and also we wouldn’t have gotten financial aid even if we had applied for it.” Luan and his family, who come from a modest background, thought about the financial burden of attending an elite private university, but decided that the perceived outcomes outweighed the cost:

[Financing college] was a big main factor. One of the reasons I would not have come here is because of that. . . . My parents’ philosophy, I guess you can say, was: It’s dumb to turn down a school because of financial reasons. . . . I guess [my parents] say that the benefit of an education is worth more than any money you can pay, so we figured, I mean, just do . . . what you need to do to go to school and just worry about the financial aspects afterwards.

Generally, students described their parents as caring deeply about their education and the type of institutions they would attend and careers they would later pursue.

Although there was some consensus in regards to the criteria by which students decided to apply, the number of colleges to

which they applied varied somewhat. Half of the students applied to 7 or more schools, some to as many as 11. Some students mentioned being advised by their counselors to apply to a variety of different schools. Shen stated, “I knew [from books] that you don’t apply to only good schools. You apply to mid-range and reach and safety schools.” Students like Shen chose to apply to a variety of schools to increase their chances of attending college. Others started with an extensive list of schools and narrowed it down to three or fewer schools to which they applied. They decided to narrow their lists by the institutions’ geographic locations, types of programs offered, parents’ approval of the institutions, or a combination of these factors. Three students applied to the university through early decision, and two of these students applied to one or two more schools that they considered “safety schools,” schools to which they were fairly certain they would be admitted.

Determinations. Students described several reasons they felt determined to succeed academically. They often described a general sense of responsibility they felt in doing well and the commitment they felt in honoring their family and not disappointing them. Kelly described her responsibility to do well in school in this manner:

[Growing up in a Korean American family], I think, did implant . . . a sense of responsibility to like do well . . . Compared to a lot of other Asian friends that I have, my family [was] not so severe in planting that sense of responsibility, but I think I did have . . . a feeling that I had to perform well [in school].

Those who had younger siblings or cousins spoke also about setting a good example for the next generation to follow. John, a Chinese American student, who prefaced several of his stories by saying that he “really never wanted to make [his parents] unhappy or make them

feel disappointed,” stated:

It’s really stereotypically Asian [to] honor your family, but honestly that’s how I feel and that’s how I grew up; and also I have three little cousins. I’m the oldest in the small group of siblings and I really want to give them a great example, set a great example for them, my cousins and my brother.

Some students were determined to succeed academically because they understood the hardships their immigrant parents endured. They were motivated and inspired by their parents’ hard work raising them in a foreign land, arriving in the United States with limited English language proficiency. John described his source of “determination” and what “drives” him in this manner:

My parents came here about 24 years ago, not knowing much English. . . . They had almost no money and their English was absolutely broken to pieces. I don’t know how they did it, but they would tell me stories about going to movies on Saturdays—not to just watch movies, but to learn English. And they would stay there for 6 to 8 hours, not understanding half the movie, but still practicing their English, and that is such great determination there. I mean, that’s just ridiculous. I can’t imagine coming to a nation where I don’t understand any of the language and having no connections. . . . They were also financially in trouble. They told me stories about selling stuff at flea markets at the lowest prices possible, . . . and they still made a living. And now, look where we are. I mean, my parents could afford full tuition here. . . . And that’s what really drives me. I need to pay them back for what they’ve done for me, you know?

Jason, who at the time of the interview was contemplating the pursuit of a different degree at another university, expressed the difficulty of bringing this idea to his parents. His feelings were burdened with guilt and shame:

Well my parents are paying for everything and I've just [screwed] around left and right, had problems. . . . It's not the way I should be doing things. . . . It's not the right way to pay them back. . . . They set up everything for [me] to do well on this one thing and if [I] don't, well what's the point, you know? Kids can coax all of their parents' money all they want, but I'm not going to be one of those people, so I'm just gonna pay them back with time [and] a lot of interest.

Several students like Jason and John demonstrated strong family values and appreciation for what their parents did for them. They felt the need and responsibility to pay their parents back for everything they provided.

Key Players

Students learned about college from various sources: parents and older siblings, friends including peers at school, and school personnel such as teachers and college counselors. Several students independently navigated the college-choice process and relied on information from external sources such as the internet and other media to inform their decisions. In varying levels of involvement, these sources helped students think about college, seek and receive information about various institutions, and ultimately decide where to apply and enroll.

Families. Families of students were involved in a number of ways throughout the decision-making process. Students who started thinking about college at an earlier age were influenced by their parents and older siblings. Daniel, a Chinese American student from Los Angeles, was one student who was influenced by his family to think about college from an early age:

I [started thinking about college] probably right after my sister got into college, so that would be about sixth grade when I started thinking about it. . . . Well, actually, it started with my father. My dad, when he was going to high school

[in New York], he always wanted to attend [a top Ivy League university]. . . . [That university] was my first choice.

Shara, another student with an older sibling, credited her older brother for helping her think about college:

My brother had gone through the [college application] process before I had, so he helped me out a lot. . . . I got to see his process while I was a freshman [in high school] and that's when I started thinking seriously about which college would be better for me.

Jade, whose parents are both highly educated, started thinking about college when she was "really small":

My parents bought me SAT practice books when I was in the sixth grade. And I had never really thought about what school I was going to [attend] until my older friends were applying to colleges, like people who were 2 or 3 years older than me.

Like Jade, students whose parents were highly educated or educated in the United States were influenced by their parents' influence or involvement (see Table 1 for parents' educational backgrounds and careers).

Parents and older siblings were also instrumental through the information-seeking phase. In describing this process, Gretchen habitually used the pronoun "we" to describe her collaborative effort with her parents to learn more about colleges, assuming that most parents were as involved as hers:

My parents were very involved in this process, as I'm sure most parents are. So we looked at the [state universities], and what we were looking for was basically what kind of school would fit, because—well first of all—I'm an engineer, and we wanted to see where the science, which schools' . . . science area was the strongest. . . . We actually talked to some of my

parents' friends. . . . We considered some East Coast schools. . . . My mom would talk to her friends who already had . . . sons or daughters who were in the East Coast, and I basically just talked to them. . . . She had a friend whose daughter went to Northwestern, for example—that's more Midwest, I guess—so I talked to her and I asked her, "What do you do when you're not working? What's the atmosphere like? What are the students like? How are the dorms?"—your typical kid-going-to-college-next-year kind of questions. So that's what we did. And then, we finally decided.

Some students whose parents were able to take time off of work went on college visits with them. Jade, for instance, recalled going on a road trip with her mother for 7 days to visit eight schools. Upon completing this trip, she made the decision to apply to the early-decision process for the university she eventually attended.

Those students, whose parents were unable to be as involved as they would have liked—due to limitations such as time constraints, language barriers, and cultural differences—sought college information from their older siblings. Kelly described her older sister as a mentor figure during the college-choice process and more generally in her life:

[My older sister] was a big help not just [throughout] high school but like throughout life. She was a mentor and also because there are certain questions that my parents couldn't answer just because they don't know the culture very well . . . and because given their age. . . . I've had several experiences where I saw my sister and my parents having a conflict about a certain issue. [At that time] I couldn't understand her, but then, several years later, I find myself in a similar situation, but then she understands me. . . . Lucky me for having that older sibling.

Friends and Peers. Several students found

their friends to be very helpful in the information-seeking phase. They found comfort and support in going through the search process with friends rather than going through it alone. Bolin described how he and his friend helped each other:

In terms of college [search], I would always . . . my friend and I would just . . . go through [the college rankings published in a well-known college manual] and look through every single college: "Oh, I've never heard of that," or "They're full of [crap]," and blah blah blah . . . I learned a lot from that [process].

Older students were also perceived to be helpful in providing information and sharing experiences, since they had gone through the college-choice process earlier. During their senior year, students like Ming and Gretchen actively sought information about colleges from their older friends who had just started their first year of college.

Teachers and College Counselors. Some students had close relationships with their high school teachers or counselors and were able to acquire information about colleges and the application process from them. Bolin felt comfortable approaching some of his teachers at school about college:

I was close to some of my teachers. One of my precalc[ulus] teacher[s] I was really close with 'cause she was also my advisor for National Honor Society, but I was basically on good terms with all my teachers . . . and I was also really close to one of my Spanish teachers . . . I would say those two would probably be the people who I talk[ed] to the most in high school, and then if I have an extra 5 to 15 minutes, I would just stop by their office and talk to them about whatever.

Other students found their counselors very helpful in obtaining information about colleges. Susan worked closely with her

counselors through the college-choice process and had fruitful interactions with them at the private college preparatory school she attended since kindergarten:

We [had] really good college counselors. . . . They [would] give us examples of applications, they [would] walk us through the Common App, the application for the [state universities] and everything. And you also ha[d] to schedule appointments with the college counselor so they can write a reference that really pertains to you—they want[ed] to actually be able to tell the college how you are. . . . With a lot of public schools in our area, we were hearing, “They each have 200 students per college counselor, so they don’t really get to know who you are or anything.”

Susan found her college counselors to be very helpful; however, this was often not the case for many of the students we interviewed. The effectiveness of college counselors varied by the type of secondary institutions that students attended. Susan, who attended an independent college-preparatory school, received individual attention from her college counselor through the application process. Besides meeting with her counselor on a weekly basis, Susan received structured guidance she saw necessary to complete all the required steps for applying to colleges:

Our college counselors really helped a lot. It made it a lot less stressful than doing it by ourselves. And they gave us deadlines. You ha[d] to give labeled envelopes with the college’s address and a stamp and [the school’s] address to your teachers by this date, and . . . they’ll have to send it out by this date, and then you would have to give . . . a list of colleges that you were applying to and stuff like that. . . . They told us never to send anything out without the [school] address [embossed on it]. So, we had to use those. . . . I feel like if I didn’t have that and it was just my parents, I would have flipped out.

Not all students were able to receive the kind of attention or support they wished from their college counselors, however. Ming recounted an unconstructive encounter with his counselor:

Our counselors . . . I don’t think they [were] very close to you at all. Maybe I saw my counselor once in my senior year and that was just for a college recommendation. And so, since they don’t even know you personally, they just give you like a sheet of paper to fill out and talk about yourself, and basically they’ll base their letter of recommendation . . . on that sheet and that would be it. But I remember when I told my counselor that I was applying to [the business school at this university], I said, “So, what do you need to get into [the school]?” And she said, “You need to walk on water.” And I said, “What? What are you talking about?” And then, she said, “It’s really, really hard.” So, she wasn’t very supportive of me.

Fortunately, Ming was not discouraged by his counselor’s remark, and he nevertheless decided to apply and got accepted into the university.

Self-Management and Reliance on Rankings. Several students carried out their own college search, or “research,” as many called the search process, and relied on themselves to make decisions about college. We refer to this as *self-management*, a process students devise for themselves to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills in order to function in their respective academic lives. These students, who navigated the search process independently, relied on information provided on the web and other sources of media. Bolin explained his process in this manner:

I was . . . someone who always kind of goes and looks for information myself rather than waiting to have it presented to me, so if I find something that might potentially be interesting, I kind of go dig it up and see. . . . When I was looking at

colleges, I'm not going to wait for colleges to send me all the mail and be like, "Oh, that looks interesting." I'll look at these [schools] . . . or go on their website and see what they're good at and [see] if it fits my interests. . . . So, I mean, I'm usually on top of stuff . . . choices-wise. Having to decide between classes or colleges, it's kind of how I was raised: to be independent in making decisions.

Just over half of the students, as well as their parents, relied on the media for information about colleges. They searched for national college rankings provided by sources such as the *U.S. News and World Report* to pick the schools they wanted to apply to. All of these students were either an only child or did not have older siblings who could provide information. Some students acknowledged their strong reliance on rankings. For example, Jason sought information from rankings provided by *U.S. News and World Report* and "all those sites that everyone uses." Others described their parents' inclinations for rankings. Susan mentioned her parents' heavy reliance on rankings and the need to strive for schools that are highly ranked:

I love my parents, I do, but they just sometimes push it a little towards rankings. . . . My mom is really into the college rankings like the "U.S. Today Weekly," or something, and she was looking at [this university] . . . and it was fourth at the time.

Ming's parents also highly regarded the rankings, though they were not as aggressive as Susan's parents were in urging their child to pursue the best ranked schools. Ming stated:

When college apps came about, my mom asked me what I wanted to do in college, and I just told her I knew I didn't want to do science. And then my dad said, "Oh, it's because you're not determined enough

to do science, so you should do business instead." And then I said, "Oh, ok, if that's the way you look at it, all right. So, point me to a good business school." And then he showed me a *Newsweek* report and it said "[name of the university] – No.1," or something. He said, "You should apply here." I said, "Oh, ok."

While some students acknowledged their strong reliance on rankings, others denied the relevance of rankings, yet demonstrated trust in the information. Shen stated:

I didn't put too much into rankings. I talked to a lot of people and I compared the quality of the education. . . . I didn't really pay attention to [*U.S. News and World Report*], but it did help serve as a guideline for which schools tend to be in the top 25. But to compare each school, I looked at more specific rankings like *Business Week*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Newsweek*.

DISCUSSION

From interviews with 14 first-year Asian American students enrolled at an elite private university, we have learned much about the college-choice process for first- and second-generation Asian Americans and how it differs from that of non-Asian Americans. As students navigated through the various stages of the decision-making process, most students valued their parents' thoughts and feelings, while trying to remain faithful to their own aspirations and goals. Most students were not able to receive help from their parents, because their parents were either unfamiliar with the American college application process or limited in their English fluency. Parents sometimes lacked the social and cultural capital to be able to aid students in the process of applying to schools, thus students turned to peers to support them or self-management. Zhou and Bankston (1994) have found that

second-generation Vietnamese immigrants who have strong adherence to traditional family values among other characteristics tend disproportionately to receive high grades, to have definite college plans, and to score high on academic orientation.

Most students in the study described the decision to attend college in the first place as a nondecision, which resulted from either their own expectations of themselves, their parents' expectations, or a combination of both. These findings affirm what Glick and White (2004) learned about educational expectations of immigrant and second-generation American youth and their parents. Their study, using data from the 1988–1994 panels of the National Education Longitudinal Study, revealed that the overwhelming majority of immigrant parents expect their children to go to college and beyond. Well over half of the Asian immigrant youth in their study had parents who expected their child to go beyond college, while less than a fifth of the Mexican immigrant youth, for instance, had parents with expectations that high. Also, immigrant and second-generation Asian youth had higher educational expectations than did immigrants and second-generation youth from other racial and ethnic groups. Perhaps for some, the self-expectation to attend college was a product of being raised by parents who held the same expectations for themselves and thus their children (Schneider & Lee, 1990).

Students started thinking about college at different times during their elementary and secondary education; some started as early as the fifth grade and others started as late as the first semester of their high school senior year. The methods by which students sought and received information depended on several factors including the type of secondary institution they attended, the availability and helpfulness of high school counselors, the level of family involvement (including parents

and older siblings), and the accessibility to information in the media. The process by which students applied to colleges and universities varied as well. While some took advantage of early decision and early action options, others applied to as many schools as possible to increase their chances of getting accepted.

Lastly, students considered a wide range of factors before deciding on which college to ultimately attend. While some put the utmost priority on the reputation and prestige of schools, others considered the availability of programs that best suited their interests. Through the stages of the college-choice process, students were greatly and diversely influenced by their family, including their parents and older siblings, friends and peer groups, and high school teachers and counselors. Some relied on rankings provided by media, such as the *U.S. News and World Report*. McDonough, Antonio, Walpole, and Perez (1998) found that students placing the most importance on national rankings are more than twice as likely to be Asian American, from high-income families, and from families with college-educated parents.

All students who participated in the study came from two-parent households, and most students described their family income as being middle class or upper-middle class. Most students' parents were also at least college educated and held high-paying jobs. Research suggests that students from such backgrounds are more likely to succeed academically and pursue postsecondary education (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Christensen, Melder, & Weisbrod, 1975; Hossler et al., 1999; Hossler & Stage, 1992). If our sample had consisted of students from lower-income homes, the results might have been vastly different given what research tells us about the diversity among Asian subcultures in the US. Some students may have had different expectations upon finishing secondary education, such as finding

a full-time job; for others, postsecondary education might not have even been an option, because they did not obtain high school diplomas. The types of institutions to which students applied—be they 2-year or 4-year, private or public—may have been different according to their socioeconomic status and family backgrounds. In some circumstances, college rankings may not have played a major role in the college choice process.

Some students felt pressure from their parents to succeed academically and attend a “good college” upon graduating from high school. Not only do Asian American students feel the immense pressure to attend college, but they are burdened with the task of finding the “right college,” or as one of our participants said, a “good college.” Similar to our research findings, Yeh et al. (2005) also found in their qualitative study of Korean immigrant youth that first-generation Korean students typically felt pressure to meet their parents’ expectations of doing academically well. For one particular student, this meant attending an Ivy League university and pursuing a career as a doctor or a lawyer. Though some students felt direct pressure to do well in school, our study revealed that several students gained inspiration and motivation to continue their academic success through postsecondary education from witnessing their parents’ struggle and determination to provide for them.

Overall, findings confirm the applicability of the sociocultural model to the process Asian Americans use to make college choices. This model has been largely applied to low-income African Americans in the literature; however, our research shows that the model may be applicable to Asian American students who may come from middle-to-upper-income backgrounds. Students from this study valued their families’ input in terms of deciding which colleges and universities to consider attending and which careers to possibly pursue upon

attaining their college degrees. Although several students managed their college searches on their own, their decisions were collectively made with their parents and older siblings. Several students expressed their desires to make their parents proud and to set good examples for future generations in their families. These sentiments were particularly important for more than half of the students who expressed keen understandings of the sacrifices their immigrant parents made to provide for their families. Previous research has attributed the academic achievement of Asian Americans to the desire to pay back parents, especially immigrant parents, for the sacrifices they made to provide opportunities for their children to succeed (Mordkowitz & Ginsburg, 1987; Ying, Coombs, & Lee, 1999). Our research shows that differences in making a college choice may be more connected to cultural differences than socioeconomic status. Of course, more research is needed to test this hypothesis.

Limitations, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The small sample of students in this study lacked in ethnic diversity; most students were East Asian Americans, and more than half of them were Chinese Americans. While some diversity was achieved in terms of gender, geographic locations of students’ hometowns, and types of secondary institutions attended, most students came from similar socioeconomic backgrounds and family structure. Though students’ majors and postcollegiate objectives varied, students were chosen to participate in this study from one university of one type. Future studies would benefit from a larger sample of students from various ethnic subpopulations, socioeconomic backgrounds, family structures, generational status, and immigration history. In addition, it would be beneficial to include students attending non-elite schools in future studies. Comparative studies of students from

various types of higher education institutions would also help us better understand the college-choice process of the heterogeneous population of Asian American students.

For this study, we interviewed students a year after they made their decisions about which college to attend; hence, students were required to recount their experiences retrospectively. Researchers have expressed concern with the validity of retrospective data because informants are inaccurate, memory decays with time, and there is systematic distortion in how informants recall events (Bernard, Killworth, Kronenfeld, & Sailer, 1984). Furthermore, recall may be influenced by the subject of the study, by whether informants are aided in their recall in some way during the interview (e.g., giving them checklists rather than open-ended questions), by whether they keep diaries, by conditions of the interview, or by a variety of cultural factors (p. 509).

To shorten the time lapse, future studies can interview students at the end of their senior year in high school or at the beginning of their first year in college. Longitudinal studies examining students during each phase of the college-choice process should also be explored to understand each phase more specifically. Further insight into the college-choice process for Asian American students may be obtained from different methodological, conceptual, or theoretical approaches (Teranishi et al., 2004).

Implications for Educational Policy, Practice, and Research

The results from this study have implications for how we think about the college-choice process for Asian American students. Important to consider are the relationships students have with their families, friends, counselors, and high school teachers, because these interactions most often influence the choices and decisions students make about where to apply and ultimately attend. Information provided by the

media, such as college rankings, also influences students' college-choice behaviors (McDonough et al., 1998). Since these individuals and resources serve as important information feeders for college-bound Asian American students, accurately and adequately informing these media venues about colleges and the application process is imperative. Inviting admissions officers or student volunteers from higher education institutions to come to the schools to speak and answer questions in an information session is one way to relay important information about colleges and their application procedures to students and their families. Equally important for Asian American students, however, is educating the parents about the college-choice process, as they have the potential to influence the college decisions and choices that their children make. Most parents of students who participated in this study were educated abroad and had little knowledge about the college-choice process in the States. Educating parents about college choices and the application process may allow them to be more resourceful to their children as well as relieve students of undue pressures imposed by parents that may result from having little or no knowledge about the application process.

Understanding the family structures and educational backgrounds of Asian American students, as well as recognizing that there may be cultural and language barriers that preclude families from adequately assisting students through the college-choice process, may better help college educators organize their recruitment efforts specifically for these student populations. During parents' weekends, for instance, colleges and universities may seek undergraduate volunteers who are able to speak Asian languages to provide tours and information sessions for parents so that they may obtain accurate information about the college-choice process and be able to ask clarifying questions.

Several students, in retrospect, explained their perceived lack of knowledge and “research” as they were going through their college-choice process one year ago. One student explained, “I didn’t do as much research as I think I should have into the college that I was really interested in, because I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do at the time.” Some students were left to discover on their own how to approach the search and application steps of the college process. Thus, institutions of higher education should work closely with high school counselors, teachers, and school administrators so that they may effectively inform students and their families about the range of colleges and universities that students can explore and the variety of admissions policies and practices that exist among institutions. Of note, because Asian American students fall victim to the model minority myth, colleges and universities may assume that these students have access to information regarding higher education institutions. Several students described negative experiences they had with college counselors who were neither informative nor supportive; hence students did not rely on them during their college-choice process. Schools and school districts should be more explicit in terms of what counselors need to know and do in order to prepare students effectively for chances at higher education. Students may benefit from institutional policies that hold counselors accountable so that students and their families are served adequately; although guidance counselors often do not want this responsibility and, by and large, do not feel it is their duty. Students also tend to obtain from senior students information and advice that they were not able to get from counselors or teachers; therefore, schools might want to establish school-wide programs that support student engagement across grade levels, providing access for younger students to older students who are experienced with the college process.

College educators may address these challenges by serving as primary informants of their own institutions. Especially with the advancement of technology and students’ dependency on the everyday use of resources available online, institutions can serve the needs of students interested in going to college by making their school websites user-friendly and interactive. Students may learn about colleges from live chats and webcams that institutions can set up and monitor; these venues may also help colleges and universities collect data in terms of which students are interested and what types of programs attract them most to pursue higher education.

Future research should examine the experiences of Asian American students at various institutions of higher education—including 2-year and 4-year state colleges and universities, small liberal arts colleges, and for-profit organizations—to explore possible differences in college-choice processes of students whose experiences vary in terms of secondary school education, family structures, socioeconomic status, and college and career aspirations. As noted, this study focuses on Asian American students at an elite institution, and as such, the particular type of student who applies to elite institutions. Also of importance is the need to look at disaggregated data of Asian American subpopulations and to account for the differences that exist within each group.

Learning about the college-choice processes of Asian Americans from the narratives of students is important in understanding the decisions and determinations that drive their academic success in K-12 and higher education. Understanding the key players who have the potential to comprehensively inform and support students’ college-choice decisions allows educators and policymakers to target their efforts in a more systematic way not only to improve students’ chances at higher

education, but also to help students find the types of institutions and programs that best suit their interests. One of the most effective ways of learning how to better serve the educational needs of ethnic students, such as Asian Americans, is to learn from their experiences and their stories. Hearing the perspectives of Asian American students also provides a counter narrative to the model minority myth,

showing that these students struggle with their decisions and the amount of information and resources that they can access.

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APPENDIX A. Sample Interview Questions

- Describe your high school experience, both academically and socially.
- How did you choose to come to this institution?
- What were some of the characteristics you were seeking in an institution?
- Who was (were) the most influential figure(s) in helping you choose colleges of your preference and ultimately deciding which institution to attend?
- What role, if any, did your family, including parents and siblings, and/or friends play in your college choice and decision-making process?
- What role, if any, did your K-12 teachers and counselors play in your college choice and decision-making process?

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