CONSTRUCTING POSSIBLE SELVES:

KOREAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

Hye Jung Choi

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Fall 2018

CONSTRUCTING POSSIBLE SELVES:

KOREAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

Hye Jung Choi

Approved: _____
Chrystalla Mouza, Ed.D.
Director of the School of Education

Approved: _____
Carol Vukelich, Ph.D.
Dean of the College of Education and Human Development

Approved: _____
Douglas J. Doren, Ph.D.
Interim Vice Provost for the Office of Graduate and Professional
Education

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed: _____

Rosalie Rolón-Dow, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of dissertation

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed: _____

Eugene Matusov, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed: _____

Carol Wong, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed: _____

Samuel D. Museus, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has been a long journey since I first decided to pursue a doctorate. Without the support of many individuals, it would have been impossible to complete. Therefore, I would like to express to them my greatest gratitude. First of all, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Rosalie Rolón-Dow. It would not have been possible to accomplish this project without her guidance and support. Her thoughtful and insightful advice throughout my graduate program helped me to grow in confidence, become an independent researcher, and nourish my continuing passion for pursuing equity and diversity issues in education. I am very grateful to be her advisee and will remember all of our experiences as I continue my journey to academia.

Next, I want to thank the members of Sociocultural Community-Based Approach and Professional Interest Group at the University of Delaware, especially Dr. Eugene Matusov and Dr. Ana Marjanovic-Shane. They always provided me with meaningful, insightful feedback and suggestions, and have academically and emotionally supported me through every step. They helped me learn different and various perspectives to examine educational issues with their intellectual challenges. Although I sometimes struggled, it was an excellent opportunity for me to grow as a critical scholar. I really enjoyed every moment with them, and am excited to work with them in the future as fellow scholars.

I also want to thank all of my family for their constant support, especially my parents in Korea, Dong Joo Choi and Nan Sun Yoo. I could not even imagine myself starting this journey without your endless sacrifice and support. They have always

been supportive of my pursuits, and I really appreciate that. To my relatives in the U.S., it is such a great fortune for me to have a big supportive family here. I always feel welcome and at home. I also appreciate that they motivated me to start this study. Special thanks to my aunt Hyun Sun Kim and my uncle Nung Sun Yoo, who were always there and took care of me when I needed it most. Without all of these families, I could not have finished this endeavor. Thank you, and I love you all!

Lastly, to the Lord, I know you were always with me for every step and protected me from suffering. I appreciate that I am able to finish this journey and believe you will always be with me for any adventure. Thanks Be to God!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

Asian Americans are generally considered an educationally and economically successful minority in the United States, a perception known as the model minority myth. These images can negatively impact Asian Americans, especially in higher education, by neglecting their challenges and limiting the research conducted related to their struggles and obstacles in higher education. Since most studies involving Asian Americans focus on their enrollment in elite universities, there is not much recognition of Asian Americans in community colleges. This study focuses on one specific subgroup of Asians, Korean Americans. Although this group is more likely to attend highly selective colleges regardless of socioeconomic status, I focus on the Korean American students who attend community colleges.

This study aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of Korean American students attending community colleges and how their perceptions and experiences influence the construction of their possible selves. More specifically, this study examined the opportunities and obstacles they experienced in community college and how these experiences intersected with model minority myths. This study also focused on the possible selves Korean American students might construct while attending community college. Possible selves are "representations of the self in the past and they include representations of the self in the future" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954) and various self-conceptions that include "the good selves, the bad selves, the hoped-for selves, the feared selves, the not-me selves, the ideal selves, and

the ought-selves" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 957). For this study, 29 Korean American community college students were recruited and semi-structured interviews were conducted regarding their high school experiences, community college experiences, and future goals and plans. Through data analysis inspired by a grounded theory approach, 40 codes were developed and three major themes emerged related to the experiences of Korean American students at community college.

The findings showed that before Korean American students attended community colleges, they negatively perceived community colleges as a place for those who did not get into four-year colleges or did not do well in high school, a perception strongly influenced by others such as parents, peers, or members of Korean communities. However, once they attended, many of them had positive experiences through the various academic and career services offered and interactions with faculty and peers. These positive experiences changed Korean American students' negative views of community colleges. Although positive experiences changed their negative perceptions of community colleges, they consistently encountered negative perceptions from others which conflicted with their positive experiences. Korean American students also constructed various possible selves based on their academic and career goals. Most constructed positive possible selves if they had more specific academic and career goals and as well as the confidence to achieve them. These students thought community colleges helped develop their future goals but were ultimately ambivalent about their attendance at community college. Some believed

community college was a foundation or stepping stone for achieving their goals while others thought attending community college would negatively influence their future.

This study is important because it explores an issue to which little scholarly attention has been paid and which has not been thoroughly investigated. Theoretically this study can contribute to the literature on possible selves and Asian Americans in higher education, give a deeper understanding of a particular group in relation to model minority stereotypes, and provide a guide for how to examine multifaceted elements which can influence the understanding of how community college students develop possible selves. This study also has practical benefits: it can promote how to better support Korean American students in order to help them succeed in achieving their goals in higher education.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

> I think for certain career paths, it [attending community college] will affect your resume. Especially if you want to do something that's kind of a high standpoint, like any grad school, dentist school, law school, [or] med school. They don't want to see that you went to a community college. They want to see that you went to a university and you could follow the curriculum of that university. Even if I did apply somewhere, I don't think I would put this community college down on the resume because it could hurt my acceptance to something.

This narrative is from Kathy, a twenty-two-year-old female Korean American student with a very specific and clear goal of attending an Ivy League college and becoming a gynecologist. Although she admits to benefiting from her current school, she is concerned that attending community college will negatively influence her future. Her perceptions of community college naturally raise the following questions: Why has Kathy chosen to attend community college despite her negative views of its impact on her future? What does attending community college mean to Kathy and other Korean American students? What kind of community college experiences encourage or impede Korean American students when developing or achieving their future plans and goals? Examining the perceptions of and experiences at community colleges by students, such as Kathy will reveal these perceptions and their believed impact on future goals. Therefore, this study focuses on the experiences of Korean American students who attend community colleges.

Background and Context

Kathy's narrative makes it clear that she believes going to a prestigious college is important for her future career. A higher percentage of Asians (including Pacific Islanders) between the ages of 25 and 29 have more college degrees or higher levels of education (68 percent) as compared to the general U.S. population in the same age group (46 percent) (McFarland et al, 2017). Not only do Asians have a higher rate of college degree attainment, but they also have a greater enrollment rate in elite public and private colleges. In a 2007 *New York Times* article, "Little Asia on the Hill," Egan (2007) describes the startling increase in the number of Asian students in higher education. While Asians constitute less than 5 percent of the overall U.S. population, they make up 37 percent of the student body at the nine undergraduate campuses of the University of California. The percentage of Asian students is also greater than expected at other elite schools, ranging from 10 to 30 percent of the student body (e.g., 24 percent at Carnegie Mellon and Stanford, 27 percent at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 14 percent at Yale, and 13 percent at Princeton) (Egan, 2007).

However, the perception that Asians are particularly overrepresented in elite colleges can create misunderstandings. To illustrate, Chang (2008) raised concerns about the misconception of an "Asian invasion" in higher education. Describing this as "the widespread belief that Asians have overtaken or invaded college and universities" (p.26), Chang argued that the portrayal of an Asian invasion misrepresents the experiences of Asian students in higher education. This perception of an Asian invasion may also contribute to stereotypes of Asian students as high achievers who usually attend prestigious universities and masks the variability of the secondary school experiences of Asian students.

Simultaneously, Chang (2008) also explained "Asian evasion," referring to "the propensity to evade a serious fact-based discussion that centers on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders" (p.26) and ignores the problems and issues facing this group. In actuality, the majority of Asian Americans attend two- and four-year public colleges and universities, rather than prestigious Ivy League universities contrasted to the image of Asian invasion especially in prestigious universities. For instance, 40 percent of Asian Americans enrolled in higher education attend two-year institutions while other groups of students (White – 39 percent, African American – 44 percent, and Hispanic – 56 percent) enrolled in two-year colleges respectively (Ma & Baum, 2016). The students who attend these public institutions often come from low-income families and can face challenges in accessing four-year private universities because of their financial and cultural-capital status. Furthermore, Asian Americans (including Pacific Islanders) make up nearly 7 percent of all community college students, and this number is expected to continue to increase more than in any other sector of higher education (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2008). Although Asian American students attend community colleges at high rates, there is almost no recognition of this fact, and little attention has been paid to their experiences of this group (Teranishi, 2010). Despite the variety of experiences of Asian Americans in higher education, the high visibility selected media outlets give to Asian American students in prestigious four-year universities and colleges leads to a simplified analysis of the experiences of Asian Americans in higher education.

Asian evasion also makes it difficult to understand the unique problems of subgroups included in the broader pan-ethnic Asian group. While the concepts of

Asian invasion and evasion in higher education that Chang (2008) introduced led to neglecting Asian students' status in higher education, the use of "Asian" as a pan-ethnic term becomes, in and of itself, problematic. The categorization of Asians as a homogeneous pan-ethnic group oversimplifies the diversity between and within Asian groups and does not allow for the wide range of experiences among Asian American students in higher education. For instance, Egan (2007) uses the term "Asian" without clearly defining its meaning. Furthermore, the definitions of "Asian" and "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander[1]" from the National Center for Education Statistics are still too broad. These groups include U.S. citizens, resident aliens, and other non-citizens. Moreover, data on the Asian population often aggregates statistics about multiple subgroups into one group, making it difficult to use such data to distinguish the differences among subgroups of Asians. Aggregating these data may lead to the conclusion that Asians do not need support because on average Asians have higher academic attainment than any other racial groups. Additionally, these aggregated data can lead to the assumption that all Asians attain success although there is a gap among them.

Despite the downsides of this stereotype, the portrait of Asian Americans as an educationally and economically successful minority, known as the model minority myth, may be viewed as positive and beneficial for Asian Americans, especially when seen in contrast to negative stereotypes of other minorities. Prevalent beliefs undergirding the model minority myth in higher education are the notions that Asian Americans attend four-year institutions, have higher rate of degree completion, and

---

[1] The National Center for Educational Statistics defines "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander" as "a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands."

they do not face any barriers or challenges compared to other ethnic or racial groups (Museus & Kiang, 2009). Researchers have explored positive impact of the model minority myth. For instance, Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady (1999) examined the salience of gender versus ethnicity in the math performance of Asian American women. They found that gender salience was negatively associated while ethnicity salience was positively associated with their participants' math performance. Therefore, they concluded that positive stereotypes can boost performance while negative stereotypes can hinder it. In addition, the model minority myth can be a factor in how students view their positive academic performance. Lee (1994) examined Asian Americans' perceptions and attitudes toward schooling. In her study, a Korean student's narrative suggested that he saw positive influences of the model minority concept. A student said, "American kids have this stereotype, like, [that] we're smarter. I mean, I don't think it's a stereotype - Look at our report cards. We are better, and we have to do it" (p. 417). From these studies, the model minority stereotypes may influence how students interpret their positive academic performances.

An overreliance on representations of Asian Americans as students in elite Ivy League universities contributes to model minority stereotypes. Nevertheless, whether or not they fit the stereotype, it can have negative impacts on Asian American students. When Asian Americans are grouped together as a pan-ethnic group, their differences in terms of histories, cultures, and identities are not considered. The concept of the model minority does not capture the diversity of experience among Asian Americans nor does it acknowledge the challenges and obstacles they face.

Furthermore, Chang (1993) argued that the model minority stereotype played a significant role in establishing a racial hierarchy which denied the reality of Asian American oppression while simultaneously legitimizing the oppression of other racial minority groups. Wang (2008) noted that the model minority concept which portrayed Asians as overcoming racial discrimination may create misguided perceptions that Asians can easily overcome racism and succeed. Wu (2001) argued that model minority stereotypes should be rejected because they inaccurately simplified and denied Asians' experiences of racial discrimination. Furthermore, when the model minority myth is used as a point of comparison, the experiences of other minorities (e.g., African Americans), are not considered in their own historical and sociopolitical context. In education, the stereotypes may impact Asian American students by contributing to their invisibility and misunderstandings about their experiences.

As I started to be interested in researching equity issues in education, I realized that racism and racial issues in the U.S. are often framed within a black-and-white paradigm that renders Asian Americans invisible. The model minority myth, especially, as part of the dominant representation of Asians as "perpetual foreigners" (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007), which refers that ethnic minorities are considered as others in white dominant society (Devos & Banaji, 2005), is a crucial aspect of racial discourses which keep Asians in an alienated position in the U.S. Why are Asians invisible in racial discourse even though they are so visible in the images of the model minority? How do images of the model minority influence the experiences of Asian American students? My curiosity about the experiences of Asian American students, and more specifically Korean American students, was sparked as I observed that most of my Korean American cousins who were born in the U.S. barely graduated from high

school and did not attend college. Instead, they joined their parents' businesses. Their educational choices have always interested me. Why did my Korean American cousins (and their parents) not pursue college education? How do they perceive themselves as Asian Americans? Did they encounter any challenges and obstacles which kept them from accessing higher education? I conducted this dissertation because I wanted to learn more about the issues Asian Americans face in attending 2-year-colleges or public colleges and because this group did not seem to fit the model minority stereotypes. My goal is to contribute to existing literature on Asian Americans in higher education by exploring the experiences of Korean American students who did not follow a conventional higher educational trajectory.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

In this study, I focus on Korean Americans, the subgroup of Asians most likely to attend private, selective colleges, followed by Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans (CIRP, 2010). This is true even when compared to other subgroups of Asians from a low socioeconomic status (SES). A study by Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, and McDonough (2004) quantitatively investigated the differences in college-choice processing within Asian American subgroups with regard to SES and other personal background characteristics. The most salient difference in determining Korean Americans' choice of colleges, particularly for selective institutions, was academic preparation (e.g., SAT score), which affected them more than any other group. In fact, academic preparation was highly important regardless of the income group (low- or high-SES) among Korean Americans – more so than in any other group, although Korean students from high-SES families were more likely to take SAT preparation courses than their low-income counterparts. However, Teranishi,

Ceja, Antonio, Allen, and McDonough's (2004) study does not take into account the experiences of Korean American students who do not attend selective colleges. The purpose of my study is to understand Korean American students' experiences in community colleges and how they contribute to their construction of possible selves.

The idea of "possible selves" is a concept from psychology literature used to study and understand "individuals' ideas of what they might become, and what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). The concept of possible selves includes how individuals think about their beliefs, ideas and images about their potential and their future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Therefore, this study also explores the future plans and goals of Korean American students and how community colleges support or impede their shaping.

The main research question is as follows: How do Korean American students' perceptions and experiences at community colleges influence the way they construct their possible selves? More specifically:

1) What opportunities and obstacles do they see (and/or experience) as community college students? In what ways do their experiences at community colleges intersect with model minority stereotypes?

2) What possible selves do Korean American students construct while attending community college?

This study will shed light on the complex and nuanced experiences of Korean Americans in higher education, particularly those students who attend community colleges.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

This study explored Korean American students' experiences at community colleges and how these experiences help to construct their possible selves, i.e. their self-conception of their future. In order to do that, I reviewed two areas of literature: community college contexts (focusing especially on the mission and purpose of community colleges, reasons to attend community colleges, and perceptions and experiences of community colleges) and possible selves. At the same time, this study aims to examine if and how stereotypes which support the model minority myth intersect with students' possible selves and their community college experiences. This conceptual frame will help us to understand the complex layers of constructing possible selves for Korean American students in community colleges. Further details of the literature review and conceptual framework are discussed in Chapter Two.

Research Design Overview

This study utilized qualitative interviews with 29 Korean American students currently attending community colleges. They were mainly selected from three community colleges in three different states in the East Coast region. The interviews were the primary tool to collect data and each interview lasted for 45-90 minutes, with 60 minutes as an average. Semi-structured in-person interviews were conducted with each participant and follow-up questions asked by emails or phone if clarification on any part of the transcript was needed. For data analysis, I adopted a grounded theory approach. Through three cycles of analysis, 40 codes were developed. These codes were utilized to outline significant findings. Further methodology details are discussed in Chapter Three.

Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this study emerges from my own experience, as well as curiosity about how Korean Americans are treated and considered in the U.S. educational system and how perceptions of Asian Americans affect their experiences. The model minority stereotypes contribute to images of Asian Americans as a successful minority group, but at the same time neglect their different experiences and backgrounds which can lead to a simplification of their experiences (Teranishi, 2010).

As already briefly discussed, although it appears that a large number of Asian Americans take part in higher education, particularly at selective four-year universities, Asian students actually constitute a small percentage of such institutions, and in reality many Asian Americans are enrolled in two-year institutions (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2008). Furthermore, most studies do not disaggregate Asian Americans in community colleges by subgroups, so it is difficult to understand the differences among Asian ethnic groups (Wang, Chang, & Lew, 2009). Wang, Chang, and Lew (2009) also argues that Asian students in community colleges were not included in the discourse of low persistence, completion, and associate-degree attainment in community colleges because they were considered an exception that did not face the same issues as other minority students because of the model minority stereotypes. Therefore, the significance of this study is that it explores an issue to which little scholarly attention has been paid. This study will add the experiences of Korean Americans attending community college to existing literature on the higher education experiences of Asian Americans.

Definition of Key Terminology

The term "Model Minority" was first used by William Petersen in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1966. In his article "Success Story: Japanese-American Style," he notes, "By any criterion of good citizenship that we choose the Japanese Americans are better than any other group in our society, including native-born whites. They have established this remarkable record, moreover, by their own almost totally unaided effort" (p.180). In the same year, another article, "Success Story of One Minority Group in U.S." in *U.S. News & World Report* declared:

> At a time when Americans are awash in worry over the plight of racial minorities- Chinese Americans are winning wealth and respect by dint of its own hard work… Still being taught in Chinatown is the old idea that people should depend on their own efforts—not a welfare check— in order to reach America's 'promised land' (p. 6).

From those articles, it can be analogized that Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans worked hard to establish their good reputation. In addition, Wang (2008) argued that they were characterized by "hard work, self-reliance and perseverance" (p.23) and their success was defined as assimilation into the white middle-class mainstream society. Therefore, Wang (2008) stated the main contents of the model minority concept: "Asian Americans, by virtue of self-improvement, and hard work, had successfully overcome racial discrimination against them and had become assimilated into mainstream America" (p.23). This became the new main racial stereotype for Asian Americans.

The term "Asians" or "Asian American" (used interchangeably in this study) refers to people having origins in the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013, p.2). Koreans

Americans have origins in Korea, including people born in the U.S. and those born in Korea who moved to the U.S. later in their life.

Organization

In the next chapter, I provide a discussion of related literature and introduce the conceptual framework for the study. First, I look at literature related to community college contexts such as mission and purpose statements, reasons to attend community colleges, and perceptions and experiences of community colleges. Next, I examine literature on possible selves. I explain the definition of possible selves and sociocultural and sociological perspectives on possible selves. Then I look at the literature on possible selves that are related to race and ethnicity, especially Asian Americans as well as possible selves in community college contexts.

After discussing the literature review and conceptual framework, I present the methodology of this study including details of data collection method such as information about research sites and participants. I also review my use of a grounded theory approach for analysis of the data (e.g., developing codes and generating themes) from Korean American students' interviews.

In the finding sections, I present three significant findings along with detailed discussion about students' experiences at community colleges. First, I explore Korean Americans' perceptions of college attendance in general and their preconceived notion of community colleges before they attended, as well as how they navigated a pathway to community colleges. Second, I examine Korean American students' opportunities and challenges at community colleges and how these experiences lead them to change their preconceived perceptions of community colleges. I explain the conflicted experiences between positive lived experiences and negative perceptions while they

attend community colleges. Third, I investigate how Korean American students construct possible selves through their community colleges experiences, focusing on their future plans and goals. In addition, I look at the attitude with which they approach goals and how they consider or utilize community colleges in order to achieve these goals. Finally, I propose recommendations, discuss limitations, and provide concluding thoughts related to this study.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study aims to explore the perceptions of Korean American students attending community colleges and how their perceptions and experiences influence the construction of their possible selves. In this section, I start with a brief discussion of relevant literature related to higher education (e.g., historical context for Asian American participation in higher education) and the impact of the model minority myth, focusing on providing the context of higher education in order to understand Asian Americans' status in the U.S. Then, I focus on two major areas of research related to the research questions I presented in the previous chapter. First, I review the context of higher education, especially community college. More specifically, I look at the roles of community colleges, the reasons for attending community colleges, and the perceptions of and experiences at community colleges. Second, I explore the literature on possible selves, discussing the definition of possible selves as well sociocultural and sociological perspectives of possible selves. Then I examine the intersection of possible selves and race and possible selves in community college. In the end, I introduce a conceptual framework for the study drawn from the literature.

The selection is based upon examination of the literature in particular areas such as model minority, community college, and possible selves, focusing on all student populations, Asian Americans, and for Korean Americans respectively. If the literature on a particular area for all student population was found to be unmanageable due to quantity, I limited the focus to Asian and Korean American students. However, if there were few or no studies about Asian Americans or Korean Americans for a specific topic, I extended the search to the general student population.

Higher Education Context

Historical Context for Asian American Participation in Higher Education

The first wave of Asian immigration to the United States started in the 1830s with the major influx of Asians, especially East Asian groups such as Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Philippines, beginning in the 1850s to Hawaii for planation labor (Takaki, 1998). Throughout their immigration history, Asians faced exclusion by law, and were not even allowed to be naturalized until the 1940s. However, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which abolished the quota system based on national origins, resulted in a new wave of immigrants from Asia (Pew Research Center, 2012).

As Asians faced immigration challenges, their experience in the higher education sector was also difficult. Anderson (2002) argued that racism is ingrained in the foundation of America and influenced America's higher education institutions as well, such that minority students were often excluded from higher education. Although early documentation of Asian Americans' participation in higher education is rare, a Chinese man named Zeng Laishun is considered the first Asian to attend a university, specifically Hamilton College in Clinton, New York in 1846, but he left before graduation and returned to China without obtaining a degree (Teranishi, 2010). Yung Wing, another Chinese man, became the first Asian to receive a bachelor's degree from Yale in 1854 (Worthy, 1965). Pyon Su, the first Korean to attend a college in the U.S., earned his degree at the Maryland Agricultural College in 1891. There is little other recognition of Asians in higher education in the U.S. until the twentieth century, and much of the existing historical data on race is limited because most data from

before the 1960s was focused on the black/white binary or contrasted white with the unspecific term "non-white" (Teranishi, 2010).

This changed with the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, which spurred change and produced policies and programs to financially and academically support students of color which led to their increased enrollment rates in higher education (Anderson, 2002). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics in 2013, overall student enrollment in higher education has increased by 880 percent from 1947 to 2012. More recently, enrollment rates increased by 15 percent between 1992 and 2002, and by 24 percent between 2002 and 2012. Along with this massive expansion of enrollment, student populations have become more diverse regarding race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Statistics on specific racial or ethnic groups also show increasing numbers of minority students. According to a report from the American Council of Education on minority students in higher education in 2011, white students' enrollment rate increased 14.1 percent while the enrollment rates of African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Native Americans increased 55.2, 74.4, 37.4, and 30.4 percent respectively from 1998 to 2008. Therefore, it seems access to higher education has improved for minority students over the years, which promotes racial and ethnic diversity in higher education institutions. However, although the growth of Asian Americans' participation in higher education was dramatic, the reality is that Asian Americans' participation growth is similar to Asians' demographic changes in the U.S. (Teranishi, 2010), which is different from the image of an Asian invasion of higher education.

Controversy has accompanied the increase of racial and ethnic diversity in higher education. For example, affirmative action is an admissions policy which aims

to improve access for minorities historically underrepresented at or excluded by higher education institutions, but affirmative action still faces prolonged challenges. Although affirmative action improved access to higher education for some students of color, it was not particularly beneficial to Asian Americans. For instance, Hsia (1988) argued that Asian Americans are less likely to be accepted by their top-choice university than white students and therefore attend community colleges in order to transfer to four-year colleges later because they are devoted to education. Wu and Wang (1996) explored how the model minority myth impacted affirmative action for Asian Americans. They argued that the images of model minority myth as related to academic achievement was exaggerated, hindering the challenges Asians Americans faced and the need for affirmative action. As a result, many politicians assumed Asian Americans would not need affirmative action, but Wu and Wang (1996) argued that it is still needed for some specific Asian American groups, such as Southeast Asians.

Paradoxically, Asian Americans are included and excluded at the same time in postsecondary education (Museus, 2014). Asian American students are visible in terms of academic achievement and enrollment rates. Asian Americans' college enrollment rate is 63 percent while the average college enrollment rate of the U.S. college age students was 40 percent in 2015. In addition, the percentage of 25-to-29-year-old Asians with an associate's or higher degree was 69 while the average percentage for the U.S. was 46 (McFarland et al., 2017). Nevertheless, Asian Americans can still suffer invisibility in higher education. Stereotypes of Asian Americans as high academic achievers (Yeh, 2002) and even as genetically superior (Museus, 2014) have led to the belief that Asian Americans do not need support because they do not face academic difficulties. Asian Americans who are

educationally at-risk are particularly overlooked. Yeh (2002) argued there is a disparity between the perceptions of Asian Americans' academic success and the reality of students' need. Yeh discussed educational risk factors depending on individual (e.g., language, education, and immigration status), family (e.g., socioeconomic status, parents' education and family support and guidance), institutional (e.g., inadequate academic preparation and institutional climate), and community/societal (e.g., model minority stereotype and intragroup socioeconomic gap) levels and how these factors influence Asian Americans. Institutional risk factors in particular are directly related to the quality of schools that students attend and their experiences in school (Yeh, 2002). For instance, a lack of academic preparation in high school can lead to difficulty with college-level courses. In addition, students of color from low socioeconomic backgrounds tend to face more difficulty accessing academic services and social support systems available to white students (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, they can feel less integrated in their new environment, especially in predominantly white colleges. Although there are many educational risk factors, their challenges such as struggling to graduate high school and difficulties seeking higher education are invisible and not recognized.

Furthermore, differences between the subgroups which make up the Asian American category are often not recognized in higher education. According to Teranishi (2010), Some subgroups of Asians are more likely to earn only an associate's degree or attend some college without earning a degree, while other subgroups are more likely to earn bachelor's degrees and advanced degrees. For instance, as you can see in Figure 1, 70.3 percent of Laotians attained an associate's degrees or attended some college but did not receive a degree, but 83.6 percentage of

Indian gained a bachelor's or an advanced degrees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Teranishi (2010) argued that some Asian groups' low rates of degree attainment are

influenced by poverty, parental educational attainment, or unemployment, and that

these socioeconomic conditions limit access to higher education. These differences

between Asian American subgroups and their higher education experiences are often

invisible in research as well as in perceptions of Asian Americans in higher education.
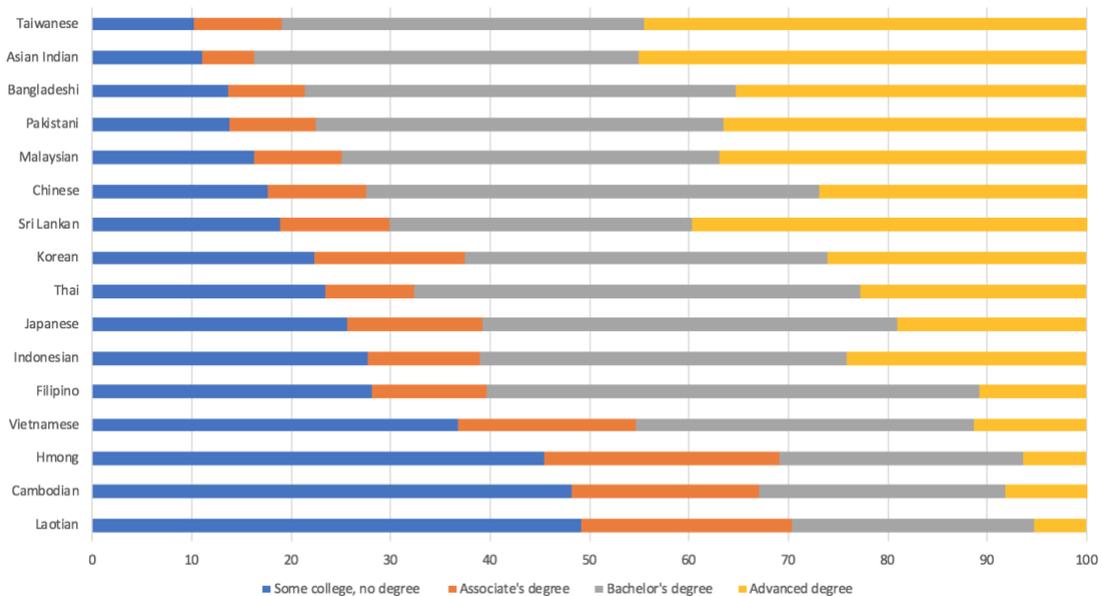
Figure 1   Degree Attainment Among Asian American College Attendees, 2000

Asian Americans faced various challenges assimilating in U.S. society along

with other minority groups in the beginning of their immigration history. However, the

positive images of Asian Americans (e.g., the model minority) blurred the reality they

faced. This phenomenon is similar in higher education. It created the image that Asian

Americans overcame racism and became the most successful minority to attain high

academic achievement. However, this also obscured the struggles they encountered and the need to be supported alongside other minority groups.

The Model Minority Myth

The images and representations of Asians have changed over time. Lee (1999) described six images of Asians: *the pollutant, the coolie, the deviant, the yellow peril, the model minority,* and *the gook. The pollutant* started in the 19th century during the United States' westward expansion. The Chinese were considered aliens and a threat that might disturb westward expansion for settlers from the eastern part of the country. *The coolie* began in the 1870s and 1880s as the U.S. working class was established. Although Chinese immigrants moved to the U.S. as free workers, they were considered subordinate, servile, unfree, and a threat to other working-class groups. *The deviant* started when Chinese immigrants (particularly males) were hired in middle-class households as domestic servants and, as a result, the possibility of interracial intimacy increased. Although they were considered necessary for their labor, they represented a threat to racial purity. *The yellow peril* was a representation of Asians as a threat to nation, race, and family in America – "the greatest threat to Western civilization and the White race" (Stoddard, 1921).

Although images and representations of Asian immigrants were initially negative, they eventually became more positive; *the model minority* emerged as an image in which Asians were considered the most successful minority, able to overcome discrimination. The image of the model minority emerged in the historical context of the Cold War in the 1950s (Lee, 1999). Mainstream fears about communism, racial integration, and homosexuality led to attention being paid to Asian Americans' success (e.g., the model minority myth) as part of a national conversation

about ethnic assimilation and national modernization (Lee, 1999). The concept of the model minority arises partly from the fact that on some educational achievement measures, Asians outperform other groups. For example, Asian students usually do well in school compared to other groups (Hsia & Peng, 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). Images of Asians as hard-working and high-achieving in school reflect the positive and nonthreatening way that Asian Americans are seen in the U.S. (particularly compared with other minorities such as Blacks and Latinos) and contribute to the construction of the model minority myth.

Then how do Asian American students perceive themselves in the concept of the model minority? Wong, Lai, Nagasawa and Lin (1998) researched how Asian American students perceive themselves as well as other racial groups' perception of Asian American students. They interviewed 704 students enrolled in four Washington State University campuses from five different racial groups including Asians, African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics and Caucasians. They conducted microcomputer-assisted telephone interviews as well as distributing questionnaires based on various dependent variables such as academic performance, motivation to do well academically, probability of success, academic preparation, confidence to finish degree, and so forth. The result showed that Asian Americans were perceived higher in academic performance by other racial groups, and even Asian American students perceived that they are better than other groups in this category. In addition, Asian Americans were perceived as highly motivated to do well by other groups as well as by themselves. Furthermore, with regards to probability of success in career, Asian Americans were perceived as most likely to have success in their respective careers. Therefore, Wong et al. (1998) concluded the perception of the stereotypes confirmed

the stereotypes and it was persuasive reason for why Asian Americans were labeled with this stereotype and even why Asian American students have adopted the model minority concept themselves.

However, the perception did not really reflect the students' actual performance. Wong et al. (1998) compared the participants' GPA and SAT scores to see if the model minority myth carried over to actual performance. Interestingly, Asian American students' GPA or SAT scores were not significantly different from other groups, with the SAT verbal scores actually averaging as lower than White, Hispanic, and Native American students. For this reason, it is more likely that the perceptions of the model minority are not matched with performance. Furthermore, if Asian American students are low achievers, it is possible that the model minority perceptions may be a negative. As briefly discussed the background of model minority myth, the next section continues to discuss the impact of the model minority myth especially for Korean American students.

Impact of the Model Minority Myth on Korean Students

As introduced in Chapter One, the concept of the model minority can impact individuals in different ways. In this section, I delve into the impact of the model minority myth on Korean students in particular. Several studies (Chae, 2004; Lew, 2004, 2006; Park, 2011; Park & Lee, 2010; Wexler & Pyle, 2012) have shown such negative influence. According to these studies, many Korean American students try to live up to the model minority concept (e.g., high academic achievement), which sometimes causes problems in that some students pretend not to have academic problems or struggles at school. Revealing their struggles would not fit the image of the model minority and might lead to social exclusion. In Park and Lee's (2010) study,

Korean students excluded their Korean peers especially classified as a (behaviorally) bad underachievers because they negatively influence to maintain the good images toward Korean students. In addition, the experiences of Korean students differ depending on their socioeconomic status. For instance, in Lew's (2006) study, Korean students from the working class distinguished themselves from Korean students from the middle-class because they struggled with financial issues at home and limited support from school. Their experiences in school were more similar to those of their African American or Hispanic peers and they believed that success was associated with whiteness.

The perception of being a model minority has both academic and social impacts on Korean students. When people stereotype Korean Americans as model minorities, they are overlooking or not seeing Korean Americans who are struggling or underachieving. Chae (2004) examined Korean students' educational and social experiences at a public high school. This study particularly focused on students' interpretations and experiences of the model minority stereotype. Although the Korean students in the study thought they were not academically successful, they were considered to be so by others including their peers and teachers. They even took advantage of the "good" image by copying homework from others. Similarly, in Lee's (1994) study examining Asian American students' identity and attitudes toward schooling, a student who was considered a good student by his/her peers was described by the teacher as a low achiever. These studies show an interesting phenomenon: whether low-achieving students intentionally or unintentionally hid their academic struggles, they were perceived as good students by others due to the positive image of the model minority. This can add to low-achieving students' struggles and

burdens if they pretend to be good students or feel they cannot ask for help because they do not want to break the positive image of Asian students.

In addition, research examining these students shows that they may be excluded from other Korean student groups. For example, Park (2011) found that the model minority myth led Korean students to police each other. He explained that Korean students embraced the model minority myth by separating themselves from other Korean students who did not fit the stereotype, and rewarded or punished their peers by helping them academically and socially or excluding them. Interestingly, some students who did not fit the model minority myth due to low academic achievement might still be acceptable to the group if the student had other characteristics of the model minority, such as being quiet and compliant. Students who had disciplinary troubles were excluded from the group. Park and Lee's (2010) study also found such social exclusion practices. Once students were labeled bad students (particularly if they had behavioral issues), they were not only excluded from the social group but also denied access to co-ethnic peer social capital[2] (Park & Lee, 2010). These studies showed that Korean students (particularly those who were high achievers) embraced model minority representations and used stereotypical traits as criteria to judge "good" or "bad" students. Therefore, the model minority myth negatively affects low-achieving students who face more challenges, not only from the model minority stereotypes that others hold, but also from exclusion by their co-ethnic peers.

---

[2] "Co-ethnic peer social capital" refers to the way Korean students who are in the same community or church share academic information about matters such as college admissions, private tutoring, or anything related to academics.

To summarize, some studies suggest that Asian Americans have experienced economic and educational accomplishments, especially compared to other minority groups. However, as this review of the literature shows, the consequences of the model minority myth can be negative. The model minority myth overlooks differences among Asians. Furthermore, the perception that they are part of a model minority group can add to the academic struggles of Asian students, particularly those with low achievement. As Chae (2004) argued, generalizations about Asian Americans based on the model minority myth are inaccurate, and the model minority myth has been used to criticize other minority groups that are not successful in the United States, thus contributing to the maintenance of social inequity.

The Model Minority Myth and Identity Issues

The model minority myth can also impact Asian American students' identity. A study by Lee (2003) investigated the identity struggles of Asian students. Lee suggested that some Asians consider whites to be Americans; they themselves do not fit their own perception of American identity. Therefore, their Asian identity and their American identity may be experienced as mutually exclusive. This causes identity confusion and influences the relationships among Asian American students. For example, Lee gave the example of Asian students who were born in the U.S. socially excluding other Asian students who were born outside of the U.S. and calling them names such as FOB (Fresh Off the Boat). This illustrates how the self-perception of their identity as a foreigner can influence peer relation.

In addition, Kim (2001) argued that the model minority myth neglects the psychological cost to Asian Americans who try to assimilate into American society and the reality of discrimination against them. Kim (2001) proposed an Asian

American Identity Development model, which posits several stages that an Asian American might go through. First, Asian Americans recognize their ethnicity in interaction with their family and relatives, through which they develop their ethnic knowledge and pride. This usually happens before entering the school system. When entering school, Asians notice their difference from their peers and this experience makes them feel alienated. Interestingly, in this stage, Asian Americans consider themselves actively or passively to be white. They have negative attitudes toward Asian Americans and negative self-evaluations. However, they realize that their experience and situation of racism are not their personal responsibility; rather, it is institutional racism. Through this experience, they reexamine their past experiences of racism and take ownership of their identity through activism (e.g., expressing their anger and outrage). Finally, Asian Americans become confident in their Asian identity. This enables them to interact with other groups without losing their ethnic identity.

Focusing on Korean Americans' identities, Chae (2004) examined the educational and social experiences of six Korean American high school students from working-class backgrounds in terms of model minority stereotypes. Interestingly, in the beginning of his research, the participants did not describe any identities related to ethnicity, race, or gender. However, once the school context was included, they thought the schools ignored their reality and needs as Asian Americans. This study demonstrated that these youths' identity was fluid, situational, and contextual. For example, participants' ethnic identity as Koreans was mostly revealed when they were with non-Koreans, but while they were with Koreans, they felt no need to adopt Korean ethnic identities. Furthermore, racism, classism, sexism, linguicism, and the

model minority myth impacted their perception of their own identity in school. Therefore, it is clear that the model minority myth influences Asian American students in many ways. This is why attention must be given to the model minority stereotype, as it may be a source of discrimination that limits Asian Americans' access to equity in education.

Community College Context

Community colleges in the U.S. have played an important role in the expansion of access to higher education (Levinson, 2005). Laden (2004) describes community college as a "vital gateway to higher education for a diverse student population" (p. 5). Community colleges provide various opportunities for students (Wang, Chang & Lew, 2009), particularly for underrepresented minority students, by creating more access to higher education (Gasman, Baez, & Turner, 2008). With their open admission policies, community colleges seek to increase access to higher education and support diverse student populations (Ireland, 2015). This section will discuss the roles of community colleges, the reasons for attending community college, and the perceptions and experiences of students who attend community college.

Roles of Community College

What kind of roles do community colleges play in U.S. higher education? Dougherty, Lahr, and Morest (2017) described major patterns of community colleges: the curricula and credentials, finance and governance, mission and social roles. Regarding the curricula and credentials, one of the primary purposes of community colleges is related to occupational (e.g., career and technical) training as well as academic subjects, and these purposes involve credentials in occupational fields such

as certificates, associate degrees in applied and liberal art fields, and bachelor's degrees (Cohen et al., 2013; Remington & Remington, 2013). Baccalaureate preparation is another important purpose of community colleges, and many students who attend community college expect to get a bachelor's degree at some point in their lives (Dougherty et al., 2017). In terms of financing and governance, revenue sources for community colleges are varied from federal, state, local, tuition and fees, and others (e.g., donations) and they are primarily governed by states. For missions and social roles, community colleges provide equal access to educational opportunities as "the open-door college" that attracting students from working class or minority communities (Dougherty, Lahr, & Morest, 2017). The mission of community college is also related to community building. Gleazer (1980) mentioned that the community college mission is "to encourage and facilitate lifelong learning with community as process and product." Furthermore, a report from the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges in 1988 explained that building community is an appropriate objective because it could embrace the comprehensive mission. It shows that community colleges have played a pivotal role in higher education by providing a pathway to different forms of postsecondary education and by attempting to meet the educational needs of students who face challenges accessing traditional four-year universities.

Reasons for Attending Community Colleges

Prior to discussing the reasons students give for attending community colleges, it is helpful to review important characteristics or components which influence students' decision-making regarding which college to attend. Although this study does not focus on the college choice itself, some elements of college choice are relevant and

helpful in understanding the reasoning of students. College choice is a complicated process (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 1997) and many researchers (Perna, 2006; Chapman, 1981; Hemsley-Brown, 1999) provided various models. College-choice models are broadly divided into three different approaches: economic, sociological and combined. Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989) describe that the economic approach of college-choice models commonly focuses on the expected cost for college and maximizing utility, while sociological models pay attention to identifying factors which influence aspirations for college enrollment and the relationship among them. However, these economic and sociological models do not fully explain the process of college choice. Therefore, the combined models include recognizing the difference between students' perception of institutional characteristics and the objective institutional indicators which impact college choice (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989).

Perna (2006) proposed a conceptual model that integrated aspects of the sociological and economic approaches by adopting Hossler & Gallagher (1987)'s model. Later, Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, Anderson, Li, and Thomas (2008) developed a multilayered conceptual model of student college enrollment showing how contexts influence college choice. The first layer, student and family context, reflects demographic characteristics such as gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, as well as cultural and social capital. For instance, family income can be a determinant factor in choosing a college a student can afford. Second, Perna et al. (2008) derived school and community context from McDonough's (1997) notion of "organization habitus" which recognizes how social structure and resources facilitate or impede students' college enrollment. For example, aspects of school context may

restrict college enrollment and choice for low-income students and racial/ethnic minorities[3] (Perna & Kurban, 2013). Third, higher education context recognizes the role of higher education institutions. These institutions may provide a source of information to students and their families about postsecondary education. Last, social forces, economic conditions, and public policies, directly and indirectly, influence college enrollment and choices. Financial aid policy, K-12 standards, or testing policies can impact how students choose the colleges they want to attend. This conceptual model shows the complexity of college enrollment and the forces that contribute to outcomes. Therefore, there are multifaceted elements to college choice, and these elements intersect with each other in complicated ways.

Some studies (Barreno & Traut, 2012; Somers et al., 2006) especially focused on specific institutions (e.g., community colleges) and the reasons community colleges are chosen. Barreno and Traut (2012) specifically studied the reasons students give for attending community college. They used the survey method in a study at a community college in Texas. Students were asked about 12 factors that were drawn from multilayered college-choice models: 1) cost; 2) college reputation; 3) financial aid availability; 4) transferability of courses to other colleges or universities; 5) advice of family members, friends, and high school staff; 6) available academic programs and quality; 7) campus activities and recreational facilities; 8) available educational facilities and technology; 9) college website; 10) campus safety; 11) available athletic team or sports; and 12) campus location. The top six reasons that students mentioned

---

[3] Stanton-Salazar (1997) argued that institutional personnel such as teachers, counselors, and their peers provide access to resources and opportunities, but working-class minority students have limited access, particularly when they are the first in their family to attend college.

were transferability of courses, available academic programs and quality, cost, available educational facilities and technology, and advice of family members, friends, and high school staff, respectively. However, in this study, the majority of students were Hispanic (64%), white (28%), with Asians constituting only one percent. Therefore, this study provides little insight into the reasons Asian students may have for attending community college.

Furthermore, Somers et al. (2006) tried to develop a model of community college choice by examining the reasons students give for choosing to attend. Through focus group interviews with over 200 students from five different community colleges, they found six themes for community college choice: 1) proving the ability to attend college to others who perceived the student as incapable of going to college; 2) personal life incident; 3) educational aspiration; 4) influence of family and peers; 5) price and location; and 6) institutional characteristics, including personalized support from faculty and flexibility of academic or vocational programs that would help their future career. They found that students who received negative messages about their potential for success in higher education from school personnel, such as teachers and counselors, sometimes chose community colleges to prove them wrong.

In addition, some students went through setbacks in life regarding finances, education, and personal issues. However, these life experiences sometimes made them stronger and more determined to succeed, encouraging them to pursue their education at community colleges. Other students expressed their aspiration for obtaining a bachelor's degree with the hope of specific employment. They were also influenced by parents and peers who encouraged them to attend community colleges. Tuition and close location were strong elements in choosing to attend community colleges. Finally,

students who had positive experiences with community colleges felt supported by their schools through the various services. From the themes found in the study, preliminary framework for community college choice seen in Figure 2 below was developed.
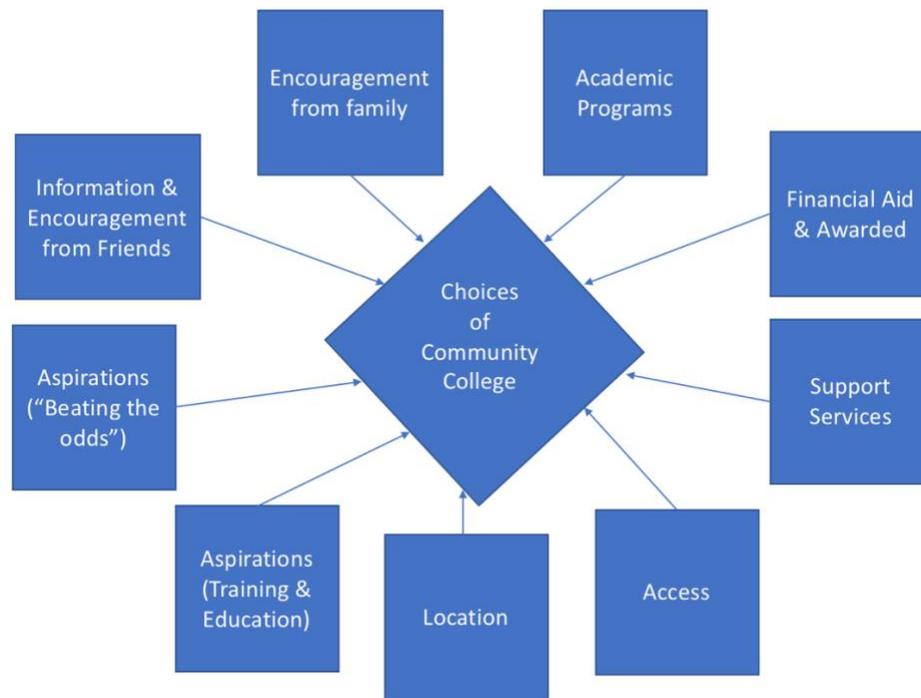
Figure 2   Preliminary framework for community college choice

Somers et al. (2006) showed the main reasons for attending community college were price, support, location, and aspiration. This framework helped me to understand how the elements of previous college-choice models were elucidated and to examine how they are applicable to Korean American students attending community colleges. I integrated ideas from this framework into my interview protocol and it was also helpful as I analyzed the reasons students gave for attending community college.

There are a few studies which focus on the reasons for enrolling in community college by specific racial or ethnic groups. For instance, Wang, Chang, and Lew

(2009) explored the reasons Asian Pacific American (APA) students have (disaggregating this subgroup further) for attending community colleges and the obstacles they may face. This study used the survey data from the Community College Student Survey from the Transfer and Retention of Urban Community College Study conducted of the students from nine campuses in the Los Angeles Community College District. They found that APA students most frequently mentioned "wanting a college degree" as a very important reason for attending community colleges. Most Asians, with the exception of Koreans, answered wanting "a better job" as their second reason for attending. Koreans stated the location of institutions (close to their homes) as the second reason. All students saw two-year college as a means to a degree, with its open-access policy and potential to transfer students.

Kurlaender (2006) examined how four factors - family's SES, prior academic achievement and preparation, degree intention, and differences in state postsecondary structure - affected Latino students' community college choice by comparing them with other racial or ethnic groups (e.g., white and African American). With data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, she found that Latino students were more likely to attend community college because they were more likely to be financially disadvantaged than white students. However, although students from higher SES were less likely to attend community colleges, a higher number of Latino students from higher SES attended community colleges compared to other groups. For prior academic achievement, high-achieving students were more likely to start at four-year institutions. Comparing higher achieving students and their tendency to attend community colleges, Latino students were still more likely to attend community colleges than four-year colleges. In general, students' (e.g., white, African American,

and Latino) higher desire for a bachelor's degree affected the likelihood to enroll in four-year institutions. Latino students were less likely to have a degree intention compared to other groups and were more likely to attend community colleges.

Another study from Wood and Harris (2015) examined the relationship between college selection factors and persistence of African American and Latino male students in community colleges. This study focused on the reasons African American and Latino male students gave for selecting community colleges. Wood and Harris (2015) used the data from the 2006 Educational Longitudinal Study and analyzed 17 measures for college choice classified with five conceptual groups: economic, institutional, familial, academic, and social factors. They found the primary factors in choosing community colleges were degree opportunity, course and curriculum, availability of financial aid, college academic reputation, and low tuition. These reasons related to either academic or financial matters. Although Kurlaender's (2006) and Wood and Harris's (2015) studies focused on other minority groups and therefore were not directly related to Asian students, these studies were helpful in my understanding of elements in my study that were similar or different for students when deciding to attend community colleges.

As reviewed in the previous studies, the major reasons students gave for attending community colleges were affordable tuition, degree aspiration, or courses and programs that were attractive to students. However, Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, and McDonough's (2004) study showed that Korean Americans were more likely than any other Asian group to attend highly selective colleges regardless of their socioeconomic status. Therefore, it would be interesting to examine Korean American students who do attend community colleges, but there is scant literature addressing the

reasons they attend or their experiences while attending. The findings from this study will provide insights on the reasons Korean American students attend community colleges. In doing so, it will broaden the understandings of the experiences of Koreans American students in higher education.

Perceptions of Community Colleges

The perceptions students have of community colleges are also an important component which may influence their experiences at community colleges. Some scholars examined individuals' perceptions of community colleges (Lendy, 2009; Proper, n.d; Mitkos & Bragg, 2008). Lendy (2009) examined how three different groups (e.g., 9 high school students, 12 college students, and nine citizens who lived in an area where the community college was located) perceived community colleges. Using focus groups and individual interviews, the authors found that community members perceived community colleges as providing a good education with affordable tuition and classes for students who did not know what they wanted to do for their career. College students had similar perceptions of community college. They believed that community colleges offered more options for higher education and that the low cost was important to continuing their education. Although community college was perceived as a "thirteenth grade" for some students, most students valued the access to education at community colleges. However, high school students had a different idea of community colleges. They wanted to be away from home and more independent, so they did not want to choose a local college. Even if this was not because of the educational value, they viewed community colleges as similar to high schools. Nonetheless, most high school students perceived community colleges as a valuable option for them depending on their specific needs. Even though there were slightly

different perceptions of community colleges among high school students, college students, and citizens, the common perception of community colleges was that it provided access to higher education.

Proper (n.d.) examined how students in community colleges perceived their context and what factors influenced their perceptions. Proper especially explored whether students were more or less satisfied with their choice for community colleges depending on whether they had other options or were forced to attend because of financial circumstances. Proper surveyed 268 students about their activities in college and their local community and their evaluation and satisfaction of their community college. Ninety-one percent of students were satisfied with their college in terms of small class size, professors, convenience and affordable cost. Almost 65 percent of the students in this study chose community college as their first choice and most of them did not apply to other colleges. In addition, more than 60 percent of students who applied to other colleges chose community college as their first choice. Students who attended community colleges as their first choice were more satisfied with their college and were more likely to feel supported by their family and peers. Therefore, in this study, students who were satisfied with their community colleges had positive perceptions of their college.

While previous studies focused mostly on students' perceptions of community colleges, Mitkos and Bragg (2008) examined high school counselors and advisors' perceptions of community colleges. Through a case study of seven counselors and advisors in one high school, they explored common perceptions of community colleges. For instance, the counselors and advisors mentioned low-cost tuition as a positive feature of community colleges, and they were likely to share this information

with their students. They also perceived that community colleges had improved in quality as Lum (2004) mentioned that community colleges have improved in the past two decades. This influenced the change in their perception of community colleges as a "last resort" (Lum, 2004, p. 54). They also saw community colleges as a bridge to college-level skills and as transfer institutions to four-year colleges, especially for under-prepared students. They thought these functions of community colleges would be beneficial and encouraged their students to attend community colleges.

Ambivalent perceptions of community colleges also are noted in these studies. Although there were some negative perceptions of community colleges (e.g., "thirteenth grade" or "last resort") in Mitkos and Bragg's (2008) study, there were more positive views, such as providing an opportunity for low cost higher education, especially from students who attend community colleges. Some citizens also viewed community colleges positively, believing they would be beneficial for their community. Although there are some negative perceptions of community colleges, this can be changed through positive experiences at community colleges and becomes positive perceptions. The next section will continue to discuss students' experiences at community colleges.

Experiences at Community Colleges

Acknowledging students' academic and social experiences on college campuses is helpful in understanding how to best support their college success. Nodine, Jaeger, Venezia, and Bracco (2012) examined students' perceptions of their experiences at community colleges. They conducted focus groups with 161 community college students including current students, completers (those who successfully completed community colleges) and non-completers (those who left

community college without completion) in four different states. They found that students' level of connection to their college was a determinant element influencing positive experiences. For instance, many participants wanted to feel more connected to their colleges by interacting with their peers, faculty, and administrators, by being supported for their coursework or major, and by understanding their needs for future goals or careers. This contributed to their positive experiences. However, although many participants agreed that the supportive services were helpful and they were positive about their experiences, they still wanted more tailored and consistent guides or services to help develop their education and career goals. This study revealed that students in community colleges had a strong desire to connect with their colleges and articulated specific needs which community colleges could address.

Some research focused on the experiences of particular racial and ethnic groups. Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (1997) released a report about the effect of race and ethnic backgrounds in community college experiences. In a survey called the Community College Student Experience Questionnaire, the Washington State Board focused on student involvement in courses and campus activities and the perceptions of campus climate. The survey was sent out to almost 13,000 students from 25 community colleges and the resulting study found a similar experience for all racial or ethnic groups. The surveyed students considered community colleges a positive environment, although most did not spend much time studying on campus and attending campus activities. However, this study showed some differences in experiences of racial/ethnic groups, such as interactions with and support from faculty and peers, skills and ability they gained, and progress in getting along with other people. For instance, Asian students reported that they spent the most

time studying, and students of color were more likely to talk with advisors and counselors and reported more academic gains compared to white students.

Another study from Pham and Dykstra (1996) found that Asian immigrant students who were born outside of the U.S. were less likely to have the social capital to successfully access higher education than students who were native-born. Furthermore, they found that Asian Pacific students faced barriers in community colleges, such as unwelcoming attitude, lack of Asian American faculty, and discrimination and stereotypes from peers and staff. Related to Asian students' challenges, Frank (2001) also found that Asian students at community colleges felt isolated and marginalized when their unique situations were not recognized. These studies show that the experiences of Asian Pacific American students in community colleges vary along ethnic lines or due to personal backgrounds. Although a high number of Asian students attend community college, there is almost no recognition of Asian Americans in the community sector (Teranishi, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to delve into challenges and obstacles that Asian Americans face in community colleges.

In addition, several other studies explored community college experiences in regard to interaction or relationship between students and faculty or peers. Chang (2005) examined the correlation between students' characteristics and faculty contact and the different interactions among racial groups (e.g., white, African American, Asian American Pacific Islanders, Latino, and Native Indian) by using data collected from the Transfer and Retention of Urban Community College Students survey. The items in this survey included students' demographic information, course-taking patterns, campus activities engagement, and attitudes and views. The survey was

conducted with 5,000 students at the nine campuses of the Los Angeles Community College District. Chang (2005) found that community college students generally had low level of interaction with faculty. Students were more likely to interact with faculty in class but less likely to be engaged with them outside of class. If students interacted with other members of their own community colleges and they felt encouraged and supported by teachers, they tried to have more interactions with people in colleges such as peers and teachers. However, it differed between racial groups. African American students who were less prepared academically tended to interact more with faculty by asking them for help. However, several factors (e.g., spending more time on campus, maturity) positively correlated to faculty-student relationships were not relevant to Asian American Pacific Islander students. Chang (2005) interpreted this result as a possible cultural mismatch between methods of interaction in college and Asians' communication style. He assumed Asian students might feel more comfortable not interacting with faculty. This could contribute to limited interaction with faculty even though students understood the benefits of such interactions. Another possibility for their lack of interaction with their professors is that they have enough guidance from others such as family or community members outside of college through their extensive ethnic communities and networks (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Chang (2005) also found that Asian students' personal challenges in racial interaction negatively influenced the level of interactions with faculty compared to other racial groups. He assumed that they might hold a negative racial climate that hindered interactions with faculty.

In addition, Hagedorn, Maxwell, Rodriguez, Hocevar, and Fillpot (2000) studied the gender differences in peer relationships and faculty-student relationships

40

among community college students. They conducted a survey of 774 community college students asking for a level of agreement on statements regarding peer and faculty-students relationships. Three-fourths mostly disagreed that they had little contact with faculty and peers outside the classroom and one-third agreed that it was easy to develop close relationships with faculty. However, eighty percent of the students reported that they never discussed career issues or informally socialized with faculty. Concerning peer relationship, more than half of the students answered that they almost never participated in activities with other students. Although there was not much difference in social involvement outside the classroom, male students were more likely to be involved in formal activities while women were more likely to attend less-formal activities such as study groups. In addition, Lundberg (2014) examined how community college students' faculty and peer relations (e.g., peer tutoring, student organization involvement) contributed to learning outcomes by using the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire, which surveyed 239 students from ethnic or multicultural organizations at 12 different community colleges. The areas of learning outcomes she measured were general education, intellectual skills, science and technology, personal development, and career preparation. It found that frequent interactions with faculty were the strongest determinants for learning outcomes and that peer tutoring also contributed to students' learning.

Although many students choose to attend community colleges because of the economic benefits (e.g., low tuition), the perception may be that they attend community colleges because they could not get into four-year colleges, which would not be true for some students. However, students are more likely to have positive experiences if they have close and frequent interactions with peers and faculty and

campus engagement. Therefore, from the literature, students who have positive experiences at community colleges would be satisfied with their colleges and this can positively influence their future plans. Findings from these previous studies inform my interest in understanding how Korean American students' lived experiences at community colleges influence them.

Possible Selves

As introduced in the beginning of this chapter, this study aims to understand Korean American students' perceptions and experiences in community colleges and how these experiences influence their construction of possible selves. Therefore, the literature on possible selves is a major component of the study's conceptual framework. In this section, I explain the definition of possible selves, the interaction between race/ethnicity and possible selves, and the literature on community college students' possible selves. This chapter focuses on exploring how students' experiences influence the construction of possible selves.

Definition of Possible Selves and Various Aspects of Possible Selves

According to Markus and Nurius (1986), possible selves are "representations of the self in the past and they include representations of the self in the future" (p. 954). Although the self in the past and the self in the future are different and separate, they are connected. Markus and Nurius considered possible selves to be various self-conceptions that include "the good selves, the bad selves, the hoped-for selves, the feared selves, the not-me selves, the ideal selves, and the ought-selves" (p. 957). In addition, the authors explained, possible selves are individualized or personalized, but they are also distinctly social. That is, many of these possible selves are the direct

result of previous social comparisons in which the individual's own thoughts, feelings, characteristics, and behaviors have been contrasted to those of salient others. Theorists believe that understanding possible selves is helpful for individuals to evaluate their current selves and they can motivate individuals to behave in ways that include attention to what they want to achieve or avoid (Strahan & Wilson, 2006).

Emphasizing this sociocultural/sociological perspective, Oyserman and Markus (1993) examined how various sociocultural contexts (e.g., ethnicity, gender, class, region of origin) or sociocultural environments (e.g., family, school, community, work) may influence the perception of self. The self-concept in this study also includes a self in the past, the present, and the future and involves social identities, role identities, and individual attributes. For example, since an individual identifies oneself as more than one role (e.g., Asian, woman, mother, etc.), the person may develop multifaceted self-perceptions. Therefore, the self-concept about how to be a person or self is shaped by various sociocultural contexts.

Building on this theory, Oyserman and Fryberg (2006) argued that possible selves are socially constructed. They suggested that specific others and social contexts generally play an important role in the creation and maintenance of possible selves. Important people (e.g., parents), role models, and media images are examples of models used to instantiate possible selves, but sociocultural identities are also important. In addition, possible selves are shaped by social context. A person's engagement in social contexts is important in shaping that person's understanding of what is a possible self and what is valued. Social contexts provide important feedback to individuals about whether a possible self is positively or negatively valued. To illustrate, a person who graduate from medical school would be more likely to

positively view working in medical field (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006) and adolescents whose parents divorced are more likely to develop feared possible selves with respect to problems in marriage (Carson, Madison, & Santrock, 1987). Therefore, possible selves are socially constructed and multifaceted self-concepts influenced by social contexts.

Intersection Between Race/Ethnicity and Possible Selves

There is limited research on the intersection of race/ethnicity and possible selves focusing on Asian American students in particular. However, a study by Kao (2000) examined perceptions high school students held of each other's group (e.g., white, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians) and how these perceptions legitimize ideas about groups and contribute to racially segregated activities. Kao also examined the range of possible selves and how the significant boundaries of possible selves differed by race. The perceptions of Asians held by white, African Americans, and Hispanic students were that Asian students were "good at math and science," "smart," "more likely to work on computers as a hobby (rather than sports or drama)," and "quiet and work in class," and that they "will rule the business world." These differed from how the Asian students to described themselves, which included that they were "hard-working" and "do well in school," that "others expect them to be smart, good in math/science"; and that they experience "pressure from parents to succeed." Kao argued that group perceptions which positively link ethnic groups with certain abilities contribute to hoped-for selves while perceptions negatively associated with ethnic groups contribute to feared selves. Kao found that Asians constructed their possible selves by focusing on meeting expectations in academic performance and educational attainment. However, Kao also suggested that their own and others'

44

perceptions of Asians as being smart may lead some Asian students to struggle and be dissatisfied with themselves.

While Kao (2000) focused on high school students, Fryberg and Markus (2007) examined achievement-related possible selves among different racial/ethnic groups (e.g., American Indian, Asian American, and white) of college students. They focused on their ideas of the purpose and function of education, the self in educational contexts, and the relationship between self and teacher. Regarding possible selves, the majority of Asian students (88.5%) expected or hoped for success in school, and 70 percent of them also believed they had a good relationship with their teacher. On the other hand, Asian students also feared failing school (84.6%) and worried about a lack of relationships with their teacher (65.4%). This study did not specify any subgroups of Asians so it is unclear how Korean students would perceive their academically-related possible selves. Therefore, there is a need to research how Koreans would positively or negatively perceive themselves related to academic work and whether or not they would be likely to be influenced by how people perceive them.

Possible Selves of College Students

Pizzolato's (2006, 2007) studies on college students' possible selves became exemplars for the conceptual foundation for this study. One study (Pizzolato, 2006) explored how low-income students of color constructed possible selves (especially about becoming a college student) and achieved goals related to their possible selves in order to understand the gap between aspiration and achievement. Through semi-structured interviews with 28 colleges students who were identified as high-risk (e.g., more likely to withdraw from college) by the institution, she found the process of how students developed their possible selves was influenced by community or family

environments. First students identified feared selves, and then constructed hoped-for selves. Finally, they saw how their hoped-for selves were linked to successfully avoiding their feared possible selves. For instance, a student whose brother was killed by a gang member developed a feared self by wanting to get away from gang-related activity and become a college student, which was not unusual in his community. This student sought information on how to become a college student. Pizzolato (2006) also argued that it is important to construct procedural (e.g., college application process) and conceptual (e.g., how their choice would affect their relationship) schema in order for students to achieve possible selves.

Another study (Pizzolato, 2007) examined how students coped with external threats to their career-related possible selves. Through analyzing the narratives of 32 students about their important decisions in the past five months, four forms of external threats were identified: admission rejection from the major of their choice, lack of job opportunities outside of college in their desired field, financial limitation to afford college education, and institutional action (e.g., probation). The study also found some patterns of developing possible selves. When students faced external factors beyond their control, some students tried to maintain their images rather than focusing on possible selves, which the study declared to be a moratorium on the development of career-related possible selves. To illustrate, a student was not admitted to a major he wanted. Instead of trying to apply again, he focused on another major that would help him graduate college on time. However, some students tried to explore various routes to achieve possible selves or developed new possible selves based on their situation being impacted by external factors. These studies showed how college students constructed their possible selves based on their situations and how to support students

to develop and achieve possible selves, especially at-risk students or those from low SES backgrounds. These studies also helped me conceptualize elements that may impact how Korean community college students construct their possible selves.

While it is rare to find studies directly related to community college students' possible selves, two fairly recent studies are somewhat relevant. Cook (2010) focused on community college students who planned to transfer to the local research university and examined why and how their self-perceptions shaped their decisions. Using the theory of possible selves, the study examined students' perceptions of self, others, and institutions. Cook found that students' possible selves affected their transfer college-choice decision, from initial choice through enrollment at the receiving institution. Students with possible selves which accommodated lower-status educational and career goals were less likely to transfer to research universities, as were students who had negative academic selves (e.g., feeling unsuited to the research university context, especially because of low high school achievement) and students who did not see themselves attending research universities. When students felt well matched to a community college (as an institution they perceived as being of equal quality to the university), this feeling seemed to have a mediating effect on their ability to see attendance at a selective research university as a possibility, thus motivating them to apply.

Ozaki (2016) used the concept of possible selves to explore internal reasons involved in individuals' decisions to return to community colleges after an extended absence. Ozaki particularly focused on the students' decision-making process and the role and development of possible selves as factors in and outcomes of educational decision-making. She distinguished "college possible selves" (CPS) from "non-college

possible selves" (NCPS). CPS were selves who wanted to go to college after high school and saw themselves as college students. On the other hand, NCPS did not see themselves as college students and did not plan to continue their education beyond high school. Students who developed CPS had more positive previous experiences in schools and more supportive friends and family compared to those who developed NCPS. Their reasons for leaving college were also different. While students with CPS left primarily due to external issues (e.g., illness or pregnancy), students with NCPS left due to poor grades or work opportunities. However, once they returned to college, all students developed college/career possible selves, meaning that they wanted to learn and do well in order to be successful.

As literature showed, constructing possible selves were varied in terms of social contexts or experiences. Therefore, Korean American students' possible selves in community colleges would also be diverse depending on their past and current experiences.

Conceptual Framework

Asians are situated in a unique circumstance compared to other minority groups in higher education. My conceptual framework includes paying attention to the ways possible selves are influenced by students' reasons for attending community college as well as their perceptions of and experiences in community colleges. Possible selves are a future-oriented self-perception, and it is assumed that they would be influenced by past and present experiences. As visualized in Figure 3, I considered the reasons Korean American students have for attending community college as past experience and their perceptions and experiences while attending community colleges as present experience. I also viewed their goals and plans after community colleges as

elements to examine their self-perception of the future. Therefore, I assumed their goals and plans would be influenced or shaped by their past and current experiences.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction, images of Asian American students as high academic achievers with high enrollment rates at elite universities may obscure the struggles and obstacles some Korean Americans face in higher education. Therefore, understanding their possible selves in the community college sector of higher education provides an entryway for expanding what we know about Korean Americans in higher education. This conceptual framework is helpful in understanding the complex layers of constructing possible selves for Korean American students in community colleges through their perceptions and experiences.
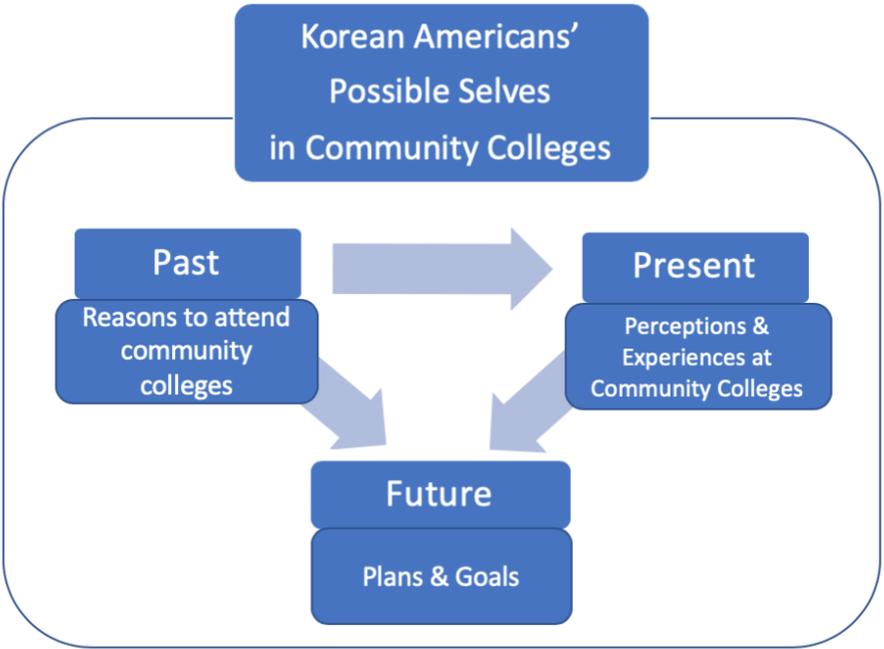
Figure 3   Conceptual framework of this study

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Overview

In this chapter, I explain the details of the methodology for this study, including research design, the rationale for the research design, research context (information about research sites and participants), data collection method, data analysis and synthesis, participant confidentiality, issues of trustworthiness, and my identity as a researcher. As mentioned in the first chapter, the purpose of this study is to explore how Korean American students in community colleges construct their possible selves through their academic and social experiences. Therefore, this study aims to explore the following question: How do Korean American students' perceptions and experiences at community colleges influence the way they construct their possible selves? More specifically, 1) What opportunities and obstacles do they see (or experience) as community college students? In what ways do their experiences at community colleges intersect with model minority stereotypes? and 2) What possible selves do Korean American students construct while attending community college?

Qualitative research is well suited for this study because it includes interpretive and naturalistic approaches to the real world, which means that it tries to understand the phenomena people bring to real life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 21). Merriam (2009) also mentions that qualitative research pays attention to how people interpret and construct the meaning of their world. In addition, it focuses on the meaning that participants hold about the issue rather than the meaning researchers bring to study (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). For this reason, qualitative research is fundamentally

interpretive. Since this study intends to understand the lived experiences of Korean Americans at community colleges and how they construct the possible selves through these experiences, qualitative research is more appropriate and relevant to understanding how Korean American students interpret their experiences and perceptions.

Research Design and Rationale

The main research design used in this study was qualitative in-depth interviews. Qualitative interviews are "conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.4). Seidman (2013) viewed the in-depth interview as being driven by "an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). Therefore, asking questions is not just for getting answers, testing hypotheses or evaluating (Patton, 1990). One of the approaches to interviewing that Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) explained was interviewing as a social production of knowledge. In this view, interviewing is considered an active process to produce knowledge through the relationship between interviewer and interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015) and this approach enabled me to play an active role in this research. Since I was interested in Korean American students' experiences at community colleges and how these experiences influence how they construct their possible selves, qualitative interviews were appropriate for this study.

Research Context (Research Sites and Participants)

Recruiting Research Participants and Searching Research Sites

In order to explore how Korean American students' perceptions and experiences at community college and their roles as community college students influence the way they construct their possible selves, I developed predetermined criteria to select research participants for this study. First, participants needed to identify as Korean, Korean American, or Korean multiethnic or multiracial[4] in order to see the variation of their experiences if any. Second, to be included in the study participants needed to be born in the United States or in Korea. If born in Korea, I only included students who had immigrated to the U.S. before or during high school. Furthermore, they must have graduated from a high school in the U.S. or have an equivalent to a high school diploma such as a GED (General Education Diploma). High school experience is important in understanding their past educational experiences because there was a possibility it would influence their experiences and construction of possible selves. Lastly, participants needed to be enrolled as students at a community college. Ideally, I was looking for participants who had completed at

---

[4] Self-defined racial/ethnic identity posed challenges for my study. When I asked them to define their racial/ethnic identity, they identified as either Koreans or Korean Americans. Their answers were not consistent and varied in terms of their legal status such as international students, permanent residence, and US citizen. For example, some students identified themselves as Korean Americans although they did not have any formal legal status, such as permanent residence or American citizenship. Contrarily, some participants who held legal status in the U.S. identified themselves as Korean but not American. Therefore, in this study, Korean and Korean Americans are used interchangeably. Further details will be discussed in the section for participants' information.

least one full semester or more as these participants were likely to have a greater breadth of experiences to inform their perspectives on community college.

With these criteria in mind, I recruited participants through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling includes the use of several sampling strategies. I applied snowball sampling and opportunistic sampling, which is "purposeful sampling undertaken after research begins, to take advantage of unfolding events" (Creswell, 2012, p. 624). In snowball sampling, which typically occurs when a study begins (Creswell, 2012), the researcher asks participants to recommend other possible participants. Before the study started, I planned to use personal networks in the Korean community to recruit initial participants. Once data was collected from initial participants, I would ask them to recommend other participants to be sampled. However, this strategy did not work as well as I expected, as only one out of eight potential participants accepted my request.

Because of this low response rate, I had to completely change my recruiting strategy in order to get more participants. I decided to focus on community college sites rather than approaching individual participants who were enrolled in community colleges. I focused on cities with substantial Korean populations in the East Coast region and then looked for community colleges in those cities. Once I found possible research sites, I looked into these community colleges again, particularly focusing my attention on student demographics. There was some information on different racial/ethnic groups, such as white, African American, Hispanic, and Asian, but demographic profiles did not indicate specific subgroups of Asian students. Therefore, I was not able to determine how many Korean students attended each college. Instead, I searched for Korean student associations at community colleges. Fortunately, I was

able to find an association and started to join its regular meetings in order to find opportunities to recruit participants. With the help of the student organization's advisor I reached out to potential participants. In order to increase the chance of recruiting more participants, I also sent an invitation email to the members of the association, directly asked students in the cafeteria or lounges, and posted recruiting flyers on campus. I applied these strategies to two other sites that had Korean student associations, contacting either the advisors or the presidents of these associations to ask for help finding possible participants.

In qualitative research, the number of participants is not as important as it is in quantitative research because of the focus on specific meanings rather than making generalizations with a large sample (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Qualitative research is also very labor intensive, so a large sample can be time-consuming and impractical (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). However, it was still a concern for me as I wanted to ensure that my sample included sufficient participants to address my research questions. Although saturation is considered an important concept to follow when determining the number of participants in qualitative research (Mason, 2010), guidelines on number of participants are generally vague. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) argues, "Although the idea of saturation is helpful at the conceptual level, it provides little practical guidance for estimating sample sizes for robust research prior to data collection" (p. 59). Mason's (2010) study provided helpful guidelines. He looked at doctoral dissertations in the U.K. and Ireland, particularly using qualitative interviews as a method of data collection in 26 different qualitative research approaches. Specifically, in studies using grounded

theory, he found the range of the number of samples from 174 dissertations[5] were 4–87, and the mode, mean, and median were 25, 32, and 30, respectively, with a standard deviation of 16.6. Other studies (e.g., Creswell, 1998; Morse, 1994; Bertaux, 1981) suggested guidelines of actual numbers for samples. For instance, Creswell (1998) mentioned 20–30, and Morse (1994) advised 30–50 interviews when using grounded theory methodology. Bertaux (1981) indicated that 15 is the smallest acceptable number for all qualitative research. These guidelines were helpful and I initially chose 30 participants based on the median number of participants in Mason (2010)'s study. However, I ended up with 29 participants due to one withdrawal from the study.

Information About Participants

The backgrounds of research participants varied regarding gender, age, socioeconomic status, and parents' educational attainment levels, as illustrated in Table 1. Of the 29 participants, the number of males and females were 13 and 16, respectively. The majority of them (20 participants) attended as full-time students, and nine participants were part-time students. In terms of immigrant status, 19 participants immigrated to the U.S. before high school (when they were ranging from ages 4

---

[5] Mason (2010) selected dissertations from a PhD database that have comprehensive list with abstracts that were accepted for higher degrees by universities in Great Britain and Ireland since 1716. He found 429 dissertations that used the grounded theory with keywords (e.g., grounded theory and interviews). However, he excluded some dissertations with the following criteria: 1) abstracts which did not state the exact number of interviews; 2) abstracts which stated that the author had been part of a fieldwork team; 3) abstracts which specified more than one interview per participant (i.e. repeat interviews, longitudinal studies, or panel studies); and 4) abstracts from other professional qualifications, such as PhDs in clinical psychology, where single case studies are prevalent in this field. After applying these excluding criteria, 174 dissertations were selected.

months to 13 years, but mostly immigrated between 3rd and 5th grades), 7 participants were U.S. born, and three participants immigrated to the U.S. during high school. In addition to their legal status, it is important to mention their self-defined ethnic identity. There was variation in how participants ethnically identified themselves unaligned to their legal status. For instance, some participants who immigrated when they were elementary students still held international student visas because of complicated circumstances. Although their visa status identified them as international students, they identified themselves as Korean Americans since they had lived longer in the U.S. and they felt assimilated into U.S. society. In contrast, although some students held permanent residence status, they identified themselves only as Koreans. One participant strongly noted that she preferred to be considered as a Korean, saying that considering herself as an American seemed not appropriate because she was not a U.S. citizen yet. Because of these aspects, the self-defined identity differed in terms of participants' legal immigration status and there seemed to be no correlation between the two. However, Korean American is commonly used, and Korean and Korean American is used interchangeably in this study.

Although the majority reported that they did not know their household income, participants who reported their household incomes represented a wide range. The median household income of participants' families ranged between $45,000 and $61,500. According to the recent income and poverty report from the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), the median household income of the U.S. was $59,039 in 2016. However, when comparing the median household income by race, Asian Americans had the highest median household income ($81,431)[6]. In 2015, however, Korean

---

[6] According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), the median income of African American, Hispanic, and White household was $39,490, $47,675, and $65,041,

Americans' median household income was $60,000 while Asian Americans' median was $73,060 (Pew Research Center, 2017a). Although recent Korean Americans' median household income was absent from the government document, it is reasonable to infer that Korean Americans' median household income would continue to be below Asian Americans' median. Since one-third of the participants declared that they did not know their family income, it is difficult to know the average household income of all participants in this study. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, it was important for Korean Americans to be academically well-prepared for college regardless of their income. However, the different socioeconomic status could influence their ability to take preparatory courses. Furthermore, previous studies on the reasons for attending community college found that affordable tuition was one of the main reasons to attend community colleges. Therefore, socioeconomic status might be an influential element for the participants when determining whether to attend community colleges.

With regards to educational attainments of participants' caregivers[7], there was a difference in educational attainment between fathers and mothers. Fathers' median educational attainment was bachelor's degrees while mothers' median educational attainment was some college degrees. Although the gender difference in degree attainment among Korean Americans is not clear because evidence specific to gender

---

respectively, while the U.S. median was $59,039. Therefore, Asians and White household exceeded the U.S. median household income while African American and Hispanic household fell below it.

[7] Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire and part of it was about their caregivers' information, such as educational attainment and occupation. Most participants reported their caregivers as either their father or mother or both.

was not available, Korean Americans are more likely to have a bachelor's degree than White Americans and other Asian Americans, as can be seen in Table 2.

For participants' educational information, the median GPA in high schools and college was between 3.0 and 3.4. More than half of participants (18 out of 29) had applied for four-year colleges or had even attended a four-year college or other community college before they attended their current community college. The number of colleges they applied to varied from one to seven colleges (the median number was two). According to the study from Smith (2013), the average number of college applications high school students submitted to four-year colleges was 3.16 per student, with the most common number being two. However, students from high-SES (3.70) were more likely to submit more applications than those from low-SES (2.67) (Smith, 2013). Many participants in this study submitted the average number of college applications but the difference in the number of college applications depending on socioeconomic status was not similar to Smith's (2013) report. Smith (2013) found that students from the higher SES were more likely to apply to more colleges than students from the lower SES. In my study, the family income of one participant who submitted six college applications was between $40,000 to $49,000 while participants whose family income was between $100,000 and $150,000 submitted two or three applications. However, 11 participants chose their current community colleges as their first choice and never applied to other colleges. One participant had already obtained a bachelor's degree in a four-year college in the U.S.

There is a variety of participants' majors, including nursing, business, science, art, psychology, and the English as Second Language program. The length of time attending community college varied from one semester to more than 2 years, depending on their

circumstances. As mentioned earlier, six participants had already attended four-year colleges and moved to community colleges before completing their degree at four-year colleges. Some participants attended community colleges longer than they initially planned because they changed majors, while other participants had prior experience in other community colleges.

As described above, participant backgrounds varied in terms of race, age, SES, legal immigration status, parents' highest educational attainment, major, and length of attendance. Maximum variation sampling, one of the purposeful sampling strategies, aims to sample for heterogeneity. This strategy can help to understand the diversity of their experiences and find the commonly observed experiences across the participants. Therefore, I believe the variety of backgrounds was helpful in capturing the complexity of experiences at community colleges which might be influenced by the different backgrounds.

Table 1   Participant profiles

Gender	Male: 13	Female: 16
Age	19 to 31 (Average age: 22.18)	
Full/part-time status	Full-time: 20	Part-time: 9
Immigration status	U.S. born: 7 Immigrated to the States before high school: 19 Immigrated to the States during high school: 3 High school graduate: 27 High school dropout: 2	

Household income (Median household income: $45,000 - $61,500)	< $10,000: 1 $10,000 - $19,999: 1 $20,000 - $29,999: 4 $30,000 - $39,999: 2 $40,000 - $49,999: 1 $50,000 - $74,999: 1 $75,000 - $99,999: 3 $100,000 - $150,000: 4 > $150,000: 1 I don't know: 11	
Parents' highest educational attainment	Father (25) High school graduate: 3 Some college degree w/o degree: 4 Associate's degree (occupational): 2 **Bachelor's degree: 1** Master's degree: 4 Doctoral degree: 1 Don't know: 1	Mother (28) High school graduate: 11 **Some college degree w/o degree: 4** Associate's degree (occupational): 3 Associate's degree (academic): 1 Bachelor's degree: 6 Master's degree: 2 Doctoral degree: 1
Participants' GPA	High school Above 3.5: 8 **3.0 - 3.4: 11** 2.5 - 2.9: 4 2.0 - 2.4: 2 I don't know/remember: 4	Current college Above 3.5: 13 **3.0 - 3.4: 8** 2.5 - 2.9: 4 I don't know/remember: 4
Applied other colleges before attending the current community colleges	Yes: 18 Number of colleges application One college: 7 Two colleges: 5 Three colleges: 3 Four colleges: 1 More than 5 colleges: 2	No: 11
Majors	Health profession (e.g., nursing, pre-med): 8 Business (e.g., accounting, banking, finance): 9 Science (e.g., general science, forensic science, computer science): 5 Art: 2 Psychology: 2 Engineering: 1 ESL: 1 Indecisive: 1	

* Note that Bold indicates the median.

Table 2   Percentage of educational attainment for those ages 25 and older (Pew Research Center, 2017b)

	High school or less	Some college	Bachelor's degree	Postgrad degree
Korean/Korean American	25%	21%	33%	20%
Asian/Asian American	29%	20%	30%	21%
Everyone in U.S.	41%	29%	19%	11%

Information About Research Sites

Twenty-six participants (out of 29) were from three community colleges located in three different states of the Mid-Atlantic regions. These community colleges were either located in or near a large Korean community. Milford Community College[8], which had the largest number of participants in this study, is located in the most populous county in a state. The county where this community college is located is one of the wealthiest counties in the U.S., with a median household income of $85,806 in 2015, higher than the $72,093 statewide median. Asian was the third largest population group (14.8%) in this county, after White (73.7%) and Hispanic or Latino (16.4%). In this county, Korean was the leading group (43.7 %), while Indian (19.2%), Filipino (14.8%), Chinese (13.2%), Japanese (4.6%), and other Asian (5%) followed.

In Milford Community College, 14,519 students including full-time and part-time students were enrolled in 2016, which is considered medium-size. When dividing

---

[8] Names of community colleges and participants are pseudonyms.

student population by race, Asian students made up 6.3 % after White (29.9%), Unknown (25.1%), and Hispanic (24.3%), according to the data from the college. Milford Community College envisions being a partner to bridging potential with educational opportunities and professional and personal growth. Its mission is to inspire the community to realize a better future. This community college has 16 academic departments and provides associate degrees such as Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Associate in Fine Arts (designed as a transfer program leading to the Bachelor of Music or Fine Arts degrees at four-year colleges or universities), and Associate in Applied Science (designed to prepare students for employment). In addition, this college also offers 40 different academic and professional certificate programs which help students to transfer to professional fields. In 2013, the rate of graduation in three years was 16 percent and the transfer rate without graduating in three years was 22 percent. This college has campuses in three different cities. The campus selected as a research site was the main campus which is quite large with soccer and baseball fields. There is a huge main building where many service offices were located, such as admissions, student center, cafeteria, and library, and many classes were held. This building was always crowded with students and a lot of events, such as job fairs or club activities, went on in this building. For this reason, the main building was important in understanding the ecology of the campus.

The second college, Bonifant Community College[9], is located in a county frequently cited for its affluence, quality of life, and excellent schools. The median household in this county was $110,238 in 2015, while the median household income of the state was $74,551. This county's schools frequently rank first in the state as

---

[9] The name is pseudonymous.

measured by standardized test scores and graduation rates. Regarding population, Asian was the third largest group (14.4%) in this county after White (62.2%) and African American (17.5%). By disaggregating subgroups of Asian, Korean was the second largest group (29.9%) after Asian Indian (30.1%), and Chinese (19.4%), Filipino (3.9%), and Vietnamese (3.6%) followed.

Student enrollment in Bonifant Community College was 29,874 in 2017, which classifies it as a large college. Asian students accounted for 13 percent of the total student population, following White (36%) and African American (31%). Its mission is to provide a pathway to success for students, and its vision is to become a place to discover greatness in self and others. Bonifant Community College has eight different academic divisions and offers an associate degree in Arts and Applied Science, an Associate of Arts in Teaching (designed for transfer to a four-year institution to obtain a baccalaureate degree and teacher certification), and an Associate of Science in Engineering (designed for transfer to a four-year institution to obtain a baccalaureate degree in engineering). This college also provides 38 career-related certificates. The transfer rate was 16% and graduation rate 15% in 2013 (tracking from the Fall 2010). The campus seemed to look modern with new buildings (there was construction at this campus at the time of my visit) and small compared to the student enrollment number. Unlike Milford Community College, this college had several buildings and seemed to be divided by majors. Therefore, the campus seemed very quiet and calm with students scattered throughout different buildings.

The third research site is Liberty Community College[10], located in a county considered to be the most metropolitan area of the research sites. In this county,

---

[10] The name is pseudonymous.

Asians were the second largest group (22.9%) after White (39.7%), and Korean was the third largest group (12.5%) among Asians after Chinese (39.1%) and Asian Indians (22.9%). The median household income in this county was the lowest ($57,720) among the selected research sites, and below the median household income ($59,269) of its state.

The total student enrollment was 15,493 in 2015 and Asian students accounted for 22 percent of the total student population (Hispanic: 26%, African American: 23%, White: 21%, American Indian and Native Alaskan: 1%, and Nonresident Alien: 7%) in 2012. The mission of Liberty Community College is to provide an affordable, high-quality education for students and to help them to become lifelong learners. The vision of this college is that all personnel are dedicated to helping their students succeed in a dynamic workforce by providing a nurturing and diverse environment with academic excellence and rigor. Therefore, this college envisions supporting both students and college personnel in having great experiences which can lead to successful outcomes. This college has five academic divisions and provides 50 degree-seeking (such as Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, and Associate in Applied Science) and certificate programs. Interestingly, this college also offers a dual/joint program with four-year-neighboring colleges. The transfer rate was 21% and graduation rate 22% in 2018. The campus of this college was the smallest compared to other two colleges, and it seemed packed with the highest density.

Although I do not intend to describe the details of the two other research sites, they had similar backgrounds. Michelle Community College and Verde Community College[11] were also located near communities with high Korean populations. Verde

---

[11] The names are pseudonymous.

Community College was in the same state of Bonifant Community College and had a similar percentage of Asian students. Michelle Community College was located in a different state and had the highest Asian student population across the all research sites. This college provided various programs like other major research sites and had a good reputation in its community. Because of the small number of participants at these research sites, I did not focus on them; however, I included these participants as they provided relevant data to the study.

Data Collection Method

Qualitative interviews are a primary tool to collect data which can be analyzed to gain an understanding of participants' perceptions of their college experiences and their construction of possible selves. Before participants were interviewed, they were asked to complete a questionnaire about their backgrounds. The questionnaire was about their current status as a student, socioeconomic status of their family (household income and educational levels of their caregivers), and their academic performance in high school and their current community college (see Appendix A). After completing the questionnaire, semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted with the 29 participating students. Interviews lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes, with 60 minutes as an average. Interviews location depended on participants' preference. Most interviews were conducted on participants' campuses, For the participants' convenience or upon their request, the interviews sometimes were conducted in their house or a local café. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All interviews were conducted in English; however, participants were given the option to speak in Korean when they could not fully express their thoughts in English in order to increase the clarity of their meaning. Additional follow-ups via phone or emails

were conducted if necessary in order to clarify the meanings of what participants said or to improve issues of trustworthiness.

Interview questions (See Appendix B) addressed three areas: high school experiences, college decision, and experiences in community colleges. I also included questions to help understand how these three areas impacted the students' possible selves. As aforementioned in Chapter Two, possible selves is a concept of the self which connects the past to the present and future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Therefore, examining their past and present experiences was crucial to understanding the connection with future possible selves. To illustrate this process, it becomes evident that developing possible selves is important for college students and can be influenced by social contexts through this brief review of previous studies.

Methodologically, a majority of the studies related to possible selves used quantitative data gathering instruments such as surveys and questionnaires. The methods used for assessing possible selves were typically checklists or listings (Kerpelman, 2006). For example, Marcus and Nurius (1986) developed a questionnaire that listed 150 items about the possibilities for the self with six categories[12]. They asked participants to judge items using three choices: positive, neutral, or negative. They also asked whether the items were relevant to them within

---

[12] These six categories are: (a) general descriptors or adjectives typically found in self-concept inventories (e.g., creative, selfish, intelligent); (b) physical descriptors (e.g., good-looking, blind, wrinkled, or athletic); (c) life-style possibilities (e.g., having an active social life, being health conscious, a cancer victim, or alcohol dependent); (d) general abilities (e.g., able to fix things, able to cook well, able to influence people, or knowledgeable about art or music); (e) possibilities reflecting various occupational alternatives (e.g., business executive, supreme court justice, artist, taxi driver, or police officer); and finally (f) possibilities directly tied to the opinions of others (e.g., being appreciated, loved, feared, or unpopular) (p. 958).

the time frame (e.g., past, present, and future). However, Leondari, Syngollitou, and Kiosseoglou (1998) utilized an open-ended format to bring out possible selves. For instance, they provided several scenarios of both situations related to success and failure and asked participants to choose one scenario from each situation to imagine themselves in a given scenario. This open-ended response methods were helpful for me to develop interview questions.

There are some studies which have used only qualitative measures of possible selves. For instance, as previously mentioned, Ozaki (2016) explored internal reasons involved in individuals' decisions to return to community colleges after an extended absence. To facilitate this inquiry, Ozaki used interviews with 58 community college students. The interview questions guided students through their educational history, goals, hopes, fears, how they changed over time, and their decision-making process to leave and return to college.

Despite the fact that there was some qualitative research to understand how college students think about themselves, the studies I reviewed did not provide any specific interview protocols or examples of specific questions. Although qualitative studies helped me to understand how the authors conceptualized possible selves, it was not clear how the authors directly asked participants about possible selves.

In addition, Anderman, Anderman, and Griesinger (1999) asked some great examples of questions about academic selves and social selves through the present- and future-oriented situation which I adapted in my study. To exemplify, the items related to academic selves are "good student," "smartest in class," and "do better than other students," and the items related to social selves are popular, have a lot of friends, and "competitive" (Anderman, Anderman, & Griesinger, 1998). Based on these items,

I formulated my interview questions to describe what kind of students the participants were in the past and the present and the relationship they have with their peers. Furthermore, as Markus and Nurius (1986) considered possible selves to be various self-conceptions that include "the good selves, the bad selves, the hoped-for selves, the feared selves, the not-me selves, the ideal selves, and the ought-selves" (p. 957), the participants would also be asked about things they hope to achieve or fears they have in their community colleges. Furthermore, this study utilizes the sociocultural/sociological frameworks of possible selves that prioritize the importance of social contexts such as the relationship with others (e.g., family, peers, or faculty) and institutional structures (e.g., campus environment). These are reflected in interview questions to explore how Korean American students conceptualize their possible selves. For instance, for hoped-for selves, I created a question to imagine what the student would be like, do, or hope to achieve in the future. In addition, in order to understand social contexts of participants, I developed some questions about their relationship with peers and faculty in community colleges and any support from their colleges. This study uses qualitative methodology to understand how the past and current educational experiences of Korean American students shape their possible selves and how these possible selves are influenced by social contexts (e.g., environments, significant others, and social structures), with particular attention being paid to the community college context.

Furthermore, Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) introduced tabular strategies to identify the relationship between data resource and research questions in order to improve the methodological rigor and analytical defensibility of qualitative research. For this reason, I also demonstrate a table of research questions in relation to

interview questions adopted from Anfara, Brown, and Mangione's (2002) study (See Appendix F).

Data Analysis and Synthesis

My data analysis framework is informed by Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory. According to Corbin and Strauss (2015), theory can be constructed (grounded) from the data itself and can then be used to explain social phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p.18). According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), one of the unique features of grounded theory is that data collection and analysis are interrelated, so data collection and analysis is an ongoing process throughout the research. Through this process, researchers can examine the phenomena from many different angles which enable them to develop comprehensive explanations (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

However, there is a major criticism of grounded theory regarding the role of existing theories in study design and analysis. Heath (2006) argued that grounded theory neglects existing theories and fails to incorporate emergent theories developed through a study into existing knowledge. Since grounded theory is better situated to developing a theory grounded in data, the use of theoretical frameworks is different from other types of qualitative research. Therefore, Corbin and Strauss (2015) discourage the use of theoretical frameworks because it would be contradictory with the purpose of this method, but theoretical frameworks can be used to compare with established theories once analysis is completed. Heath (2006), however, took a different approach. She used the literature as data to challenge the emergent theory, and to locate the theory within the current body of knowledge. Before data collection for this study, I had already engaged in previous studies while examining relevant

literature which contradicts what Corbin and Strauss (2015) suggested, so I adopted Heath's strategy most closely matched my approach and use of grounded theory.

Based on the grounded theory approach, this study also followed Creswell's (2012) six steps for analyzing qualitative data: (1) organizing data; (2) an initial engagement with data through coding; (3) development of descriptions and themes from codes; (4) representation of findings with narratives and visuals; (5) interpretation of findings; and (6) validation of findings. This was conducted with three cycles of analysis. In the first cycle, a preliminary exploratory analysis was implemented in order to get a general sense of the data (Creswell, 2012) by reading the entire set of transcripts several times (Agar, 1980). While I was reading the transcripts, I also jotted down my thoughts in the margins and wrote reflective memos. Through the first cycle, I was able to see some overall commonalities across all cases and find interesting excerpts from each case. In the second cycle of analysis, I focused on developing a codebook. I initially reexamined five to six transcripts and started to develop codes drawn from notes and the literature. I applied these initially developed codes to the rest of the transcripts and added new codes as necessary. A list of inductive codes was identified and refined through several coding processes. Each inductive code corresponded to a particular concept, belief, or idea that often appeared frequently in the data. This study particularly utilized the in Vivo coding, emotion coding, and values coding that Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) suggested. They explained that in Vivo coding uses the words or phrases of the participants' own language as codes. For instance, in Vivo coding could be about the experiences of community college, particularly in-class experiences. An example for in Vivo coding can be as follows, as the participant described classmates met in class:

I like my class. It was different age group, too, which I thought that was cool, because normally I would think, "Oh, you know, most people would be very young." But there is actually a lot of people who are a lot older than me and also younger than me. So it's a very diverse age group. And very cultural, too. It's not one so dominant.

(Jane, a 27-year-old Korean American female student from Bonifant Community College, majoring in nursing)

Emotion coding is appropriate when exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions. It provides insight into participants' perspectives. For example, expressing a feeling of shame was considered emotion coding. One participant explained that she felt shame when revealing that she attended a community college:

In the beginning, […] I was kind of ashamed like, "Oh, wow, I go to Milford, to community college." I did have that feeling because it's honestly the way people say it. But at that time, I also did not believe in myself. I think it all comes down to self-esteem because now I'm like, "I don't care" because I know what I'm doing and this is one of the things that I am proud of. I just took a different route. Now, I am okay but before I did a little it, I didn't like it.

(Sue, a 21-year-old Korean American female student from Milford Community College, studying business)

Value coding is also applicable for examining cultural values, identity, and intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions. One of the examples for value coding is how this participant perceived attending college:

But now, since I got older, I saw the purpose of going to college. Why I want to go to college and what I want to do with college. Yeah. It becomes more specific and more detailed. When I was young, I didn't know about myself and what my interests was and what my future steps will be. So, I had no idea what the next step would be.

(Jack, a 23-year old Korean American male student from Milford Community College, studying accounting)

This quote shows how he valued attending college and saw the importance of it. These different coding strategies helped me to understand their values, perceptions, and opinions through their experiences. Through the second cycle, I developed a codebook with 40 codes (See Appendix G). In the third cycle, I transferred all data to Dedoose, an online data analysis program, and I coded all interview data again with the codebook developed from the second cycle. The third process enabled me to reexamine and verify coding, and using online analysis helped focus on particular codes and compare codes by codes in order to find specific patterns.

In order to be clear and transparent in the analysis process, I adopted a study by Harry, Sturges, and Klingner (2005) as an exemplar. They shared processes and challenges in grounded theory analysis and especially provided data analysis maps based on each stage of their analysis. I also show in Figure 3 how I synthesized codes into themes and reached a finding. Given more details of a data analysis map, I gained 40 codes from open coding, and clustered and came up with four different topics, including experiences in high schools, experiences in community colleges, identity, and possible selves. From the topics, I found themes related to each topic. For instance, from the topic of experiences in high schools, I discovered that attending community colleges was influenced by predetermined circumstances (e.g., financial issues) or that perceptions of community colleges were negatively impacted by peers. Another example of themes related to experiences in community colleges was that opportunities and challenges participants experienced in community colleges influenced their perceptions and attitudes toward community colleges. From these themes, one emergent finding was that Korean American students in community colleges have ambivalent perceptions of community colleges and these perceptions

72

impact how they will utilize community colleges in their future. In the next chapter, I will discuss my findings further.

1. Open coding	• Based on interviews
2. Topics	1. Experiences in high schools 2. Experiences in community colleges 3. Identity 4. Possible selves
3. Themes	1. Influence of predetermined circumstances and peers in high school 2. Opportunities and challenges that influenced the perception of community colleges 3. Identity struggle 4. Desired self and feared future
4. Finding	• Korean American students held negative perceptions of community colleges before they attended, but negative perceptions positively changed after their attendance. However, they still held ambivalent perceptions on community colleges, and this influenced their plans and their attitudes toward community colleges.

Figure 4   Data analysis map

Participant Confidentiality

Informing and protecting research participants is a researcher's responsibility. To protect my participants' privacy, they were informed about the study's purpose and what they would be asked to do if they decided to participate. They were also informed that their participation was completely voluntary. Once they understood the purpose of the study and the procedure of participation, written consent was obtained from each participant. Since this study dealt with personal experiences, it is extremely important to maintain the confidentiality of participants' personal information and

what they shared for this study. Therefore, participants were given pseudonymous names, and all data were securely maintained, reported, and disseminated with caution.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In order to increase the quality and trustworthiness of the study, the accuracy of data is important. Creswell (2007) suggests eight strategies for accuracy: 1) prolonged engagement; 2) triangulation; 3) peer review; 4) negative case analysis; 5) acknowledging researchers' biases, prejudices, or past experiences; 6) checking data with participants; 7) the detailed explanations provided by thick description; and 8) checking by external auditors. I adopted a few strategies such as triangulation, especially theory triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999), which used different theories to analyze and interpret data (Carter et al., 2014), acknowledging researchers' biases, prejudices, or past experiences, checking data with participants, and thick description. Triangulation enables researchers to use multiple resources and thus provides a way to confirm evidence. Acknowledging researchers' biases, prejudices, or past experiences at the beginning of research improves the accuracy of interpretation. Checking data with participants by sharing transcripts with them can increase the accuracy of the data, as interpretation by the researcher alone can be biased. Detailed explanations provided by thick description[13] (Geertz, 1973) can also enhance accuracy.

---

[13] The term was first used by Ryle (1949) and later Geertz (1973) applied this term in ethnography. It refers to the detailed explanation of field experiences in which a researcher tries to find the patterns of cultural and social relationships and puts them in context (Holloway, 1997).

In addition, Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) suggested some strategies to promote methodological rigor and analytical defensibility in qualitative research. They explicitly provided details of the data analysis process in order to improve trustworthiness. Elaborating on the entire process of their research and having a transparent description, which refers to the audit trail, can enhance trustworthiness. Therefore, in this study, I used multiple strategies such as triangulation, thick description, checking data with participants, and following an audit trail in order to increase the quality and trustworthiness of the study.

Researcher's Identity

The idea for my study was originally derived from my personal experience related to images of Asian Americans. When I started to pursue a degree in the U.S. as an Asian international student, it was interesting to me to learn the prevalent stereotypes for Asian Americans such as being high achievers or mostly going to prestigious universities. Although these stereotypes seemed more positive (and some Asians actually considered them as such) compared to stereotypes of other ethnic groups had (e.g., African Americans or Latinos), they still created limited views on the experiences of Asians. Through my research on Asian Americans' status in American society and in education, I realized the experiences of Asians are often left out, partially due to a dominant black-and-white paradigm when discussing race relations. One of the reasons that Asian Americans were invisible in this discourse was because they were considered "perpetual foreigners" (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007), which means Asians were less likely to be seen as Americans. This was something I had never experienced because I had lived in an ethnically homogeneous country, so experiences concerning my ethnic background in the U.S. were more dynamic (e.g., visible,

invisible, discriminating, or welcoming) depending on the situation. For instance, my presence was sometimes visible as the only Asian in a class, but invisible when discussing some topics in that same class. I also felt discriminated in terms of services in restaurants or offices because of my ethnic background. I have had similar experiences to the perpetual foreigner image. When people complimented my English at the beginning of my stay in the U.S., I enjoyed their compliments. However, when I still continued to hear such comments after a few years had passed, I no longer felt that they were compliments. At the same time, I have experienced moments when I felt that Americans see me as a complete foreigner. What if I were an Asian American born in this country and spoke only English? How would I feel if other Americans complimented my English although I was a native speaker? The perception of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners can lead to feelings of marginalization for Asian Americans.

In addition, throughout my lived experiences in the competitive K-12 educational environment in Korea, I was expected to go to college, specifically a selective one, and I felt pressured by this societal norm of college-going to ensure I could have a successful educational trajectory. I also saw this pressure in Korean communities in the U.S. and witnessed many Korean American parents expressing their pride of children attending Ivy League universities. Of course, other members in my Korean community admired these parents. However, not all Korean American students would attend these selective colleges, including many of my cousins who were born and raised in the U.S. My cousins barely went to college and although it seemed okay for their parents (at least from what I knew), some Korean parents did

not want or hesitated to talk about their children' colleges unless they attended prestigious colleges.

These experiences with the stereotypes and educational expectations in Korean communities sparked my curiosity, especially about those students who did not attend selective colleges. How would Korean American students who attended community colleges feel about that? What would their experiences at community colleges look like? Are their challenges in higher education recognized? In order to explore Korean American students' experiences, I used my Korean identity as an entry point to build rapport with my participants. A good relationship between interviewer and interviewee is crucial to qualitative interviews (King & Horrocks, 2010). However, Korean identity was not the only element used to influence the relationship with my participants. I believed that if participants found something in common with me other than Korean identity, they would be more open to talking about themselves. Therefore, I actively shared my similar experiences with them as an Asian living in the U.S., especially experiences related to the model minority myth. However, sharing my experiences sometimes limited participants when elaborating upon their experiences because they seemed to assume I would understand their experiences without providing details. At the same time, I approached the interviews with curiosity about community colleges and avoided sharing any negative perceptions of community colleges because I wanted my participants to fully explain their own lived experiences.

Chapter 4

REFLECTING BACK: GOING TO COMMUNITY COLLEGE IS BETTER THAN NOTHING!

Overview of Findings

The purpose of this study is to explore how Korean American students at community colleges construct their possible selves through academic and social experiences, including understanding their reasons for attending community colleges and how that influenced their possible selves. In the following chapters, I present and discuss key findings drawn from 29 in-depth interviews. As displayed in Figure 5, I also present the relationship among findings with regard to their influence upon Korean American students' construction of possible selves. I start with findings focused on students experiences before and while attending community colleges. More specifically, I describe participants' preconceived notions of attending college in general and community colleges in particular, and how they came to their decision to attend community colleges. Next, I discuss the opportunities and challenges participants experienced in community colleges and how their preconceived perceptions were changed through their experiences. Then I examine the contradiction between students' perceptions and experiences at community colleges. Finally, I discuss how their experiences at community colleges influenced their construction of possible selves. More specifically, I explain positive and negative selves of Korean American students, their attitudes toward their goals, and how they used community colleges experiences to construct possible selves.

Figure 5 outlines relationships between the findings I will discuss. I found that participants' perceptions before attending community colleges influenced their expectation for community college experiences especially in their initial time

attending community college. I also found that preconceived perceptions of community colleges positively changed through the experiences at community colleges. For instance, participants who held negative perceptions, such as that community college students would not be intelligent or not study hard, expressed their surprises that their peers differed from their perceptions. This perception changed through interacting with their peers. In addition, positive experiences in community colleges impacted how participants positively visualized their future. For example, although many participants believed that positive experiences at community colleges helped develop their future plans, they thought that negative perceptions of community colleges, especially from others, negatively influenced their future as well.
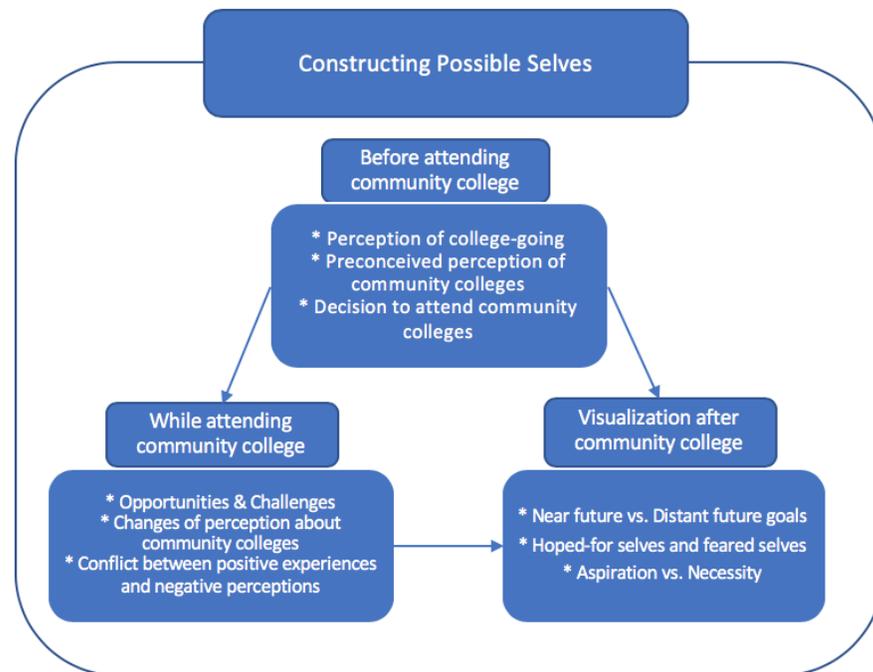
Figure 5   Relationship among the findings

This chapter discusses Korean American students' experiences before they attended community colleges. It includes their notions of attending college in general, preconceived perceptions of community colleges, and their reasons to choose community colleges. Many participants thought going to college would be a natural step after high school, a notion influence by important people, especially parents or cultural or societal norms. Most participants held negative perceptions toward community colleges, such as a place for those who did not get into four-year-colleges or those who were not smart. Although they negatively perceived community colleges, some of them chose community colleges because of financial issues or status. Figure 6 shows how I reached findings outlined in this chapter through the data analysis process. The codes related to experiences before attending community colleges were clustered by topics, themes emerged from these topics, and then findings were developed from the themes. More details of these findings will be discussed as follows:

Figure 6   Data analysis process for findings of Chapter Four

Korean American Students' Perceptions of Attending College

This study revealed that Korean American students' notions of attending college were heavily influenced by external elements such as societal and cultural norms or other people's expectations. They considered going to college a natural (or given) step after high school and did not consider any other plans after high school except going to college. When I asked their reasons for this, some participants mentioned they did not know what else they could do, or that going to college was the only option or choice for them. Participants might need more time to know their own professional inclinations or explore what they wanted because they might not have been exposed to other possibilities. For instance, Jack, a 23-year-old male student was a U.S. citizen and identified as Korean American. He was attending Milford

Community College as a full-time student studying accounting when I interviewed him. He maintained a high academic performance (with a GPA of over 3.5) at the time of the interview. Before he attended Milford Community College, he had prior experience with a four-year college and another community college. He had a personal medical issue and dealt with depression while away from his family in Korea. While he was suffering from this, his close friend's family suggested he come to live with them near Milford Community College and he started his study again at Milford. He reflected that he had thought about attending college because all his peers were going to college at the same time. He also thought college was an important step to prepare him for a job that he wanted. Jack frequently moved between the U.S. and Korea due to his family's financial circumstances. This situation greatly influenced his academic experiences. He faced a lot of challenges adjusting to different academic environments in the U.S. and Korea. Within this complex situation, he shared his experience and thoughts on attending college. When I interviewed him, he had already attended a four-year college and other community colleges before his current one. After he studied marketing and philosophy in a four-year college for a year, his father wanted him to change his major to accounting. He accepted his father's suggestion because he thought becoming an accountant would make him financially stable. But before he changed his major, he took a break from school and went back to Korea. While he stayed in Korea, he temporarily worked at a government office and a café for a year. At this time, his mother insisted that he continue his college education, so he went back to the U.S. and attended a community college in a different state. It seemed his decision of attending college (and his choice of major) was heavily influenced by his

parents. However, he also explained that his views on attending college changed over time:

> But now, since I got older, I saw the purpose of going to college, why I want to go to college and what I want to do with college. Yeah. It becomes more specific and more detailed. When I was young, I didn't know about myself and what my interests was and what my future steps will be. So, I had no idea what the next step would be.

It seemed that once Jack became clear about what he really wanted to do and explored his interests, attending college became more meaningful to him rather than just following what others would do or what his parents wanted him to do. However, twenty-five participants addressed their perceptions of attending college by stating that they had planned to go to college at some point in their life even though they were not sure what they wanted to study.

Similar to Jack, a majority of the students mentioned that their decision to go to college was impacted by other people, mostly their parents. In their perception of attending college, parents played a significant role, and some participants accepted their parents' suggestions even though they did not want to go. Helen, a 20-year-old female student, held a student visa and identified herself as Korean American. She came to the U.S. when she was a middle school student. At that time, she thought she was visiting the U.S. temporarily and did not expect to stay permanently. However, circumstances changed and she was still in the U.S. pursuing a college degree. She originally applied to a four-year college, but did not attend because of her inability to afford the tuition. Therefore, she chose a more affordable community college. Currently, she was enrolled as a full-time student in the English as a Second Language program at Milford Community College and maintained a GPA between 3.0 and 3.4. In addition, Julie, a 20-year-old female student with a permanent residence, considered

herself a Korean American. She came to the U.S. when she was in the third grade and was attending Liberty Community College as a part-time student majoring in art. She had also applied to a four-year college but went to community college. Helen and Julie both shared experiences of the conflict between their will and their parents' desire for them to attend college. Helen did not want to go to college when she was in high school, preferring to travel the world and/or go to a professional academy to learn more about the food industry rather than obtaining a college degree. However, her mother insisted that she go to *any* college to study in order to improve her English and seemed to believe that getting a college degree would help Helen's future. Helen accepted her advice because she thought English proficiency was a top priority to achieve her goal of getting a job. In Julie's case, she was not interested in studying even though she enrolled in community college. She was still unsure if it was necessary for her when interviewed. Her parents persuaded her to go to college by asking what else she would do otherwise. Julie reported that her parents emphasized that going to college would provide more options and opportunities. The question they asked Julie seemed to bother her and impacted her decision to go to college despite her continuing doubts. However, she wanted to test herself and see if she would like college or be able to adjust to a college environment.

The study participants addressed the influence of others when considering college attendance. Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989) discussed aspirations for college as influenced by important people (e.g., parents, peers, and teachers). They claimed that important people would play a role as models to develop students' aspirations or expectations for college, which similarly appeared in my study. Some research reveals that parental involvement is positively related to college expectation

and enrollment (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Horn, 1998; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Perna, 2000). Particularly, Perna and Titus (2005) studied the relationship between parental involvement and college enrollment in different racial and ethnic groups such as African Americans, Hispanics, whites, and Asian Americans. More specifically, this study explored the relationship between parental involvement (e.g., parent-student, parent-school, or parent-parent involvement), student-level forms of social capital (e.g., race, gender, family income, parents' education, academic achievement), and likelihood to attend two- or four-year colleges after controlling for other predictors of college enrollment and school structural characteristics. They conceptualized parent involvement as a form of social capital (drawn from the work of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Lin (2001a, 2001b)) which became a resource to access college enrollment. They found that a greater percentage of whites and Asian Americans enrolled in four-year colleges than African Americans and Hispanics. In addition, parents' interaction with schools, students, and other parents increased the likelihood of enrolling in two- or four-year colleges by conveying their norms and standards (Perna & Titus, 2005).

Furthermore, Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, and Perna's (2008) study focuses on parental involvement with regards to SES by utilizing case studies of 15 high schools from five different states. This study found that parents supported or encouraged college opportunities for their children by setting expectations for higher education. They discussed college-related activities and demonstrated their ability and willingness to pay for college tuition. However, their involvement varied based on socioeconomic status (e.g., availability of resources such as information, money, time). More interestingly, Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, and Perna (2008) argued that parents

who had a college education reinforced the advantage of having a college degree and expected their children to follow their educational trajectory. Therefore, as the literature explained, many Korean American students in this study were also strongly influenced by others, especially their parents. This was illustrated by George, a 31-year old (U.S. born) Korean American male student attending Bonifant Community College. When we had a conversation about his college decision, he talked about his parents' story of college education and their parenting style. Both his parents attended elite universities in Korea to become medical doctors and moved to the U.S. after they graduated. They obtained doctoral degrees and became medical doctors in the U.S. Their high educational attainment directly influenced their parenting. He recalled that his parents cared about his grades, but he did not. This resulted in a lot of conflict between him and his parents. During his high school years, his parents forced him to study in order to get good grades and sent him to a SAT prep school so he could be well-prepared for college applications. He was also forced to learn a musical instrument to build a better resume for college. His parents' educational backgrounds affected his college decision and even his choice of major. He started school for pre-med but changed to his major to biology to help continue to medical school later. Although George did not always embrace or like his parents' demands, he seemed to accept his parents' expectations and followed what they wanted him to do before he came to community college.

In addition, participants' college aspirations seemed similar to those illustrated in Park's (1998, 2001, 2003) studies. She examined the educational and occupational aspirations of Asian Pacific American high school students and found that their aspirations were shaped by expectations from important people such as parents,

teachers, and peers. She argued that parental influence was significant due to parents' financial support and high academic standards. Park (1998) specifically examined Korean American students and found that they had high educational and occupational aspirations regardless of their parents' SES or education level, which was different from other non-Asian groups. Participants in this study developed their perceptions and aspirations for college by others and believed attending college would provide more options in the future.

On the other hand, some participants described their notions of attending college as being influenced by Korean cultural or societal norms in general. For example, Kathy, a 22-year old female student who was born in the U.S. and identified herself as a Korean American, was attending Bonifant Community College to prepare for a pre-medical program. She applied to some 4 year-colleges but chose to go to community college for financial reasons. She attended other community colleges before her current school. She expressed that she thought it would be a norm not only for Asians but also for other Americans. Her parents told her that going to college would provide a better life with more varied options later. Therefore, she believed that college was something she should do.

Henry, a 20-year-old male student who attended Milford Community College full-time, moved to the U.S. at the beginning of high school and held a student visa. He identified himself as Korean because English was not his native language. He applied to several four-year colleges but finally decided to go to community college because of the affordable tuition. He was majoring in psychology and maintaining a high GPA (over 3.5). Another participant, James, a 21-year-old male student, was attending Milford Community College as a full-time student. He immigrated to the

U.S. when he was 11-years-old and held a permanent residence visa. Interestingly, he considered himself both Korean and Korean American as a bridge to connect the Korean and American communities. He was pursuing an Associate of Science and maintaining a high GPA (over 3.5). Henry and James shared a strong cultural notion of attending college. For Henry, the idea of attending college seemed to subconsciously be embedded in him when he attended schools in Korea, and he explained the cultural norm as follows:

> You know Korean culture, you have this strong perception, or prejudice that you have to go to college to be a better person, to be accepted in society, to have a better income, and so on. And also my mom's like that too and then my older generation, like my uncle and all of them, they think this way too, so I think I have this ... I am affected by that kind of ... [this environment].

It is interesting to see how Henry described attending college as something that could make a person better and more acceptable in society. It seemed that he believed attending college could help to create a well-rounded person. Furthermore, James shared a strong cultural view of attending college. When I asked him about when he considered going to college for the first time, he answered that in high school he thought college was "an obvious choice" for him. I asked him again to elaborate what *"an obvious choice"* meant to him and he explained:

> You know like when you go to elementary school, you look up to the middle school. If you're in middle school, you think of high school. Just like that. In high school, it's just an obvious choice for me to go to college. There was no other choice for me. There was but I didn't think- [of any other choice].

He did not consider any choice except college and continued to mention that going to college after high school was natural to him. I wondered where his idea came from and he explained:

Definitely Korean culture. In Korean culture, if you don't go to college you're a dumb ass. […] Even in Korean society, in Korea. If you don't go to college you're looked down upon. Now that's changing a bit, but that is really big. And if you go to a good college, you get a good reputation. And you get accepted.

His explanation indicates that not only does he see going to college as a cultural norm but also believes going to a *good* college is valued in Korean culture. However, he contrasted this cultural norm of attending college with U.S. cultural norms. He thought American society would not judge an individual depending on whether a person attended college but would consider a wider range of postsecondary plans as acceptable. He witnessed that his high school peers chose diverse options after high school graduation:

From what I see, that's [people looking down upon if you do not go to college] not true [in the U.S.]. I see so many people ... not all of my class, class of 2014, went to college after. They went to the Army, they started work or did their own thing. But I don't think there was any shame for that. I think in America, it's really ... I don't think there is judgment on that. Which I think is really great.

One possible reason for college attendance as an only option would be that he might not have been exposed to other options other than college being a very natural step after high school and strongly influenced by cultural norms. In addition, he had an interesting comparative cultural view of attending college. Without hesitation, he explained that his idea of attending college was derived from Korean culture. He believed that going to college mattered among Koreans and Koreans would look down those who did not go to college. He even used the strong words *"dumbass"* when he described Koreans' perception of people who do not go to college. It is also interesting to see how Korean American students viewed attending college as a part of being a well-rounded or better person.

Related to cultural and societal norms, having an attending college culture in high school was a significant element which influenced students' attending college decisions. George, a 31-year old (U.S. born) Korean American male student who was attending Bonifant Community College, described the competitive culture of his high school as follows:

> Academically, it's relatively strong and most people who go to that high school, they end up getting a better chance of getting into better colleges. […] Amongst the top half it was crazily competitive and when I started high school, I said I was in the top 5%, so I was immediately put into all the highest-level classes. So, like AP, all that stuff. The level of the standards in those classes was extremely high, so it was really competitive and really stressful.

Because of the competitive culture in his high school, he felt pressured to go to college and this resulted in the negatives change in his academic behavior. A report from the Consortium on Chicago School Research in 2008, "From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to College," investigated how high schoolers in Chicago public schools who had aspirations of going to four-year colleges participated in college search and application processes. One of the important findings was that students who attended a high school with a strong college-going culture were more likely to plan to attend four-year colleges. More importantly, this made a huge impact for students who had low levels of college qualifications to accessing four-year colleges. In summary, participants' perceptions of attending college were influenced by important people (mostly parents in this study) and societal and cultural norms in schools and local communities.

Preconceived Perceptions of Community Colleges

Surprisingly, the majority of participants expressed that prior to attending community colleges they held negative perceptions of community colleges. Their negative perceptions were more likely to be associated with what they perceived as the low academic ability of community college students. Many participants described community colleges as a place for those who did not get into four-year colleges or did not study hard enough in high school. Other participants explained that community colleges would be for certain people with characteristics related to negative images. To exemplify, Amy, a 24-year-old female student, identified herself as a Korean American. Although she immigrated to the U.S. in the 5th grade, she still held an international student visa. For her, attending community college was predetermined during her high school years because of financial issues in her family. She shared her negative experiences with members of her Korean community when she mentioned her attendance of community college. She illustrated her perception of community college students as academically weak:

> I considered community college, when I was in high school, where
> people who don't get into any other college attend. I didn't have any
> good thing about community college, good idea, because if you could
> go to four-year college then go, but you can't go because your
> academically not fit, like those things, for non-smart people.

Sue, a 21-year-old Korean American female student who attended Milford Community College, immigrated to the U.S. at the age of eight and held a permanent residence. She dropped out of high school because of her strong passion for art. While she explained her story about being a high school dropout, it was interesting that she distinguished herself from other high school dropouts who might suffer from academic struggles. Ken, a 21-year-old Korean American student who was born in the U.S.,

attended Bonifant Community College. However, he previously attended a state four-year college. He shared how his parents raised him, forcing him to study hard and expecting that he would go to a good college. He also shared an insightful comparison between a community college and a four-year college which will be introduced in the next chapters. Like Amy, Sue and Ken also shared similar perceptions of community colleges. They considered community colleges as a place for students who did not study or were not smart. Sue reflected on how she thought about community colleges while she was in high school.

> So funny. Back then [in high school] I was like ... You know a community college, and people [in the society] used to think about it as a bad thing. Like, "Only people who don't study go to community college." There was a notion about that. I was with my friends, it was high school, and we're like, "Oh my gosh, you know, Milford Community College is like the last thing I'll ever go (to)." […] Because we [high school peers] all thought community college is only when you don't do well and you go. I never thought about it could be because of financial issues. I never had those in mind. I was like, "It's just bad."

Her comment indicated that she held a negative view of community college. However, she later discovered other reasons (e.g., financial issues) why people attended community colleges besides academic reasons. Going to college for her was strongly influenced by the societal norm that "everyone goes to college" and she thought she would go to college *for sure*. She explained how her experiences in community college changed her negative views and even gave her pride. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

When I asked Ken what he knew about community college before he attended, he asked me if I meant facts or feelings about community college. I was interested in his analysis of my question and I wondered how he would answer for both aspects. He described that community college was for two years to get an associate's degree, with

the main goal being to transfer to a four-year college as the "facts." He believed that there were not many options for majors compared to universities, but it was enough to find what students wanted to do, although he did not know any specific programs relating to this in his college. However, he believed there might not be many things to do with only an associate's degree. When it came to his feelings about community college, he intriguingly explained a stigma around community college. He felt that community college was for those who were not smart, and he thought those who did not get into any four-year college would end up going to community colleges.

Not only did these participants express negative perceptions of community colleges, other participants stated similar thoughts. I was curious why the majority of participants held negative perceptions and where they were derived. Therefore, in the middle of collecting data, I added an additional question about how participants thought Koreans would perceive community college as I presumed that there might be some negative influence from members of their Korean communities. As I expected, some participants confirmed this suspicion. Noah, a 20-year-old male student who attended Milford Community College, immigrated to the U.S. when he was 2 years old. He held U.S. citizenship and identified himself as a Korean American. He came to community college because he was not accepted to a four-year college. He expressed a very negative perception of community college influenced by elitism present in his Korean community. He also shared that his previous educational experience was forced by his parents, particularly his mother. He believed his own academic capacity was not enough to attend a four-year college, but his mother forced him to attend a SAT prep school in order to get ready for college applications. Noah explained that many Korean parents would want their children to go to a good high school, get all

As, go to an Ivy League school, and get a professional job (e.g., medical doctor).

Therefore, he believed that they would not want their children to go to community

college:

> It's a bad college… [I asked what he meant by bad] Not bad, like it's
> not that good. Because most Korean parents would want me to go …
> always want you to get As, 100s on tests, go to a good high school and
> become doctor. They wouldn't want you to go to community college
> maybe in my point of view. I don't know about …They expected their
> kid to be smart and go to the university.

Yardley, a 19-year-old female student from Milford Community College, immigrated

to the U.S. when she was 4 months old and held U.S. citizenship. She identified

herself as a Korean American; however, she seemed to have difficulty with her ethnic

identity. During the interview, she became emotional when we talked about her

identity. She confessed that she wanted to be white when she was young, which might

be because she was raised in a predominantly white environment. Similar to Noah, she

described Koreans' negative perceptions of community college as follows:

> I don't think they [Koreans] think very highly of it [community
> college]. I feel like they see it more just like if you're in a situation
> where you need to go there you can but it's not the best option in
> Korean people's eyes. Because the ideal situation would be going to an
> Ivy or even if it's not an Ivy, a state school or something.

Yardley believed that going to community college for Koreans would not be the best

choice unless a person had an adequate or special reason for that. On the other hand,

Sunny, was satisfied with her community college and thought that the community

college provided more life experiences. She was a 25-year-old Korean American

female student who attended Verde Community College. She had immigrated to the

U.S. when she was 12 years old and become a U.S. citizen. She also thought Koreans

considered those who go to community colleges as not being smart or having bad grades.

Why did my participants negatively perceive community colleges? Where were negative perceptions of community colleges derived from? As discussed in Chapter Two, Proper (n.d.) used a survey to examine how students in a state community college viewed their college and what elements might have influenced their perceptions. He analyzed the reasons for the stigma surrounding community colleges. One reason was a misinterpretation of community college's missions and open-door policies. Their missions lead community colleges to offer remedial courses to help members of a community move on to upper-level courses. But this can lead to a perception of all courses as lacking academic rigor. In addition, community colleges are often depicted as "second rate schools" (Tucciarone, 2007) by the media. Television shows especially portray them as lacking academic rigor (Tucciarone, 2007) and this can contribute to stereotypical perceptions of community colleges (Proper, n.d.). In fact, many participants in this study also addressed these perspectives. Some believed that some of their community college peers were not qualified to be accepted to four-year colleges because of lack of academic ability, but they would be able to attend community colleges because of an open-door policy. In addition, some participants mentioned the lack of academic rigor in the community college setting and described community colleges as "second high school" or "13th grade."

Another reason for negative perceptions is related to the low cost of community colleges in comparison to four-year universities. Proper (n.d.) claimed that the cost of something influences its status and there is an assumption that it must be

better if it costs more money. Furthermore, he explained that prestige was often tied with cost; therefore, prestigious colleges with expensive tuitions were more likely to have a better reputation than cheaper community colleges. In the hierarchical educational system, community colleges are at the bottom of the postsecondary educational hierarchy (Lendy, 2009) based on prestige, cost, selectivity, and purpose (Alfred & Horowitz, 1990). Koreans might be influenced by those perceptions and their educational aspirations might be much higher, which may lead to not being satisfied with what a community college would offer. Some participants illustrated their perceptions of community colleges in terms of prestige. Esther, a 25-year-old Korean American female student majoring in nursing at Verde Community College explained as follows:

> Community college, to me, was where all the students who didn't get into their first university goes to, students who have lower financial income go to… It wasn't a very prestige image in my mind.

Although the majority held the negative perceptions before they attended, intriguingly, one participant positively perceived the role of community colleges. Jim, a 28-year-old male student from Liberty Community College, shared an uncommon life story. He dropped out of high school when he was in junior year because he felt school was not helping with his plans. Although he maintained a high academic record, he was not interested in studying and felt pressured as the eldest son in his family. Because he thought schooling was a waste of time, he wanted to start working. In this way, he believed he could save more money than his college-going peers. After he dropped out of high school, he started to work in a restaurant. Working as a waiter and a bartender at night for many years influenced his regular daily routine and he was almost addicted to alcohol. His family worried about him and advised him to go back

to school, but he was reluctant to take their advice. Later, he realized he honestly did not like what he was doing (and did not see it as helpful to his future) and wanted to go back to school. However, he did not know how to go back without a high school diploma. His siblings helped him to continue his education. After getting a GED, he started to attend community college. He described community college as follows:

> Community college is sort of like giving us, giving everybody the same amount of equal opportunity to start over and build up from the bottom so it's a good, it's one of the best ways to build up. Like, I should say, at the very basic steps, fundamental steps. How to start new or how to live differently or choose something that you want to be.

Although many participants negatively viewed community colleges, there were some positive perceptions of community colleges, but mainly these formed as a result of first-hand experiences as students in community colleges. The changes in participants' perceptions while attending community colleges will be further discussed in Chapter Six.

Navigating a Pathway to Community Colleges

In order to understand participants' reasons for attending community colleges, I asked them to rank their priorities which influenced their decision to attend community colleges. The purpose of this section is to present significant elements which influenced Korean American students' decisions to attend community colleges. My intent is not to focus on how they navigated the decision process, but instead highlight what they remember as the most influential components influencing their decisions. Drawing on the literature, I provided a list of common reasons for attending college to participants, including: 1) affordable tuition, 2) distance from home, 3) reputation of the college, 4) makeup of the student body, 5) recommendation from

others (e.g., family, teachers, friends), 6) academically good fit for me, 7) programs or majors offered that interested me, and 8) other (If they chose others, they were asked to specify the reason). Participants did not necessarily have to choose all the reasons but could select as many as they felt applied. The most frequent reasons by rank are provided in Table 3 below. The top four reasons most frequently ranked at the top reason for attending community college were affordable tuition (n=13), other (n=7), and recommendation from others (n=4), and programs or majors offered interested me (n=4). The second ranked reasons were distance from home (n=12), affordable tuition (n=7), and recommendation from others (n=5), and the third ranked reasons were academically good fit for me (n=6), recommendation from others (n=5), and affordable tuition (n=4).

Table 3   Top three reasons to choose community colleges by frequency

	Sort by frequency
The first ranking	Affordable tuition (n=13)
The second ranking	Distance from home (n=12)
The third ranking	Academically good fit to me (n=6)

When sorting the reasons to choose community college only by frequency at any rank, the first was affordable tuition (n=24), followed by recommendation from others (n=14), distance from home (n=12), other reasons (n=7), academically good fit for me (n=6), and programs or majors offered that interested me (n=4). For the majority of participants, college expense was the most significant reason to attend community colleges. Particularly when comparing family income among those who selected affordable tuition as the first reason, the majority of participants' family income was below the average of median income in the state in which they resided.

The ranking exercise thus helped me understand that the financial component was one of the most important influences in participants' decision to attend community colleges. Laura, a 22-year-old female student who was born in the U.S. and considered herself a Korean American, illustrates this case. She attended Milford Community College but had prior experience attending a four-year college and changed her majors (music, education) a few times. Now she wanted to pursue a nursing major in her community college. She shared her financial reason to choose this school. She thought community college would be affordable for her because she was not from a wealthy family and she wanted to be as independent from her parents as possible. She also thought it would be beneficial to get a degree. Charles, a 21-year-old Korean American male student who immigrated to the U.S. when he was in the 4th grade, attended Milford Community College studying nursing. Interestingly, he held contradictory feelings about his pride in attending this community college and the stigma around the community college. He also gave the same reason. He had to choose this school because he could not get any financial aid due to his immigrant status. He did not specify his legal status, thought he mentioned holding work authorization in the U.S. but not permanent residence. This status did not permit him to apply for financial aid. Therefore, I asked him whether he would still choose to go to community college *if* tuition was not a priority issue.

> No, I would have academically tried in high school, well at least [I would have tried] senior year of high school, and then after that, if I was lucky enough to go to a four-year college, I would have gone to a four-year college.

He already knew his financial status during high school and realized that he would not be able to afford a four-year college, and this influenced his attitude toward his academic performance. Once he found out he would not able to afford four-year

college but only able to attend community college, it seemed that he lost his motivation to study hard for college preparation as he thought community college would admit any student.

Almost half of the participants mentioned recommendation from others as a reason for attending community college. They were influenced by parents, siblings, friends, or teachers. This was especially true when these significant people in participants' lives had attended community colleges (e.g. siblings or friends) themselves. They provided their (positive) hands-on experiences and encouraged participants to go to community colleges. Interestingly, for some participants, the recommendation from others seemed related to their academic ability. For instance, Min, a 20-year-old female student who was attending Milford Community College, explained how her school counselor recommended community college. Min's counselor knew her SAT score was low, so the counselor advised Min that it would be a good opportunity for her because Min (considered a hard worker) would be able to do well academically, and possibly make it easier to transfer to a four-year college.

The third highest reason participants gave for attending community college was distance from home (n=12). Some participants chose the current college because it was an easy commute. Although many of them expected to reside on-campus as college students, distance was a significant reason for them in selecting community colleges. Other reasons participants gave varied in terms of their situations, such as failing to get into four-year colleges or maintaining their immigrant status.

Some participants already had experience at four-year colleges and provided interesting insights of these experiences. They did not choose community college as their first choice but selected a four-year college either by their own decision or due to

influenced from their parents. However, a majority of them had negative experiences from academic or emotional challenges in four-year colleges which eventually impacted academic performance, resulting in academic probation, quitting, or the feeling that it was a waste of money because they were not truly learning. Eric, a 20-year-old male student from Milford Community College, provides an example. He came to the U.S. when he was 14 years old. He had permanent resident status and identified himself as Korean but introduced a new unique term to describe himself. There are two terms to describe recent Asian immigrants (FOB: Fresh Off the Boat) and Asians who were Americanized (Twinkie). However, he described himself as "Twob," a combination of Twinkie and FOB. He started at a four-year college not far from home, and then quit for a year before he came to his current college. He elaborated that he got depressed, took a break and worked for a semester, then started to feel that he needed to study. For this reason, he began at Milford. He considered attending community college a new start since he thought he *"screwed up"* at his past school.

Ken and George both felt strong pressure from their parents to go to college. For Ken, his parents forced him to study hard and always talked to him about going to college. He tried to build a good resume for a college application by doing extracurricular activities such as volunteering, music, and sports. He was able to enroll at a four-year state university in the state where he lived right after high school graduation. However, he struggled to adjust to college life. He skipped a lot of classes because of being free from his parents' supervision and this led to low grades. His low GPA resulted in academic probation and subsequently he dropped out of the college. This incident shocked him and, even more so, his parents. In retrospect, he recalled

that his academic behavior was prompted from too much freedom. He was used to doing what he was given rather than proactively looking for what he wanted to do or choose to do by himself. In addition, another problem for him was he had no desire or motivation for education. After leaving college, he started to work at a grocery store as a cashier. Working for a substantial time as a cashier, he realized that the job was too simple, and he wanted to do something challenging. He seriously started to think about what he wanted to do and decided to go back to community college to become a nurse in order to help others.

Similar to Ken, George also experienced strong academic pressure from his parents, particularly during high school. Both his parents and his high school environment pressured him to go to a *good* college, which meant a selective four-year college to him. As mentioned earlier, his parents had a high expectation for him since they also had achieved high academic attainment. This negatively influenced him to counter their expectations. For example, he chose the wrong answers on purpose while he was taking the Preliminary SAT test in order to rebel against his parents. Nonetheless, he went to a four-year college in a different state (far from home) studying pre-med and stayed for two years. However, he did not like that school and did not study hard, hoping to be forced to go back home. He was academically dismissed from that college and transferred to another four-year college close to home. He actually obtained a bachelor's degree in biology at the transferred college, but he wanted to study nursing, so he started at community college to continue that. He had already taken some classes at community colleges to transfer credits back to his four-year college; therefore, he was familiar with his current community college and decided to come back.

Laura, a 22-year-old female student attending Milford Community College, had also previously attended a four-year college. She was interested in music and majored in music, but she was not sure what her future plans with a music major would be. In the meantime, she felt guilty because her parents were paying her tuition while she did not truly enjoy and find fulfillment in her major. Therefore, she moved to another four-year college to be a teacher and enjoyed life there. At the same time, she was working to help other adults (especially those who had criminal records) to get their GED. While she was teaching, she realized there would always be institutional barriers she could not remove, and the educational system was in favor of the privileged. Her disillusionment led her to quit studying education because she thought she could not help people in need but was still looking for something that she could do to help others. Therefore, she came to Milford to major in the nursing program.

From those who previously attended four-year colleges, it could be inferred that they wanted to continue their education. Although it was not clear how much these students felt they were ready to adjust to college, it seemed obvious they faced some challenges while attending a four-year college. Especially when participants went to colleges without serious consideration of what they wanted to do, they were more likely to face difficulties or struggles. However, they learned from this setback and attending community college became a way to pursue educational goals in a different context.

There were both similarities and differences between my participants' reasons for attending community college and findings from the literature. Barreno and Traut (2012) examined reasons for students to choose a specific community college in Texas

by using a survey of more than 4,000 students. The top six frequently mentioned reasons affecting community college decisions were 1) transferability of courses, 2) available academic programs and quality, 3) campus location, 4) cost, 5) available educational facilities and technology, and 6) advice from family, friends, and high school staff. Wang, Chang, and Lew's (2009) study particularly focused on Asian Pacific American students' reasons for choosing community colleges and specified subgroups of Asian Pacific Americans, including Koreans. Across all subgroups of Asian Pacific Americans, wanting a college degree was the first reason to attend community colleges. The second most important reason for Koreans was distance from home, and learning English for work was the third. I think this might be because many Koreans in this study were immigrants, therefore, learning English would be an important element for them when attending college.

To summarize, participants had aspirations for more and better education, and attending college provided a way to achieve their own or others' expectations. In addition, they considered attending college as a natural step after high school or a common goal. On the other hand, perhaps students saw going to college as the only option because they had not been exposed to other options. In terms of perceptions of community college before participants attended, they were mostly negative especially related to low academic ability (e.g., not enough to get in four-year colleges, not smart). Despite negative perceptions of community college, participants chose to attend because tuition was much cheaper than four-year colleges and others recommended the community colleges they currently attended. In the next chapter, I discuss Korean American students' experiences (including opportunities and

challenges) while attending community college and how these experiences influenced their previously held ideas.

Chapter 5

OPTIMIZING OPPORTUNITIES AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

The previous chapter provided information about the perceptions held by participants regarding attending college and community colleges prior to their attendance. In this chapter, I attempt to answer the following questions: What opportunities and obstacles do participants experience as community college students? In what ways do their experiences at community colleges intersect with model minority stereotypes? The findings will help to understand Korean American students' lived experiences at community colleges. As I provided Figure 7 for data analysis process for findings, I specifically discuss what opportunities and challenges participants encountered while attending community colleges. Opportunities included various academic services, building better academic credentials, and saving money, while challenges consisted of dealing with negative perceptions, developing peer relationships, and negative peer influence. In addition, I investigated how their perceptions of community college changed, generally toward the positive, through their attendance. Finally, I present Korean American students' conflict between negative perceptions and positive experiences at community colleges, which is a major struggle in their decision to attend and continue at community college.

1. Codes	• Opportunities/challenges at community colleges • Like/Dislike about community colleges • Perceptions of community college/faculty • Resources at community colleges • Comparison between community colleges and four-year colleges • Experiences with model minority stereotypes
2. Topics	• Positive/negative experiences in community colleges • Dealing with model minority stereotypes
3. Themes	• Various opportunities available for academic and career development • Facing negative feelings such as shame or embarrassment regarding attending community colleges • Conflict between negative perceptions and positive experiences
4. Findings	• Many Korean American students found various opportunities at community colleges, which they did not expected and this changed negative perceptions of community colleges they held before attending. • Despite of positive experiences through various opportunities, some participants experienced the feeling of shame or embarrassment to attend community colleges. • Many of them had to deal with the conflict between negative perceptions and positive experiences.

Figure 7   Data analysis process for findings of Chapter Five

Opportunities and Challenges in Community Colleges

The study participants reported they noticed various opportunities (or advantages) and challenges (or disadvantages) while attending community colleges. Many participants were surprised by unexpected opportunities. First of all, more than one-third of the participants mentioned community colleges offered academic opportunities such as tuition scholarships, research opportunities with faculty members, career services, tutoring or counseling services, and beneficial classes and programs. Some of them addressed the fact that community colleges offered diverse majors and courses and the academic flexibility helped students change majors or classes without restrictions. They believed that this enabled them to freely explore

107

their career options. Other supportive services such as career counseling and tutoring guided them in finding a pathway for the future. To illustrate, Sunny, a 25-year-old Korean American female student who immigrated into the U.S. when she was 12 years old, mentioned that it would be a lot easier to change majors in a community college than at a four-year college, which she saw as an academic advantage. She believed that students in a community college would be able to experience a variety of classes, which would be helpful especially if students did not know or were not sure what they wanted to do or major in after graduating high school.

Heidi and Theresa described advantageous experiences with the available services that would help their academic and career development. Heidi, a 21-year-old Korean American female student at Liberty Community College who immigrated to the U.S. at the age of 11, was studying science and working as a research assistant with her academic mentor. Heidi reported that she visited the career services office in search of a job. She found that the employment opportunities that the office offered prioritized students who planned to graduate soon, but fortunately, a director of the office recommended her for a research opportunity. She stated that she would not know about a lot of opportunities such as research, honor's courses, and scholarships if she did not initially reach out to career services. Therefore, she emphasized that an individual's effort was important in obtaining the opportunities available in community college. Theresa, a 19-year-old Korean female student who attended Bonifant Community College, came to the U.S. when she started high school and held an international student visa. She shared a racially discriminatory experience she went through in high school and was very vocal about white privilege. She believed that community college provided opportunities for developing a career pathway.

> …We have a lot of job fairs and internship fairs here. So you can get jobs and internship opportunities… I think you can find your career pathway here very well. So, I think a lot of people set goals or find goals here like what they want to do after college because mostly what I found out most people come here because they don't know what to do with their college degree, like they don't know what to study... That's why they choose here.

From Theresa's point of view, one of the significant opportunities in community colleges was that students could get supportive services to develop their career goals and plans or develop a pathway to achieve their goals. This indicates that even though students may not know what they want to study before attending, community colleges would help them not only to explore what they want to study but also to discover what they can do with various majors. Additionally, a quarter of the participants mentioned that their colleges provided tutoring services where advanced students helped to tutor their peers. These participants had used this academic service in order to improve their academic performance. However, although various academic opportunities and services were available for students in community colleges, they would be beneficial only if students actively sought them out. Steve from Liberty Community College illustrated:

> There's a lot of resources to help students to follow the course. Let's say I have a difficult time in certain class then I can just go into the tutor and ask for help. Also, some of the professors are very caring. They reach out to you outside of school sometimes. I think that is the most thing that I like about this school.

Another remarkable opportunity in community colleges that participants mentioned was the possibility to build better academic credentials. For instance, five participants explained that attending community colleges could boost a low GPA and, in the end, this could result in successfully transferring to a four-year college. Greg, a 21-year-old multiethnic Korean American who attended Milford Community College, was of

Korean, Hispanic, and South Asian (Filipino) descent. Even though his appearance did not look like a typical Korean's, he considered himself Korean, and he tried to mingle with other Korean students in this college. However, his peers did not recognize him as Korean at first because of his different look. At the same time, he identified himself as a sexual minority. These backgrounds sometimes made him feel alienated from his Korean peers. He illustrated the advantage of building better academic credentials:

> It's a wonderful opportunity to boost your GPA if it's not that high in high school, as long as you put the effort into the work and you can get good grades, it can go up so good and then you are set to do whatever you want. If you don't want to go to four-year school after Milford Community College, that's okay, or if you want to transfer that will help you a lot, and requirements will knock down, so by the time you transfer over there's lot of classes you don't have to take 'cause you already take it at Milford.

Greg thought that he could improve his academic performance as long as he made an effort and maintained good grades. Similarly, Noah, a 20-year-old Korean American male student from Milford Community College, saw this opportunity. His main reason for attending community college was that he was not accepted to any four-year colleges. He believed his academic ability was not good enough to get into a four-year college or that he was not ready yet. He explained the academic advantage of community college as follows:

> I guess just like a community college, it will be less of a hard work. The work will be easier than like a regular university. They help you a lot with like tutoring and everything, so I could start fresh in the community college, then bringing my grades up to attend the university.

Noah seemed to consider community college a bridge for a four-year college or university. He also assumed academic work in a four-year college would be more difficult than in community college. He believed that with the academic support his

community college offered he would be able to improve his grades and build better academic credentials to move on to a four-year college.

Greg's and Noah's views were premised upon the fact that academic work in community colleges would be easy enough if they assiduously followed the classwork. Eric, a 20-year-old Korean male student from Milford Community who immigrated to the U.S. when he was 14 years old, reflected that his ability to do well in school was an advantage for him. Before he enrolled in community college he had attended a four-year college but quit because of mental health challenges which made it difficult to continue. He elaborated that he did not know how to study while he was there. However, he felt community college was academically easier and this helped him learn how to study. Although he thought there was a gap in academic rigor between four-year college and community college, he felt that learning how to study at the community college would make his eventual transfer back and re-adjustment to a four-year college easier.

Besides academic opportunities offered through the academic support service's offices on campus and the development of better academic credentials, another advantage of community college was saving money (affordable tuition) compared to a four-year college. As discussed in Chapter Two, when compared to all reasons Korean American students might choose to attend community colleges, affordable tuition was the most substantial element for the participants. One-third of the participants considered affordable tuition as a significant advantage in their choice.

On the other hand, there were several challenges which participants addressed. The primary challenge while attending community colleges was dealing with negative feelings about being a community college student such as embarrassment, shame, or

the stigma that came with others' negative perceptions of community colleges. One-fifth of participants explained that they experienced these, particularly when they revealed their attendance at community colleges to other people. Min, a 20-year-old female student from Milford Community College, came to the U.S. when she was in the third grade. She held a permanent residence and identified herself as a Korean, not American. She believed that considering herself American was not appropriate because of her background. She said she felt embarrassed in front of her peers and other Koreans in her community to tell them about her college because of negative perceptions. For example, when Min shared her community college experiences with one of her peers who was attending a state four-year college, her peer mostly responded with negative comments about community colleges. This made her frustrated and led her to stop talking to her peer about her community college. She received similar reactions from other Koreans in her community. Whenever she told them she was attending community college, she observed their facial expressions and felt that they seemed to look down on her. For this reason, she often lied to others, telling them she attended a state four-year-college, particularly those who were not close to her, in order to avoid embarrassment.

Similarly, Kathy, a 22-year-old Korean American female student from Bonifant Community College, thought telling others in the Korean community about her attendance at a community college would be a challenge. She explained this as follows:

> Kathy: My parents are really active in church. Anyone who goes to a Korean church, I think they can relate to this. Word spreads like wildfire. So they're always asking questions about one's daughter or son -- what they're going to do, what college they attend. Sometimes

the adults will ask me. I kind of do feel a little embarrassed saying the community college.

Researcher: Why?

Kathy: I know their children. In the Korean community, community college is still kind of looked down on. It's not really open. I think that's the only disadvantage -- saying that I attend here.

Kathy felt embarrassed to say she attended community college, and she even thought her parents would also feel ashamed because of the negative perception of community colleges possibly held by fellow church members. For this reason, she preferred to tell her major or the career path she would like to pursue, but not the name of her community college. Kathy was enrolled in a nursing program that she described as having very competitive acceptance rates and a strong academic reputation. When I questioned if other Koreans would know about the reputation of her program, she explained as follows:

No, they don't know that. All they hear is the community college part. That's all they hear. Some words when you first think of it, there's that one [negative] image, so I think that's what they're assuming.

She believed that the negative perception of community college would be the most salient element in influencing how Korean community members judged her academic ability.

James from Milford Community College, a 21-year-old Korean American male student who moved to the U.S. when he was 11-years-old, shared similar negative feelings when he had to reveal where he attended. He explained that the negative perception of community college was strong when he was a high school student. If someone went to community college, high school peers would automatically think this person was "dumb" or did not get into any other colleges. He felt ashamed to reveal that he attended community college, and because other peers

knew his GPA was high enough to go to a four-year college but instead he chose to attend community college. He explained that he thought his friends would wonder not understand his decision, which was influenced by the fact that his immigrant status would not allow him to get any financial aid or loans to pursue a four-year college. Therefore, his immigrant status and socioeconomic status limited his higher education options. Not everyone, however, knew his situation, so he thought they might still suspect that his academic ability prevented him from going to a four-year college. When I asked him if this situation would offend him or not, he provided an interesting answer:

> I don't know. Not really because I knew why I was coming here. My grades told me I wasn't stupid, and I could support myself. And people would know if I was to explain everything. But I was annoyed. I didn't want to explain it, so I didn't even tell many people… I guess I avoided that situation by not telling people, and if I did tell people I had reasons.

Although he was confident with his academic ability to get into a four-year college, he seemed frustrated about revealing his community college attendance because of negative perceptions from others. This was a feeling that many participants shared.

Laura, a 22-year-old Korean American female student from Milford Community College, and George, a 31-year-old Korean American male student from Bonifant Community College, also faced challenges related to negative perceptions of community college, particularly focusing on the implications of attending community college for their future. They described their fear that if potential employers saw the names of their community colleges on their resumes or transcripts, they would hold negative perceptions, be less impressed with their backgrounds, and less likely to

select them as potential employees. They both believed that employers would look for a certain background in prestigious institutions, specifically four-year college.

Another challenge students faced was related to their social experiences with peers, including difficulties developing peer relationships and negative peer influences. Three participants expressed the struggle to make friends on campus and brought up interesting analyses. Charles, a 21-year-old Korean American male student who moved to the U.S. when he was in the 4th grade, attended Milford Community College and suggested that a difficulty in developing peer relationships was the lack of residence halls. All students commuted on a daily basis, which resulted in the campus environment providing limited opportunities to make friends. In addition, he did not feel a sense of community on campus. Ironically, he reported that there were opportunities to make friends if he got involved in clubs or student organizations, but he believed that it would not be as good as the resident experience in a four-year college.

Helen, a 20-year-old Korean American female student who immigrated to the U.S. when she was a middle school student, also pointed out the same challenge. In her experience, students on campus only mingled with those who spoke the same language, so it was hard for her to interact with different groups and make friends.

Both Charles and Helen explained that making friends was difficult. Although Charles complained about this challenge, he also mentioned that he was not interested in making friends at all because attending community college was just a pathway to transferring to a four-year college and that was the only thing he cared about. Moreover, he was in a nursing program which was very competitive and reputable, and it required a lot of demanding work including frequent tests and an internship at a

local hospital. On the other hand, although Helen said it was difficult to mingle with peers in different ethnic groups, I wondered what caused the challenge in peer relations for her. Because I did not ask for details, it is difficult to know what she would think of this challenge. However, one of the possibilities could be discomfort with peers from other ethnic groups. By the time of the interview with her, she was actively involved in the Korean Student Association and was very close to her Korean friends. As she mentioned that she liked to mingle with her Korean friends but felt uncomfortable approaching other groups, other ethnic peers might find it difficult to get along with her Korean peer group.

Another challenge was the negative influence derived from peers' attitudes toward community colleges. Some participants expressed that they felt inspired by some peers' motivation to study hard and achieve their future goals (e.g., transfer to a four-year college or other professional goal). This was one of the surprising experiences of community colleges they did not expect and considered a positive influence, so they wanted to follow their example to motivate themselves as well. For instance, Charles, a 21-year-old Korean American male student from Milford Community College studying nursing, illustrated this positive peer influence:

> Well, I feel for the most part the students that come here, they come here because they want to work hard at something, not to just go to school because someone said to. They come here to actually further their life. I guess that would depend on whatever classes they take, too, because I mostly took science courses. Everyone's just working toward the degree, and there's no, again, I don't know how other community colleges are. But everyone who comes to work hard and get good grades, and I like that. They're serious.

Although some participants experienced a positive peer influence, other participants negatively viewed peers in community colleges, explaining that they were still not

motivated to work hard or they seemed to waste time and money. Therefore, they considered this as a challenge which could make them less motivated. Nick, a 22-year-old male student who attended Bonifant Community College, immigrated to the U.S. when he was 11 years old and held permanent residence. Nick considered himself Korean American. He shared a stigma strongly associated with community colleges. He elaborated on this aspect:

> I feel like people who come here ... They might not care about their academic goals, or they don't know what to do. They might just go because of their family, or whoever pushing them. […] Although, it's easy classes. I mean, some are hard. Yeah, many classes can be tough. There are people who just don't care, because they think, "Oh, this is community college, and I don't care." There's one of that. Or, the people who, I guess, surrounded by. They might just be like, "Hey, I don't care as well, so we should just do other things out of school.

His comments indicated that some peers might not take community colleges as seriously as he does and seemed to worry about the negative influence of these peers. A recent study by Jennings (2017) examined the opportunities and challenges for international students at community colleges. Although Jennings' study focused only on international students, the findings are relevant to this study. Jennings (2017) mentioned that community colleges can provide a pathway to transfer and specialty programs. Transferring to competitive universities was one of the attractions for both domestic and international students, and special programs encouraging this could potentially make a local community college more reputable. On the other hand, some of the challenges mentioned in my study were limited campus life and lack of academic rigor. As many of the participants in my study described, their engagement in campus life may be limited because of their status as commuters. In terms of academic rigor, they may be a negative perception of the academic quality of

community colleges. For instance, some participants worried about the gap in academic rigor between community colleges and four-year colleges, and this gap could be a challenge when transferring and adjusting to four-year colleges.

However, the major challenge that my participants felt was the stigma associated with community colleges which was different from the finding in Jennings's study. As discussed earlier, one of the possible reasons for the negative perceptions of community colleges was related to low cost, which was associated with less prestige. I became curious if negative perceptions of community college would be stronger in more affluent communities. I compared data among research sites from Bonifant Community Colleges, located in the most affluent community, and Liberty Community College, located in the least affluent community. Negative perceptions of community colleges were varied, so it was difficult to examine which one would be stronger. However, when comparing student perceptions of challenges or disadvantages at community colleges, I noticed that participants from Liberty Community College mostly addressed functions of community colleges, such as choice of majors and level of difficulty of courses, while all participants from Bonifant Community College mentioned negative feelings, such as stigma or a sense of embarrassment when mentioning their choice of college with others. Future research should explore how the SES of the community influences community college students' experiences. My findings revealed negative stigmas toward community college in the Korean community. These stereotypes and perceptions may influence how Korean American students deal with their experiences of community college. The stigma associated with community colleges could be detrimental for Korean American students attempting to construct a positive self-perception. These stereotypes and

perceptions may influence how Korean American students deal with their experiences of community college.

Experiences which Change the Perceptions of Community Colleges

As mentioned in Chapter Five, many participants held negative perceptions of community colleges before they attended, mainly related to low academic ability or competence. This section focuses on how the participants' perceptions of community colleges changed while they attended. Three significant changes of perceptions were found: 1) positively viewed faculty, 2) positively viewed their peers, and 3) community college provide another chance. These will be discussed by comparing perceptions before and during community college attendance.

In order to understand their current experiences at community colleges, I asked participants what they liked and disliked about their colleges. Regarding what they liked about their colleges, more than one-third of the participants shared positive experiences with professors. They thought their professors were smart, helpful, open-minded, and cared for them deeply. Charles, a 21-year-old Korean American male student at Milford Community College, mentioned, "I like a lot of the professors. They're actually very intelligent. They're really smart people, coming from fields that, they actually were working in the fields that they're teaching in." In addition, Min explained that her professors were very helpful whenever she asked for assistance. Moreover, Laura, a 22-year-old Korean American female student at Milford Community College, described her professors as follows:

> Some teachers were just so incredibly bright that I don't know why
> they're settling for [inaudible] salary even though they could be at
> Harvard because I felt that they were just that bright. That gave me the

enthusiasm and motivation to be like, "I want to be like them. I want to be passionate about what they're teaching or what they're learning."

Laura's assumption that some of her professors were as great as professors at Ivy League schools goes against the negative perceptions of community college. Since many participants perceived community colleges as a place for those who were not intelligent or did not get into a four-year college, they might also devalue the quality of community college professors. However, after they interacted and took classes with professors, they found that their professors were smarter and more caring than expected. Some of them even thought that professors might be overqualified to work at community colleges or did not understand why they worked at community colleges instead of four-year colleges.

Ken, a 21-year-old Korean American male student at Bonifant Community College, made an interesting comparison between professors of four-year colleges and those of community colleges. From his experiences, he felt that professors in community colleges were personal and reasonable, therefore he felt closer to them. He thought class size influenced the relationship between professors and students because he noticed that the courses in community college were much smaller than classes at four-year colleges, so he thought there would be a higher chance to build a close relationship with professors. Furthermore, he mentioned that although professors in a four-year college he attended were "smart," it did not mean they were good at teaching, which indicated that being intelligent does not mean being a good teacher.

> They [Professors] understand the concept very well but they don't know how to explain the concept to the students. I see this a lot. Luckily, I understand it, but a lot of students do not. I'm like, "Something is wrong." I am told that some professors consider teaching as a side profession and they focus more on their research. I'm hoping that's for a minority case, but it is a thing apparently.

Many participants addressed positive relationships with their community college professors. One possible reason for the closer relationship between faculty and students might be that faculty in community colleges have strong teaching commitments (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010), thus they are more likely to frequently contact with students (Wirt & Jaeger, 2014). Various research on faculty-student interaction found that interactions between faculty and students positively correlates to students' achievement and development (Wirt & Jaeger, 2014). Tinto (1997) especially found that a community college classroom is the major place for students to experience social and academic integration, which was connected to faculty-student relationships. Therefore, the unique environment of community colleges (e.g., small class size and more time for professors' devotion to teaching) may be conducive to building good relationships with professors.

Charles, however, had a different experience. He mentioned that the work in the classroom was easy, so he thought their instruction could have been more academically challenging. He assumed his classes were academically lax because it was just community college. Therefore, he thought that professors might make their classes easier for an associate's degree. He continued to explain the difference in academic rigor between a four-year college and a community college. He believed that most professors in his college did not grade on a curve, in comparison to those in four-year colleges. He suggested that because a lot of students attending community colleges have diverse economic backgrounds and might be working full-time, single mothers, and/or from low-income families, the professors tried to lessen the stress. In addition, he doubted the academic ability of students in his college compared to students in four-year colleges.

Like Charles' assumption of peers' academic ability, many participants pointed out this negative perception of community college, as described previously in Chapter Four. In addition, some participants addressed negative peer influence (e.g., not studying hard, not motivated). However, some participants changed their negative perception about their peers in community colleges. For instance, Charles was impressed by his peers' academic efforts and expressed his impression as follows:

> Well… I feel for the most part the students that come here, they come here because they want to work hard at something, not to just go to school because someone said to. They come here to actually further their life… Everyone's just working toward the degree… Everyone who comes to work hard and get good grades, and I like that. They're serious.

He liked his peers' attitude, and this influenced his motivation as well. Furthermore, Ken elaborated how his negative perceptions of peers had changed. He described his original feeling that community college was attended by less intelligent students and those who did not get into any other college. However, he came to realize that his feelings were not true, and he even found that he was inspired by his peers. He explained how he changed his perception as follows:

> Once I attended here my first semester I was really inspired by the students. I've never seen such great work ethic and they're very mature students. […] I was like, "Wait these guys are really smart. There's a lot of reasons other than just you're not smart, to enter into this school." Just seeing the students themselves and the teachers just seeing them so impassioned. I was like this is not what I thought it was [before attending community college].

While he was explaining his view, he illustrated what he learned from one of his classmates, a first-generation college student. She came into the class not knowing basic skills, such as how to convert liters to milliliters, but she took many good notes and he was really inspired by her perseverance. In addition, other participants

mentioned that they met peers from diverse backgrounds (e.g., SES, race, ethnicity, gender, and age) and learned from them. For example, participants were especially impressed by their peers' maturity and their work ethic. Therefore, participants' negative perceptions of community college related to peers changed positively, and they wanted to learn from their peers.

Although there were some positive perceptions, some students formulated more negative perceptions while attending community colleges. Nearly half of the participants felt community colleges were like an extension of high school, what they called "advanced high school" or "13th grade." Sally, a 22-year-old Korean American female student from Milford Community College who immigrated into the U.S. at the age of 9, described this as follows:

> […] it's kind of like a high school, like the classes, and they treat you like you're in high school sometimes. It feels like high school only because the classes, the teachers are very lenient toward you, I've heard from other people it's different from a four-year college. I think that's just community college in general, it's a lot easier than four-year colleges, compared to.

Sally also mentioned it was easy to handle school work (e.g., to get a good grade) because it was not complicated work. Some participants pointed out that the reason it felt like high school was because of the similar routine of taking classes and going back home. This might also be because students have multiple roles (e.g., work a full-time job) with various commitments so they do not have much time for socializing with their peers through clubs and student organizations. Related to this idea, one participant even noted that community college was "not a real school."

While I was investigating participants' perceptions of community colleges, I wondered how they perceived colleges in general. Therefore, I asked them if the

community college they attended was how they had imagined college would be. Interestingly, many of them expressed the differences between their community college and the college they imagined. Some of them described their imagined college with a dorm, a campus life with various clubs or student organizations (specifically a sorority or fraternity), or an academic environment with larger lecture classes. Others mentioned academic rigor, which indicated more academically difficult or challenging classes than community colleges. From their descriptions of the college they imagined, it seemed that many of the characteristics for an ideal college were similar to a four-year college.

One-third of the participants mentioned that community colleges provided another chance or opportunity to prepare for their future. For example, Laura, a 22-year-old Korean American female student from Milford Community College, thought that community college would be "a good zone" to explore what she wanted to pursue and offered various resources and classes for that. Ken also had a similar perception. He considered community college a very good starting point for people like him who had a bit of a hard time transitioning into being independent at college. The community college provided a lot of resources and opportunities to help students. Furthermore, Jim, a 28-year-old Korean American male student from Liberty Community College and a high school dropout, reflected this idea as follows:

> Community college is sort of like giving us, giving everybody the same amount of equal opportunity to start over and build up from the bottom so it's a good, it's one of the best ways to build up. Like, I should say, at the very basic steps, fundamental steps. How to start new or how to live differently or choose something that you want to be.

Although negative perceptions were dominant among participants before they attended community colleges, these negative perceptions were often positively changed through experiencing various opportunities that they did not expect in community colleges.

Conflict Between Negative Perceptions and Positive Experiences

Korean American students attending community colleges experienced various opportunities and challenges. These experiences influenced the way they perceived community colleges. Most notably, they struggled with contradictions between positive experiences and negative perceptions of community colleges. In Chapter Four, I showed that participants' preconceived negative perceptions of community colleges were influenced by others (family, peers, or members of the Korean communities). However, these negative perceptions became more positive while they attended community college and gained first-hand experience. Nonetheless, they still faced negative perceptions from others and this influenced their contradictory situations in community colleges.

Some participants expressed pride in attending community colleges. To illustrate, Amy, a 24-year old Korean American female student from Milford Community College, attended community college because it was the only option she could afford. She was not eligible for financial aid because of her immigrant status. When she started community college, she was concerned about how others would think of her. She noted that people would tell her it would be good to go to Milford, but she believed they really thought she was not intelligent. In addition, Amy shared experiences in which others made her feel offended. To demonstrate, one Korean elder asked her which college she went to and what she studied. When she answered that

she went to Milford, she saw the elder's negative expression which seemed to look down on her. This experience made her cry, and she explained that it was not just because of this incident, but because she imagined that many Koreans would think the same of students who attended community colleges. In her case, her twin brother transferred to an Ivy League college after Milford while she stayed there, and this made others compare their academic ability. However, she was in a nursing program which was considered to be competitive and she expressed her pride in attending. As she continued to experience others' negative perceptions, she learned how to deal with these situations.

Sue, a 21-year-old Korean American female student from Milford Community College, also had a negative perception of community college before she attended. However, once she found out the reasons why other peers chose community colleges, such as financial issues or a late decision after a gap year, she expressed her pride:

> So now to me, I'm kind of proud, I'm like, "Milford is actually one of the best community colleges." I don't have a bad feeling if someone asks me, "Where do you go?" "Community college," and I'm okay with that. Now it's good.

However, until Sue felt proud of attending community college, she struggled with a feeling of shame. She shared an experience of how she struggled and overcame this feeling by developing her confidence through positive experiences at her school. Her experience was that other people would associate community colleges with negative perceptions (especially low academic ability). She was annoyed whenever her friends made comments that devalued community colleges. When she started community college, she felt ashamed and reflected upon her feelings:

> In the beginning, [...] I was kind of ashamed like, "Oh, wow, I go to Milford, to community college." I did have that feeling because it's

126

> honestly the way people say it. But at that time, I also did not believe in myself. I think it all comes down to self-esteem because now I'm like, "I don't care" because I know what I'm doing and this is one of the things that I am proud of. I just took a different route. Now, I am okay but before I did a little it, I didn't like it.

Although early on she felt ashamed revealing that she attended community college, she seemed to overcome this feeling by justifying her reasons for attending community college and focusing on what she wanted to do rather than paying attention to what others said. For Sue, her academic ability (e.g., she had the academic credentials to get into a four-year college) was not the main reason to attend community college, and she was clear about her future goals and plans after community college. However, her comment suggested that students could internalize negative perceptions of community college and this could make them struggle with positive experiences.

Several participants expressed this struggle. Ken, who had previously attended a state four-year college, compared his experiences between community college and four-year college. He felt a negative feeling (e.g., stigma) when he told other people that he was in community college. He also felt a different level of respect and recognized differences in people's responses. For example, when he said he attended a four-year college, people told him that he attended a good college. However, when he said he went to community college, they expressed surprise and, while they said that was still a good college, Ken felt that he knew what it meant and saw in the different responses a mismatch between what they said and their facial expressions.

Theresa, a 19-year-old Korean female student from Bonifant Community College, expressed a similar feeling. She felt that people (especially Koreans) thought she might not be a hard-working student or not good at studying once she revealed she attended community college. She was worried about this negative perception. Despite

her concern, she elaborated on her positive experience in community college as follows:

> Things that I hear about community college, so but when I got here it was very different than what people actually view and think. It's just ... Community college is just like other universities and it's just getting associate degree while others are working for bachelors and they were more good opportunities, there were good fit for me to be here. So I realized that there are a lot of ... they were different than I actually thought before coming here.

She strongly seemed to be influenced by negative views of community colleges even before attending community college and worried about how others considered her based on the negative perceptions. However, she found that there were more good opportunities in community college and believed that community college would be a good fit for her.

Nick, a 22-year-old Korean American male student from Bonifant Community College, discussed a similar experience. He thought that community college offered easier classes, but he felt he had to work just as hard as he would in a four-year college to maintain a good grade. Although community college classes required a similar amount of effort, he experienced a feeling of stigma from others which he hated. I asked him how he dealt with this feeling:

> I think I still have it in me. […] It just, you just have it. Even with the parents maybe you would even feel it too. It's that stigma. Personally, I think it's about ... You can't avoid it. You can never avoid it, but I think it's about accepting yourself, kinda thing. […]

> If you can prove it yourself, I think you'll be fine. I maintain a really good GPA here, and then I moved to a four-year college and I came back with my own personal decision, not where you can just go because they accept everybody. I mean, it might be a special case for me, but because I made a decision to come back here, like, I'm proud of it. I know they offer a good program. I shouldn't take that stigma inside.

It was interesting that he felt that he could not avoid this stigma but accepted it. He justified to himself why he attended community college and distinguished himself from other students who might come to community college because they did not get into four-year colleges. For him, it was his own decision rather than an inevitable choice. The participants who expressed negative feelings about their attendance at community colleges had to deal with their feelings from others' negative attitudes toward community colleges. Some participants intentionally avoided situations where they would need to talk about community colleges or they tried to develop their confidence or pride in attending community college.

So far, I have discussed the opportunities and challenges study participants encountered, how their perceptions were changed through their experiences, and their conflicts between perceptions and experiences. I was also curious to explore the ways in which their experiences at community colleges intersected with model minority stereotypes. When interviewing participants, I did not use the term model minority myth nor ask for its definitions. However, I discussed general stereotypes of Asians with participants – that they tend to attend prestigious universities, they are smarter than other students, or they are good at math and science. Participants reported their ambivalent experiences with model minority stereotypes at community college. Almost all of the participants experienced stereotypes associated with the model minority myth at some point in their life before they attended community colleges. Most their experiences of model minority stereotypes before community colleges were related to academic work, such as being good at math and science or attaining/maintaining high GPA. More than one-third of the participants expressed that they experienced the model minority stereotype before colleges, but they did not see

or experience it in college. Nearly another one-third of the participants experienced model minority stereotypes, but they did not care or it did not matter to them (or did not really influence them). Because some of them thought that stereotypes were somewhat true for them (e.g., good at math, having a good grade on math, enjoying math), they did not feel offended or uncomfortable by this particular stereotype if it was considered as positive. Five participants reported that they were somewhat negatively impacted by the stereotypes. Four participants felt negative, uncomfortable, burdened, or even stupid not to fit into the stereotypes, especially related to academic attainment. One participant mentioned that she did not think as herself as Korean because she did not fit the stereotype, especially related to high academic attainment. For example, Amy, a 24-year old female student from Milford Community College who majored in nursing, illustrated a positive view:

> You're Asian, so you're smart, you're good at math. Even nursing
> school, we take the math test every semester, and need to get 100 on it
> in order to go on, and even my friends say, "You're Asian. You're
> good with math." I don't get offended with it.

As Amy mentioned, some of the participants thought that stereotypes were somewhat accurate for them so they did not feel offended or uncomfortable by the stereotypes that were more "positive" in nature. James, a 21-year-old Korean American male student from Milford Community College, highlighted this experience. He said, "In this community college… they were like 'Oh, look at this Asian kid, he's doing math right now faster than us, even faster than professor.' And then…I'm like… No, I'm not." It seemed that he pleasantly accepted the image as a truth for him although he seemed not to agree with that image.

On the other hand, Heidi, a 21-year-old Korean female student from Liberty Community College, explained the negative influence of the stereotype:

> Actually I don't think I'm good at math. The professor in the calculus class was really harshly strict at grading. I wasn't doing good and there was some Chinese classmates and they were looking at me "You should be good at math. Aren't you Korean? […] Don't you have to do good on math? Don't you learn in the same Korea?" Even though I said, "I never learn these before," but I feel stupid not learn too much. Sometimes don't think as a part of Korean. […] When I went to math learning center to get help for the calculus, the assistant teacher was Indian guy. He looked at me like "You don't know this?" He asked me, "Where are you from?" I was like, "From Korea." That made me feel bad, feel sad.

For Heidi, this experience with stereotyped notions of who she was as a student had a detrimental impact on her confidence and even her ethnic identity. Assalone and Fann (2017) studied the influence of model minority stereotypes on Asian American students in community colleges. From the interviews with 28 Asian American students of 13 different ethnicities, they illustrated conflicted (mixed), color-blind (positive), and contemptuous (negative) feelings in the ways that Asian American students perceived these stereotypes. According to Assalone and Fann (2017), a conflicted perception is when students are conflicted about what they feel is wrong and what others perceive to be true about the stereotypes. A color-blind perception is when students perceive the stereotypes to be positive and embrace them. Contempt perception is when students perceive the stereotypes as offensive. My study found that the majority of students experienced conflicted feelings about the stereotypes and how they influenced their experiences at community college. The participants in this study experienced the stereotypes as mostly color-blind and contempt perceptions. More than one-third of the participants reported that they did not care, or it did not matter to them or really influence them. Although it was not strongly evident how model minority stereotypes influenced their experiences at community colleges, the influence of these stereotypes should be further studied to learn more about its significance in

the ways Korean American students develop their identities in relation to these stereotypes. For a few of the participants in the study it seemed to negatively influence their experience, as I presented earlier.

In this chapter, I demonstrated experiences (especially focused on opportunities and challenges) that Korean American students encountered while they attended community colleges. The majority of the participants negatively perceived community colleges before or even at the beginning of their attendance. In addition, experiences with negative perceptions of community colleges negatively influenced (e.g., low confidence or pride, avoidance of discussing their attendance) some participants' self-perception. However, for many participants, their views on community colleges positively changed through various opportunities they experienced.

The participants reported many positive experiences as students in community colleges. For example, the participants reported that positive interactions with faculty and peers helped them keep up with their academic work. This was similar with the findings of Lundberg's (2014) study that frequent interactions with faculty were the significant determinant for learning outcome and peer-tutoring positively contributed to students' learning. These positive experiences with faculty and peers can contribute to positive self-perception among students and may provide the motivation and confidence students need to achieve their academic and career goals. The next chapter will discuss how their perceptions and experiences at community college influenced participants' construction of possible selves.

Chapter 6

**MOVING FORWARD: CONSTRUCTING POSSIBLE SELVES IN
COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

In the previous chapters, I discussed Korean American students' perceptions of attending college and community colleges before they attended, opportunities and challenges they experienced while they attended, and contradictions which arose between their positive experiences and negative perceptions. This chapter focuses on how Korean American students construct their possible selves, especially hoped-for selves and feared selves through their experiences at community colleges.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, possible selves are "representations of the self in the past and they include representations of the self in the future" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). This includes various self-conceptions influenced by social interactions with significant others or social contexts. To better understand the participants' possible selves, it is necessary to present their goals after community college because possible selves include "representation of the self in the future." Therefore, I view their possible selves as a future-oriented conception which allows for hypothetical images about an individual's future (Strahan & Wilson, 2006). To explore these hypothetical selves, I asked participants about both their near-future and distant-future goals. In addition, participants were asked to imagine what they would like to be or what they would be doing next year as their hoped-for selves. I also asked them to imagine what they would like to avoid and about any concerns or fears they may have.

As I presented in Figure 8, participants' hoped-for selves and feared selves were derived from their future plans or goals. If they could articulate more details of their plans or goals, they were more likely to have stronger confidence, certainty, or

motivation to achieve them. Simultaneously, participants had different approaches to their goals based on their needs and aspirations and most of them believed community colleges would be a foundation or means to achieve their goals and plans. More details of these findings will be discussed in this chapter.

1. Codes	• Hoped-for/positive selves • Feared/negative selves • Goals/plans for future • Motivation for future • Level of certainty/confidence for future • Relation between community colleges and goals/plans
2. Topics	• Near-future and distant-future goals • Future possible selves (positive/negative) • Community colleges and goals/plans
3. Themes	• Hoped-for selves and feared selves derived from future academic and career goals and plans • Uses of community colleges depending on goals/plans • Various approaches to goals based on aspiration or necessity
4. Findings	• Most Korean American students constructed hoped-for selves and feared selves based on their academic and/or career goals and plans. Those who articulated detailed future goals had more confidence and motivation and developed stronger hoped-for selves. • Korean American students considered community colleges in different ways depending on aspiration and necessity for their goals.

Figure 8   Data analysis process for findings of Chapter Six

Future Goals as Components to Construct Possible Selves

In this study, future goals are considered as components to construct possible selves. There were different ways participants constructed their near-future and distant-future goals. For distant-future goals, three patterns appeared: clearly having certain occupational goals, still looking for what they want to do, and searching for an occupation that would provide financial stability. Nearly one-third of the participants

mentioned a specific occupation such as a nurse, scientist, engineer, counselor, psychologist, teacher, doctor, business manager, or writer. When the participants attended a professional program (e.g., nursing), they were more likely to have specific occupational goals for the future. However, some participants were not sure about their distant-future goals yet because they were still exploring different career options. Interestingly, some participants did not elaborate on any specific occupations but addressed that they wanted a job that would make them financially stable. These participants were mainly from low-income families and the more affordable tuition (compared to a four-year college) was their most significant reason for attending community colleges. Perhaps these students were more aware of their financial situation and wanted to avoid financial struggles in the future. On the other hand, near-future goals were related to their academic work. For example, many participants said they wanted to pass all their classes, have good grades, or maintain a high GPA in order to transfer to a good college, which could lead a positive result in achieving their future goals.

Concerning near-future goals, one-third of the participants mentioned they planned to transfer to four-year colleges. This was highly related to their distant occupational goals, and many of them believed that at least a bachelor's degree would be necessary for their future occupational goals or more advanced degree. To illustrate this, Charles, a 21-year-old Korean American male student who studied nursing at Milford Community College, expressed his ultimate goal as follows:

> I would be attending a four-year college and working. […] get my Master's, become a nurse practitioner. […] I just feel like if you're going to choose a major and choose something to pursue, you should just pursue the maximum you can achieve in that major, so that's like the highest position that a nurse can be.

Participants who had clear goals for their distant future confidently described their occupational plans. Some participants wanted to maximize their potential to reach the highest level of academic attainment. The description of near-future and distance-future goals differed in terms of time frame, but most of their goals were related to either academic or occupational goals. Participants also described their reasons or motivations for future goals. They varied regarding participants' situations and experiences, but many participants mentioned that recommendations from others (e.g., coworkers or family members) were important in choosing occupational goals.

There were some cases that provided compelling evidence of how personal life experiences shaped goals for the future. To illustrate, James, a 21-year-old Korean American male student from Milford Community College who was studying nursing, planned to transfer to a four-year college in the same state and ultimately become a nurse. He shared a personal story that showed why he decided to be a nurse. As a faithful Christian, he met a lot of church members who worked as nurses. Through his observation and interactions with them, he learned that they seemed to have a good life, especially in regard to finances. He concluded that becoming a nurse would provide a path to financial stability. His religious convictions and experiences confirmed his decision. He had an opportunity to participate in a mission trip to a developing country and was able to work in a local hospital while he was there. This experience made him want to help others and motivated him to be a nurse. Since financial stability was a strong influence in his decision, I was curious to know if he had considered the challenges associated with nursing. He explained that his desire for financial stability was greater than the challenges he might face as a nurse.

Tina, a 21-year-old multiethnic Korean American female student studying accounting at Milford Community College, was not certain about what occupation she wanted to pursue but planned to transfer to a four-year college and eventually find a job that would give her financial security. In addition, she described her experience of how she decided to attend community college. Tina took a gap year right after she graduated high school because she was not interested in going to a four-year college and did not know what she wanted to study. Therefore, she wanted to take some time to think about her future. During the gap year, she had a chance to travel to different places and develop friendships with the people she met. She was inspired by their passion and the progress they made in their life. These new friends inspired her to live with a zeal. Therefore, she wanted to have the flexibility to decide what she would like to pursue and thought a community college would be a good option. However, although her decision to attend community college was inspired by friends in the beginning, she, like James, also considered financial stability when it came to her choice of major:

> Well, I knew that it was going to be a very practical choice. It was mainly that. […] Like my parents are getting older. They're already in their sixties. So I knew that if I had gone and taken a lot of risks with what I wanted to do and messed around for a while trying to search for whatever I want to do, I knew that I wouldn't be able to support them. Or there's a good chance that I might not be able to. So first off I wanted something that would give me independence so that I wouldn't have to rely on them. And second, I wanted something that would give me enough stability to the point where I could take care of them if I needed to.

Tina considered how a future profession would influence her ability to support herself and her parents as she chose her major. Since she was the only child in her family and she came from a low-income background, she felt obligated to support her parents as

they became older. At the same time, she believed that majoring in accounting would reduce the risk of unemployment and would provide an opportunity to be independent from her parents and possibly support them as well. However, she expressed conflict between financial stability and what she wanted to do. In fact, she reported that she did not know what she wanted to do but knew that it would not necessarily be related to her accounting major. Therefore, it seemed that she struggled between a desire for financial stability for the future and something she actually wanted to do that might not guarantee financial security. For both James and Tina, financial security was a significant criterion in deciding their future goals. Besides James and Tina, Jane, Greg, and Steve also expressed similar motivations about getting a job that would provide financial stability. They believed that this would help them to be financially independent from their parents. This motivation was more likely to be felt among those who were from low-income backgrounds.

Unlike the participants described above, George, a 31-year old Korean American student at Bonifant Community College, prioritized the pursuit of personal happiness over financial stability in his career decision. For George, his marriage seemed to change his priorities and future goals:

> I was kind of thinking about a career that would give me long term security, like financially and just being able to have a secure job for a long time. But after I met my wife and after we got married and she moved here, suddenly it seemed so much more important and so much more desirable to pursue something I'm really passionate about and I really enjoy. And I guess just in general, since she came here I've just been more focused more on making all my days happy and just enjoyable. So that's kind of the theme I'm going with from right now.

Similarly, Ken, a 21-year-old Korean American male student from Bonifant College, set a career goal as a nurse and was motivated to choose career goals related to things he enjoyed:

> Ever since I was just a cashier, I learned that I enjoy interacting with people. Even throughout my life I enjoyed helping people whether or not I was reciprocated gratitude. I just enjoyed helping people and I was thinking what I can do that allows me to exercise that skill and get paid.

These examples illustrate that financial stability and happiness or enjoyment influenced participants' construction of their possible selves.

Related to near and distant future, Strahan and Wilson (2005) explored how close- or distant-past and close- or distant-future would influence possible selves, identity, and motivation. They argued that temporal proximity of future possible selves impacted people's current motivation to behave in ways that would achieve their future goals. For instance, participants in this study were asked to develop their hoped-for selves and feared selves by listing who they wanted to be or who they would like to avoid becoming by graduation. Strahan and Wilson (2005) examined how close or distant students felt from graduation influenced participants' current academic motivation. They revealed that those who felt that graduation was in their close future were more motivated in their current academic work than those who felt that graduation was in the distant future. The findings in this study confirmed what Strahan and Wilson (2005) found. Participants who elaborated more specific future goals clearly developed their future possible selves and this induced them to have a strong motivation to achieve their goals. For instance, Amy, a 24-year-old female Korean American at Milford Community College, wanted to become a nurse. However, when she was a high school student, she did not think about becoming a nurse as future

career, but a conference she attended at church changed her view. She shared her story of this change:

> It's a church conference. Then I saw those poor kids in the third world country, I wanted to help with my talent, with something I have. […] That's that main reason why I chose [to become a nurse]. It really helped me because in high school I didn't really study because I didn't have any motivation. I didn't have any goals. After I graduated high school I had a goal. I did really well in school, in Milford, because of that.

Once she developed a specific future goal, she became confident to achieve her goal and this motivated her to do well in college.

Participants were more likely to easily articulate near-future goals than distant-future goals, although they had different motivations related to these goals. As discussed above with regards to Strahan and Wilson's (2005) study, students were more motivated if they felt the future they imagined to be quickly approaching. Therefore, participants in this study could easily envision themselves in the near future than in the distant future. However, those who already had clear goals for their distant future constructed strong possible selves and were motivated to achieve them.

Although the main focus of this study was not ethnic identity, I was curious to explore how ethnic identity, more specifically being Korean, shaped how participants thought about their future. In terms of ethnic identity, all participants considered themselves belonging to one of two groups (Korean and American). Fourteen participants mentioned they felt they belonged to both groups, and thirteen participants felt they strongly or slightly belonged to only one group (either Korean or American). However, two participants described how they seemed grounded in-between groups. Interestingly, the significant elements used to describe their identity were strongly related to cultural traits (e.g., physical appearance and language) and their status (e.g.,

citizenship). Cultural traits were more salient when participants described their identity as it has been influenced by others. For instance, William, a 24-year-old Korean American male student from Verde Community College, explained how his identity was influenced by others:

> Anywhere I go, as I grew up, and as I go to real world job or whatever, people categorize me as Korean American in an instant, so I accept their perspective as mine, and say, "Yeah, I'm Korean." They treat me as Korean, that's the expectation they have. The general stereotypes of being Asian or Korean, that you should have a high GPA, or you should have a really good work ethic, always diligent, work hard, things like that. I guess…. I don't know. I would consider myself as Korean, but these days it's heading towards… [more American].

Although he felt more attached to his American identity, he could not deny his Korean identity and the stereotypes for Koreans also influenced how he self-identified.

Some participants seemed to assume that Europeans or Caucasians would be more likely to be considered as (typical) American and they felt they did not fit into that. Theresa, a 19-year-old female student from Bonifant Community College, shared her description of her ethnic identity:

> This is a funny thing because when I got to high school, I wanted to be like white people, I wanted to be one of them because you know, you realized there are Korean American who are like white people. Do you know what you mean? I think there are two different kinds for like white people or not like white people. But I realized that's impossible to be white, you know...the cultural background is very different. It's really hard for me to understand them and I think it's hard for them to understand me. So, I think I'm actually in between, between ... No, actually, I'm just, I'm Korean. I can define me as Korean. I don't know if I'm saying this right...I am a part of a Korean community, but I don't fit in to the American, white people ... White society.

She seemed to assume that Americans could be only white and wanted to "be like white people." However, she realized it would be impossible because of different cultures and obvious physical differences.

Although the definition of participants' ethnic identities was varied in terms of their situations or experiences, there was some commonality in how being Korean shaped (or influenced) how they thought of their future. Many participants addressed the influence of parents or their Korean communities. Although some participants mentioned that being Korean would not influence their future, the underlying meaning of their narratives indicated that this was not always true. Those who mentioned these influences on their future thought it would impossible to completely get rid of the connection to their Korean community because there would be some sort of link. Some of them also believed that the connection with their Korean community would be beneficial whenever they decided to reach out and be part of it.

In addition, some participants brought up parental influence - although they believed they could choose what they wanted to do or to be, they described how this impacted how they thought of their future. Ken, a 21-year-old male Korean American from Bonifant Community College, mentioned as follows:

> Being Korean, the American philosophy with career choice in particular, the child usually gets to pick what they desire. Of course, parents do have some input, but I think because I am Korean and also just because of the way my parents raised me I take more of a consideration of what they desire as a choice too. I think just taking into my parents' advice into consideration into my career choice as well. I think that's just career choice has a big impact with my parents.

Although he lived in the U.S. and believed that American parents did not have as much influence on their children's futures, he felt that as a Korean, he had to put more consideration into his parents' advice and hopes for his future.

In addition, some participants commented on the challenges being Korean created in terms of their future. For instance, Yardley, a 19-year-old Korean American female student from Milford Community College, addressed this as follows:

> I think I feel being Korean... I think, in a sense like there's still that white privilege in America where if you're not white, you have to work harder for what you want. And I think being Korean has not growing up in a privilege home that has fueled me to want to succeed even more. [She suddenly became emotional and burst into tears.] I guess growing up sometimes I wished I was white because I felt I viewed them as always having it easy.

She seemed to have a tension between her American and Korean identities. She did not want to continue this conversation because she became emotional discussing her past experience with identity struggles, so it was difficult to understand the details of her issue. However, it seemed that she believed white privilege had a significant impact in terms of future possibilities. It was evident that participants' notions of shaping their future seemed to be influenced by being Korean, although their self-defined identities were varied.

Constructing Various Possible Selves: Hoped-for Selves and Feared Selves

This section focuses on "hoped-for selves" and "feared selves" developed in relation to students' attendance at community colleges. "Hoped-for selves" show how participants would positively view themselves in the future, while "feared selves" is how they envisioned themselves negatively in the future. The hoped-for selves of almost all participants mainly related to positive selves in terms of academic or professional areas. For instance, many participants described that they hoped to pass all their classes or get good grades. In addition, they positively saw themselves as having professional experiences such as internships or field practices which would help achieve their future goals. To demonstrate, James, a 21-year-old Korean American male student who studied nursing at Milford Community College, planned to transfer to a four-year college and envisioned himself there:

> If I do get accepted into the nursing program [in a four-year college], I'll be studying all the time. Because it is really tough. From what I saw from my sister [who majored in nursing in a four-year college], you don't have a life. You just have to study. So, I kind of see that for the next two years. Unless I'm on a break. I'll definitely be learning more. And it is a field that I am genuinely interested in, so ... I don't know. It's going to be tough, but I think I'm going to enjoy it. Hopefully. [laugh]

It seemed that James definitely saw himself in a four-college and already understood what his life would look like though his sister's experience. Although it sounded negative when he mentioned "not having a life" and he thought there would be some challenges, he seemed confident and even excited about his future at a four-year college.

Besides academic and professional areas, a few participants mentioned that they would positively build or develop social relationships with peers in four-year colleges. William, a 24-year-old Korean American male student from Verde Community College, was an engineering major with a permanent visa. He immigrated to the U.S. when he started high school. He positively envisioned himself interacting with peers at a four-year-college after transferring. He commented:

> It's good that I know Koreans, but I want to take this opportunity, me going to a four-year college, and I want to get to know other people. I want to experience more, because once I graduate, it will be no more new stuff, I'll be stuck in a company and doing the same thing for the rest of my life. I want to experience culture from Uganda, or Japan, Germany. I want to meet different types of people, I want to more get involved, and I want to gather people who have the same interests as me, and I want to do projects that we can do together. That way I can make a bond more with them.

Although William mentioned having Korean friends at a four-year college as an advantage (e.g., helping each other through group study), at the same time, he also considered this could be a disadvantage because it could limit his opportunity to build

peer relationships with other non-Koreans. Another interesting comment was his view on the ultimate final goal. As he said, "I want to experience more, because once I graduate, it will be no more new stuff, I'll be stuck in a company and doing the same thing for the rest of my life." It is noticeable that he described his career goal as an endpoint in life, with no further goals once he achieved it.

In fact, he had an unusual background, having lived in more countries compared to the majority of participants. He was born in Canada and grew up in the U.S. until he was four. He went back to Korea and lived there until he was a sophomore in high school when he immigrated back to the U.S. He had a permanent residence status and recently applied for citizenship. Although he acknowledged his Korean heritage, he considered himself as "a U.S. citizen." He mentioned that his nationality would not matter because the U.S. was already a melting pot and his origin would not influence his future much. However, he had concerns about how possible institutional discrimination in the workforce could be a barrier for him. He explained that even though the U.S. had an African American president, he believed that it was still majority white and that whiteness conferred power. He explained:

> Even if I go to a white people community they're not going to accept me as a white person, you know? There are barriers. You probably know, even if I try hard, I'll be just an Asian kid who thinks white, but I'm still Asian. I hear a lot of things about going to the job you really wanted, and you got the job, but you can only go up to a manager position, but you can't really go higher than that, because you're not the dominant race, I'll say. […]

> I want to be more leadership per se, and be someone who is irreplaceable with a company, and since I heard so much about Asians not being able to go to more than a certain level, I want to beat the odds, and break that.

It seemed that William thought that his ethnic background as a minority could negatively influence the construction of his possible selves, but wanted to change that by attaining a leadership position and developing his confidence.

On the other hand, the participants' answers for feared selves were even more varied than hoped-for selves, but most of them were also related to academic fears. For instance, some of them described fears that they would not pass their classes, certificates, or exams they needed for future careers.

Another salient feared possible self was failing to transfer to four-year colleges. Since many of the participants planned to transfer to four-year colleges, they worried about not meeting this goal. Some participants even worried about not being able to finish college because of financial issues. In addition, some participants feared they would not be able to adjust to four-year college environments because they did not have prior experience, although they heard a lot about four-year colleges from others, especially peers. For instance, Greg, a 21-year-old multiethnic Korean American student from Milford Community College, expressed his concern about the possibility of not continuing his education. He described his fears as follows:

> Definitely grades, grades, my biggest fear is flunking out of college,
> dropping out of my own volition, like I get sick and tired, I'm like,
> "I'm done." Like too frustrated or just not being able to continue
> because of financial problem, which actually is current situation, but
> I'm hanging in there, for now, but my biggest fear is just not being able
> to finish.

Greg had several fears, such as lack of motivation and financial issues. Other significant feared selves were related to differences between community colleges and four-year colleges. Theresa, a 19-year-old Korean female student from Bonifant Community College, illustrated this fear. She heard from friends different opinions

about community colleges and four-year colleges. Some said that they were same, but others said they would be different and that four-year college was much more difficult. She addressed this concern:

> So based on what I hear, I am kind of worried because I never seen what it would feel in a four-year university like compared to a community college so if it's academically challenging, that's a good concern that I have. I want to know how it is different, so they're like grading is very different, the workloads you get is very different, so I am concerned about that one.

Although she was concerned about the difference in academic rigor between community college and a four-year college, it seemed that she was willing to take on the challenge. However, she still had some concerns because she did not know how a four-year college would be different. Some participants developed feared selves based on what they were mostly worried about, especially in a college context.

Besides fears related to academic work, students also mentioned feared selves related to other aspects of their lives. Noah, a 20-year-old Korean American male student from Milford Community College, had an interesting view on the relationship between education and life. When I asked him about his fear, he said, "My fear is not being able to provide for my family when I grow up being jobless. I'm scared of that. Mostly because I didn't do well at school, I feel like I would fail in life." I was intrigued by his reason, so I asked him to elaborate the meaning of "failing in life." He had a strong belief that doing well in school would make him successful in life. I challenged him that not doing well in school did not necessarily mean failing in life and studying would be a part of his life, not his whole life. He replied:

> It's a big part. […] Because that's where you start. Where you're graduating, that's how you start with jobs. Like people drop out of high school and then they become billionaires. That's like a one in a million

> chance. I don't know. […] I feel like I don't know what I would do, where I would be going [if I did not do well in school].

Noah believed that academic success would be an important criterion to making his life successful. The underlying meaning of his comment would be that a successful academic performance would determine his level of education and this would influence his career choice.

Another compelling feared self was failure to meet the expectations of others or of society. Henry, a 20-year-old Korean male student from Milford Community College, described his fears:

> This crazy society has really high expectation on you… Of being one completely individual in one society. You have to earn money ... You have to meet all the criteria. Like what my older generation expect me to be. I don't think I could meet them because I don't consider money as my priority goal.

Henry thought that the society would consider money to have the highest value, which was related to an expectation to have a good job with high salary. This value would be measured against his own pursuit of happiness. Although he said money did not matter to him, he measured himself against his parents' expectations that their children have professional occupations such as doctor or lawyer, and he already conflicted with his parents on this issue.

Unlike other participants who mentioned academic fears, Julie, a 20-year-old Korean American female student from Liberty Community College, brought up a very different fear. Bringing up her past background again, she said she was not interested in studying or even going to college. However, her parents believed that she should at least have a college degree to help her have more opportunities for her future. Therefore, she went to community college because she wanted to try to find something that she would like to do even though she was not interested in college. Interestingly,

she feared that she would get easily tired or sick of something. As she described herself as a person who easily gave up if she was not interested in what she was doing, she was worried about this propensity.

From the presentations of Korean American students' hoped-for selves and feared selves, their possible selves seemed to be influenced by their roles as students because their future goals were mostly related to academic goals based on what they studied, and this also influenced occupational future goals for some participants. Kim, Sax, Lee, and Hagedorn (2010) explored self-perceptions of community college students, especially primary roles as students, employees, and parents. Kim et al.'s (2010) descriptions where helpful in my analysis. For examples, the students in my study who fit the category of "students who are employees" (e.g., having an internship in the related field) wanted to complete the courses at community colleges and transfer to a four-year college or get a job in a related field. To illustrate this in my study, Esther, a 25-year-old Korean American female student at Verde Community College who wanted to become a nurse, also worked in a local clinic as an administrative assistant. She thought this experience would benefit her in the future in terms of dealing with patients and also wanted an internship to practice scanning since her major was in ultrasound. Those who were classified as "employees who are students" valued the life experience and believed community colleges offered more practical opportunities that could benefit their future careers than four-year colleges. Sunny, a 25-year-old female Korean American at Verde Community College who worked part-time, held this view. When I asked her about how her community college might help or support her to achieve her goals, she said:

> I guess because I have a job, and I've experienced more life
> experiences, I guess like, like I said, I'm pretty self-centered like most

... like, more motivated toward life ... because I'm sure there ... like, a lot of my friends like who just come off from colleges, they have no life experiences toward the jobs. They don't know what to do when they first get out their job, but ... I guess I kind of have experiences compared to them [in four-year colleges].

Participants who were "students only" had some complaints about the community college environment because they believed social interactions were limited. For example, Helen, a 20-year-old Korean American female student from Milford Community College, wanted to experience a college campus, and discussed a complaint about peer relationships:

Lack of making friends. Because... as we talked, they only stick with their language group. They don't really make friends other than their language, so can be hard for them to make other language friends, non-Korean friends. That's a little hard.

Although most participants had their own academic and career goals, the level of certainty in achieving those goals depended on their situation and confidence. If participants had well-elaborated and clear goals, they were more likely to have positive possible selves with high levels of certainty that they would achieve their goals.

Community College as a Means to Construct Possible Selves

As explored in the previous section, participants developed various hoped-for selves and feared selves based on their academic and career goals or situations. While they developed various possible selves at community colleges, I wondered how they perceived community colleges as helping or supporting them in their goals and how community colleges shaped how they thought of themselves. This section focuses on how participants considered community colleges when developing possible selves, although this may not directly influence their construction of possible selves.

150

Many participants thought that a lot of the opportunities community colleges provided changed their perceptions of themselves. Almost one-third of participants expressed the belief that community colleges helped their personal growth. For instance, they had become independent, open-minded, less arrogant, more responsible, or gained wider perspectives on their peers, future, and life. To illustrate, Greg, a 21-year-old multiethnic Korean American male student from Milford Community College, stated that he was independent from his parents since he tried to figure everything out by himself at community college. In addition, he could become more open-minded and knowledgeable through taking various classes outside of his major.

In addition, Laura, a 22-year-old Korean American female student, brought an insight on her peers. She thought she should achieve a certain goal at a particular age. For example, she thought she should graduate from college at the age of 21 and start work at the age of 22. Furthermore, she had a negative image of students who attended college when they were older, believing they would not be accomplished, lazy, or not intelligent. However, while she attended community college, she met a lot of different students who were much older than she was, and found them to be much wiser. She described her impression of her peers:

> They're pursuing their dreams. Nothing's going to stop them. I guess I needed that sense of shamelessness. I guess that's shaping me to be a more possibly open person instead of thinking like, "Oh my gosh! I need to get straight As. I need to do this. I need to get a job by, at least, 25."

Through these interactions with older students, Laura became more open-minded and inspired by older peers.

Similarly to Laura, Tina, a 21-year-old multiethnic Korean American female student from Milford Community College, met various peers in all different stages of

life, and this made her realize that she did not necessarily have to follow any given journey. She believed that there were no rules when it came to education and a person should try to the best of his or her ability to follow their dreams. Although she was not sure what she really wanted to do yet, her community college introduced a lot of options for her to consider so she felt confident that it was possible to go in any direction. Kathy, a 22-year-old Korean American female student from Bonifant Community College, learned that people attended community college for many different reasons. She also thought other people outside of community college would not understand this and would still hold negative perceptions toward students in community colleges. Attending community college helped her to become less judgmental and more open-minded about others' situations. However, although attending community college helped her personal growth, she believed that community college could still negatively impact her future educational and career opportunities:

> I think for certain career paths, it [attending community college] will affect your resume. Especially if you want to do something that's kind of a high standpoint, like any grad school, dentist school, law school, med school. They don't want to see that you went to a community college. They want to see that you went to a university and you could follow the curriculum of that university. Even if I did apply somewhere, I don't think I would put this school down on the resume because it could hurt my acceptance to something.

Even though she had positive experiences at a community college that changed her negative view, she still seemed to have a fear that the negative perceptions that others held would influence her future.

Some participants indicated that community college helped to develop their confidence. Confidence is one of important elements to construct possible selves

because this can help to develop positive selves and ultimately can influence achieving possible selves. Ken, a 21-year-old Korean American male student from Bonifant Community College who had a hard time adjusting to a four-year college, explained that he learned to be more responsible in his classes while attending community college. He believed that this made him more confident in what he was doing and what he wanted to do for the future. Heidi, a 21-year-old Korean female student from Liberty Community College, also expressed that her confidence was improved. Through different learning experiences in her college, she became more knowledgeable in science, and this made her more confident in her ability to do better academically than she did in high school.

Other participants described community colleges as "a good foundation" or "a stepping stone" to constructing their possible selves. Noah, a 20-year-old Korean American male student from Milford Community College, explained that he chose community college because he was not accepted at a four-year college. He came to believe that attending community college provided a good and fresh start for him, especially given the low cost of attendance. Although he initially did not want to come to community college, he eventually saw it as a great choice for himself because he could get better grades and save money at the same time. Although he might feel that he had failed because he was not accepted to a four-year-college as his first choice, he started to have positive experiences at community college and saw more benefits for himself and his future. Finally, these experiences might help him to develop positive possible selves.

Sally, a 22-year-old from Milford Community College, also mentioned that community college was a stepping stone for her to discover what she wanted to do at a

lower financial cost. In addition, Sue, a 21-year-old Korean American female student from Milford Community College, considered community college a safe place that would always be there for her, which meant that if any choices did not work for her, she could still try other things because she believed that community college would continue to provide this chance. Therefore, she reported that this made her feel that she could not fail.

Related to how participants considered community colleges, Bahr (2013) studied community college students' patterns of use of their colleges based on Bahr's (2010, 2011) typology that was developed by course-taking and enrollment behavior. The typology us as follows: 1) drop-in; 2) experimental; 3) non-credit; 4) terminal vocational; 5) transfer; and 6) exploratory. Drop-in refers to students who tend to enroll in few classes and successfully completed their classes at a high rate while experimental refers to students who registered with heavier course loads and completed them at a low rate. Transfer and exploratory are related to transfer-oriented behaviors and transfer students usually stay longer in college than exploratory students. Terminal vocational refers to students to enroll in nontransferable vocational courses and completed at a high rate. Based on patterns of use and institutional characteristics such as characteristics of student bodies, urbanicity, and global characteristics of the colleges. He found that five different types of community colleges such as community education intensive, transfer intensive, workforce development intensive high-risk intensive, and mixed use. Students' use of their community differed in institutional policies and practices and they encouraged or discouraged students' certain behaviors. For instance, students in community colleges with a high vocational course completion rate used community colleges for workforce

development while students in colleges with a high year-to-year persistent rate highly used for transfer intensive. In this study, many participants considered transferring to four-year colleges as their plans and used their colleges as a foundation for that.

Although many participants experienced personal growth through their attendance at community college and thought of community colleges as a stepping stone or a good foundation for their goals, some participants also mentioned that the challenges or the disadvantages of attending community college negatively influenced their possible selves. As Kathy mentioned, some participants described that community colleges would not help much or would even be a disadvantage for future employment although they had good experiences there. In addition, one participant believed that community college helped them to become a better person but would not help them achieve their higher goal (e.g., obtaining a doctoral degree).

Even though some participants expressed these negative views, the vast majority of participants were found to use their community college experiences to create positive future selves. Although many participants negatively perceived community colleges before they attended as discussed in Chapter Five, their negative views of community colleges were positively changed through their positive experiences while they attended. Subsequently, positive experiences at community colleges provided a foundation to create positive future selves.

Constructing Possible Selves with Different Approaches to Goals: Aspiration vs. Necessity

As I explored the participants' future plans or goals through the interviews, one significant theme emerged concerning the value that appeared to underscore their academic work and their future goals. Although this was something I did not expect

from this study, this is one of the most significant findings that helped me to understand the construction of Korean American students' possible selves at community colleges. The participants addressed different approaches to their goals based on aspiration and/or necessity. Aspiration refers to the ontological aspect to achieving goals (e.g., self-actualization or pursuit of happiness) (Maslow, 1943), which is related to the enjoyment of learning itself, while necessity refers to the instrumental aspect of achieving goals (e.g., financial security), which is related to attaining academic credentials. Examining the participants' attitudes toward academic work at community colleges was fundamental because I found a connection between their approaches toward future goals and attitudes toward academic work at community colleges.

As aforementioned, the different aspects to achieving goals were an unexpected finding; therefore, they were not sufficiently discussed in the literature review. However, as this finding became evident through the data analysis, I thought it would be necessary to examine educational instrumentalism in order to understand Korean American students' views on education. Education is viewed as being practical in educational instrumentalism. Under educational instrumentalism, credentialism is one type. Brown (1995) introduced four theories on credentialism related to higher-education expansion and labor-market affiliation (functionalism, human capital, social reproduction, and multiethnic conflict) and examined the utility of these theories. Functionalism (Clark, 1962; Halsey, 1960; Bell, 1973) in higher education focuses on teaching new job skills as technology is developed, especially in an industrialized society, and this influenced changes of the curriculum in colleges. In human capital theory (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961), intelligence, knowledge, abilities,

talents or experiences are an asset for an individual work in skilled labor. It is believed that a better educated person gets a better job so individuals try to look for better chances with higher educational levels. Social reproduction theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) argues that social structures maintain conditions favorable to dominant classes. Therefore, in education, dominant classes are more likely to have better educational opportunity, and this causes inequality among classes. Lastly, multiethnic conflict theory (Collins, 1971) was derived from class conflict overlapped by ethnic and racial categories. In an education setting, the efforts of ethnic groups who competed in the job market caused the expansion of higher education. Since the dominant group tried to protect their positions by creating educational barriers to employment, other ethnic groups tried to establish their own schools for securing jobs for themselves. Therefore, credentialism relates to the expansion of higher education.

Some participants addressed these aspects of credentialism in their academic work. For instance, Charles, a 21-year-old Korean American male student from Milford Community College who studied nursing, described himself as focused only on studying and getting good grades. He viewed other peers in his program as behaving similarly. He also explained that his peers were motivated and serious about their academic work. Therefore, they worked hard to get good grades that would lead to a degree. For Charles, maintaining high academic standards was his top priority. Involvement in clubs or student organizations related to social experiences were not his top priority. Eric, a 20-year-old Korean male student from Milford Community College, had a similar attitude. Eric considered attending community college as a means to transfer to a four-year college. For this reason, he was concerned about academic work and not interested in socializing with peers.

Noah, a 20-year-old Korean American male student from Milford Community College, also elaborated on the instrumental aspect of academic work but had a different reason for doing so. He wanted to work hard in community college so that he would not fail to transfer to another four-year college, which in this view could be credentialism or human capital. Since Noah's primary reason to attend community college was because he did not get into any four-year college, he seemed to develop a mindset of failure by being rejected from college and not being able to be educated. He attributed his attendance at community college to previous failures in high school. As mentioned in the previous section, he perceived that not doing well in school could lead to a failed life and he did not want to experience that.

Unlike participants who expressed an instrumental aspect to academic work, some participants brought an ontological aspect to their work. However, their approach to academic work started from an instrumental aspect but changed to the ontological aspect while they attended community college. Sue, a 21-year-old Korean American female student from Milford Community College, elaborated on her great efforts in regard to academic work. She was very satisfied with her academic work, which drastically improved her GPA from 2.1 to 3.7. She was motivated by peers who she thought had negative perceptions regarding community college and her academic capability. She wanted to prove them wrong. Therefore, she started to work hard to show others that she could do well, but later she worked hard because she loved what she studied.

I illustrated two different approaches to academic work from the participants. As the examples show, an instrumental approach to academic work was getting good grades for a certain purpose (e.g., successful transfer to a four-year-college) while an

ontological approach was an aspiration to enjoy learning itself. These approaches also influenced participants' approach to future goals and plans. For George, a 31-year-old Korean American male student who already had a bachelor's degree in biology, attending community colleges was an instrumental way to get better grades in order to look good on his future resume, which could be related to credentialism. While he attended a four-year college, he realized that a lot of the classes he had to take were really intense and he did not do well. Therefore, he started to take classes at a community college that could be transferred to his four-year college.

Kathy, a 22-year-old Korean American female student from Bonifant Community College, also indicated an instrumental approach to her goal of transferring to a four-year college. She had a health issue in her family, so she could not focus on her academic work. Although she did not explicitly elaborate on the health issue, she believed that the issue destroyed her GPA. For this reason, her academic goal was to maintain a stable GPA so that she could move on to a four-year university and maintain a stable GPA there as well.

Furthermore, Steve, a 20-year-old Korean American male student from Liberty Community College encountered a lot of opportunities at a community college through his academic mentor. He believed that if he continued to work with the mentor he would be able to have more choices and opportunities which could help him build a better resume. Participants in these cases showed they wanted to achieve a better academic record because they wanted to get better jobs or become attractive candidates to potential employers.

On the other hand, some participants demonstrated an ontological approach (which values enjoyment of learning itself without considering any academic

credentials) to their future goals. Theresa, a 19-year-old Korean female student from Bonifant Community College expressed her in-depth interest in her major. For her, maintaining a good GPA was not the top priority, but instead she wanted to learn something beyond the textbooks. Even though she mentioned that she did not have a specific occupational goal, she believed that focusing on learning would help her to set future goals or get some ideas of what she wanted to be.

Henry, a 20-year-old Korean male student from Milford Community College especially represents the ontological approach to education. At the beginning of his community college attendance, he just thought he wanted to get a higher degree as soon as possible while minimizing the educational expense. However, his view changed to the desire to be a critical thinker and active learner. He really wanted to be well educated to become wise, smart, and intelligent. When I asked him about the reason for this change, he explained:

> Because friends of mine, they're all pursuing money. Whenever I meet them, they are talking about job, getting a degree, and then earning money, but then I don't want to be like them. My goal is pursuing happiness. Not money. […] So what I thought was that if you're educated, if you're smart, if you have intelligence, you don't have to struggle for money. You earn money as you make your life progress.

His comments suggest that pursuing his happiness would eventually bring monetary compensation. In addition, becoming a well-rounded person would pay off. Similar to this idea, Nick, a 22-year-old Korean American male from Bonifant Community College, shared how his approach to his goals changed. He was one of the participants who wanted to be a nurse. At first, he decided to become a nurse because of the money he would able to earn. However, once he started to take classes and learned more about it, he developed a passion and came to love it. Especially when he experienced

160

the nurse's tasks in the field, he really loved what he was doing and developed his goals. In these cases, participants wanted to learn for enjoyment or happiness rather than expecting specific financial results.

Some participants mentioned either instrumental or ontological approaches for their goals or a struggle between these two aspects. This conflict might come from the purpose of higher education. Dual philosophical perspectives were derived from the ideal college education (Mullen, 2010). Mullen (2010) explained these philosophical perspectives: one is an applied or pre-professional field, and the other is liberal arts education. Applied or pre-professional fields such as business, education, nursing, computer programing, social work, and engineering emphasize knowledge and skills which can be transferred to a particular occupation. Therefore, a degree in this area values usefulness in the marketplace. Contrasted to this is a liberal arts education like arts and humanities, social science, math, and the natural and physical sciences which all value the breadth of knowledge and advocate learning for its own sake and the intellectual and moral development of individuals.

It was evident that Korean American students constructed their possible selves based on their experiences while attending community colleges, as I suggested in my conceptual framework. Although many participants strongly held negative perceptions of community colleges before they attended (considered past experiences according to the conceptual framework), their perceptions changed positively through various academic, social, and occupational opportunities they found at community colleges. As many participants had positive experiences through various opportunities which community colleges offered, these positive experiences influenced their construction of positive possible selves (e.g., they had more confidence or self-esteem to achieve

161

their goals). Although there was a conflict between positive experiences and negative perceptions at community colleges that could lead Korean American students to construct negative possible selves (e.g., fears or concerns for the future), it seemed that many participants saw more benefits at community colleges over fears and considered community colleges a good place to construct possible selves. They used community colleges mostly in instrumental ways (e.g., attending community colleges in order to transfer to four-year-colleges) to develop and achieve their future plans and goals. However, there were also some participants who develop their possible selves in ontological ways, which focused on enjoyment of learning itself. Therefore, it became clear that community colleges should carefully consider how to support students with different goals and plans in order for them to be successful to achieve them. In the next chapter, implications, future studies, and limitations of this study will be discussed.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

This qualitative interview-based study explored how Korean American students constructed their possible selves while attending community colleges. More specifically, it discussed their experiences, focusing on opportunities and challenges they encountered, and how these experiences influenced their future goals. This study is important because the experiences of Korean American students who attend community colleges are understudied compared to the many studies of those who attend four-year colleges. Therefore, the challenges and obstacles they might face in community colleges are not recognized, such as how the students might benefit from or find themselves at a disadvantage under the influence of model minority images. Furthermore, based on the literature of possible selves, I developed a conceptual framework which intersected with other literature related to community colleges and model minority stereotypes to understand the complex layers of Korean American students' experiences at community colleges and how these layers of their experiences influenced the construction of their possible selves.

This study found that most Korean American students had negative perceptions of community colleges. Many participants perceived that community college was a place for those who did not get into any four-year colleges, did not work hard during high school, or were not intelligent. In addition, a lot of participants viewed community colleges as an advanced high school or "13th grade". These perceptions were often influenced by others, specifically their family, peers, or community members. However, once students attended community colleges, they discovered more positive experiences such as supportive academic services, academic

opportunities (e.g., scholarship, research), and school personnel. Because of these positive experiences, participants' negative views of community colleges positively changed for the most part. However, they constantly encountered negative perceptions of community colleges, especially from others outside of community colleges, and this experience caused conflict between their positive experiences and the negative perceptions. In addition, most Korean American students specifically articulated their academic and occupational goals, and those with specific goals were more likely to have strong motivation and the confidence to achieve them. However, the participants' approaches to their goals were very different from how they utilized their community college experiences and how they valued and prioritized their goals. Although many Korean American students constructed positive possible selves while attending community college, their positive possible selves were still influenced by the negative perceptions of community colleges by others.

My study started with the problem of model minority stereotypes which simplify Asian Americans' complex experiences and backgrounds within a higher education context. Due to preconceptions of Asian American students' high enrollment rates and academic attainment rates in higher education, the struggles and obstacles of those who do not fit these images are often neglected. This can detrimentally influence Korean American students who attend community colleges. This study confirmed previous studies of how model minority stereotypes negatively impact Asian students. This study especially focused on particular Korean American students, a group which has not much been paid attention to, and will contribute to the complex nuances and understandings of the differing experiences of Asian subgroups in higher education. I believe that this study will also contribute to the literature of

possible selves for Korean American community college students, a specific group that has rarely been academically investigated. It will provide a guide of how to examine multifaceted elements which can influence the understanding of how community college students develop possible selves. Therefore, in this chapter, I discuss some implications which can improve the experiences of Korean American students or other students at community colleges and which can lead to more access and success in postsecondary education.

Implications

An interesting implication of this study is that the conflicts Korean American students experience between positive experiences at community colleges and negative perceptions of community colleges should be addressed. One solution would be the improvement of negative perceptions of community colleges. Chen (2018) described some prevalent perceptions of community colleges and how to deconstruct these perceptions. A common perception is that community colleges are for people who are rejected from four-year colleges, which was similar to a claim expressed by the majority of the participants in this study. She suggested that although this might be true for some students, the prevailing reason for attending community college was the low cost of tuition. According to Chen (2018), some careers only require an associate's degree which can be obtained at community college for a lower cost. Chen (2018) also argued that those who wanted to earn a bachelor's degree found that transferring from a community college to a four-year college would be a cost-efficient way to obtain a bachelor's degree without accumulating a lot of college loan debt. Therefore, this decision was considered a "smart financial choice" (Chen, 2018). Some participants in this study also mentioned this financial benefit as a strategy to

attain a bachelor's degree with a lower cost. However, some of them suggested going directly to a four-year college was preferable if a student was able to afford the tuition and unwilling to deal with negative perceptions of community college.

One of the reasons for these prevailing perceptions was a lack of accurate information about community college, especially among universities (Chen, 2018). In order to fight negative perceptions, one local university built a year-long program with a local community college. This program allows high school students who were not accepted to the university to live and access the resources of the university while attending community college. If the students met specific criteria by the end of the year, they could transfer to the university during their sophomore year. In addition, most participants of this study chose community colleges as their first choice. Although they did not all have experiences with four-year colleges, they consistently compared community colleges with four-year colleges during interviews. Their information about four-year colleges was mostly from others, especially peers. Conversely, their peers who attended four-year colleges may not have had personal experiences with community colleges, which could influence their misunderstandings.

As many Korean American students in this study mentioned that members of their Korean American communities held negative perceptions of community colleges, it would appear that community colleges specifically need to reach out to Korean communities to provide accurate representations of their appeal and benefits. While conducting this study, this raised some questions about perceptions of community colleges. Do Koreans have stronger negative perceptions of community colleges compared to other racial/ethnic groups? How do other groups perceive community colleges? This study focused on Korean American students and did not explore non-

Koreans' perceptions of community college; therefore, it is not possible to compare the perceptions at present. However, although it is true that many participants had positive experiences at community colleges which contrasted the negative perceptions, their positive experiences seemed to conflict specifically when Korean ethnic identity or stereotypes of Koreans were considered. Further research is needed to explore how Koreans' negative perceptions of community colleges develop. This could lead to better understandings of Korean students' challenges and improve negative perceptions of community colleges.

The second implication is that students' college experiences in community colleges need to be improved, especially student engagement appropriate in the community college environment. One of the challenges Korean American students frequently addressed in this study was peer relations. There were several reasons they had difficulty developing peer relationships. First, since community colleges generally do not provide resident facilities, Korean American students felt that the environment in community colleges was restrictive when it came to making friends. Some participants considered community college to not be ideal because of the lack of residential facilities and believed this would be a significant difference in the collegial experience between four-year colleges and community colleges. However, although some of them recognized that social opportunities exist on campus, such as student organizations and clubs, they noticed that some peers were too busy with other commitments or roles (e.g., working or raising children) to be engaged in these activities.

Furthermore, some Korean American students complained that peers only mingled with certain groups, which made it difficult for them to socialize. Some

research (Deli-Amen, 2011; Maxwell, 2000) has investigated the unique social interactions at community colleges and how they differ from four-year colleges. Deli-Amen (2011) and Maxwell (2000) found that social activities at community colleges were centered on academic (e.g., group study) rather than extracurricular activities. This finding was also relevant for some Korean American students in this study, particularly those who enrolled in professional programs such as nursing. They worked together with their peers on different subjects and supported each other when they struggled. Since many of them had similar schedules and classes, they spent a lot of time together with their peers. Therefore, this kind of academic environment created natural social interactions with peers related to academic activities. In addition, all three major research sites from which Korean American students were recruited provided peer-tutoring services. However, not all of them used this service. Thus, if community colleges can offer more academic activities and assign Korean American students to group academic activities with non-Korean students, they can provide opportunities for social interaction with peers and improve Korean students' experiences regarding social integration as well as collaborative learning.

In addition, some participants acknowledged that community colleges were not their ideal colleges. One participant even mentioned that attending community college was primarily a means for transferring to a four-year college. Therefore, if community colleges can provide opportunity for students who want more college experiences, especially as related to social engagement with peers on campus, they can enrich students' college experiences and assist in students' transfers to four-year colleges. This may help improve the misperceptions of community college.

The third implication is that it is necessary to improve faculty-student interactions to enhance students' positive experiences at community colleges. Although participants held ambivalent opinions on the faculty at community colleges, many expressed a positive impression of their professors' characteristics. For instance, they were very impressed by their instructor's intelligence, caring, and passion for teaching, and many of them explained that the faculty's characteristics and quality were beyond their expectations. In addition, because the class size for most courses in community colleges are relatively smaller than in four-year colleges, students in community colleges are more likely to interact with faculty in class. This in-class interaction between students and faculty is key for social interaction (Deli-Amen, 2011). Furthermore, access and satisfactory interactions with faculty positively influenced academic performance and institutional satisfaction (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). If students develop an interpersonal relationship with faculty, they are more likely to improve academic skills and be satisfied with their experiences in their institution (Nauta, Epperson, & Kahn, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1976). Faculty at community colleges are characterized as being dedicated to teaching (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010), so there seems to be potential for them to connect with students frequently.

However, as discussed in Chapter Two, Chang (2005) found that community college students generally had a low level of interaction with faculty. Although several elements positively correlated to faculty-student relationships, they were not relevant to Asian American students because there might be a cultural mismatch between Asians' and their professors' communication style and ways of interaction. (Johnsrud & Sadao, 1998). In addition, Chang (2005) found that Asian students' perceptions of

169

racial challenges negatively influenced the level of interaction with faculty. Therefore, in order to improve faculty-student relationships with Korean American students, faculty need to initiate communication with their students and develop a rapport in and outside of the classroom.

Another challenge which impeded student-faculty interactions was the level of difficulty of the courses. Dudley, Liu, and Stallard (2015) investigated the reasons for the gap in community college students' engagement level including student-faculty interaction through a qualitative case study regarding students' perceptions and behaviors in engagement, faculty expectation and characteristics, course characteristics, and institutional support. One of the findings in this study was that Korean American students wished for their courses to be more challenging. Faculty should be encouraged to academically challenge Korean American students, as well as other groups that desire or need more rigorous academic experiences, and build good relationships so that students will be more likely to have positive experiences at community colleges.

The last implication is that students require support as they articulate or develop their goals and plans in relation to their possible selves. This can help community colleges understand how they can better support their students' needs and aspirations by learning their future goals and plans. As Strahan and Wilson's (2005) study on possible selves regarding temporal proximity found, students differently elaborated their possible selves regarding the near or distant future and developed a strong motivation for near-future events. Therefore, if community colleges can support and encourage students to establish a specific goal or plan for the future, it can provide more motivation for the students. Many Korean American students in this study shared

positive experiences at community colleges, but still had suggestions for improvements. As discussed in Chapter Two, community colleges seek to improve access to educational opportunities, especially for working class or minority students (Dougherty, Lahr, & Morest, 2017). Although community colleges offer positive experiences and educational opportunities for Korean American students from low income households, the students still dealt with racialized model minority stereotypes as Korean students. Community colleges need to consider the unique ways that Korean American students are racialized. In addition, if students feel their colleges are interested in their future and support them in achieving their goals, they would be more likely to have a sense of belonging to their colleges, and this would enable students to have better experiences.

Furthermore, educational goals are strongly associated with student success (Tinto, 1985; Noel, 1985; Stennick, 1989). If students clearly identify educational goals, they can receive relevant and consistent support (Nolan, 1989). In addition, Kreider and Walleri (1988) stated "educational institutions have a greater responsibility to ensure that students are successfully achieving their individual goals and aspirations" (p. 48). Nolan (1989) argued that institutions can measure students' success only if goals are identified, and institutions support and track the progress of these goals. In addition, Bragg (2011) examined student transition to and through community colleges, especially pathways to college and careers for youth and adults through empirical literature. She found that students felt that community colleges were more accessible, prepared them for higher education, and provided more opportunities to enroll and make progress toward degree completion. Community college can be a pathway to developing educational or career goals. Therefore, not only establishing

171

future plans and goals but also supporting the achievement of those goals is important to construct positive and strong possible selves. For Korean American students to construct positive possible selves, colleges need to constantly guide them in maintaining or refining their goals and encouraging them to achieve their goals in order for them to be successful in community colleges.

Interestingly, many Korean American students in this study expressed transferring to four-year colleges as a primary academic goal. However, their feared possible selves considered the possibility of failing to transfer to four-year colleges, as discussed in Chapter Seven. They also worried about whether or not they would be able to adjust to the four-year college environment. Several studies (Hills, 1965; Bulkley, 1974; Watt & Touton, 1930; Diaz, 1992) focused on transfer students as related to transfer-shock theory, which is defined "as a drop-in grade-point average at the new four-year institution" (Flaga, 2006, p.3). Some research (Townsend, 1995; Laanan, 1996, 1998; Flaga, 2006) specifically investigated community college students' adjustment to four-year colleges. Townsend (1995) explored academic adjustment through community college students' perceptions of the academic environment and transfer process and found that students experienced higher academic standards at their four-year colleges. Unlike Townsend (1995), Laanan (1996, 1998) examined academic, social, and psychological elements which influenced the four-year college adjustment. Laanan's finding showed that students' positive adjustment processes were influenced by their level of involvement and quality of effort. Furthermore, Flaga (2006) investigated community college students' process of transition. She found five important dimensions of transition - learning resources, connecting, familiarity, negotiating, and integrating - and concluded that that the most

important key was "initiative," which meant individuals should search for resources on their own. Some participants in this study also mentioned that this "initiative" would increase the chance to find more opportunities at community colleges. Therefore, it would be important to investigate further how community colleges can support students wishing to successfully transfer to four-year colleges.

This study was not intended to focus on Korean American community college students' process of transition. Therefore, although some participants planned to transfer to four-year colleges, I did not delve into how they planned for transferring. For this reason, it is inadequate to discuss the details of their transitional process (e.g., where and how they get transfer information, what kind of support they receive from community colleges). However, it is necessary to discuss how to support community college transfer students for successful transition to four-year college. Surprisingly, there is a lack of admission information for community college transfer students compared to freshman admissions, although the number of community college transfer students is quite large (Handel, 2007). According to Ellis's (2013) research on successful community college transfer students in a four-year college, she found that many participants in her study experienced insufficient advising at community colleges, and this was not much different in four-year colleges. Because of insufficient advising, transfer students sometimes lost credits earned in community colleges.

In addition, Korean American students seemed to experience tension between ontological and instrumental aspects of education. A college education is designed generally for an instrumental purpose (e.g., building credentials) although it may have an ontological aspect to it. However, the ontological aspect of a college education is very important for students because it influences their attitudes toward learning, and

173

should be recognized and supported by colleges. The instrumental aspect, such as credentialism which prioritizes academic qualifications over enjoyment of learning itself, is prevalent in community colleges (e.g., a pathway to transfer to a better four-year-college). As discussed in the various approaches to educational instrumentalism such as functionalism, human capital, social reproduction, credentialism, and multiethnic conflict, many participants envisioned themselves continuing their education in four-year colleges in order to meet the educational credentials for their future jobs or believed they would have better jobs if they received a higher degree.

If education over-emphasizes the instrumental aspect, this can diminish the ontological aspect and make it difficult for students to develop an enjoyment of and aspiration for learning. In this study, many Korean American students reported they were influenced by expectations from others, especially parents, in terms of their decision to attend community college, choice of major, and even future goals. Some were conflicted between what they wanted to do and what others expected them to do. Thus, community colleges need to support and provide services tailored to the specific needs of Korean American students so they can establish goals for the future based on what they value or their aspirations.

Limitations and Future Study

Although this study is meaningful in terms of understanding the complex and nuanced experiences of Korean American students at community colleges, there are a few limitations to this study. First of all, this study included only a small number of participants in a particular regional area. There might be different stories or experiences of Korean American students in community colleges in different states or regions. Second, this study focused only on Korean American students. Therefore,

findings might be different for other racial or ethnic students in community colleges. Third, this study addressed only students' experiences, perspectives, and points of view, and other people such as their parents, peers, faculty, or college personnel might have different views or perceptions than those described by the participants. In addition, students' views may change after graduation and throughout their lives. Therefore, students' perspectives or points of views may or may not be the same if they were to be interviewed at a different time.

Even though there are limitations to this study, there is also strong potential for this study to inform future work. One possible future study could trace the participants' future goals and plans after they graduate from community college. Since many Korean American students said that their academic goal was to transfer to a four-year college, it would be interesting to follow-up and see if they were able to transfer and then compare their experiences at four-year colleges to that of community colleges. In addition, in future research I could follow-up on which experiences at community colleges helped or impeded them in adjusting to four-year colleges. However, if the participants do not transfer to four-year colleges as they initially planned, I could examine the reasons and circumstances that caused this change. Intriguingly, the actual transfer rates are lower than expected. For instance, while the U.S. average transfer rate from community college to a four-year institution for the Fall 2010 cohort was 31.5 percent (Shapiro et al., 2017), the overall transfer rate (without graduating) for the Fall 2014 cohort at Milford Community College was only 15 percent (12 percent for Asian students). The overall transfer rate at Bonifant Community College was around 12 percent while it was 21 percent at Liberty

Community College. Therefore, it would be important to explore who transferred, who did not transfer, and their reasons and circumstances influencing these decisions.

Final Thoughts

Korean American students are uniquely impacted by equity issues in education. They are highly visible and invisible at the same time. The model minority myth constructs Korean American students as high achievers, even in comparison to other Asian students. This may cause the challenges and experiences of Korean American students to be overlooked. This study shows that they face a set of challenges which are both common among college students and unique to their situation, such as pressure to do well, anxiety about failure, feelings of hopelessness, and whether or not they fit into the model minority myth. Some participants in this study also expressed the negative influence of their stereotypes while attending community colleges. The perception of Asian Americans as high achievers or part of the "Asian invasion" image (Chang, 1998) in highly selective universities minimizes Korean American students' challenges, especially for those attending less selective colleges.

This study provided an opportunity to understand Korean American students' academic and social experiences at community colleges and how these experiences influenced their construction of possible selves. Although they had many positive experiences while they attended, these experiences were diluted by negative perceptions of community colleges by others, resulting in internal and external conflict. Students adapted to this negative influence by learning or developing their own strategies for dealing with this conflict during their attendance. All of these experiences, along with their goals and plans for their education and future,

contributed to the development of various possible selves. The desires and aspirations of Korean American students should be supported and encouraged through various services and options provided by community colleges to help them to achieve success. I believe this study contributes to the understanding of the different experiences of a particular subgroup of Asian American students and the uniqueness of their experiences in the construction of their future.

REFERENCES

Agar, M. (1980). *The professional stranger: An informal introduction to ethnography*. New York: Academic Press.

Alfred, R., & Horowitz, M. (1990). Higher education and public perception: Dynamics of institutional stature. *Journal of Higher Education Management, 6*(1)*,* 7-28.

American Council on Education (2011). *Minorities in higher education: 2011 supplement*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

Anderman, E. M., Anderman, L. H., & Griesinger, T. (1999). The relation of present and possible academic selves during early adolescence to grade point average and achievement goals. *The Elementary School Journal, 100*(1), 3-17. https://doi.org/10.1086/461940

Anderson, J. D. (2002). Race in American higher education: Historical perspectives on current conditions. In W. A. Smith, P. G. Altbach, & K. Lomotey (Eds.), *The racial crisis in American higher education: Continuing challenges for the twenty-first century* (pp. 3-21). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Anfara, V. A. J., Jr., Brown, K. M., & Mangione, T. L. (2002). Qualitative analysis on stage: Making the research process more public. *Educational Researcher, 31*(7), 28-38. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X031007028

Assalone, A. E., & Fann, A. (2017). Understanding the influence of model minority stereotypes on Asian American community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *41*(7), 422-435. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2016.1195305

Barreno, Y., & Traut, C. A. (2012). Student decisions to attend public two-year community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *36*(11), 863-871. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668920903505007

Becker, G. S. (1964). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education*. New York: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Bell, D. (1973). *The coming of post-industrial society: A venture in social forecasting*. New York: Basic Books.

Bertaux, D. (1981). From the life-history approach to the transformation of sociological practice. In D. Bertaux (Ed.), *Biography and society: The life history approach in the social sciences* (pp.29-45). London: Sage.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. London: Sage Publications.

Bragg, D. D. (2011). Examining pathways to and through the community college for youth and adults. In J. C. Smart & M. B. Paulsen (Eds.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol 26, pp. 355-393). Dordrecht; New York: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0702-3_9

Brown, D. K. (1995). *Degrees of control: A sociology of educational expansion and occupational credentialism*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Bulkley, K. V. (1974). *A study of the academic achievement and graduation rate of transfer students to Michigan State University from two-year and four-year institutions*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University, East Lansing.

Cabrera, A. F. & La Nasa, S. M. (2000). Understanding the College-Choice Process. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, *2000*, 5-22. doi:10.1002/ir.10701

Cabrera, A. F., Nora, A., & Castaneda, M. B. (1993). College persistence: Structural equations modeling test of an integrated model of student retention. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *64*(2), 123-139.

Carson, A. D., Madison, T., & Santrock, J. W. (1987). Relationships between possible selves and self-reported problems of divorced and intact family adolescents. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, *7*(2), 191-204. https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431687072006

Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, *41*(5), 545–547. Retrieved from https://doi-org.udel.idm.oclc.org/10.1188/14.ONF.545-547

Chae, H. S. (2004). Talking back to the Asian model minority discourse: Korean-origin youth experiences in high school. *Journal of Intercultural Studies (Melbourne, Vic.), 25*(1), 59-73. https://doi.org/10.1080/0725686041000168702*7*

Chae, H. S. (2006). Using Critical Race Theory to explore Korean-origin working class youth's conceptualizations of identity. In C. C. Park, R. Endo, & A. L. Goodwin (Eds.), *Asian and Pacific American education: Learning, socialization, and identity* (pp. 219–240). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

Chang, J. (2005). Faculty student interaction at the community college: A focus on students of color. *Research in Higher Education, 46*(7), 769-802. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-004-6225-7

Chang, M. J. (2008). Asian evasion: A recipe for flawed resolutions. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education, 25*(7), 23.

Chapman, D. W. (1981). *A model of student college choice. The Journal of Higher Education*, *52*(5), 490-505. https://doi.org/10.2307/1981837

Chen, G. (2018). Second rate? Community college fight stereotypes [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://www.communitycollegereview.com/blog/second-rate-community-colleges-fight-stereotypes

Clark, B. R. (1962). *Educating the expert society*. San Francisco: Chandler Pub. Co.

Cohen, A. M., Brawer, F. B., & Kisker, C. B. (2013). *The American community college* (6th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, *94*(Suppl.), S95-S120. https://doi.org/10.1086/228943

College Board. (2008). *Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders: Facts, not fiction: Setting the record straight*. New York: College Board.

Collins, R. (1971). Functional and conflict theories of educational stratification. *American Sociological Review, 36(*6), 1002-1019. https://doi.org/10.2307/2093761

Commission on the Future of Community Colleges. (1988). *Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century*. Washington, DC: American Association of Community and Junior Colleges.

Cook, M. A. E. (2010). *The effects of students' perceptions of self, others, and institutions on community college transfer to a selective four-year university* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. http://search.proquest.com.udel.idm.oclc.org/pqdt/docview/822410964/42167E C4AA944444PQ/1?accountid=10457

Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). (2010). Freshman survey. Available at http://heri/ucla/edu/cirpoverview.php

Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.

Crouch, M., & McKenzie, H. (2006). The logic of small samples in interview based qualitative research. *Social Sciences Information*. *Information Sur les Sciences Sociales, 45*(4), 483-499. https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018406069584

Deil-Amen, R. (2011). Socio-academic integrative moments: Rethinking academic and social integration among two-year college students in career-related programs. *The Journal of Higher Education, 82*(1), 54-91. https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2011.0006

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Devos, T., & Banaji, M. R. (2005). American = White? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88(3), 447-466. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.3.447 PMID:15740439

Diaz, P. E. (1992). Effects of transfer on academic performance of community college students at the four-year institution. *Community Junior College Quarterly of Research and Practice*, *16*(3), 279–291. https://doi.org/10.1080/0361697920160307

Dougherty, K., Lahr, H., & Morest, V. S. (2017). *Reforming the American community college: Promising changes and their challenges* (CCRC Working Paper No. 98). New York, NY: Community College Research Center, Columbia University, Teachers College. Retrieved from https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/reforming-american-community-college-promising-changes-challenges.pdf

Dudley, D. M., Liu, L., Hao, L., & Stallard, C. (2015). Student engagement: A CCSSE follow-up study to improve student engagement in a community college. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *39*(12), 1153-1169. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2014.961589

Egan, T. (2007 January 7). Little Asia on the hill. *New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/07/education/edlife/07asian.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Ellis, M. M. (2013). Successful community college transfer students speak out. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *37*(2), 73-84. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668920903304914

Flaga, C. (2006). The process of transition for community college transfer students. *Community Journal of Research and Practice*, *30*(1), 3–19.

Foskett, N. H. & Hemsley-Brown, J. V. (1997). *Career perceptions and decision-making among young people in schools and college*. Leeds: Heist Publications.

Frank, R. A. (2001). Repositioned lives: Language, ethnicity, and narrative identity among Chinese-Vietnamese community college students in Los Angeles' San Gabriel Valley (California). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 6I(07A),* 2560. (UMI No. 9979017)

Fryberg, S., & Markus, H. (2007). Cultural models of education in American Indian, Asian American and European American contexts. *Social Psychology of Education, 10*(2), 213-246. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-007-9017-z

Gasman, M., Baez, B., & Turner, C. S. V. (2008). *Understanding minority-serving institutions*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture. In C. Geertz (Ed.), *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays* (pp. 3-30). New York: Basic Books.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co.

Gleazer, E. J. (1980). *The community college: Values, vision & vitality*. Washington, D.C: American Association of Community and Junior Colleges.

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). "How many interviews are enough?" An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, *18*(1), 59-82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Hagedorn, L. S., Maxwell, W., Rodriguez, P., Hocevar, D., & Fillpot, J. (2000). Peer and student-faculty relations in community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 24*(7), 587-598. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668920050139730

Halsey, A. H. (1960). The changing function of universities in advanced industrial societies. *Harvard Educational Review, 30*, 119-127.

Handel, S. (2007). Transfer students apply to college, too. How come we don't help them? *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *54*(9), 1.

Harry, B., Sturges, K. M., & Klingner, J. K. (2005). Mapping the process: An exemplar of process and challenge in grounded theory analysis. *Educational Researcher, 34*(2), 3-13. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X034002003

Heath, H. (2006). Exploring the influences and use of the literature during a grounded theory study. *Journal of Research in Nursing, 11*(6), 519-528. https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987106069338

Hemsley-Brown, J. (1999). College choice: Perceptions and priorities. *Educational Management and Administration, 27*(1), 85-98. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263211X990271007

Hills, J. R. (1965). Transfer shock: The academic performance of the junior college transfer. *Journal of Experimental Education*, *33*(3), 201–215. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1965.11010875

Holloway, I. (1997). *Basic Concepts for Qualitative Research.* London: Blackwell Science.

Horn, L. J. (1998). *Confronting the odds: Students at risk and the pipeline to higher education*. (NCES Report No. 98-094). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Hossler, D., Braxton, J., & Coopersmith, G. (1989) Understanding student college choice. In M. B. Paulsen (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 231-288). London, New York: Springer International Publishing.

Hossler, D., & Gallagher, K. S. (1987). Studying student college choice: A three-phase model and the implications for policymakers. *College and University Press*, *62*(3), 207-221.

Hossler, D., Schmit, J., & Vesper, N. (1999). *Going to college: How social, economic, and educational factors influence the decisions students make*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.

Hsia, J. (1988). Limits of affirmative action: Asian American access to higher education. *Educational Policy*, *2*(2), 117-136.

Hsia, J., & Peng, S. S. (2007). Asian American academic achievement: Facts and fiction. In N. Zane & L. C. Lee (Eds.), *Handbook of Asian American psychology* (pp. 325–358). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904888002002002

Hurtado, S., Inkelas, K. K., Briggs, C., & Rhee, B. S. (1997). Differences in college access and choice among racial/ethnic groups: Identifying continuing barriers. *Research in Higher Education, 38*(1), 43-75. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024948728792

Ireland, S. M. (2015). Fostering success or stratification?: A macroapproach to understanding "success" in the community college context. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 39*(2), 150-162. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2013.775087

Jennings, R. (2017). International students at community colleges: Challenges and opportunities for this unique segment of U.S. higher education. *New Directions for Student Services, 2017*(158), 61-71. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20220

Johnsrud, L. K., & Sadao, K. C. (1998). The common experience of "otherness": Ethnic and racial minority faculty. *The Review of Higher Education, 21*(4), 315-342. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.1998.0010

Kao, G. (2000). Group images and possible selves among adolescents: Linking stereotypes to expectations by race and ethnicity. *Sociological Forum: Official Journal of the Eastern Sociological Society, 15*(3), 407-430.

Kerpelman, J. L. (2006). Using Q methodology to study possible selves. In C. Dunkel & J. Kerpelman (Eds.), *Possible selves: Theory, research and application* (pp. 163-186). New York: Nova Science.

Kim, J. (2001). Asian American identity development theory. In C. Wijeyesinghe & B. W. Jackson (Eds.), *New perspectives on racial identity development: A theoretical and practical anthology* (pp. 67–90). New York: New York University Press.

Kim, K. A., Sax, L. J., Lee, J. J., & Hagedorn, L. S. (2010). Redefining nontraditional students: Exploring the self-perceptions of community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 34*(5), 402-422. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668920701382633

King, N., & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in qualitative research*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Kreider, P. E. & Walleri, R. D. (1988). Seizing the agenda: Institutional effectiveness and student outcomes for community colleges, *Community College Review*, *16*(2), 44-50. https://doi.org/10.1177/009155218801600207

Kurlaender, M. (2006). Choosing community college: Factors affecting Latino college choice. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2006*(133):7-16. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.223

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage.

Laanan, F. S. (1996). Making the transition: Understanding the adjustment process of community college transfer students. *Community College Review*, 23(4), 69–84. https://doi.org/10.1177/009155219602300407

Laanan, F. S. (1998). *Beyond transfer shock: A study of students' college experiences and adjustment processes at UCLA*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles

Laden, B. V. (2004). Serving emerging majority students. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2004*(127), 5–19. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.160

National Commission on Asian American & Pacific Islander Research in Education (CARE). (2008). Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders: Facts, not Fiction, Setting the Record Straight. Retrieved from https://professionals.collegeboard.com/prof download/08–0608-AAPI.pdf

Lee, S. J. (1994). Behind the model-minority stereotype: Voices and high- and low-achieving Asian American students. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 25*(4), 413–429. https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.1994.25.4.04x0530j

Lee, R. G. (1999). *Orientals: Asian Americans in popular culture*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Lee, S. J. (2003). Model minorities and perpetual foreigners: The impact of stereotyping on Asian American students. In M. Sadowski (Ed.), *Adolescents at school: Perspectives on youth, identity, and education* (pp. 41–49). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Lendy, S. J. (2009). Perceptions from Students and the Community about Community Colleges. *Community & Junior College Libraries*, *15*(2), 91-117. https://doi.org/10.1080/02763910902832230

Leondari, A., Syngollitou, E., & Kiosseoglou, G. (1998). Academic achievement, motivation and future selves. *Educational Studies, 24*(2), 153-163. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305569980240202

Levinson, D. L. (2005). *Community colleges: A reference handbook*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

Lew, J. (2004). The "other" story of model minorities: Korean American high school dropouts in an urban context. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 35*(3), 303-323. https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2004.35.3.303

Lew, J. (2006). *Asian Americans in class: Charting the achievement gap among Korean American youth.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Lin, N. (2001a). Building a network theory of social capital. In N. Lin, K. Cook, & R. S. Burt (Eds.), *Social capital: Theory and research* (pp. 3-29). New York: Aldine De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815447.002

Lin, N. (2001b). *Social capital: A theory of social structure and action*. New York: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815447

Lum, L. (2004). Not your father's community college. *Black Issues in Higher Education*, *21*(9), 54. Retrieved from http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=64hid=54sid=f64ae0f1-f0ab-4ca8-a754-76b842a13c%40sessionmgr7 Accessed February 15, 2006

Lundberg, C. A. (2014). Peers and faculty as predictors of learning for community college students. *Community College Review, 42*(2), 79-98. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552113517931

Ma, J., & Baum, S. (2016). *Trends in Community Colleges: Enrollment, Prices, Student Debt, and Completion.* New York: The College Board; Retrieved from http://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/trends-in-community-colleges-research-brief.pdf

Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *The American Psychologist, 41*(9), 954-969. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.41.9.954

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2016). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*(4), 370-396. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346

Mason, M. (2010). Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews [63 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *11*(3), 8. Retrieved from http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs100387.

Maxwell, W. E. (2000). Student peer relations at a community college. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *24*(3), 207-217. https://doi.org/10.1080/106689200264169

McDonough, P. M. (1997). *Choosing colleges: How social class and schools structure opportunity*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

McFarland, J., Hussar, B., de Brey, C., Snyder, T., Wang, X., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Gebrekristos, S., Zhang, J., Rathbun, A., Barmer, A., Bullock Mann, F., & Hinz, S. (2017). *The Condition of Education 2017* (NCES 2017- 144). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2017144

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Mitkos, Y. M., & Bragg, D. D. (2008). Perceptions of the community college of high school counselors and advisors. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *32*(4-6), 375-390.

Morse, J. M. (1994). Designing funded qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp.220-235). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mullen, A. L. (2010). *Degrees of inequality: Culture, class, and gender in American higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Museus, S. D. (2014). *Asian American students in higher education*. New York: 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. https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.292

Musu-Gillette, L., de Brey, C., McFarland, J., Hussar, W., Sonnenberg, W., & Wilkinson-Flicker, S. (2017). Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2017 (NCES 2017-051). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch

National Center for Education Statistics. (1993). *Digest of education statistics.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

National Center for Education Statistics (2010). Special analysis 2008: Community colleges. Retrieved January 10, 2010 from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2008/analysis/sa02f.asp#info

National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). *Digest of education statistics.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Nauta, M. M., Epperson, D. L., & Kahn, J. H. (1998). A multiple-groups analysis of predictors of higher level career aspirations among women in mathematics, science, and engineering majors. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *45*(4), 483-496. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.45.4.483

Ng, J. C., Lee, S. S., & Pak, Y. K. (2007). Contesting the model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes: A critical review of literature on Asian

Americans in education. *Review of Research in Education*, *31*(1), 95-130. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X07300046095

Noel, L. (1985). Increasing student retention: New challenges and potential. In L. Noel, R. Levitz, & D. Saluri (Eds.), *Increasing student retention* (pp. 1-27). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Nodine, T., Jaeger, L., Venezia, A., & Bracco, K. R., with research support from Public Agenda (2012). *Connection by design: Students' perceptions of their community college experiences*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

Nolan, B. (1989). Who knows where the path leads? Educational goals and student success. *Community College Review, 17*(3), 44-49. https://doi.org/10.1177/009155218901700306

Oyserman, D., & Fryberg, S. (2006). The possible selves of diverse adolescents: Content and function across gender, race and national origin. In C. Dunkel & J. Kerpelman (Eds.), *Possible selves: Theory, research and application* (pp. 17-39). New York: Nova Science.

Oyserman D., & Markus, H. R. (1993). The sociocultural self. In J. Suls (Ed.), *Psychological perspectives on the self: The self in social perspective.* (pp. 187-220). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Ozaki, C. (2016). Possible selves, possible futures. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice, 17*(4), 413-436. https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025115579248

Park, C. C. (1998). Educational and occupational aspirations of Korean youth in Los Angeles. In R. Endo, C. C. Park, & J. N. Tuchida (Eds.), *Current issues in Asian and Pacific American education* (pp. 65–76). Suth El Monte, CA: Pacific Asia Press.

Park, C. C. (2001). Educational aspirations of Southeast Asian students. In C. C. Park, A. L. Goodwin, & S. J. Lee (Eds.), *Research on the education of Asian and Pacific Americans* (pp. 1–20). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Park, C. C. (2003). Educational and occupational aspirations of Asian American students. In C. C. Park, A. L. Goodwin, & S. J. Lee (Eds.), *Asian American identities, families, and schooling: A volume in research on the education of Asian and Pacific Americans* (pp. 135–156). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Park, G. C. (2011). Becoming a "model minority": Acquisition, construction and enactment of American identity for Korean immigrant students. *The Urban Review, 43*(5), 620-635. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-010-0164-8

Park, G. C., & Lee, S. J. (2010). The model minority stereotype and the underachiever: Academic and social struggles of underachieving Korean immigrant high school students. In R. Saran & R. Diaz (Eds.), *Beyond stereotypes: Minority children of immigrants in urban schools* (pp. 13-27). Rotterdam: Sense.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1976). Informal interaction with faculty and freshman ratings of academic and non-academic experience in college. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *70*(1), 35-41. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.1976.10884944

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Perna, L. W. (2000). Differences in the decision to enroll in college among African Americans, Hispanics, and whites. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *71*(2), 117-141. https://doi.org/10.2307/2649245

Perna, L. W. (2006). Studying college choice: A proposed conceptual model. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*, Vol 21. (pp. 99-157) Springer, Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer. https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-4512-3_3

Perna, L. W., & Kurban, E. R. (2013). Improving college access and choice. In L. W. Perna & A. P. Jones (Eds.), *The state of college access and completion: Improving college success for students from underrepresented groups* (pp. 10-33). New York, NY: Routledge.

Perna, L. W., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., Bell, A., Anderson, R., Li, C., & Thomas, S. L. (2008). The role of college counseling in shaping college opportunity: Variations across high schools. *The Review of Higher Education*, 31(2), 131-160. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2007.0073

Perna, L. W., & Titus, M. (2005). The relationship between parental involvement as social capital and college enrollment: An examination of racial/ethnic group

differences. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *76*(5), 485-518. https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2005.0036

Petersen, W. (1966, January 9). Success story, Japanese-American style. *New York Times Magazine.* pp. 20, 21, 33, 36, 38, 40, 41, 43.

Pew Research Center. (2012). The rise of Asian Americans. Retrieved June 19, 2012, from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/06/19/the-rise-of-asian-americans/

Pew Research Center. (2017a). Key factors about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing. Retrieved September 8, 2012, from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/08/key-facts-about-asian-americans/

Pew Research Center. (2017b). Koreans in the U.S. fact sheet. Retrieved September 8, 2012, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/fact-sheet/asian-americans-koreans-in-the-u-s/

Pham, N., & Dykstra, P. (1996). *A positive learning environment is everybody's business: Asian Pacific American students speak*. Santa Ana, CA: Rancho Santiago Community College District. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED400893)

Pizzolato, J. E. (2006). Achieving college student possible selves: Navigating the space between commitment and achievement of long-term identity goals. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology, 12*(1), 57-69. https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.12.1.57 PMID:16594855

Pizzolato, J. E. (2007). Impossible selves: Investigating students' persistence decisions when their career-possible selves border on impossible. *Journal of Career Development, 33*(3), 201-223. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845306296644

Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2001). *Legacies: The story of the immigrant second generation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Proper, F. (n.d.). *Student perceptions of community colleges*. Retrieved from http://www.palmbeachstate.edu/honors/Documents/student_perception_of_community_colleges_faithproper.pdf

Remington, N., Remington, R., & Community College Baccalaureate Association. (2013). *Alternative pathways to the baccalaureate: Do community colleges offer a viable solution to the nation's knowledge deficit?*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Pub.

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., & Elam, G. (2003). Designing and selecting samples. In J. Ritchie & J. Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (pp. 77-108). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Roderick, M., Nagaoka, J., Coca, V., Moeller, E., Roddie, K., Gilliam, J., & Patton, D. (2008). *From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to College*. Chicago, IL: Consortium for Chicago School Research.

Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., Bell, A. D., & Perna, L. W. (2008). Contextual influences on parental involvement in college going: Variations by socioeconomic class. *The Journal of Higher Education, 79*(5), 564-586. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2008.11772117

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452226651

Ruvolo, A. P., & Markus, H. R. (1992). Possible selves and performance: The power of self-relevant imagery. *Social Cognition*, *10*(1), 95-124. https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.1992.10.1.95

Ryle, G. (1949). *The Concept of Mind.* London: Hutchinson.

Schultz, T. (1961). Investment in human capital. *The American Economic Review, 51*(1), 1-17.

Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Shih, M., Pittinsky, T. L., & Ambady, N. (1999). Stereotype susceptibility: Identity salience and shifts in quantitative performance. *Psychological Science, 10*(1), 80–83. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00111

Smith, J. (2013). The effect of college applications on enrollment. *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, *14*(1), 151-188. https://doi.org/10.1515/bejeap-2013-0002

Somers, P., Haines, K., Keene, B., Bauer, J., Pfeiffer, M., McCluskey, J., … Sparks, B. (2006). Towards a theory of choice for community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *30*(1), 53-67.

Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Huie, F., Wakhungu, P. K., Yuan, X., Nathan, A., & Hwang,

Y. (2017). *Tracking transfer: Measures of effectiveness in helping community college students to complete bachelor's degrees* (Signature Report No. 13). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Retrieved from https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SignatureReport13.pdf

Stennick, J. S. (1989). *Persistence of new full-time students: A study in a community college* (Order No. 9009696). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I. (303802248). Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/303802248?accountid=10457

Stoddard, L. (1921). *The rising tide of color against white world-supremacy*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons.

Strahan, E. J., & Wilson, A. E. (2006). Temporal comparisons, identity, and motivation: The relation between past, present, and possible future selves. In C. Dunkel & J. Kerpelman (Eds.), *Possible selves: Theory, research and applications* (pp. 1-15). Hauppauge, NY, US: Nova Science Publishers.

Success story of one minority group in U.S. (1966, December 26). *U.S. News & World Report*, pp. 6–9.

Takaki, R. (1998). *Strangers from a different shore: A history of Asian Americans*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Teranishi, R. T. (2010). *Asians in the ivory tower: Dilemmas of racial inequality in American higher education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Teranishi, R. T., Ceja, M., Antonio, A. L., Allen, W. R., & McDonough, P. M. (2004). The college-choice process for Asian Pacific Americans: Ethnicity and socioeconomic class in context. *The Review of Higher Education, 27*(4), 527-551. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2004.0025

Tinto, V. (1985). Dropping out and other forms of withdrawal from college. In L. Noel, R. Levitz, D. Saluri, & Associates. (Eds.), *Increasing student retention* (pp. 28-43). San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1997). Classrooms as communities: Exploring the educational character of student persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *68*, 599-623.

Townsend, B. K. (1995). Community college transfer students: A case study of survival. *The Review of Higher Education*, *18*(2), 175–193. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.1995.0022

Tucciarone, K. M. (2007). Community college image - By Hollywood. *Community College Enterprise, 13*(1), 37-53.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Summary files*. Retrieved from http://factfinder/census.gov/servelet/DatasetMainPageServlet

U.S. Census Bureau. (2013). *State & county quick facts*. Retrieved from http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html

U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). *Income and poverty in the United States: 2016.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Wang, L. L. (2008). Myths and realities of Asian American success. In G. Li & L. Wang (Eds.), *Model minority myth revisited* (pp. 21-42). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.

Wang, W. W., Chang, J. C., & Lew, J. W. (2009). Reasons for attending, expected obstacles, and degree aspirations of Asian Pacific American community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 33*(7), 571-593. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668920902885574

Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Education Division. (1997). *The effect of race and ethnic background on students' community and technical college experience* (Research Report 97-5). Olympia, WA: Author.

Watt, R. R. G. & Touton, F. C. (1930). Relative scholastic achievement of native students and junior college transfers at the University of Southern California. *California Quarterly of Secondary Education*, *5,* 243–248.

Wexler, J., & Pyle, N. (2012). Dropout prevention and the model-minority stereotype: Reflections from an Asian American high school dropout. *Urban Review: Issues and Ideas in Public Education, 44*(5), 551-570. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-012-0207-4

Wirt, L. G., & Jaeger, A. J. (2014). Seeking to understand faculty-student interaction at community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 38*(11), 980-994. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2012.725388

Wong, P., Lai, C. F., Nagasawa, R., & Lin, T. (1998). Asian Americans as a model

minority: Self-perceptions and perceptions by other racial groups. *Sociological Perspectives, 41*(1), 95-118. https://doi.org/10.2307/1389355

Worthy, E. H. Jr. (1965). Yung Wing in America. *Pacific Historical Review*, *34*(3), 265-287. https://doi.org/10.2307/3636523

Wood, J. L., & Harris, F. I. I. I. (2015). The Effect of College Selection Factors on Persistence: An Examination of Black and Latino Males in the Community College. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice,* 16(4), 511-535.

Wu, F. H. (2001). *Yellow: Race in America beyond Black and white*. New York: Basic Books.

Wu. F. H. & Wang, T. H. (1996). Beyond the model minority myth: Why Asian Americans support affirmative action, *Guild Practitioner*, 53, 35-47.

Yeh, T. L. (2002). Asian American college students who are educationally at risk. In M. K. McEwen, C. M. Kodama, A. N. Alvarez, S. Lee, & C. T. H. Liang (Eds.) *Working with Asian American college students* (pp. 61-72). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.39

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR BACKGROUND

Name:
Age:
Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male

Please check the box that is relevant to you. You can check multiple boxes.

1) I am ☐ a full-time student ☐ part-time student at the community college.

2) I currently live with (mark all that apply) ☐ Self only ☐ Father ☐ Mother
    ☐ Grandfather ☐ Grandmother ☐ Sister (☐ older ☐ younger)
    ☐ Brother (☐ older ☐ younger) ☐ Aunt ☐ Uncle
    ☐ Others (Please specify:)

3) My household income is between: ☐ Under $ 10,000
                                      ☐ $10,000 - $19,999
                                      ☐ $20,000 - $29,999
                                      ☐ $30,000 - $39,999
                                      ☐ $40,000 - $49,999
                                      ☐ $50,000 - $74,999
                                      ☐ $75,000 - $99,999
                                      ☐ $100,000 - $150,000
                                      ☐ Over $150,000
                                      ☐ I don't know

4) Relationship with caregiver 1:   Relationship with caregiver 2:
    (e.g. father, mother…etc.)   (e.g. father, mother…etc.)

    _____   _____

My primary caregiver 1's   My primary caregiver 2's
highest educational attainment: highest educational attainment:
☐ Under high school diploma   ☐ Under high school diploma
   [e.g. dropout, only primary education, or no compulsory education]
☐ High school graduate   ☐ High school graduate
☐ Some college degree without degree   ☐ Some college degree without degree
☐ Associate's degree (occupational)   ☐ Associate's degree (occupational)

☐ Associate's degree (academic)   ☐ Associate's degree (academic)
☐ Bachelor's degree   ☐ Bachelor's degree
☐ Master's degree   ☐ Master's degree
☐ Professional degree   ☐ Professional degree
☐ Doctoral degree   ☐ Doctoral degree

5) My caregivers are involved in:

My primary caregiver 1   My primary caregiver 2
☐ Self-employed   ☐ Self-employed
☐ Working full-time for pay   ☐ Working full-time for pay
☐ Working part-time for pay   ☐ Working part-time for pay
☐ Not working, but looking for a job ☐ Not working, but looking for a job
☐ Other (e.g. home duties, retired) ☐ Other (e.g. home duties, retired)

My primary caregiver 1's main job is: My primary caregiver 2's main job is:

_____   _____

6) My high school GPA was:
     ☐ above 3.5
     ☐ between 3.0 and 3.4
     ☐ between 2.5 and 2.9
     ☐ between 2.0 and 2.4
     ☐ between 1.5 and 1.9
     ☐ between 1.0 and 1.4
     ☐ below 1.0
     ☐ I don't know/remember or it does not exist.

7) My current college GPA is:
     ☐ above 3.5
     ☐ between 3.0 and 3.4
     ☐ between 2.5 and 2.9
     ☐ between 2.0 and 2.4
     ☐ between 1.5 and 1.9
     ☐ between 1.0 and 1.4
     ☐ below 1.0
     ☐ I don't know/remember

8) I have attended any after-school programs or cram schools for my academic development during high school.

☐ Yes   ☐ No

When did you attend? _____

9) I have applied to other colleges before this community college
☐ Yes   ☐ No
If yes, which colleges? Please feel free to list all the colleges you applied.

Appendix B

IINTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Exploring prior educational experiences in high school

1) Where did you go to high school? When did you graduate?
   When did you immigrate to the U.S.? Why? (educational/occupational opportunity or other reasons?) Can I ask your immigrant status? US citizen? Permanent resident? Or other status?

2) How would you describe yourself in high school? What kind of student were you?

3) What activities were you involved in both in and out of school during high school? (prompts: sports, arts, clubs, job, family, religious activities, etc.)

4) What was your favorite part of your high school life? What was your least favorite part of your high school life?

5) How would you describe your academic performance when you attended high school? How have you tried to change or maintain your academic performance from high school to community college or not at all?

6) Can you describe the racial/ethnic makeup of your high school?

7) How do you describe yourself in terms of your race/ethnic background or identities?

8) How would you describe the peer group you belonged to in high school? Why did you hang out with this group? What is it about this group that attracted you to them and not to other groups?

9) Do you think that race/ethnicity played a role in your peer group? If so, how? (prompt: positive experiences/support? Negative experiences, such as prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination?)

Exploring college decisions

10) Do you remember when you decided to go to college for the first time? If so, when? Was it your own decision or influenced by others? (If so, who?).
   Did you consider any other post high school plans (other than college) and if so, why didn't you go with those plans?

11) [Provide the cards that listed the reasons to attend community college] Can you rank your priority that influenced your decision to this community college? [List of the reasons]: 1. Affordable tuition, 2. Distance from home, 3. Reputation of college, 4. Makeup of student body, 5. Recommendation from others (e.g. family, teachers, friends, or others), 6. Academically good fit for me, 7. Programs or majors offered that interested me 8. Other (Please specify:)

Exploring experiences at community colleges and constructing possible selves

12) What do you study at community college? When did you start to attend?

13) What did you know about community colleges in general before you attended? What did you know about this particular community college before you attended? How do you think other Koreans perceive community college?

14) Is this school how you imagined (as a college) it would be? In what ways? How similar or different are your images as a college student before you attend and now?

15) How would you describe your current school to incoming students?

16) What do you like about your school? What did you dislike about your school?

17) Can you describe your relationship with faculty or campus staff or administrators? Do you have any faculty that you consider a mentor or a role model?

18) Who is your support system? Do you have anyone to ask for help if you face any difficulties or challenges? How did/do they help you?

19) What are your academic goals for yourself this year? Are you satisfied with how you have done in your classes so far? In what way do you try to improve your academic performance?

20) What opportunities or advantages do you see (or have you encountered) in attending community colleges as [race/ethnicity that the participant identified]?

21) What challenges or disadvantages do you see (or have you faced) in attending community colleges as [race/ethnicity that the participant identified]?

22) What's your experience like as [race/ethnicity that the participant identified] on this campus? Do you think students or faculty here have any stereotypes of Asian

American students? Do you have any personal experiences with those stereotypes on campus?

Some common stereotypes of Asian Americans are that they attend prestigious Ivy leagues schools, that they are smarter than other students, that they are good at math and sciences.

Do you have any experiences related to those stereotypes? In what ways do you think those stereotypes influence your experience at this school, if at all?

23) Please imagine what you'll be like, and what you'll be doing next year. What are things you hope to achieve as a student on this campus?

How has attending school here shaped how you think of yourself and the options you have for your future and future plans? Do you see more or less possibilities for yourself than before you attended school here?

24) Please imagine you would not like to be next year. For example, things you are concerned about or want to avoid being like. What are things you have any fears as a student on this campus?

25) What is your plan after this community college? (Going into a professional field? Transfer to a 4-year college? Or something else?) How certain do you feel that you will be able to achieve your plan?

26) How do you think being Korean shapes how you think about your future?

27) What are your ultimate professional and/or occupational goals? Is there any experience or person that has influenced these goals? How do you think your community college may help or support you to achieve your goals? (or impede?) How certain do you feel that you will be able to achieve your goals?

Appendix C

RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENT

Korean (American) Students Needed!
Your voice is so important!!!

I am seeking individuals for participating in a research study exploring the experiences of Korean (American) students at community colleges.

Are you interested in sharing your experiences of community colleges?

There will be a compensation with a **$15 gift card** at the end of participation. (You will be asked to have an hour-interview.)

Eligibility to participate

- **A least 18 years old (or more) and identify yourself as Korean (American)**
- **Either born in the U.S. or immigrated into the U.S. AND graduated from any high schools in the U.S.**
- **Currently attend community colleges**

If you are eligible and interested in participating or if you have any questions, please feel free to contact.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Hye Jung Choi (University of Delaware)
Principal investigator
hjcchoi@udel.edu
XXX-XXX-XXXX

Appendix D

IRB APRROVAL LETTER

RESEARCH OFFICE

210 Hullihen Hall
University of Delaware
Newark, Delaware 19716-1551
Ph: 302/831-2136
Fax: 302/831-2828

DATE: September 6, 2016

TO: Hye Jung Choi
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [952204-1] Constructing Possible Selves: Korean
                   American Students in Community Colleges

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: September 6 6, 2016
EXPIRATION DATE: September 5, 2017
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # *(6,7)*

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that <u>informed consent </u>is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent

form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Farnese-McFarlane at (302) 831-1119 or nicolefm@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Appendix E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

University of Delaware
Informed Consent Form

Title of Project: Constructing Possible Selves:
Korean American Students in Community Colleges

Principal Investigator: Hye Jung Choi

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form tells you about the study including its purpose, what you will do if you decide to participate, and any risks and benefits of being in the study. Please read the information below and ask the research team questions about anything we have not made clear before you decide whether to participate. Your participation is voluntary, and you can refuse to participate or withdraw at anytime without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and a copy will be given to you to keep for your reference.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to explore Korean American students' possible selves (identity related to the past, present and the future) and their educational experiences in community college. You were asked to participate in the study because you are currently enrolled in community college and you are Korean American. This study expects to include 30 students.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

During this study, you will be asked to answer some questions about your prior experience in high school, decision-makings to attend community colleges, your current educational experiences   in community colleges and your plans for the future. First, you will be asked to complete a survey about your background information and then you will be asked to complete one interview in a location that is convenient for you. The interview will be audio-recorded. If there are any questions you feel you cannot answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, feel free to indicate this and I will move on to the next question. After the interview, I may ask you to clarify your answers through a second

interview or follow-up email.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no known risks associated with participation in the study.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS?

It could help you to have an opportunity to examine your educational experiences in community college. The responses you answer may help educators to better understand how to support you and other Korean American students in order to be successful in community college.

HOW WILL CONFIDENTIALITY BE MAINTAINED?

I will make every effort to keep all research records that identify you confidential to the extent permitted by law. Your real name will not be used in any reports or presentations related to this research. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

WILL THERE BE ANY COSTS RELATED TO THE RESEARCH?

There are no costs associated with participating in the study

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

Taking part in this research study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to participate in this research. If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time. If you decide not to participate or if you decide to stop taking part in the research at a later date, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you change your mind about participating in the study, you may withdraw from the study at any time and I will destroy any data that you have shared. Your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with Montgomery College.

WHO SHOULD YOU CALL IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the Principal Investigator, Hye Jung Choi (hjcchoi@udel.edu or XXX-XXX-XXXX) or Rosalie Rolón-Dow (rosa@udel.edu or XXX-XXX- XXXX) at the

University of Delaware.

Your signature below indicates that you are agreeing to take part in this research study. You have been informed about the study's purpose, procedures, possible risks and benefits. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and those questions have been answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

By signing this consent form, you indicate that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I understand the study described above and have been given a copy of the description as outlined above. I am 18 years of age or older and I agree to participate.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____
Printed Name of Participant

Appendix F

RELATIONS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How do Korean American students' perceptions and experiences at community colleges influence the way they construct their possible selves?

Research question	Interview question
What opportunities and obstacles do they see (or experience) as community college students? In what ways do their experiences at community colleges intersect with the model minority stereotypes?	• Do you remember when you decided to go to college? If so, when? Was it your own decision or influenced by others? (If so, who?) Did you consider any other post high school plans, and if so, why didn't you go with those plans? • What did you know about community colleges in general before you attended? What did you know about this particular community college before you attended? How do you think other Koreans perceive community college? • Is this school how you imagined (as a college) it would be? In what ways? How similar or different are your images as a college student before you attend and now? • How would you describe your current school to incoming students? • What do you like about your school? What did you dislike about your school? • Can you describe your relationship with faculty or campus staff or administrators? Do you have any faculty that you consider a mentor or a role model? • Who is your support system? Do you have anyone to ask for help if you face any difficulties or challenges? How did/do they help you? • What opportunities or advantages do you see (or have you encountered) in attending community colleges as [race/ethnicity that the participant identified]? • What challenges or disadvantages do you see (or have you faced) in attending community colleges as [race/ethnicity that the participant identified]? • What's your experience like as [race/ethnicity that the participant identified] on this campus? Do you think students or faculty here have any stereotypes of Asian American students? Do you have any personal experiences with those stereotypes on campus?

	• How do you think being Korean shapes how you think about your future?
What possible selves do Korean American students construct while attending community college?	• What are your academic goals for yourself this year? Are you satisfied with how you have done in your classes so far? In what way do you try to improve your academic performance? • Please imagine what you'll be like, and what you'll be doing next year. What are things you hope to achieve as a student on this campus? • How has attending school here shaped how you think of yourself and the options you have for your future? Do you see more or less possibilities for yourself than before you attended school here? • Please imagine you would not like to be next year. For example, things you are concerned about or want to avoid being like. What are things you have any fears as a student on this campus? • What is your plan after this community college? (Going into a professional field? Transfer to a 4-year college? Or something else?) How certain do you feel that you will be able to achieve your plans? • What are your ultimate professional and/or occupational goals? Is there any experience or person that has influenced these goals? How do you think your community college may help or support you to achieve your goals (or impede)? How certain do you feel that you will be able to achieve your goals?

Appendix G

LIST OF CODES

Topic	Code	Description
Experiences in high schools	1. Types of students	Participants describe what kind of students they were (including descriptions of participants' characteristics or personality), attitudes or perceptions on the academic work that may provide insight into participants as students.
	2. Attitude/perception on academic work	Participants describe their attitudes toward academic work. For example, they talk about their motivation (e.g. no motivation or very motivated) or they describe how easy or hard they feel it is to get a good grade).
	3. Challenges & Struggles	Participants talk about their challenges and struggles during high school years. This includes both academic and social challenges. For example, English language barriers, lack of resources for college admission, strict academic environment in high school and peer (or parental) pressures on academic work.
	4. Comparison of academic environment	Participants compare academic environment of high schools in U.S. and Korea. This is only applicable for those who immigrated from Korea and had a prior educational experience in Korea.
	5. Dislike	Participants describe least favorite parts of high school life.
	6. Improvement/ Adjustment/ Change	Participants describe how they adjusted or improved their high school life. This involves academic and social traits.
	7. Involvement in clubs or student organizations	Participants discuss whether/how they were involved in clubs and/or student organizations.
	8. Like	Participants describe their favorite parts of high school life.
	9. Parenting style	Participants describe their parents' attitude on their academic work.

210

	10. Peer relationship	Participants talk about their relationship with peers in high schools. This includes relationships not only with Koreans but also with non-Koreans. Participants describe their peer groups and some attributions such as race, ethnicity, culture, language, and friendship which influenced their peer relationships in high school.
Identity	11. Self-identified identity	(Identity fluidity or shift)
		Participants talk about their identity, specifically how they see and/or think of themselves. They also discuss their identity fluid and shift. This includes nationalistic, cosmopolitan, and Americanized identities. Participants also talk about identity that is embedded in culture.
	12. Identity perceived by others	Participants discuss their identity/how others view or think of them.
	13. Identity struggles/challenges	Participants discuss how they struggled with their identity. This includes their misfit to their own culture. They also talk about the differences between Koreanized Americans and Americanized Koreans and which they would fit into.
	14. Religious identity	Participants talk about their identity related to religion. (This is related to their future plan later.)
	15. Stereotypes/images of Asians/Koreans	Participants express their feelings or opinions about the stereotypes or images of Asians or Koreans. They also talk about how different (or similar) they are compared to their group images or stereotypes and discuss how they dealt with these stereotypes or images.
Experiences in community colleges	16. Advantage/ Opportunity at community colleges	Participants discuss any opportunities or advantages attending community colleges. This includes academic opportunities such as easy access, being exclusive or competitive within the program, and available resources. This also entails relationships with peers and professors (e.g., support), and the characteristics of

		peers (e.g., goal-oriented) and professors (e.g., caring).
	17. Alternative plan	Participants describe alternative plans besides going to colleges.
	18. Attitude toward academic work	Participants describe their attitudes on academic work at community college (CC). For examples, some participants think it is easy to get a good grade if they just follow what the professors ask to do. Or they express no interest or care about their grades.
	19. Challenges/ disadvantages at community colleges	Participants describe any challenges and disadvantage of attending community colleges. It entails academic and social difficulty. For instance, they talk about the lack of information about CC (or resources on campus), the diversity of programs and difficulty to make friends.
	20. Comparison between community colleges and 4-year college	Participants compare community colleges with 4-year colleges, particularly focusing on differences.
	21. Decision to community colleges	Participants talk about their reasons or decisions to go to community colleges. This includes (but not limited to) affordable tuition, close distance, recommendation from others, rejection from other schools, maintaining legal status and other reasons. In addition, this includes the narratives about how they navigate their current CC.
	22. Dislike	Participants describe what they dislike about their CC.
	23. First college decision	Participants discuss the very first time to think about going to college. This included the decisions influenced by others such as parents, teachers, and peers as well as their first thought for college by themselves.
	24. Like	Participants describe what they like about their CC.

	25. Perceptions of (going to) college	Participants discuss their opinions about going to college. For example, many participants consider that going to college is a natural step after high school or only option or choice after high school.
	26. Perceptions of community colleges	Participants describe their (positive and negative) perceptions (including expectation and images as well) about CC. This includes their expectations about CC, comparison with HS (particularly negative perspectives), a good foundation or a stepping stone for exploring what they want for the future. Participants also describe Koreans' (mostly negative) perceptions on community colleges and their experiences with these perceptions.
	27. Perceptions on faculty	Participants describe their opinions or thoughts about faculty at CC. For instance, they discuss their faculty as a role model or mentor as well as the quality of faculty.
	28. Relationship	Participants explain the relationship with peers, faculty or school personnel. They also discuss how they get supports from school. It also includes their expressions of feeling of belonging or pride.
	29. Resources at community colleges	Participants describe any resources that are available at CC.
	30. Students' life	Participants describe the campus life particularly about student organizations or clubs. It includes whether or not they are involved in club activities and describe what they do as extracurricular. Or they explain why they do not want to be involved.
	31.Suggestions/improvement/advice/ recommendation for community colleges	Participants discuss any suggestions, advice, recommendation for improving their community colleges or to incoming students.
	32. Support	Participants describe any supports (academic, mental) from CC.
Possible selves	33. Relation between community college and self	Participants describe the relation between CC and the self. For example, they talk

		about how attending CC shape to think of themselves.
	34. Fearful/negative selves	Participants describe their fears or being afraid of not being for their future.
	35. Relation between goals and community colleges	Participants describe how attending CC shapes how they think of their options for future.
	36. Relation between goals and identity	Participants describe how attending CC shapes how they think of their options for future.
	37. Goals/plans for the future	Participants describe their future goals or plans.
	38. Hopeful/positive selves	Participants describe their hope for the future or positively envision their future.
	39. Level of certainty	Participants describe their feelings about how certain they will achieve their goals.
	40. Motivation for future	Participants discuss their motivations or events that influence future goals or plans.