Majority to Minority Shift: Experiences for American Born Chinese College Students from Predominant Chinese American Communities to Predominantly White Institutions

Joseph C. Chung
University of San Francisco, jchung_703@yahoo.com

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Majority to Minority Shift: Experiences for American Born Chinese College Students from Predominant Chinese American Communities to Predominantly White Institutions

A Clinical Dissertation Presented to

The University of San Francisco
School of Nursing and Health Professions
Department of Health Professions
Clinical Psychology PsyD Program

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Psychology

By

Joseph C. Chung

June 2021
PsyD Clinical Dissertation Signature Page

This Clinical Dissertation, written under the direction of the student’s Clinical Dissertation Chair and Committee and approved by Members of the Committee, has been presented to and accepted by the faculty of the Clinical Psychology PsyD Program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Psychology. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the student alone.

Student Signature

______________________________________________  6/30/21
Student
Date

Clinical Dissertation Committee Member Signatures

______________________________________________  6/30/21
Committee Chair
Date

______________________________________________  7/12/21
Committee Member
Date

______________________________________________  7/12/2021
Committee Member
Date

______________________________________________
Committee Member (if applicable)
Date

Administrator Signatures

______________________________________________  7/12/21
Program Director, Clinical Psychology PsyD Program
Date

______________________________________________  7/13/2021
Dean, School of Nursing and Health Professions
Date
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Dedications

I am dedicating this work to my amazing partner Victoria, and our two wonderful children, Ethan and Ted for the tremendous patience you’ve given me over years as I worked to complete this dissertation. Victoria, I also truly appreciate your help and support throughout the writing process, as well as the encouragement you’ve provided.

I am also dedicating this work to my mother and brother, who have provided family support every weekend, to ensure I have time to work on my research. I am deeply grateful.

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I would like to thank Professor Cheng for the insights and recommendation around the research design and for suggesting the framework utilized in this study. Your suggestion to use the Bronfenbrenner Ecological System model perfectly complemented and seamlessly integrated
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into the Grounded Theory’s Explanatory Paradigm. Your suggestion provided structure for me to describe the research with greater meaning and depth. I am grateful for the guidance.

I would like to thank Professor Page for the introduction to Grounded Theory and for providing the initial resources to utilize this qualitative method.
Abstract

This research aimed to fill the gap in literature by focusing on the experiences of American born Chinese college students that moved from ethnically dense Majority Minority Chinese American Communities (MMCAC) to attend Predominantly White Institution (PWI) college/universities. The study utilized a Grounded Theory qualitative approach, which led to the development of 6 categories or themes from 17 concepts and 48 codes. These were based on data from 10 participants across two phases with two interviews each (initial and follow-up). The 6 themes “Previous MMCAC Environment,” “Identity,” “New PWI Environment,” “Values,” “Transition Experience,” and “Mental Health” provided the descriptive experience for this population. The context of the MMCAC and PWI environments were further described using Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model in conjunction with Grounded Theory’s Conditional/Consequential Matrix Explanatory Paradigm tool. This resulted in the identification of two participant subgroups and the development of a substantive theory (non-generalized, specific to the defined situations). The prominent subgroup (8 of 10 the participants), defined by Path #1, consisted of participants that preferred to develop communities around peers that identify as Chinese or Asian American while in the PWI environment. The less prominent subgroup, defined by Path #2, consisted of participants that chose to receive support primarily from peers that identify as White (with acknowledgment of their preferences). The clinical implication of these findings provides a guide to mental health providers: to consider identifying the client’s historical relationships within the culture of the prior MMCAC and current PWI environments, and to determine the support around clients’ preferences in navigating pre-existing and new relationships.
Keywords: Chinese American, college students, predominantly white institutions, ethnic majority minority
Introduction and Critical Literature Review

The statement of the problem is first discussed, followed by the critical literature review demonstrating the gap in research. The purpose and rationale, research questions, and clinical relevance are subsequently demonstrated, followed by the definition of the terms that pertain to this current research.

a. Statement of the Problem

Background to Problem

Historically, the transition of going to college (moving from a different geographic area) has been stressful for young American adults (Lapsley et al., 1989). According to Espinosa et al. (2019) and Snyder et al. (2019), this transition to college experience is more common for some ethnic groups. For example, a greater percentage of high school graduates that identify as Asian (87%) choose to immediately enroll in college (compared to 70.5% that identify as White, and 69.5% of all ethnic and racial groups). Although this indicates that people that identify as Asian are more likely to attend college, their transition experience, as people of color, can have additional stressors (from discrimination and racism in addition to the loss of support; Atkinson et al., 1998; Kearney et al., 2005). Furthermore, despite people that identify as Asian having a high rate of college enrollment (as indicated earlier, 87%), they comprise only 5.7% of the students of all undergraduate programs across America. This is within the context of people that identify as White, which represent 52% of university demographics across America in 2016 (Espinosa et al., 2019; Radwin et al., 2018). The Asian demographics (5.7% as stated above in American colleges/universities) are consistent with the national Asian demographics in the US (between 4.8%-6.1%) from 2010 to 2019 (Hoeffel et al., 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), which is also consistent with certain geographic areas (3% Asian in the Midwest and South, and
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6% Asian in the Northeast; Hoeffel et al., 2012). This is drastically different for certain geographical locations (62% Asian in Honolulu County, Hawaii and 55% Asian in Fremont, CA as well as 46% who identify as “Asian alone or Asian in combination” in broader Western Regions of the US; Hoeffel et al., 2012).

Hoeffel et al. (2012) also provided an overview of the skewed nature of the Asian demographic distribution in the US. The authors report that 66-75% of all counties in the US have fewer than 1% representation of Asians. However, 75% of all the Asian identified people live in ten US states, with the highest concentration in three states, California, New York, and Texas, which account for 8.3 million Asian people or about 56% of the total Asian identified people in all of the US.

The Problem

The problem that arose was multi-faceted. The first facet of the problem was in regard to conducting research on Asians as a general group (in America). Subgroups within the Asian category can be described with idiosyncratic characteristics from over 50 ethnicities that speak over 100 languages (Chin, 2017; Ponce et al., 2018). The term “Asian” also posed a challenge in the health field, which led Bentz et al. (2018), with the self-reports of participants (653 parent-child families), to define three Asian subgroups: East Asian (defined as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Taiwanese), South Asian (defined as Afghani, Asian East Indian, Indian, Pakistani), and South East Asian (Cambodian, Filipino, Indonesian, Laotian, and Vietnamese), and found differences in physical risk factors. More specifically in psychological literature, Ying et al. (2008) demonstrated research focused Asian ethnic subgroups (i.e. Chinese Americans) have different findings, and are not generalizable to other subgroups (that also identify as Asian American). This was supported by the meta-analysis by Huey Jr and Tilley (2018), where 21
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studies were reviewed (that consisted of 6,377 participants) on mental health interventions that ranged from specific Asian subgroups to larger nonspecific Asian groups. They found that treatments tailored specifically for individual Asian subgroups, such as for Chinese Americans, Cambodian Americans, or Korean Americans solely, had better outcomes compared to general Asian group studies. They also indicated that culturally specific strategies (such as tailoring the level of focus on family for support) in the mental health field are needed, but still understudied. For this reason, as feasible as possible, the literature review focused on Chinese Americans as a goal. However, due to limitations (i.e. published demographics data from universities/existing body of literature/public institutional data, only has Asian as a category), may require inferences, which the researcher acknowledges. The researcher was conscientious about these limitations during this research of Chinese Americans for this study.

The second facet of the problem was the limited literature on the intersection of both the importance of geographic location (in context of ethnic density of people of similar identity), as well as the specific Asian ethnic subgroup (Chinese American). For example, the most relevant study, Juang et al. (2006) on the identity development of Asian Americans, compared two separate groups (one in a predominantly White area and a second where they were an ethnic majority). However, this study only focused on Asian Americans as a whole and not one Asian subgroup (as mentioned earlier about this importance). Although the researcher concluded that geographic ethnic diversity and density was unrelated to ethnic identity development, the authors/researchers stated significant limitations: the “concentrated sample may have grown up in a similar, ethnically dispersed neighborhood as those in the dispersed sample” (p. 556). Without the survey of the origins of the participants (or defining this in the inclusion criteria), this implied that their two groups could have been similar during the early years of identity
development (both groups either being in an ethnically dense or sparse environment). This problem is addressed in this dissertation, where the geographic origins of participants were defined in the inclusion criteria. The second relevant study in the literature by Xu et al. (2015) factored in the historical geographic locations of development for the participants, however, the inclusion criteria focused on Asian Americans as a whole (which is a limitation that has already been discussed).

**Summarized Problem Statement**

Given the background described (the challenges for college transition, importance of geography due to ethnic density of demographics, specifying the precise Asian ethnic subgroup, and the gap in literature), the following demonstrated the complex constellation of the problem:

- Asian people are more likely to attend college (Espinosa et al., 2019; Snyder et al., 2019);
  - 75% of all the Asian identified people live in ten US states with an even higher concentration in three states that accounts for about 56% of the total Asian identified people in all of the US. (Hoeffel et al., 2012);
- People that identify as White comprise 52% of university demographics across America in 2016 (Espinosa et al., 2019; Radwin et al., 2018).
  - Certain university/colleges are considered Predominantly White institution (PWI) in the US, which is “the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment” (Christopher Brown II & Elon Dancy II, 2010, p. 2);
- The transition experience for people of color can have additional stressors from discrimination and racism, in addition to the loss of support (Atkinson et al., 1998; Kearney et al., 2005);
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○ College students that identified as Asian American reported higher levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, compared to students that identified as White (Eisenberg et al., 2007; Tummala-Narra et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2011; Young et al., 2010);

● Asian Americans have proportionately lower levels of mental health treatment utilization compared to other ethnic groups (Abe-Kim et al., 2002; Cheung & Snowden, 1990; Ying & Hu, 1994);

○ Kearney et al. (2005) and Mays and Albee (1992) state that, despite ethnic minorities having more psychosocial stressors than their White counterparts, mental health services for minorities are underutilized.

To address the problem, this dissertation focused on American born Chinese American students from MMCAC (Majority Minority Chinese American Communities) that transition to University/Colleges considered to be Predominantly White Institutions (PWI).

The goal was to describe their experiences in both environments, in the context of the transition, for clinicians to better understand and serve this population.

b. Critical Literature Review

The Role of the Literature Review in Grounded Theory Studies

Corbin and Strauss’ (2014) Grounded Theory approach, based on Corbin and Strauss (1990) and Glaser and Strauss (1967), is a unique methodology, where the process of conducting an exhaustive literature review prior to the start of a study is intentionally limited. Corbin and Strauss (1990) asserted that Grounded Theory was designed to “provide a thorough theoretical explanation of a social phenomena under study” (p. 5) and meant to describe, explain, and predict with specific conditions. This theory, in conjunction with Ponterotto’s (2002) definition
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of a social constructivist research paradigm, allowed for multiple versions of realities to have equal validity. These natures of realities include the exploration of inner experiences and the formation or transformation of meanings to experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). In areas not thoroughly researched, this paradigm provided an open and flexible approach (to account for preconceived notions from the researcher’s own experiences, and from concepts and perspectives from the literature review).

Since it was impossible to decouple the researcher’s conscious and unconscious biases from these sources, a reflexivity statement was used. This strategy was a form of bracketing, described by Starks and Trinidad (2007), as the recognition of prior knowledge and preconceptions during the analysis of data, without abandoning them. This would not only help to provide a balance for the limited literature review, but also assisted in remaining open for novel theory development.

Summary of Scholarship on Topic

The brief literature review had set the foundation to explore American born Chinese college students that moved from MMCAC to attend PWI colleges/universities. More specifically, this study made meaning of their experiences in relation to their identity(ies) before and after they moved. Meaning making, or the interpretation of participant’s reality, was the result of Corbin and Strauss’ (1990) Grounded Theory methodology approach with Ponterotto’s (2002) social constructivist research paradigm.

Although the review of existing literature may have unintentionally impacted the researcher’s perspectives, the brief literature review was necessary to set the foundation in the development of the guiding questions for the new research design. At the same time, the use of reflexivity (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) limited preconceived notions to maintain the open
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perspective. For the population of American born college students that moved from MMCAC to
attend PWI colleges/universities, the literature review was the starting point, which addressed
topics that included: theoretical perspectives of identity, contextual factors, details of
demographics within geography, the differences between American born Chinese and immigrant
Chinese, and college transition factors (additional literature review occurred during the iterative
research process).

Theoretical Perspective of Identity

Due to the limited research, specifically for American born Chinese from MMCAC
environments, the general overview of characteristics for identity development was explored.
The backgrounds for both racial and ethnic identity theories provided a guide to query the
participants. This also helped in the analysis of the meaning behind their experiences and self-
identified identity.

Identity development. According to Grotevant, (1992), Josselson (1994), Spencer,
Swanson, and Cunningham (1991), Swanson et al. (1997), and Umaña-Taylor et al. (2004),
identity development and formation occur during adolescence, and involves one’s own self-
deinition process in the context of group membership in broader society. Tajfel (1981) described
this as social identity theory. Other aspects of identity can be multifaceted, which include gender
and occupation. Erikson’s (1959) exploration or commitment to the religious, vocational, or
political, etc. aspects of identity relate to community recognition, which is the social aspect of
identity.

Although Cooper and Leong (2008) described race as a category made into
generalizations (based on physical characteristics, such as hair or skin color), Umaña-Taylor et
al. (2004) reported that for individuals in the U.S., ethnicity (through group membership) is the
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most salient facet of identity. Branch et al. (2000), Branch and Carter (1997), Carter (1995), and Phinney (1992) distinguished race from ethnicity. They described ethnic identity as the sense of connectedness and psychological affiliation to a common heritage (with a group of people from a geographic place of origin). However, Yip et al. (2019) did not distinguish ethnicity and race during the mixed findings for their study. They found that the impact of ethnic/racial identity (ERI) had opposing findings (both protective and risk factors in their metastudy) in regard to discrimination experiences. Despite the mixed findings, the purpose of the literature review was to prepare for the interviews with a background range of identity models. The review of various racial and ethnic identity theories (while maintaining reflexivity) provided a foundation of reference points throughout the iterative research process.

Racial Identity Theory. Helms’s (1995) and Alvarez and Helms’ (2001) racial identity model demonstrated a dynamic process for identity development for people of color. It included five statuses: Conformity, Dissonance, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Integrated Awareness. Conformity refers to when a person trivializes race and only identifies with White American culture, while Dissonance refers to the beginnings of one’s awareness of racial affiliation (with ambivalence and confusion). Immersion-Emersion refers to when the person of color only identifies with their own racial group (with possible resentment towards White culture). Internalization refers to the ability to have a balanced perspective for both cultures (for example, to see both limitations and strengths in both Asian American and White American cultures). Integrated awareness refers to the acceptance, integration, and appreciation of all cultures.

It is important to note that this model is nonlinear, and a person may fluctuate back and forth between statuses depending on life events, including racism (Parham et al., 1999; Quintana,
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2007. Since the population of interest, American born college students that moved from MMCAC to attend PWI colleges/universities, was unlikely to experience conformity (only identified with White culture due to the majority Chinese American environment), this demonstrated the gap in the existing literature regarding the theoretical racial identity models. This exemplified the need for further research.

**Ethnic Identity Theory.** Branch (1999), Levine (1997), and Umaña-Taylor et al. (2004), described ethnicity as a categorization that can assist in daily living, such as with shared beliefs, history, and cultural traits that include food, art, types of clothing, language, and literature. Cross (1971) and Phinney (1992) both defined ethnic identity as knowledge with the sense of self as a member of one’s own ethnic group. The described sense of connectedness, common heritage, shared beliefs, cultural traits, as well as geographic place of origin, were important factors to assess in the population of interest for the current study (American born college students that moved from MMCAC to attend PWI colleges/universities).

**Phinney's (1989) Model of Ethnic Identity Development.** Phinney’s (1992) ethnic identity development theoretical model assessed participation of cultural activities, the levels of positive feelings, affirmations, and the sense of belonging towards an ethnic group, as well as the levels of exploration and commitment (Erikson, 1968) to their ethnic identity. This originated from Erikson’s (1968) level of exploration and commitment, which was expanded by Marcia’s (1980, 1994) Identity Status Theory, into four identity statuses: **Diffuse, Moratorium, Foreclosed,** and **Achieved.** **Diffuse** status refers to when an individual has neither explored nor committed to an identity. **Moratorium** status refers to when an individual has explored their ethnic identity, but not committed to it. **Foreclosed** status refers to an individual’s commitment, but without exploration of their ethnic identity. **Achieved** status refers to when an individual has
both explored and committed to an ethnic identity. However, due to the challenges of discerning between the *Diffuse* status or *Foreclosed* status in Marcia’s (1980, 1994) model of identity development, Phinney (1989) developed a Three-Stage Model of Ethnic Identity. This consisted of the following stages: *Unexamined*, *Moratorium*, and *Achieved*. The *Unexamined* stage characterized a person that has not explored their ethnic identity. This could have been from the lack of exposure to other ethnic groups. In addition, a person in the *unexamined* stage may have adopted the dominant culture’s perspective and not the individuals’ own ethnic group. The *Moratorium* stage was described as a period where a person develops their ethnic identity and its meaning, from exploration in their daily life. *Achievement* is the resolution stage, which occurred after the internalization and development of their ethnic identity with meaning, and commitment to group membership (Bachay, 1998; Phinney, 1989, 1990). However, according to Umaña-Taylor et al. (2004) a limitation of Phinney’s (1989) model was that individuals who have explored and committed to their ethnic identity may not feel positive about the commitment (as affect was not assessed in the stages). For example, due to the colonization history of ethnic groups or negative stereotypes, a person may have explored and committed an ethnic identity with negative meanings associated with that ethnic identity. In contrast, another person may focus on other aspects of the ethnic group and have pride in their ethnic group. Another limitation of Phinney’s (1989) model was the stage-wise linearity assumed in the model. French et al. (2006) proposed that individuals engaged in developing their ethnic identity may take a non-linear path, such as with regression or with fluctuation between stages. This may occur from various life events, from unpredictable experiences, or from changes of settings.

The limitations in the reviewed racial/ethnic identity models for the population of interest did not fit, due to the unique aspect of the MMCAC environments (having predominantly
Chinese American peers with the lack of exposure to other ethnic groups). However, this literature review provided a foundation of possible perspectives that guided the interviews (so that the participants were able to describe salience characteristics and meaning behind their experiences). Reflexivity ensured that the theories did not hinder new concepts that arose from this population of interest. This provided background to explore the sense of belonging (and group membership in the ethnically dense and homogeneous MMCAC environment) as well as the exploration of interests for participants of this dissertation study.

**Contextual Factors and Identity Development**

For American born Chinese college students that moved from MMCAC to attend PWI colleges/universities, context had to be considered for identity development. According to French et al. (2006) and Tajfel and Turner (1979), rather than conceptualizing in stages of identity, one’s identity could be focused on group membership from a social perspective in the broader context of society. Since this proposed study focused on American born Chinese college students that moved from MMCAC to Predominantly White Institution (PWI) college/universities, the various contexts, including time needed to be considered. Bronfenbrenner’s (1974, 1977, 1979, 1986) model was reviewed, along with the literature on developmental age and school environments in this section.


Bronfenbrenner’s (1974, 1977, 1979, 1986) ecological systems theory addressed the contextual factors involved in an individual’s life. The theory helped to conceptualize human development in a multidimensional framework, which included interactions between the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and the chronosystem. This can be thought of as a set of expanding concentric circles representing the different systems. The microsystem is in the
innermost layer referring to the individual’s relationship to their immediate surroundings from their point of reference (in the center). This may include interpersonal connections, such as peers or family, or even events, and the setting. For example, characteristics such as group cohesion, socioeconomic status could influence an individual’s experiences with family or peers. The mesosystem is the next ecological context, which is a network of Microsystems, particularly linking two or more Microsystems that influences the specific population. This refers to interactions between the individual’s family, peers, and school or institutions. The ecosystem refers to the next level of the ecological system, such as remote social settings, one’s social network, neighborhood, and the broader society that has an indirect effect on the specific population. The macrosystem is the next level of the ecological system and refers to the large sets of social values, such as customs, broad cultural beliefs, politics and laws that are pervasive to all levels of systems. Lastly, the chronosystem addresses the individual’s changes across time, life transitions, developmental transitions, or major life changes. As the proposed study focused on American born Chinese college students that moved from MMCAC, to attend PWI college/universities, Bronfenbrenner’s (1974, 1977, 1979, 1986) ecological systems theory served as a useful framework to inform the initial development of interview questions.

Developmental Age. Regarding developmental age considerations of ethnic identity, Branch et al. (2000) highlighted the importance of ego identity development. Marcia’s (1966) ego identity statuses, which expanded upon Erikson’s (1968) model with Marcia (1980, 1994), was similarly based on the four statuses (mentioned earlier): Diffused, Foreclosed, Moratorium, and Achieved. However, Achieved, in this case refers to a commitment to an identity more globally. For example, this included ideological characteristics (such as political views and life philosophy), and interpersonal development (such as intimate relationships and friendships),
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which are also part of the ego identity status. Age was found to be a key aspect of ego status
(Archer, 1994; Branch et. al., 2000; Meilman, 1979; Phinney, 1992; St. Clair & Day, 1979;
White, 1980), where older adolescents tended to be in higher stages compared to younger
adolescents (French et al., 2006; Marcia et al., 1993; Meeus et al., 1999; Waterman, 1982). The
studies on age and identity development (Chatman, 1999; Clubb, 1998; Phinney, 1989) tended to
focus on adolescents. The literature for early adults and identity development was found to be
limited, which highlights the importance of focusing research on the college student population
age range.

School Environment Context. Since the college environment was an important aspect of
this study, the literature on school environment and identity development was also explored. This
was important due to the varied ethnic densities in the two environments. French et al. (2006)
suggested that ecological contexts, such as school, are also an important component for ethnic
identity development, particularly in junior high school. Furthermore, Tatum (1997) indicated
that self-segregation by ethnicity typically occurred in school settings, during earlier
developmental time periods. This choice of self-segregation was limited in ethnically
homogenous school environments (French et al., 2006). According to French et al. (2006) and
Sellers et al. (1998), the lack of heightened racial salience phenomena and opportunities for self-
segregation, inhibited chances of encounters in a way to stimulate thinking about their own
ethnic identity. Encounters (Cross, 1971, 1991) were part of Cross’s (1971) Nigrescence Theory,
which posited a racial identity model for African Americans. Encounters are where the
exploration begins, which can be triggered from a racial related prejudice event that could be
traumatic and this could lead to new perspectives of their racial identity. This is consistent with
French et al. (2006), which indicated that homogenous school environments did not stimulate
encounters, nor exploration (in junior high school) because their ethnic identities were not salient. However, the transition of the adolescents to a new senior high school with a heterogeneous population led to more encounters from racial salience being heightened. The dissertation study research focused on the experiences of Chinese American college students in homogeneous universities that are predominantly White. In this environment, the Chinese American college students were not ethnically part of the major homogeneity, compared to their earlier schooling in their MMCAC environment.

**Demographic and Geographical Areas for Asian Americans and Chinese Americans**

This section describes the historical categorization of demographics, for people that identify as Asian and Chinese population in America, followed by the geographic areas in which these populations settle. Since the focus was on American born Chinese college students that moved from MMCAC, to attend PWI college/universities, the geographic areas with concentration of people that identify as Chinese American were addressed. In addition, the differences between American Born Chinese (ABC) and Chinese immigrants were explored.

**Demographics of Asians in America.** According to Hoeffel et al. (2012), the U.S. Census Bureau has been keeping track of data since 1790 but did not have a category for people that identified as of Asian descent. However, by 1860, the response category “Chinese” was added only for California. By 1870, “Chinese” and “Japanese” were also added to other states, but all other people with Asian descent had no other option. It was not until 1980 that “Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese” (Hoeffel et al., 2012, p. 2) was added. It is noteworthy that 7 responses of the 15 discrete categories in the last Census in 2010 were of Asian descent, specifically Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese and “Other Asian.” While the population in the U.S. overall grew by 9.7%, from
2000 to 2010, the population that identified as Asian alone grew substantially by 43% (Hoeffel et al., 2012).

Demographics of Chinese in America. During the 2010 Census, 23% of the Asian alone category, or 3.3 million respondents reported identifying as Chinese alone in the US (Hoeffel et al., 2012). This specific population is one aspect of the research study, and the other is the geographic location, which is described as follows.

Geographical Context of Chinese in America

Country Wide and Regions. According to Hoeffel et al. (2012), the geographic distribution of people that identify as Chinese in the 2010 Census was 49% in the West region, and 26% in the Northeast. In California, Chinese identified people constitute 36% of Asian alone or with any combination. Whereas in New York state, people that identify as Chinese comprise 15% of the Asian in any combination. People that identified as Chinese were the largest of the Asian group in Colorado, Oregon, Utah, District of Columbia, North Dakota, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Massachusetts.

Metro Areas. For the population of interest in this study, a narrower focus on specific geographic areas was needed. According to Hoeffel et al. (2012) in the 2010 Census, Chinese were the largest population within the Asian groups for 6 of 20 metro areas. The largest Chinese populations were in the “New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island NY-NJ-PA metro area” (p. 19) at 695,000 (Hoeffel et al., 2012). Additional distribution included: “Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA (544,000), San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA (477,000), San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA (173,000), Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA-NH (123,000), and Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA (101,000)” (Hoeffel et al., 2012, p. 19). These statistics were helpful to focus on the inclusion criteria and for outreach of participants.
Branch et al. (2000), Speight et al. (1996), and Lien (1994) indicated that people’s preferences to identify with their ethnicity rather than their race differed by political participation or civic duty. This might have been due to embracing the identity of being “American” more fully. With this consideration, another inclusion criterion for the study was to identify as Chinese American. However, Chinese Americans can be further delineated between American Born Chinese and Chinese Immigrants.

American Born Chinese. Although the 2010 Census categorized Chinese as a group in a singular category in the U.S. (Hoeffel et al., 2012), Tsai et al. (2000) explored the meaning of Chinese Americans amongst American-Born Chinese (ABC) and immigrant Chinese. Tsai et al. (2000) described ABCs as being permeated with American culture, while influenced by Chinese culture. However, they attributed the Chinese culture exposure to the limited context from the Chinese community (such as Church or Chinese school and home [from family]), and separated the influence of American culture to different contexts (such as at work or at school). These separate contexts for different cultural influences (Chinese and American) on a daily basis provided a construct for the American Born Chinese experience (Tsai et al., 2000).

Chinese Immigrants. According to Tsai et al. (2000) immigrant Chinese people had the experience of being in an all Chinese culture in every aspect and context of their lives prior to immigration. However, after the immigration to the US, the context of their exposure to American culture became encounters with Americans in daily life. According to Tsai et al. (2000), immigrant Chinese people adopted aspects of American culture, while relinquished aspects of Chinese culture, to function and survive in new contexts. This led the authors to consider their development as unidimensional. Tsai et al. (2000) further explained that immigrant
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Chinese people had a sole Chinese identity formed during adolescence (Phinney, 1990), and engaged in both cultures when they moved to America. The limitation of this study was it did not discern if the sole identity for immigrant Chinese varied with the age of immigration, particularly when this occurred at a very early developmental age. However, Tsai et al. (2000) suggested over time, the exposure levels to American culture, and internalization of being American might occur. When the internal shifts of being “more” American happened, the Chinese identity arose more from external cultural engagements (including use of language and proficiency, affiliation with the people, participation in activities, pride in the culture, exposure to the media/culture, and preference for food).

Since people that identify as immigrant Chinese might have identified as Chinese American over time (Tsai et al., 2000), and people that identify as American Born Chinese could have also identified as Chinese American, the area of interest for this research was discerned to focus on people who are American Born Chinese (for the inclusion criteria).

**College Transition Factors and Identity Development**

This section outlines college transition factors and the role of identity development. The background of the general stressors in college transitions, was distinguished between 2 and 4 year colleges. Also, the literature of identity development in college was addressed.

**General Stressors.** The transition to college has been considered a major life event, especially if the person was moving away from home for the first time. According to Lapsley et al. (1989) and Henton et al. (1980) stressors included challenging adjustments (that a college freshman might encounter): living apart from friends and family (especially their parents), having new daily activities, the handling of the new academic load, and the development of a variety of new relationships. However, Lapsley et al. (1989) found that the separation from
family was the most important factor for college freshman (1st year), who tend to be more poorly adjusted than upperclassmen (in their 3rd or 4th year). This was due to psychological dependencies from parents (such as the separation-individuation), which could be unresolved and even lasting into later college years (Lapsley & Rice, 1988; Lapsley et al., 1989).

According to Lapsley et al. (1989), the psychological dependencies that some college freshmen demonstrated were related to functional dependence (managing affairs and tasks) and attitudinal dependence (self-chosen values related to self-image) in relation to both parents. In addition, freshmen had more emotional dependence (need for approval) from their mothers, compared to upperclassmen. However, upperclassmen had more conflictual dependence (resentment, guilt, or anxiety) due to the individuation process prior to entering society (residual financial dependence from parents; Lapsley et al., 1989).

**2-year versus 4-year college or university.** Tsai and Fuligni (2012) and Edman and Brazil (2009) indicated a 2-year college commuter school reduced likelihood of engagement of activities, whereas a 4-year university could help foster close relationships with peers of similar ethnic backgrounds. In addition, the awareness of ethnic-related issues and connections to heritage tended to develop on a larger campus, by providing opportunities to interact with people from different cultures (including the dominant culture). The 4-year colleges generally had more extracurricular activities, which could have been important for ethnic identity exploration. People in the 4-year colleges were able to reflect on their interests, develop themselves, interact with peers both within their group or outside their groups (Davies & Casey, 1999; Dworkin et al., 2003; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Edman & Brazil, 2009; Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Inkelas, 2004; Saylor & Aries, 1999; Sidanius, et al., 2004). An interpretation of the utilization of the resources and connections with others on campus could be defined by *ethnic search* (Phinney, 1992; Tsai
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& Fuligni, 2012). Ethnic search is the exploration of group membership, cultural practices, family heritages. Tsai and Fuligni (2012) found ethnic search was lower at 2-year colleges compared to 4-year colleges. Due to the ethnic identity exploration and development based on social context that 4-year colleges and universities provide (as well as time for the transition adjustment period from general stressors due to the environmental change that was mentioned earlier), an inclusion criterion for the research study was to focus specifically on 4-year colleges and universities.

Identity Search in College. According to Tsai and Fuligni (2012), college transition is a time where ethnic minorities likely change their ethnic identity (due to the substantial changes in social environment and context). During this time in young adulthood, independence is increased as well as exploration of their interests. As they determine their role in society, ethnic minority college students learn how their ethnicity impacts their lives, as they adjust to mainstream society in the US (Arnett, 2000; Syed & Azmitia, 2010). In this environment, Kiang’s (2008) study found that greater ethnic search or exploration occurred for students that self-identified as “Chinese American” versus solely “Chinese”. This demonstrated the need to be more specific and supported the need for discernment in the inclusion criteria to specify Chinese Americans college/university students.

Synthesis of the Findings

The findings of the literature review began with the theoretical perspective of identity development, which included racial and ethnic identity models. The factors reviewed included the school context, considering the demographics of geographical areas. The differences between American born Chinese and immigrant Chinese people was explored. The literature review also included the general stressors during the college transition period, and the difference in identity
search between 2- and 4-year colleges. Together this built a foundation that prepared for the study. Prior to this research, the area that had not been addressed directly was the ethnic density environments, and majority-minority experiences (for American born Chinese college students that moved from MMCAC to attend PWI colleges/universities). These gaps in research are addressed in more detail in the next section.

**Identification of Gaps and Limitations of the Literature and Research Needs**

**Ethnic Numeric Majority and Ethnically Dense Community.** Xu et al. (2015) explained that ethnic minorities on a national scale could be numeric majority locally. The local smaller contexts were certain geographic areas, such as in small communities, neighborhoods, or schools (Juang et al., 2006; Umana-Taylor & Shin, 2007). In addition, Tsai and Fuligni (2012) highlighted that identity development could be impacted by context (Berry, 1980; Phinney, 1990). This is supported by Phinney (2006), Yip (2005), Saylor and Aries (1999), and Umaña-Taylor (2004), where the presence of similar or other ethnic groups impacted one’s own ethnic identification. In less-diverse areas, where a person’s ethnic minority identity was more salient, greater exploration of their own cultural background could occur. However, adopting the dominant culture or decreasing association to own ethnic groups (from the desire to fit) could have alternatively occurred. This implied that the demographic composition or diversity of the context (with different ethnic groups), could impact a person’s identity development.

Juang et al. (2006) used the adapted Bronfenbrenner (1979), García-Coll et al. (1996), and Lerner’s (1996) ecological approach to study the context of the ethnically concentrated Asian American populations, or ethnic numeric majority areas. They also studied Asian American populations in ethnically dispersed areas that were either predominantly White, or had an ethnic numeric minority in relation to identity development. The initial findings of Juang et al.
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(2006) appeared to be in contrast with other literature (Phinney, 2006; Saylor & Aries, 1999; Yip, 2005; Umaña-Taylor, 2004), which implied that ethnic diversity or ethnic density was unrelated to ethnic identity development. However, Juang et al. (2006) later clarified the limitations of their findings with the following statements “concentrated sample may have grown up in a similar, ethnically dispersed neighborhood as those in the dispersed sample” (p. 556) and “Indeed, these students may have self-selected a more ethnically diverse university based on their preexisting ethnic identity and communities of origin” (p. 557). Additionally, Juang et al. (2006) acknowledged that “future research should assess more specifically their samples’ community of origin” (p. 557). This was an important clarification, which demonstrated the need for studies to factor in geographic origins when studying ethnic identity development. This was further demonstrated by a more recent study by Xu et al. (2015), which also contradicted Juang et al. (2006), that found Asian Americans who grew up in U.S. mainland (ethnically dispersed) had higher ethnic identity based on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R; Phinney, 1992; Roberts et al., 1999) compared to Asian Americans on Hawaiian Islands (ethnically dense). Asian Americans in less ethnically dense US geographic areas were more aware of their ethnic identity than those in geographic areas with a significantly higher density of Asian American populations (which demonstrated a lower level of ethnic identity based on the MEIM-R). This demonstrated that geographic location, ethnic density, and demographic composition of the social environment could be a contributing factor in ethnic identity development. However, a limitation of Xu et al. (2015) study was the focus on Asian Americans more generally, and the findings may not be generalizable to every Asian subgroup. This was thoroughly explained in the statement of the problem for this research study in the introduction section.
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These limitations in the literature justified the need to be more specific with parameters including geographic location, surrounding demographics, and focusing on people that identify as Chinese American.

c. Purpose and Rationale of the Study/Project

While the transition to college can be stressful for new college students moving between different geographical communities (Lapsley et al., 1989), students that identify as people of color experience additional unique challenges including racism and discrimination (besides relocation and loss of support systems; Atkinson et al., 1998; Kearney et al., 2005). This was more salient in universities or colleges considered to be PWI, defined as “institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment” (Christopher Brown II & Elon Dancy II, 2010, p. 2). Further complicating the issue, Kearney et al. (2005) and Mays and Albee (1992) explained that despite ethnic minorities having more psychosocial stressors than their White counterparts, mental health services for minorities were underutilized. According to Atkinson et al. (1990, 1998), ethnic minorities' perception that their mental health counselor lacks knowledge or cultural sensitivity was a barrier to them utilizing services or postponing seeking further services.

In addition, ethnic minorities and persons of color have more complex identity intersections beyond general categories (e.g. Asian Americans, such as American born Chinese, or specific categories). Intersections such as developmental stage, birthplace, socioeconomic status, and ethnic density based on geographic location (Tsai et al., 2000; Ying et al., 2008) has been shown to impact ethnic identity and self-esteem (Xu et al., 2015; Umana-Taylor & Shin 2007). Geographical Ethnic density needed to be considered when studying ethnic identity experiences. This was demonstrated by Ying et al. (2008) that compared South East Asian
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participants (including Mein, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotians) to Chinese Americans and found that Chinese American high school students were more orientated towards their ethnic culture rather than American culture due the geographic Chinese ethnic density of where they resided. The geographic location of the study was the city of Oakland’s Chinatown, which had the highest ethnic density of Chinese Americans, with high access to their community, language, and food compared to the different South East Asian groups in the study (Ying et al., 2008). However, ethnic cultural orientation towards Chinese culture may hinder the first stage of Phinney’s (1989) Three-Stage Model of ethnic identity development. Phinney’s (1989) model asserted that ethnic identity may be underdeveloped from a lack of exposure to people of the dominant culture. This may hinder exploration and cause them to remain in the “unexamined stage” of identity development (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004), which is linked to self-esteem (Xu et al., 2015). As mentioned earlier, even within the Chinese American community, variations exist (Chinese immigrants and American born Chinese). Tsai et al. (2000) indicated that while Chinese immigrants and American Born Chinese (ABC) both self-identified as Chinese Americans, they also differed in their cultural engagement to American and Chinese culture (demonstrating the need to be specific).

The purpose and rationale for this qualitative study arose from the review of the past research and limitations. For example, Iwamoto and Liu (2010), Juang et al. (2006), Juang and Nguyen (2010), Tsai et al. (2000), Ying et al. (2008), Xu et al. (2015) utilized quantitative measures, such as the General Ethnicity Questionnaire Ethnic (GEQ-E; Tsai et al., 2000) or the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992) to measure characteristics such as culture by rating one’s feeling of own cultural background on a discrete scale. This method poses a challenge to capture the complex and unique experiential shifts for a population with multiple
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intersections and specific environmental changes (moving from an ethnically dense geographic area to a PWI community university). Due to these limitations of the quantitative measures, the qualitative Grounded Theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) was utilized to gain a better understanding of their experiences and to more comprehensively describe the population of interest (and the phenomenon of transitioning from MMCAC to PWI environments).

d. Research Questions and/or Conceptual Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to explore how American born Chinese college students make meaning of their experiences moving from MMCAC to attend PWI colleges/universities. This study was guided by the following questions:

1) How do American born Chinese college students that moved from ethnically dense Chinese American communities to attend Predominantly White Institutions colleges/universities, make meaning of their identity(ies) before they moved?

2) How do American born Chinese college students that moved from ethnically dense Chinese American communities to attend Predominantly White Institutions college/universities make meaning of their identity(ies) after they moved?

Expected outcomes

The expected outcome was the development of a substantive theory that captured the experience of American born Chinese (ABC) college students that moved from ethnically dense Chinese American communities (or MMCAC) before moving to attend PWI Universities. In addition to filling a gap in the literature, this researcher also expected that the study would yield clinical implications to contribute to mental health practitioners, and therefore provide culturally responsive services for this population.
e. Clinical and Theoretical Relevance

**Clinical Relevance**

According to Chavira and Phinney (1991), Phinney and Chavira (1995), Umaña-Taylor et al. (2002), and Umaña-Taylor et al. (2004) ethnic identity is important because it can be positively associated with a person’s psychological well-being. Ethnic identity is also related to a sense of group belonging, which has shown to impact self-esteem (Cross, 1995; Phinney, 1992; Phinney et al., 1997; Tajfel, 1981; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004).

Understanding the context and society’s value placed on a group could also be helpful for clinicians and interventions. For example, French et al. (2006) and Tajfel and Turner (1986) found if a person or a member of a group were deemed as devalued by a society, then a possible intervention that could be utilized is a strategy called *social creativity*. This strategy helped redefine negative attributes and values assigned to an ethnic group with positive characteristics (rather than to be defined by society). This example strategy could change the trajectory of ethnic identity development.

To determine the general sense of belonging, or to utilize clinical strategies for a specific group, the population needs to be studied. Gaining a better understanding of experience, worldview, and identity development of American born Chinese college students that lived in MMCAC, before attending a PWI college or university, would clinically help improve services for this population.

**Overview of Theoretical Approach**

The qualitative approach for this study utilized Corbin and Strauss’ (2014) Grounded Theory methodology, which was based on Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Corbin and Strauss
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(1990). This framework is based upon interactionism and pragmatism, which imply that knowledge is created through action and interaction with self-reflective beings (Dewey, 1929; Mead, 1972). In addition, this framework was utilized in conjunction with Ponterotto’s (2002) description of the social constructivist research paradigm (where multiple socially constructed realities are equally valued and valid). This research method enabled this researcher to capture the depth and breadth of the experiences of American Born Chinese college students at PWI college/universities, while reflecting on the changes between their home community, and subsequently transitioned to an ethnic numeric minority (where they were previously part of an ethnic numeric majority).

Participants for this study included 10 university undergraduate students aged between 18 to 24 that identify as Chinese American. Inclusion criteria included being born in the United States and having moved to attend a PWI university from a previous MMCAC environment. Based on Corbin and Strauss’ (1990) Grounded Theory, the iterative process included intertwined data collection, analysis, and coding. Initial interviews and follow up interviews were conducted for the participants. This was done in phases with purposeful sampling (and open coding), as well as theoretical sampling (and axial coding/coding selective coding). Purposeful sampling is defined as efficiently specifying and selecting participants (Palinkas et al., 2015) for the study, for example, recruitment from people referred through organizations, or through Facebook ads (advertisements). However, theoretical sampling utilized criteria from the emerging theories relative to developing themes, concepts, and codes from the progressing analyses. Theoretical sampling was performed through the LinkedIn platform rather than Facebook ads, which had more capabilities of being more specific for recruitment.
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For eligibility determination, an online Qualtrics screener was provided, followed by a brief phone screen. When all criteria were met, consent was received. The demographics questionnaire was then provided. Subsequently, initial interviews were performed (and transcribed). Tools such as memos, and strategies such as constant comparisons (described in the methods section) were utilized during the analysis. Codes were then refined, consolidated, and developed into categories, code families, and core categories. The preliminary results from the analysis during the 1st phase (using purposeful sampling) guided the theoretical sampling for the 2nd phase. The iterative cycles of recruitment, data collection, and coding were performed. The relationships were analyzed, and a substantive theory was derived based on the data. Subsequently the substantive theory was systematically validated with the Grounded Theory methodology.
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f. Definition of Terms

ABC: American Born Chinese

MMCAC: Majority Minority Chinese American Community

Minority-majority, Ethnic numeric majority, and ethnically dense: are all terminology referring to the community that has a high concentration of people identifying as a minority on a national scale, but a majority in a smaller context or local area.

PWI: Predominately White Institution
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Method

This section describes the research design, participants, procedures, measures and instrumentations, analysis plan, coding, and the IRB approval.

a. Research Design/Type of Study

Rationale for Qualitative Research Approach

To study college students that identify as Chinese American and that came from MMCAC prior to attending college as an ethnic minority, the qualitative method best captured their lived experiences. According to Corbin and Strauss (2014), qualitative methods allow for better exploration of participant’s inner experiences and how meanings are formed. This was important to not only illustrate the experiences of this population, but also revealed potential transformations or shifts in their identity based on the new environment. This complexity was better measured and analyzed qualitatively (in a more comprehensive and holistic fashion), rather than through discrete quantitative indeterminate variables (during this stage of exploration). In addition, the fluid qualitative approach best captured participants’ complex worldview.

Research Paradigm

The philosophical assumption behind the Grounded Theory framework (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Schatzman, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1989), was the social constructivist (Ponterotto, 2002) research paradigm. Also in this paradigm, the epistemology, or the relationship between the researcher and participant was interactive, which uncovered deeper insight and meaning in the participants’ lived experiences. Since the axiology, or values of the researcher had an acknowledged inevitable role, to maintain objectiveness for full exploration of the participants’ perspective, bracketing was used (McGhee et al., 2007;
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Tufford, 2012). Bracketing, a form of reflexivity, in Grounded Theory’s framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Schatzman, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1989), is an explicit method used to bring awareness to the researcher’s background, or preconceived notions, to limit the researcher’s effects (McGhee et al., 2007; Tufford, 2012). Besides bracketing, other reflexivity strategies were used. This included reflexivity statements, memos, and reflection journals that allowed the engagement of a high level of interaction with participants, while adhering to the social constructivism research paradigm. The Grounded Theory framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Schatzman, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1989), along with reflexivity strategies helped to preserve participants’ perspectives, by allowing them to uncover meanings, and their socially constructed realities (Ponterotto, 2002), and experiences through their words.

Grounded Theory

The Corbin and Strauss (2008, 2014) method was used to make sense of experiences that led to a substantive theory development from the data. The theory was developed through revisions adapted from new knowledge, with robust procedures and a methodology that interconnected the iterative processes (recruitment, data collection, analysis, coding, and categorization; Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2014; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998). The framework also helped to accommodate multiple perspectives to provide explanations, meanings, and exploration of beliefs behind behaviors and actions (emotions and logic behind responses to events or interactions), required for theory development. Additionally, the framework was culturally sensitive to communities, organizations, as well as individuals due to the versatility, nature of openness, and intention of the framework to fully understand participants’ experiences within their system (with minimal impact from the researcher).
Description vs Theory. According to Corbin and Strauss (2014), a ‘description’ is the detailed background about an event and a person’s experience of the event. Qualitative descriptive research helped to provide insight and to develop knowledge around the population through their experiences. The description differs from a theory, because it offers a framework (or structure) to explain the reason behind why certain events happen. The purpose of the Grounded Theory framework was for the “discovery of theory from data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.1), which could have been either a substantive or a formal theory. The substantive theory was generated by a narrower focus on an “empirical situation” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 33). Since a formal theory is “usually derived from investigations of a concept under a variety of different related topics and conditions” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 56), it is outside the scope of the focus of this research. This research study was specifically defined with a “empirical situation” (transition of Chinese American students from MMCAC to PWI college/university environment), which was appropriate for the development of a substantive theory (derived and verified from the data).

The development of the substantive theory was based on the organic data, using tools and strategies within the Grounded Theory framework, called the Conditional/Consequential Matrix (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Schatzman, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1989). The Conditional/Consequential Matrix was used to create an explanatory paradigm through identifying the conditions, context, and responses (action/interactions/emotional). The consequences of events were based on the codes, concepts, and category/themes from the gathered data. However, the method that described the context in the Conditional/Consequential Matrix (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Schatzman, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1989) was limited by the one-dimensional assessment of the system. To expand upon the descriptive analysis of the
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context, Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979, 1986, 1994) ecological model provided 5-dimensions through subsystems (microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and the chronosystem; described in more detail later). This allowed for a comprehensive description of the context embedded in the Conditional/Consequential Matrix. The subsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1994) captured the depth needed to address the complex context and “empirical situation,” which included two environments (MMCAC and PWI environments), two distinct time periods (before college/university and during college/university), as well as all the relationships and cultural factors.

The Grounded Theory framework with Conditional/Consequential Matrix (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Schatzman, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1989) along with the embedded Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979, 1986, 1994) ecological model provided the context and structure to analyze the external and internal psychological experiences (of Chinese American college students that transitioned from MMCAC to PWI environments) for this research study. The development of a substantive theory provided depth of understanding, with clinical implications to inform action.

Iterative process. The iterative process is an important aspect of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Corbin and Strauss (2014) Grounded Theory. The iterative process ensures each step (recruitment, data collection, analysis, coding, categorizing, and theme development) are revisited throughout the duration of the study. Literature reviews, memos, diagrams, and reflection journals were utilized throughout the research as guides. Each step informed subsequent steps (which cycles and circulates back to the recruitment process numerous times). This kept the research process open and flexible, while finding new phenomena as well as
confirmed the validity of existing codes, concepts, or categories. This interrelated cycle also included reviewing the literature throughout the research process in a mindful manner.

**The Role of the Literature Review in Grounded Theory.** The literature review process was mindfully performed in an open manner, due to the philosophy behind the social constructivist research paradigm and Corbin and Strauss’ (2014) Grounded Theory. As previously mentioned (in the preface of the literature review section), the reflexivity process was utilized to minimize, or mitigate the researcher’s effects and preconceptions (McGhee et al., 2007; Tufford, 2012). The literature review was intentionally limited before data collection, as any other knowledge or data outside of the study may unintentionally lead to an impression of a theory before the commencement of the research. The literature was reviewed iteratively throughout data collection and analysis, which guided the process, along with journal reflections and memos.

**Trustworthiness**

According to McGhee et al. (2007), Jootun et al. (2009), and Primeau (2003), reflexivity is essential in qualitative research because it enhances the quality of research in all stages by limiting researcher’s effects. Reflexivity (Parahoo, 1997) is the reflection process that a researcher performs by looking at values, behaviors, or preconceptions with the recognition of the possible influences to the study. This was done by bracketing, which Speziale et al. (2011) define as a cognitive process to observe data in an open manner (to the extent of not making judgements based on preexisting beliefs). This was also done by a statement before the onset of the study to consciously reveal beliefs, ideas, thoughts, personal biases, and preconceptions about the topic. The awareness of pre-existing beliefs helped to be more open during the data collection process and the analysis processes. Although a reflection journal and memos were
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utilized throughout the study, a researcher reflexivity statement was also written before the onset of the study to prevent distortion of data. This statement addressed the researcher’s background and identity (Robson, 2002).

**Researcher Reflexivity Statement**

As a researcher reflecting on my interest on this under researched topic, “American born Chinese college students that moved from MMCAC to PWI college/universities,” I reflected on my personal background. I was born in San Francisco in the 1980s to two immigrant parents, from China and Hong Kong (before unification with China). I identify as a Chinese American male and speak Cantonese, a dialect of Chinese, at home. I experienced many of the Southern Chinese traditions and cultural values that my mother inherited from her homeland.

However, I grew up in San Francisco, specifically residing in an ethnically dense Chinese American neighborhood. I attended preschool through 12th grade with peers that were predominantly Asian American of which the majority were Chinese American. It was salient when a person of a different ethnic background (other than Asian or Chinese American) or a person that identified as White was in our classes, being the numeric minority in a class of majority Chinese American students. I imagine how that parallels saliency for the traditional perspective of being the sole person (or one of a few people that identify as an ethnic minority in a predominant White community. I didn’t realize that my experience as a Chinese American in a predominantly Chinese community was unique. As Chinese American I identified as part of the majority dominant culture locally at my school and in the city, despite being an ethnic minority on a national scale. For example, the public-school system observed Lunar Chinese New Year as an official holiday for all students. Also, a large Chinese New Year parade is celebrated by the city of San Francisco with week-long fairs. Most official documents and advertisements on buses
and street signs have a Chinese language translation. There are many Chinese stores and restaurants throughout the city, even outside the highly concentrated Chinese American neighborhoods. It was no wonder people that identified as White, Black, Latino/a and other identities knew brief Chinese language phrases and the Chinese culture. They also befriended predominantly Chinese American friendship groups as they were considered the “in-group” as the dominant population. I didn’t realize how uniquely uncommon this was until I became old enough to understand the culture outside of my neighborhood and city. It was different in other local Bay Area cities. Through media, television and the internet, I became aware of the racism, discrimination, and negative stereotypes that existed in my home country, but this did not fit my experience. In general, I didn’t experience direct racism or discrimination in my early childhood or adolescence to my awareness, besides any institutional marginalization that I was not aware of. However, in late high school working in a store for tourists, I heard the derogatory term “chink” used towards me by a European. It was then, right before college application time, that I realized how fortunate I was and applied to only local Universities in the Bay Area that had a predominantly Chinese or Asian American population as it felt safer. I also realized that most of my friends did as well. However, for the few friends that went to predominantly White institutions, there was culture shock for them, but they had different experiences. I wonder how it impacted their identities and world perspectives.

I also came to the realization that the stressors might have been a beneficial experience from the limited literature review as guided by Grounded Theory, where Umaña-Taylor et al. (2004) mentions the need for exploration to work through the unexamined phase for Phinney’s (1992) identity model. I wonder if I have been limited based on my earlier experiences. Even in my undergraduate and Masters in Engineering, I was surrounded by male peers that identify as
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either Chinese or other ethnic minorities. It wasn’t until I went back to school for Counseling Psychology in a Marriage and Family Therapy program that I became the only Chinese American male student in many of my classes. I remember being very self-conscious of my ethnic background and had some challenges. Since my first class in the Master’s program 5 years ago, I have experienced tremendous growth, which wasn’t easy. However, I had the privilege of being in my community in a larger context as Bronfenbrenner’s (1974, 1977, 1979, 1986) ecological systems theory describes, and I wonder how that influences people at PWI institutions.

Since I identify as an American born Chinese, I am aware that the participants that I interview may expect me to have an immediate understanding of their experiences, especially coming from a MMCAC. However, I have not attended a PWI and will need to be conscious of the questions I ask based on this understanding of myself. Also, as a Chinese American whose parents came from Southern China, and Hong Kong, my worldview may differ from people who came from Northern China, Macau, or other areas, that also identify as Chinese American. Also, I identify as a straight male, and need to be conscientious of my privileges. My presence and the questions may be received differently depending on participants’ background. People with different sexual orientations and genders may respond to me as a straight Chinese American cis male. To address these concerns, and additional concerns that arise, I will document my thoughts throughout the study in my reflection journal and memos.

b. Participants

Eligibility criteria and Targeted Sample Size

Participants in this study included 10 college/university undergraduate students that identify as Chinese American, between ages 18 to 22. The number of participants was allowed to
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reach saturation, which is a point where new data and analyses does not contribute to a concept any longer (Schwandt, 2001). Inclusion criteria consisted of the following:

1) Identify as Chinese American
2) Born in the United States
3) Currently student in an undergraduate University
4) Prior to attending university, individual’s home community was in a high ethnically dense Chinese American community from preschool to 12th grade.
   a. Based on Shaw et al. (2012)’s meta-analysis, 50% is a conservative proportion of the local community to determine if a participant has been part of a high ethnic density population. Due to the possibility of limited availability to local census data, the demographics questionnaire will ask the participant to self-report if they believe at least 50% of the people in their neighborhood community were people who identify as Chinese American.
5) Attending a predominantly White institution (PWI) in the United States, which is “the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment” (Christopher Brown II & Elon Dancy II, 2010, p. 2).

Of note, one of the initial criteria (focusing only on the early years of College/University, 1st or 2nd year), contradicted the inclusion age range (18-24), so the broader criteria of accepting participants based on age criteria (rather than year in school) was utilized. This was especially important during COVID pandemic in 2020. The resulting participant respondents were primarily in years 2 through 4 of university, which already had at least 1 year of in-person and on-campus experiences (as opposed to remote only experiences) to reflect upon. This allowed them to draw upon their initial transition experiences (from earlier year[s] before the prolonged
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widespread shelter-in-place orders were in place). However, since the study was focused on Chinese American college students that moved from MMCAC communities to PWI Universities, the key criteria were: 1) Chinese American identity, 2) U.S. Citizenship, 3) enrollment in an Undergraduate program, 4) previous home in an MMCAC environment, and 5) moved to a PWI environment. These components ensured that the primary focus was on the geographical demographic density changes. The Questionnaires (Online screener in Appendix D and phone screener in Appendix E discussed more in detail later in the procedure section) assisted in determining if participants met requirements to be included or were excluded from the study.

**Sampling Method and Source**

**Purposeful sampling.** Due to the unique and specific criteria for participants, purposeful sampling was utilized. Purposeful sampling refers to specifically identifying and selecting particular participants in an efficient way (Palinkas et al., 2015). This was utilized by asking administrators, staff, or program managers at relevant sites to help identify participants with characteristics relevant to the focus of the research study. In addition, semi-targeted Facebook ads were used for outreach and recruitment for purposeful sampling.

**Snowball sampling.** Due to limited resources and the sequential nature of the data collection process (which will be further discussed, i.e. interviews), a sampling strategy called “snowball” sampling was utilized. The snowball strategy was to ask the participants to recommend peers for the study that were likely to have met criteria. The researcher first determined the universities that met the requirement of a PWI, then reached out to staff, professors, or administrators from departments, clubs, diversity programs, and/or other organizations to help with recruitment.
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**Criterion sampling.** Due to the tight inclusion criteria, criterion sampling was used (Draucker et al., 2007; Patton, 1990). This sampling method was applied by targeting through Facebook ads and LinkedIn public profiles, based on specific criteria.

**Theoretical Grounds Based sampling.** Draucker et al. (2007) described theoretical sampling as the focus on potential participants that would yield the most relevant data for categories. Theoretical sampling was primarily used in a later phase, after the preliminary/working codes, concepts, and category/themes that were developed from the initial set of data (from the earlier participant interviews). Prior to the theoretical sampling procedure, theoretical memos and reflection journals were reviewed regarding the thought processes, connections, analyses, and theoretical insights. In addition, memos that logged thoughts and debriefs (from after previous interviews) were reviewed. Additionally, a discussion with the chair advisor for consultation around potential changes for theoretical sampling ensured the procedures were optimal.

In terms of implementation of theoretical sampling, a more direct method of recruitment was used for outreach by using LinkedIn. The relevant profiles (publicly available) were reviewed for outreach (rather than the broad and indirect use of Facebook ads in the previous phase). The theoretical sampling goals (i.e. theme/concept/code saturation, confirmation, disconfirmation, or expansion of topics, etc.) were better met with the LinkedIn strategy compared to the Facebook ad strategy. The Linkedin public profiles showed information, which included their current college/university (as well as past high school and graduation date), current field of study, skills, awards, previous and current jobs, interests, and organizational groups, along with a profile picture. This was much more transparent than the Facebook ad strategy, which was an indirect approximation of the target audience (based on aggregate target
settings). The LinkedIn strategy also helped in theoretical sampling to address the most up-to-date analysis for codes, concepts, and categories at the time. Additionally, narrowing geographic location down to the community level based on the high school/colleges with verifiable demographics, such as with the U.S. Census Bureau (2019) was more efficient than vetting an initially unknown respondent for a Facebook Ad.

c. Procedures

Recruitment Procedures

As this research study is focused on American born Chinese college students that moved from MMCAC to attend PWI university/college, the recruitment process had to consider the most challenging combination of eligibility criteria prior to developing the recruitment plans. Figure 1.

The intersection of the criteria that the potential participants had concurrently met were: 1) attend a PWI, where people that identify a White is “50% or greater of the student enrollment” (Christopher Brown II & Elon Dancy II, 2010, p. 2), and 2) had come from a MMCAC, which is considered as ethnically dense or greater than 50% (Shaw et al., 2012).
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Figure 1

*The Recruitment Flow*
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During the first phase of recruitment, purposeful sampling, and criterion sampling were used. The data for the demographics of university/colleges on the website, Best Colleges in America, Ranked. (n.d.), were reviewed to compile a list of PWI universities/colleges that met the 50% White demographics criteria. The list of PWI universities/colleges were ordered and prioritized by their national rank/competitiveness. Facebook ad campaigns (with available filters) were set to target the geographic areas at and around the PWI college/universities. Additionally, cultural organizations, clubs, and departments were emailed about the research study. Also, the study was sent to Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA) listserv. During the second phase recruitment, theoretical sampling was used (based on the guidance of the preliminary codes, concepts, and categories, which were developed/analyzed from the data from earlier participants in phase 1).

The respondents were then screened (in both phases) through a brief online survey regarding the criteria (Appendix D), followed by an email to contact if they met criteria. If a respondent met initial criteria, a brief phone call was scheduled for further detailed vetting, using the phone screen guide (Appendix E), which primarily focused on the previous home community’s demographics. If all criteria were met, the respondent was asked to participate. If they agreed, an informed consent (Appendix A) with the conditions and agreement were reviewed together (and signed and dated by both the participant and researcher). Then the initial interviews were scheduled. Prior to beginning each interview, an email consisting of 1) a document with a list of mental health resources in the participant’s local areas, as well as national mental health hotlines were provided (as agreed upon in the approved IRB), and 2) A link to a Qualtrics based Demographics Questionnaire were provided (Appendix F) and completed by the participant. The initial interview then occurred over a mutually agreed upon
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recorded zoom call. After completion of the initial interview, the researcher sent the agreed upon incentive (digital gift card). Using Snowball sampling strategy, each participant was asked about other potentially eligible participants that might have been interested in the study. A follow up interview was then scheduled. When the follow-up interview was completed, the participant received the second part of the incentive (as detailed in the informed consent in Appendix A).

**Informed Consent**

The informed consent was provided and reviewed with each participant prior to the data collection process. This document is shown in Appendix A. The sections include 1) Purpose and Background, 2) Procedures, 3) Risks and/or Discomforts, 4) Benefits, 5) Costs/Financial Considerations, 6) Payment/Reimbursement. Additionally, the language of the voluntary nature of this research study was stated. Lastly, the contact information for the researcher and the IRBPHS office was provided. After the review with the offer to discuss/clarify, the participant and researcher both signed and dated this document.

**Screening**

The screening processes consisted of two levels. The online screener level and the phone screen level. Both are discussed below.

**Online screener (Qualtrics).** The online screener (shown in Appendix D) was developed on Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com), as the first level of screening. This was designed to be very broad in scope for the potential target respondents (due to the limited settings for the Facebook [www.facebook.com] advertisements [ads]). The available settings on the Facebook ad interface were indirect and less specific than needed, which led to an aggregate of recipients that included people who did not identify as Chinese American. This was also the reasoning behind the brief and broad initial online screener.
The goal of the screener was for anyone to complete in less than a minute. This screener helped the researcher to determine the next level of screening for the potential participants. The screener described the purpose, instructions, and next steps if criteria is met. If the respondents met all criteria and agreed to be contacted, they were emailed to schedule a call for a phone screen.

**Phone screen.** After permission was given to contact the respondents (on the Qualtrics online screener), an email was sent to set up a 5-10 minute phone screen. The phone screen call was guided by questions shown in the phone screen guide (in Appendix E). The phone call first verbally verified their responses from the previous online screener to ensure accuracy (as well as to expand upon them). However, the most important aspect of the call was to verify that the respondent lived in an MMCAC environment prior to moving away to college/university. This was important because the PWI college/university demographics was easily verifiable but determining the location and demographics of respondent’s home community required more vetting (particularly from Facebook ad respondents, but less so from LinkedIn respondents as their high school was listed in their public profiles). During the screen, all respondents were provided the ability to elaborate or to ask questions for clarification as needed.

There were additional questions in the phone screen guide that depended on the phase of sampling/coding. If the respondent met all criteria, an invitation to participate in the research study was offered. If accepted, the initial interview was scheduled.

**Data Collection**

**Strategy for Participant Sampling and Phases.** The data collection implementation within the Corbin and Strauss’ (1990, 2008) Grounded Theory framework methodology could not have been done in one phase, due to the iterative process that intertwines the recruitment, the
data collection, the coding, and the analysis together into an interconnected cycle. The purpose of the iteration was to allow for flexibility and adaptation through revisions from newly acquired knowledge (Corbin & Strauss 2008, 2014). This assisted the capturing of the socially constructed realities (Ponterotto, 2002), equally valid for each unique individual participant, as well as the discovery of the shared/similar experiences across participants. The high-fidelity data collection process came from being separated into two phases, with each phase consisting of 5 participants. The new knowledge, collected from the interview data of the first 5 participants in phase 1 was coded and analyzed, and informed phase 2’s recruitment (data collection, the coding, and the analysis). The emphasis on using the data from participants to guide the direction of research (rather than prioritizing past literature as a guide), was highlighted by Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) methodology, “discovery of theory from data” (p.1).

**Logistics.** Logistically, the two phases in the current research addressed all processes of the methodology. Phase 1’s goal was to widen the range of codes, concepts, and categories to describe the individual and group experiences, while Phase 2’s goal was to saturate/solidify, narrow (or in some cases to expand) the codes, concepts, and categories revealed in Phase 1.

Phase 1’s recruitment (first 5 participants) utilized purposeful sampling, with a goal of exploring the wide range of experiences. During this phase, each transcribed interview utilized open coding to analytically break down data, for expansion into various concepts and categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

In Phase 2, the recruitment for next 5 participants used theoretical sampling (rather than purposeful sampling with open coding in phase 1). Two types of coding utilized in Phase 2 were selective coding and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2014). Selective coding was used to strengthen, saturate, solidify, clarify, or narrow down the categories from Phase 1 to determine
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central phenomenon or core categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2014). Axial coding focused on
encoding data that demonstrate relationships/connections/observed links between codes,
concepts, or categories. This set the foundation for theory development (using the
Conditional/Consequential Matrix tool discussed later in the analysis section). As described
earlier, the criterion for theoretical sampling was determined carefully, along with consultation.
While maintaining objectivity through reflexivity, the analysis led to the derivation of the codes,
concepts, and categories that were reviewed. This led to the systematic development of the
criterion for theoretical sampling.

**Interviews.** Seidman (2013) proposed a three-interview series, first establishing the
context by focusing on the participant’s life history, followed by reconstructing experiential
details within the context, and finally reflecting on the meaning of the experiences. However,
due to limited time and resources, the spirit of Seidman (2013)’s three-interview series was
modified into two interviews. The initial interviews (45 mins to an hour), focused on background
history, the transition from MMCAC to PWI environments, as well as experiences in both
contexts. The same participants had a follow up interview for approximately 30 minutes, which
focused on verifying the themes, descriptions, and theory developed after the first interview.

**Initial interview.** The initial interviews were conducted over video chat (Zoom). The
interviews began after the informed consent process (Appendix A), with the permission to
record. The explanation of the study was discussed. In the interview process, the main portion of
the interview was semi-structured with guiding questions (Appendix G). The questions first
covered the background demographics and brief history of when the family settled. The
questions subsequently focused on describing the context of their communities (both MMCAC
and after the move to a PWI college/university communities). The narratives and experiences in
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the two contexts were explored. Although the interview guide provided an overall structure, the
interview flow was based on the participants’ responses. The participants were informed that a
follow up interview may revisit topics discussed, that was scheduled for a later date.

Follow-up interview. The follow-up interview, which was also over video chat, focused
on the themes developed from the first interview. This was an opportunity for two-way feedback,
ensuring the validity of their described experiences, while within the Grounded Theory approach.
This provided the opportunity to reflect on conditions and to connect events that lead to their
experiences.

Debriefing

The debriefing process was performed both individually and dyadically. Individually
after each interview, reflections were made with memos and journaling (which is described
further in the next section). The written memos documented thoughts that arose about the
research, such as the procedures, processes, and sampling strategies. The reflection journal was
used as a tool for reflexivity (e.g. salient internal observations in the administration during the
semi-structured interviews). These reflections assisted the practice of bracketing, which
maintained relative objectivity for subsequent interviews. These tools guided discussions with
the chair advisor during weekly check-ins, particularly during the data collection phases. This
helped to discuss criterion for theoretical sampling, which adhered to the procedures. The
systematic optimization of processes in thoughtful manners provided fidelity and validity.

Incentives

The incentive for participants were $15 Amazon gift cards after each interview (initial
and follow up), for a total of $30 per participant. The incentives were provided at the end of each
interview.
d. Description of Measures and Instrumentation

**Tools**

**Demographics Questionnaire.** The demographics questionnaire was utilized to gather background data such as age, gender, self-identified race and ethnic identity, geographic location of home prior to attending college and demographics, and current college/university location and demographics (Appendix F).

**Interview Guide for Interviews.** In the initial and follow up interviews, semi-structured interviews were utilized. This maintained a degree of consistency to similar topics, while allowing flexibility of the interviews to flow naturally to important, relevant, or unforeseen topics. The guide for the initial interview is in Appendix G. The three broad areas the semi-structured interview explored were the participant’s background, the two contexts, and related experiences. This data was recorded and transcribed for coding. The detailed range of questions for the semi-structured interview is in Appendix G.

**Transcription.** A transcription service was used to transcribe the interviews for efficiency and to minimize time delays.

**Reflexive Journal.** The purpose of the research or reflexive journal was to document or note thoughts about the research process, separate from memos (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Tufford & Newman, 2012). This journal helped to gain self-awareness on biases and reasons for making decisions. The evolution of the research process and progress, and insight to own behavior was helpful. Problems and researcher/participant reactions were also noted. For example, the responses to narratives with expressed emotions, empathy, and feelings, were tracked with running logs and self-reflections (to help understand influences of interpretations).
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**Memos and Diagrams.** According to Corbin and Strauss (2014), *memos* are “written records analysis” (p. 135), while *diagrams* are “visual devices that depict relationships between analytic concepts” (p. 135). Both analytic tools were efficient systems beyond recording and analysis, as they allowed dialoguing with the data, deepening the analysis. This process captured the researcher’s internal flow of thoughts about the data. Comparisons, examinations, and questions helped form concepts, and relationships from concepts. The combination of the memo and diagrams tracked the analysis, which led to the final findings.

**Memos.** According to Corbin and Strauss (2014), memos vary in terms of length, level of conceptualization, content, and research phase. Memos have functions beyond information storage. The memos led to working with concepts rather than raw data. The analytic thoughts within the memos were sorted, retrieved, ordered, and reordered. The memos helped to organize categories for further refinement by indicating if the category is well developed. Writing memos were done periodically, which helped to gain a better sense of how the concepts fit relative to each other.

**Types of memos.** According to Corbin and Strauss (2014), types of memos include: 1) open data exploration, 2) identifying/developing concepts, or categories, 3) question asking, making comparisons, 4) exploration of relationships between conditions, actions-interactions, and consequences (further discussed and defined in the concept and guideline section of the data analysis), and 5) developing the story line.

Memos were used to ask questions, and to make comparisons of previous memos. They facilitated systematic thinking. The questions written into the memo were the thought processes that assisted the development of the criteria for theoretical sampling. This helped documented thoughts during the steps in recruitment, data collection, coding, and analysis. In addition,
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memos helped explore relationships, conditions, actions-interactions, and consequences that led to the theory development. Memos also kept track of the thought processes and the complexity of the theory development over time.

Diagrams. According to Corbin and Strauss (2014), diagrams are the visualized concepts of data. Diagrams helped to conceptualize beyond descriptions organized in a way. Creating diagrams reduced concepts down to the essence and into illustration maps of their relationships. This helped to systematically integrate ideas with respect to relationships and concepts.

e. Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis section first explains the background concepts related to Grounded Theory analysis. This is followed by the explanation of the ATLAS.ti software tool used during the coding and data analysis. Lastly, the three types of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, utilized were described.

Concepts and Guidelines

Corbin and Strauss (1990, 2008, 2014) describe the framework and procedures for an analysis strategy that was utilized in this study. Using the constant comparisons strategy, the codes, concepts, and categories were developed. These components, along with conditions, action-interactions, consequences/outcomes in the Conditional/Consequential Matrix were used in the application of the framework and the theory development within the analysis paradigm.

Codes. Codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, 2014), were developed from raw data around content with similar topics during the analysis. The preliminary codes were solidified by constant comparison of existing data.

Concepts. A concept is as a product of analysis and interpretations (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2014). This was developed from words analyzed from the transcripts regarding groups,
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events, objects, and actions. The concepts were logged, and cross checked during the memo and research journal reflections.

**Categories.** Categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, 2014), are higher level conceptions, where lower-level concepts are grouped. This can also be referred to as a theme. Categories were derived from reducing and combining relevant phenomena.

**Constant Comparisons.** Constant comparison (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2014) is a strategy and tool utilized in coding analysis by comparing similarities or differences amongst incidents. The benefit of the constant comparison tool was to protect against researcher bias through active challenges of new data, to achieve higher consistency with greater precision. The constant comparison strategy was also used throughout the data collection, coding, and analysis processes, which were all interrelated based on the Grounded Theory framework. Parts of data were compared to each other for differences or similarities. They were grouped into codes, concepts, categories, or themes to guide further data collection and analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 2014).

**Analysis Paradigm.** The analysis paradigm within the Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, 2014) provided the perspective lens that assisted in determining the relationships between codes, concepts, categories by linking conditions, action-interactions, and consequences or outcomes.

**Conditions.** Conditions refer to initial settings with the explanation on ‘why’ things happen, or perceived reasons for subsequent action-interactions. According to Corbin and Strauss (2014), this may be explicit (in the field notes) or implicit, but “sometimes a person use words that cue analysts that they are about the explain or give reasons for behavior, such as because, since, due to, when, which is followed by an action-interaction” (pg. 196).
Responses or Action-interactions. According to Corbin and Strauss (2014), action-interactions refers to the “actual responses people or groups of people make to the events or problematic situations that occur in their lives” (p. 197). Action-interactions (feelings and behaviors) were responses due the conditions of a context, such as managing problems, goals, and challenges.

Consequences or outcomes. Consequences are described as actual or anticipated outcomes of the action/interactions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, 2014).

The Conditional/Consequential Matrix. The conditional/consequential matrix (Corbin and Strauss, 2014) is a tool that links and organizes concepts that “helps analysts identify the range of possible conditions that are operating in any situation” (pg. 191). According to Corbin and Strauss (2008, 2014), the range of conditions refer to the participants’ experiences, assumptions, cultural background, education, etc. that led to the problematic situation or event within a context (beyond the individual, micro, and macro) and conditions. This influenced the responses or action-interactions and was followed by the outcome consequence. The matrix helped to capture the complexity of the range of conditions, outcomes, and the relationships between the components. This analysis tool assisted theory development within the defined context.

Context. Due to the complexity of context (the multiple environments over time periods, in this research), Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979, 1986, 1994) ecological model was utilized and embedded in the conditional/consequential matrix. The context was described thoroughly through subsystems that included the Microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and the chronosystem. The complex dynamic relationships amongst the micro and macro
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systems, conditions, and consequences provided meaning behind the responses or action-interaction.

**ATLAS.ti, A Software Tool for Coding, and Analysis**

The software tool utilized in this research analysis process was ATLAS.ti. This software allowed for the development of systematic analysis from texts, graphics, audio, and video data sources. The components in ATLAS.ti were documents, quotations, coding entities, memos, groups, and networks. The features included extraction, comparison, exploration, and management of data for interpretation. This allowed for systematic yet flexible development of meaningful interpretations during the qualitative processes.

**Coding**


**Open coding.** Open coding, according to Corbin and Strauss (1990), is the process of analytically breaking down data to provide new ways to interpret phenomena. The implementation of the technique for open coding was to compare events, actions, and interactions (as defined earlier), and to provide conceptual labels. The open coding process was a guide to increase theoretical sensitivity with the comparisons of new information to each category. This process resolved ambiguities amongst solidifying categories, guided additional work, and determined new categories. Open coding also helped to determine the method of fracturing data into subsets of categories or multiple concepts. The use of questioning and constant comparisons during this process helped to systematically examine categories against the data. This ensured the data and errors were appropriately classified (and reclassified if needed).
Axial coding. Axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2014) utilized the analysis paradigm to determine the relationships between the categories, concepts, codes, or data. These connections, relationships, and links were identified through axial coding, which assisted in theory development. Axial codes utilized strategies to connect the contextual conditions to action/interactions and the consequences to set the foundation for the Conditional/Consequential Matrix analysis tool within the Grounded Theory framework (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2014). During the axial coding, all relationships were initially hypothetical and considered provisional until verified. The hypothesis was verified through multiple confirmations of data with consistent relationships between the same codes, concepts, and categories. The systematic process led to the developed substantive theory.

Selective coding phase. Selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2014) helped to identify the core categories and central phenomenon (main analytic concept in the research). Core categories emerged from the range of categories, some more developed than others. The well-developed categories were saturated with density of information. The core categories set the foundation for both the descriptive analysis outcome, as well as the substantive theory outcome, within the Grounded Theory framework.

f. IRBPHS Approval Letters

Human Subjects

A formal document was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was approved. Additionally, a renewal was also accepted. Both approval emails are shown Appendix C.
Results

This results chapter is organized in three sections: 1) The results of the demographics questionnaire describing participants’ background for context; 2) Thought process of the interview data organization and narrowing of categories that were prevalent across all participants; 3) The strongest themes presented with supportive data.

Demographics Background

The demographics data was collected on a Qualtrics demographics questionnaire. The general aggregate of the results provided an overview starting with the referral source. The participants’ gender distribution as well as the regions of the PWI university/colleges were determined, including the enrollment size and rank of the universities/colleges. Descriptions of the participants including income, GPA, and the major field of study during college is presented. Characteristics of the MMCAC environment and family background descriptive, including parents’ education and language(s) used are also described. The prevalence of mental health service use for the participants was determined across both environments. Lastly, contrasting demographics between the PWI and MMCAC shifts are also described.

Referral Source

The overall sampling sources across the two phases (purposeful sampling and theoretical sampling) differed. Since phase 1 was broader (Facebook online ads/groups, campus groups, and listserv such as for the Asian American Psychological Association [AAPA]). Also, snowball sampling referrals resulted in further peer outreach. Phase 2, with narrower parameters, outreach focused on LinkedIn as it allows for more specificity based on the iterative analysis and theme saturation. In total, 44 participants completed the online screener (36% from Facebook ad/group,
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36% from LinkedIn Site, 18% from recommendations of staff/peers, 5% from organizations including the AAPA, and 5% Other including posts by family/friends).

Figure 2 shows the distribution of respondents through the two phases to narrow down to the final 10 participants over the two sampling phases.

**Figure 2**

*Outreach and Participant Sampling Process*

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Phase 1 utilized purposeful sampling through Facebook ads/groups and snowball sampling through referrals. After the online screener and a brief screen via telephone, 5 participants were selected and interviewed. The theoretical sampling in Phase 2 was guided by the initial analysis for the 5 remaining participants.

**Participants’ Gender and University/College Regions**

The initial analysis after phase 1 revealed a gender disparity. Since 100% of the respondents in phase 1 identified as female, the subsequent outreach utilized theoretical sampling...
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to address this disparity. In phase 2, 40% were male and this led to an overall final distribution (after phase 1 and phase 2) of 80% female, and 20% male, n=10.

To ensure broader geographic representation and to provide anonymity, geographic regions based on the US census original definitions in their Geographic areas (4 regions: Northeast, Midwest, South, West), were utilized. Similar to gender distribution in phase 1, there was no geographical variation in initial respondents (predominantly from the Northeast region). This was addressed in the theoretical sampling in phase 2. Overall, after the two phases, the participants n=10, were represented by: 50% from the Northeast Region, 30% from the Midwest Region, 10% from the South Region, and 10% from the West Region, Pacific Division.

*Enrollment Size of Participants’ attending Universities/Colleges and National Rank*

Theoretical sampling was also used for the distribution of national rank for the universities/colleges. After the two phases, 40% were determined to attend universities/colleges between 1-19 rank, 20% between 20-39 rank, 20% between 40-70 rank, and 20% rank 70 or greater nationally.

The university/college size was categorized by either small, medium, large, and very large.\(^1\) Based on this definition, for n=10, the result was: 20% from small sized, 30% from medium sized, 20% from large sized, and 30% very large enrollment sized universities/colleges.

*Participants’ descriptions during university/college*

Descriptions included age, income during college, year in university, and GPA for the n=10 participants. The mean current age was 20.2 (SD=0.5), the mean estimated current income

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\(^1\) Small is defined as a university/college with fewer than 10,000 student enrollments, medium is defined as between 10,000-20,000 student enrollments, large is defined as between 20,000-30,000 student enrollments, and very large is defined as more than 30,000 student enrollments at the university/college.
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was $12,107.33 (SD=$17,632), the mean current year in university was 3.3 (SD=0.7), and the
mean current university GPA was 3.77 (SD=0.16).

Major study field

Chen and Weko (2009), and Ma (2011), describe an over-representation of Asian
Americans in STEM fields compared to those identifying as White and other minority groups.
Additionally, Min and Jang (2015), using data from American Community Surveys 2009–11
state 68% of Chinese Americans are in the STEM related field. This led to the descriptive
analysis of the participants’ major study areas to be categorized as STEM (including double
majors that include a STEM degree) and non-STEM, which was 60%, 40%, respectively.

Population and Geographic Region of previous MMCAC Setting

The geographic regions and population size of the towns and cities of the participants,
MMCAC environments were described. The geographic regions from the participants
represented all four U.S. regions: 45% came from Region 1 (Northeast), 11% came from Region
2 (Midwest), 11% came from Region 3 (South), and 33% came from Region 4 (West).2

Family Background and Characteristics of previous MMCAC Setting

A variety of characteristics regarding the participants’ family background were
determined. Additional questions from the demographic’s questionnaire were also described. For
example, with n=10, the mean number of siblings was 1.1 (SD=0.9). In terms of the highest level
of education for the father was 15.7 years (SD = 2.9) and for mother was 15.1 years (SD = 4.3).
The mean estimated family income (prior college) was $133,887.78 (SD=$73,485.76). In the
previous setting, the mean in high school GPA was 3.74 (SD=0.19), across all the participants.

2 The size of the town or city is categorized by population size. For this study, 20% from > 500K population, 30%
from 500k-1 Million population, 30% from 1-5 Million population, and 33% from < 5 million people.
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Additionally, the demographics questionnaire also determined that 20% of participants were “first to attend” university/college.

Languages and self-described ethnic/racial identity
All participants identified as Chinese American and primarily spoke English. In addition, 90% of the participants also spoke a dialect of Chinese at home. The specific language(s) were incorporated with the interview coding and presented in the category/themes section.

Mental Health Service Use History
The demographics questionnaire also determined that the majority of the participants have not used mental health services. In the question, “Have you ever received mental health services?”, 80% said “No”.

PWI University/College vs MMCAC High School Demographics Contrast
The most salient characteristic that distinguished this group (participants that identified as Chinese American College Students, that experienced a demographic shift from MMCAC to PWI environments), experienced is shown in Figure 3.
Figure 3 described the drastic change in the demographics across the two environments. The demographics at their Universities/Colleges (predominantly White=59.8%, Asian=11.2%, average participant reported schools from n=10) appeared to be an inverse of the demographics compared to their High Schools (predominantly Asian=72%, White=17%, average from participant reported schools n=10). The data gathered for the figure was from the websites, Best High Schools Rankings (n.d.), and The Best Colleges in America (n.d.). They did not have a more specific ethnicity beyond “Asian”. However, each participant confirmed that their peers were predominantly Chinese American.

Categories/Themes

The overview describes the development process for categories, also called themes. Subsequently, each theme is described in detail.

Overview

To determine the categories or themes, the raw data was encoded into codes then concepts. Codes were phrases or ideas that represent the raw data (or quotes). Concepts, according to Corbin and Strauss (2008), are interpretations that stand for groups or the cluster of
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codes. Categories or themes are a higher-level grouping that represent phenomena from reduced and combined data.

Using ATLAS.ti during the initial stages, 1067 quotes from the raw data were gathered. After multiple iterations and reductions, 48 codes, 17 concepts and 6 categories/themes, were developed. The 6 primary categories/themes were: “Previous MMCAC Environment,” “Identity,” “Values,” “New PWI Environment,” “Transition Experience,” and “Mental Health.” These categories/themes are further described in terms of concepts and codes from the data, summarized below.

Previous MMCAC Environment (Category/Theme 1).

The theme, “Previous MMCAC Environment”, included the concept of characteristics, and phenomenon. The codes under the concepts are described.

Characteristics (Concept). This concept encompassed the following codes: “Description of Early Demographics and Social Groups,” “The Collectivistic value with Family, Peers, and Chinese American Organizations,” “Accelerated programs and Competition,” and “Extra Academic Prep, Music, or Additional School Culture”. These codes are further described.

Description of Early Demographics and Social Groups (Code). This code primarily described the common experience that the participants (in this case all 10) had, which was having predominantly Chinese American peers in the previous MMCAC. For example, Participant 3 (2019) said “I... always mostly had Asian friends...it was just easier to make friends with them because it was the majority.” Participant 9 (2020) said “My Chinese American friends from elementary school followed me through middle school...”

The Collectivistic value with Family, Peers, and Chinese American Organizations (Code). This code described the communal aspect of the MMCAC environment, which included...
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family, peers, as well as clubs in high school. For example, Participant 3 (2019) said, “there's
more of a communal family-centered view in Asian communities”. Additionally, Participant 7
(2020) said “I was part of the Chinese American club in my school.”

*Accelerated programs and Competition (Code).* This code described the competitive
nature of the MMCAC environment. For example, Participant 7 (2020) said “My high school
was really, really competitive.” This is further supported by Participant 8 (2020) stating “My
high school is definitely much better than a lot of other high schools.” Many of the participants
described special programs, such as “AP [Advanced Placement] program” or “IB [International
Baccalaureate] program” (Participant 2, 2019) in high school. In addition, selective entrance tests
were described by Participant 9 (2020) as “[I took] an entrance test to get into these specialized
high schools" and Participant 6 (2020) as “the high school I went to ...you have to take exams to
get in.” In addition, Participant 6 (2020), described the demographics of the program and schools
and said “60% or 70% of the student body was Asian.”

*Extra Academic Prep, Music, or Additional School Culture (Code).* This code described
the common additional extracurriculars, primarily also focused on academics. For example, both
Participant 7 (2020) and Participant 9 (2020) described this as “prep school”. Participant 9
(2020) said it was “to prepare for these exams that we have to take to get into middle school and
then high school.” Also, both Participant 2 (2019) and Participant 4 (2019) described “Chinese
school” on weekends. Participant 4 (2019) also said “we also all did play musical instruments”.
This was a similar experience to Participant 7 (2020), who also added “SAT prep was very early.
That was elementary school.”

*Phenomenon (Concept).* The concept, “Phenomenon”, encompassed codes that
included: “Awareness of being in a Majority-Minority Group and Lack of Reflection or
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Discussion of identity in Environment,” “Due to being in a MMCAC environment, Lack of Negative Encounters Related to Ethnic background,” and “Level of Pride Reflection,” which are further described.

Awareness of being in a Majority-Minority Group and Lack of Reflection or Discussion of identity in Environment (Code). This code described the phenomenon of growing up in a MMCAC as it relates to identity reflection and social experiences. For example, Participant 10 (2020) described “...I didn't think too much about my Asian identity... all of my friends were Asian...” Similarly, Participant 9 (2020) said, “I belong with the Chinese...I'm a majority. I didn't need to think about it.,” while Participant 3 (2019) said “we had generally similar ethnic backgrounds, it's not something that we talked a lot about.” Participant 2 (2019) also said “I hang out with a lot of Chinese American people.” Participant 8 (2020) explained a similar experience but also the conditions, stating “student population demographic did somewhat influence, like how much I thought of [identity] because I'd never really thought about it too much.” This showed that on a daily basis, reflection of identity was limited in a MMCAC environment, however, when learning about the broader history of the people, reflection occurred. Participant 8 (2020) further described reasons for the limited reflections, stating, “I never really gave it a lot of thought... back home is just people who are just people.”

Due to being in a MMCAC environment, Lack of Negative Encounters Related to Ethnic background (Code). This code described the phenomenon of having a lack of negative experiences in terms of racism or microaggressions as a Chinese American in a MMCAC environment. For example, Participant 7 (2020) said “because we were all Asian, I don't think there's a lot of racial issues with that regard.” Participant 9 (2020) said “in high school, I didn't
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really experience any discrimination because I was in such a bubble...” Participant 6 (2020) reasoned, “I live in very liberal areas...where that kind of stuff is less likely to happen.”

Level of Pride Reflection (Code). This code described self-reflection on the level of pride as it relates to ethnic identity. For example, Participant 1 (2019) stated “I’m pretty proud. I’m happy to be Chinese American.” Other participants chose to provide a rating to describe their level of pride, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most positive. This resulted in some variation. For example, Participant 7 (2020) said “Probably 10...[it’s] comforting to know that there are other people around me with the same experiences.” Since this was a qualitative question, some participants organically used a scale to describe their experience whereas others were more verbally descriptive.

Identity (Category/Theme 2)

The theme, “Identity”, included “History and Heritage” and “Self-Described Characteristics” as concepts.

History and Heritage (Concept). The concept, “History and Heritage,” encompassed the following codes: “Rituals, Ceremonies,” “Chinese language,” and “Ancestry, History, Parent's Origins, Heritage/Family Immigration History/Generation.” These codes are further described.

Rituals, Ceremonies (Code). This code described cultural rituals and ceremonies based on history and heritage as it relates to Chinese American cultural identity. For example, Participant 2 (2019) said “I celebrate Chinese New Year. I think that my parents definitely place a bigger value on culture, and they try to instill it in me as well.” Participant 7 (2020) said “We do celebrate the Chinese holidays...I think there's a ghost festival or something.”
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**Chinese language (Code).** This code described Chinese language use as it relates to Chinese American cultural identity. Nine out of the ten participants described speaking at least one Chinese dialect at home with parents. For example, Participant 3 (2019) said “When I'm at home, it's usually a mix of English and Mandarin.” Similarly, Participant 7 (2020) said “I also speak Mandarin.” The one exception was from Participant 8 (2020) stating “I am not fluent in any form of Chinese,” and explained that their parents were born in America. Participant 6 (2020), however, had parents that are immigrants, language use was described as, “When [parents] had me, they were not very Westernized. I grew up speaking Cantonese a lot more than English.” Participant 10 (2020) discussed language in the context of peers, stating “My friends were Asian. We often talk to each other in Cantonese.”

**Ancestry, History, Parent's Origins, Heritage/Family Immigration History/Generation (Code).** This code described the perspective of history and identity. The majority of the participants described the parents as immigrants. For example, Participant 2 (2019) said “My dad came to the US around the 1980s and my mom came to the US around the 1990s.” Participant 6 (2020) said “My parents didn't come here till maybe the '90s.” The one exception was Participant 8 (2020), who described the grandparents rather than parent’s immigration stating, “My grandparents immigrated and my parents grew up in America.”

**Self-Described Characteristics (Concept).** The concept, “Self-Described Characteristics”, encompassed the following codes: “Description of Ethnic Identity,” “Gender and Sexual Orientation,” “Religious/spirituality,” and “SES Identity”.

**Description of Ethnic Identity (Code).** This code related to the self-described description of ethnic identity, which is a common thread as all participants identify as Chinese American. For example, Participant 1 (2019) said “Chinese. Broadly speaking Asian and then Chinese

**Gender and Sexual Orientation (Code).** This code described the self-described identities and supplemented the demographics questionnaire, where 8 out of 10 identify as female. For example, Participant 7 (2020) said “I identify as a female.” Some participants also added their sexual identity as well. For example, Participant 9 (2020) said “I'm a female Chinese American. Straight”, Participant 1 (2019) said “Female, bisexual,” and Participant 10 (2020) said “I am a cis-gendered woman...I'm pansexual.” An example from the male participant’s self-description is Participant 6 (2020), stating “I identify as male.”

**Religious/spirituality (Code).** This code described the impact of religion or spirituality on identity. The responses varied, with clusters around: 1) Christianity, 2) Buddhism, or 3) religion/spirituality not being a focus on their identities. For example, for Christianity, Participant 4 (2019) said, “I also strongly identify as a Christian,” similar to Participant 6 (2020) stating “My family...basically Christian.” For Buddhism, Participant 9 (2020) stated “My family, I grew up following Buddhism and Confucianism.” The two participants said religion or spirituality was not a focus of their identities. Participant 8 (2020) said “religion [was] not something that's really focused on in my family,” and Participant 7 (2020) said “Nothing religious, but we do celebrate the Chinese holidays.”

**SES Identity (Code).** This code described the self-described socioeconomic status, which varied from “low to middle” to “upper-middle-class” to high SES. For example, Participant 4 (2019) said “low to middle class.” Participant 3 (2019) elaborated on the experience with “…only recently has my parents' incomes stabilized and we've been at an okay place.” Participant 6
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(2020) described SES in terms of context, “came from lower-middle-class background. I actually feel in a sense poor compared to how well off everyone is.” Participant 1 (2019) said, “I came from a pretty comfortable upper-middle-class family,” while Participant 2 (2019) said “when I was growing up maybe middle class, then when I went into high school, we were more upper-middle-class.”

**Values (Category/Theme 3)**

The “Values” theme included “Chinese Traditions and American Culture” and “Education, Occupation, Financial Stability” as concepts.

**Chinese Traditions and American Culture (Concept).** The concept, “Chinese Traditions and American Culture,” encompassed the following codes: “Chinese Culture Influenced Values: Instilled Filial Duties and Work Ethics,” and “Reflection of Eastern-Western Values.”

**Chinese Culture Influenced Values: Instilled Filial Duties and Work Ethics (Code).**

This code described culturally influenced values. Two participants stated Confucianism in their responses, in relation to valuing family and education. Participant 6 (2020) said “I feel like that's a very traditional Chinese or even Confucian value just to study really hard and value education.” Similarly, Participant 9 (2020) said “filial piety is a big thing. Family is a big part of me...Confucianism, it's more of a...like moral guide, it's ingrained in the culture.” Participants also focused on work ethics as Participant 2 (2019) said “Our Asian parents were much stricter.” While Participant 4 (2019) said “another value I have is like work ethic and self-discipline.” Participant 5 (2019) discussed reputation, “There's a strong emphasis on reputation...There's a strong emphasis on saving face and pride.”
Reflection of Eastern-Western Values (Code). This code described the juxtaposition or integration of Chinese and American cultural values. Participant 4 (2019) demonstrated this through internal reflection, with “For the American side...the values were like being an individual...my values and how I treat people...I lean more towards my Chinese culture.” Participant 5 (2019) focused on events from the two cultures, stating “we would celebrate Western holidays... but we'd also hold celebrations for Chinese New Year.” Participant 8 (2020) described differences between the two cultures as:

I'd say most of the cultural influences I've had from my Chinese heritage was from familial values. Some speaking terms for example, like uncle and aunt, typically, as I've learned in America, and typically like European and Western cultures. You only refer to uncles and aunts with actual familial relations. The uncle and aunts cannot be a-- unlike a-- at least the Chinese culture can be referred to like friends, like elders as a like a term of respect and endearment as well.

Education, Occupation, Financial Stability (Concept). The concept, “Education, Occupation, Financial Stability” was distilled down to the code “Value Education, Finances, and Stability instilled from parents.”

Value Education, Finances, and Stability instilled from parents (Code). This code described the value of education, finances, and career choice influenced by parents. Participant 9 (2020) said, “from a young age, we're always pushed to pursue things that are very STEM heavy.” With a similar experience, Participant 5 (2019) chose a double major as a compromise for parents (one in STEM and one in non-STEM) “I felt like creativity was pretty important. I don't think my parents share the same values.” Participant 6 (2020) associated valuing education as a protective factor, stating “[My parents] think that education is a source of social mobility...
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because Asians face discrimination in many ways... education is one of the best ways to prove
yourself to society... I was brought up to see education that way.”

New PWI Environment (Category/Theme 4)

The “New PWI Environment” theme included “Demographics and Location” and
“Culture At PWI” as concepts.

Demographics and Location (Concept). The “Demographics and Location” concept encompassed the following codes: “Awareness of Peers that Identify as White,” and “American Born Chinese Students and International Students.”

Awareness of Peers that Identify as White (Code). In the context of the new PWI environment, this code described the awareness of peers that Identify as White with respect to the demographics of the location. For example, Participant 1 (2019) stated, “I would say 95% White.” Participant 3 (2019) stated, “at my school, it's 70% White,” while Participant 7 (2020) stated, “70% White.” Similarly, Participant 9 (2020) stated that “the [university/college] is predominantly White.”

American Born Chinese Students and International Students (Code). In the context of the new PWI environment, this code described the awareness of peers that Identify as American Born Chinese Students and International Students with respect to the demographics of the location. For example, Participant 5 (2019) said, “they see international kids at school and they see the Asian Americans at school and there are these very distinct little niches or communities.” Also, Participant 9 (2020) estimated that international Chinese students had higher representation than Asian American students, stating “about 50 are international Chinese students, and then about 10 are Asian Americans.” Participant 4 (2019) described interactions and efforts to form a
community, stating “I was trying to start an Asian-American Bible study... it didn't work because it just was too scattered."

**Culture at PWI (Concept).** The “Culture at PWI” concept encompassed the code “Liberal/Progressive Culture”, which was a consolidation of similar codes.

**Liberal/Progressive Culture (Code).** This code described the culture experienced at the PWI universities/colleges. For example, Participant 2 (2019) said their PWI “...is a liberal college.” Similarly, Participant 6 (2020) said, “[university/college] is a very open and liberal place.” However, Participant 3 (2019) has a slightly different perspective stating, “...everyone tries to be very politically correct so people are very afraid of crossing lines.”

**Transition Experience (Category/Theme 5)**


**New Challenges (Concept).** The concept, “New Challenges,” encompassed the following codes: “Initial Change, Earlier Years/Experience, Awareness of Shift from MMCAC to PWI” and “Cultural barriers to connect, Mutual/Media interest, Code Switch Learning Curve, Speech and Interactions.”

**Initial Change, Earlier Years/Experience, Awareness of Shift from MMCAC to PWI (Code).** This code described the initial transition for Chinese American participants shifting from the MMCAC to PWI environments, becoming a statistical minority. Participant 8 (2020) described the initial experience as “shock” regarding the demographics, stating “I grew up in an area where like 85% of the student body was Asian...here, it's 50% White, so this was just a little bit of a shock.” Participant 6 (2020) also used the word “shock,” due to the background of peers,
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in the statement “the biggest culture shock for me at [university/college] was meeting people who went to very elite high schools.”

Participants also described the adjustment process in terms of: 1) no longer being the statistical majority and 2) the process or challenges of connecting with peers in a PWI environment. Participant 3 (2019) stated “I'm definitely not in-group when I'm here,” However, Participant 9 (2020) described the challenges of explaining Chinese American culture to peers that identify as White “When I tried to explain to my roommate who was White, ‘Oh, I eat with chopsticks.’ She just found it very surprising.”

Cultural barriers to connect, Mutual/Media interest, Code Switch Learning Curve, Speech and Interactions (Code). This code described the challenges in the new environment, regarding the need to adapt interpersonally and culturally (due to barriers to connect with peers that identify as White). Participant 3 (2019) described this by stating “I've learned that I adapt to speak differently in [university/college] in general and with certain people, but even that is a slow shift and a slow learning curve.” Participant 5 (2019) noticed the behavioral differences but did not express adaptation, and said “…harder for me to...connect with people just because I'm so used to the culture of like Asian-Americans.” Multiple participants also expressed the difficulty of interpersonal exchanges due to preferences in cultural media. Participant 6 (2020) said, “I find it difficult to talk with White people just because I don't know what to talk with them about...It's so much easier to connect with Asians.”

Similarly, Participant 7 (2020) also discussed media preferences as a barrier:

If you watch The Office...or something like that, chances are, I can't talk with you because I haven't watched those so I can't relate... Versus... K-dramas... I have a better chance of talking to you because I have at least seen so I can communicate with you.
Awareness of Differences in Culture (Concept). The concept, “Awareness of Differences in Culture,” encompassed the following codes: “Values of independence from family after college difference,” “Food Culture Differences,” and “Cultural Behavioral Differences.”

Values of independence from family after college difference (Code). This code described the awareness of differing values, such as independence and cultural expectations.

Participant 3 (2019) expressed this in the anecdote:

I was talking to [someone] recently…she wants to move back home after she graduates...she felt a lot of, shame...the norm is that you move out...separate from your family, whereas I feel like if I did that with my family, it's very normal...I also want to be there to help them...it's kind of a familial responsibility.

Similarly Participant 9 (2020) became aware of this difference in the statement: “...like Asian culture, the parents are fine with their kids moving back...In the Western society, now, after you graduate college, you have to move and be more financially independent...”

Food Culture Differences (Code). This code described interpersonal interactions with peers in new environments regarding cultural differences in food. For example, Participant 1 (2019) said: “...trying to explain to a classmate, who's White, about this Chinese snack that I miss. She was just really confused.” Participant 3 (2019) said, “I would have to...justify why I did certain things with...food...people would be grossed out. I'd be like, ‘Why?’”

Participant 9 (2020) also experienced the challenging discussion around cultural foods:

...My mom taught me how to make a summer roll, and I told [friends that identify as White], "Oh, this is how you do it." They told me, "Oh, what's the difference?" I was like, "I know the difference, but I just don't know how to explain it."
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*Cultural Behavioral Differences (Code).* This code described specific behaviors such as Participant 3 (2019) stated, “...it's mostly the, ‘Take off your shoes before you walk inside’... I would also have to explain things that I said a lot more often.” Similarly, Participant 7 (2020) also described “taking off shoes” along with other behaviors in the statement, “In our dining hall, I would only take chopsticks because that's just what I'm familiar with. When I go into my room...you have to take off your shoes.”

*Notable Changes of Experiences (Concept).* The concept, “Notable Changes of Experiences,” encompassed the following codes: “Building New Peer Relationships – Two Group Paths (Associated to Theory),” “Salient Challenges in Connecting with Home Community, MMCAC (Exceptions, Associated to Theory),” “Freedom from Parents and Previous Community Culture,” “Level of Support, Social Cultural Advocacy Organizations,” and “Post COVID and Social Challenges”.

*Building New Peer Relationships – Two Group Paths (Associated to Theory) (Code).* This code referred to the friendship building process, which was associated with the theory development, further explained in the discussion. What arose from the data was a phenomenon that the majority of the participants (eight of the 10) tended to seek or build friendships with Chinese American or Asian American peers despite being in a PWI environment. However, two of the 10 participants found Chinese American or Asian American peers in the PWI environment but preferred to have a primary White-identifying friend group. The unique findings and variations clustered into two subgroups that took two different paths. The two subgroups were described with data in two subcodes:

1) *Path #1 (8 of 10 participants): Gradually Finding/Seeking, Chinese American or Asian American in PWI Environment (subcode).* Participant 2 (2019) highlighted the
phenomenon of the subcode by first describing the context of the PWI demographics. Participant 2 (2019) stated, “It's known to be a mostly White University. However... I like to surround myself in the Asian bubble.” Similar to Participant 2 (2019), Participant 6 (2020) used the phrase “Asian Bubble”, and stated, “I feel the odd thing is even though [university/college] is commonly white, I feel like I've surrounded myself in an Asian bubble once again...I feel like it's easier to connect with them.”

Providing more insight on this phenomenon, Participant 1 (2019) stated, “I felt like it would be a lot easier to connect with people if we had that shared commonality of being Asian.”

However, the process of finding and developing a Chinese or Asian American social friend group in the PWI environment was gradual, as described by Participant 3 (2019):

It was a slow building of relationships. I hung out with a lot of people, a lot of other White kids and then I transitioned to just hanging out more with a group of people that were Asian...I've surrounded myself with people that are similar to me/people that are POC.

This is similar to Participant 7 (2020), that described friends to be predominantly Asian, stating “I still tend to hang out with the... Asians. I know it's a bad thing.” Participant 7 (2020)’s use of the phrasing “I know it's a bad thing,” referred to having predominantly Asians friends, and implied a sense of obligation to having an alternative friend group. This might explain Participant 9 (2020)’s experience, which described two friend groups:

I have... two friend groups, my Asian friend group and my White friend group. I guess here I'm supported by all my friends... my white friend group, it's more of just a wholesome group who I have fun with. The Asian friend group... I tell them more truths or more personal stuff about my family and stuff.
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Since this clearly described the Asian friend group as more deeply connected, based on the cultural activities and conversational depth, Participant 9 (2020)’s experience was categorized in the first subgroup of “Path #1 (8 of 10 participants): Gradually Finding/Seeking, Chinese American or Asian American in PWI Environment (subcode).”

On the other hand, two participants had a different experience, which led to a second subcode, path #2, where the participants connected more deeply with peers that identify as White.

2) Path #2 (2 of 10 participants): Choosing Support Primarily from Peers that identify as White, after Acknowledgment Existence of Chinese American or Asian American Peers in the PWI Environment (subcode). This subcode was demonstrated by two participants that were the exceptions compared to path #1. Participant 4 (2019) stated “...the Asian community...we are just not connected at all. Most of my friends are White.” This statement distinguishes this participant (from the previous 8 participants in path #1), to be in path #2 because of the described lack of connection to the Asian community, and instead had friends that predominantly identify as White. Similarly, Participant 10 (2020) also described the primary group of friends that identified as White (due to choice, and not due to the lack of demographics limitations in the PWI environment). This was demonstrated in the statement, ‘Occasionally, I would hang out with the friends that are also Cantonese. The friend group that I primarily hung out with in college was White.”

To summarize the code and subcodes, the Building New Peer Relationships – Two Group Paths code comprised of subcodes: 1) Path #1 (8 of 10 participants), Gradually Finding/Seeking, Chinese American or Asian American in PWI Environment (subcode); and 2) Path #2 (2 of 10 participants), Choosing Support Primarily from Peers that identify as White, after
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Acknowledgment Existence of Chinese American or Asian American Peers in the PWI Environment (subcode). These were under the Notable Changes Of Experiences (Concept), which is associated with theory development (with the Grounded Theory framework) in the discussion chapter.

Salient Challenges in Connecting with Home Community, MMCAC (Exceptions, Associated to Theory) (Code). Although most participants did not report any issues connecting to the Chinese American peers in the MMCAC environment, there were exceptions from 2 participants of the 10 participants. For example, Participant 4 (2019) described experiencing invalidation and having inconsistent values with the community in the statement, “I was just so alone and felt so lost... no one had the same values as me. I attribute a lot of that to how alone I felt and without community.” This demonstrated the disconnect Participant 4 (2019) felt in the MMCAC community due to inconsistent values with peers regarding the perspective of academics.

Participant 10 (2020) discussed the lack of depth of connection to the MMCAC, but only realized this during the reflection of the new community, which has been supportive of their expression of sexual orientation:

I'm pansexual...I have not explicitly told [my parents] about it. [With the] friend group that I associate from my high school, I don't really look into my sexuality too much... it's more something that I will open up to for close friends.

The phrase Participant 10 (2020) said, “will open up to for close friends,” demonstrated closeness of the PWI college friends, compared to previous MMCAC environment peers.

Freedom from Parents and Previous Community Culture (Code). This code described the relative freedom experienced, when away from the home MMCAC environment. This varied
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amongst the participants, including gaining new perspectives about major study choices, advocacy and political involvement, mental health discussions, and openness with peers about sexual orientation. In the new environment, Participant 1 (2019) gained new perspective regarding field of study and explained:

[Parents] connected my major to salary. I remember talking to one of my professors...she's like, "Yes. That's how your parents are seeing it but other people see it more like college is to help you grow as a person...", and it was like, "That's a different mentality that your parents might not have."

Participant 2 (2019) described the freedom that led to the ability to advocate for rights, as indicated in the statement “[As a student president of an Asian union], I think that my parents whenever they hear about me doing these things, they're always like, "You should focus on your education.” Participant 8 (2020) described the environment of new peers provided support around mental health challenges, with “I'd say in high school, [topic of mental health] just wasn't something that came up...at college, we bring up the subject of mental health every once in a while, just on a more personal level.”

Participant 10 (2020) described the freedom to be open about sexual orientation in new environment:

The friend group... from my high school, don't really look into my sexuality too much...My [university/college] roommate is very openly bi, so she just asked me...“Oh, what's your orientation?". I told her I was pan. There was no positive or negative factor.

Level of Support, Social Cultural Advocacy Organizations (Code). This code described the various organizations that participants found for peer support. Participant 2 (2019) said “GLBTQ student organization, I was able to meet other queer Asian people... they were the first
fellow queer Asian people I met… They had a freshman mentorship program and my mentor was Chinese-American.” Participant 2 (2019) stated “Asian Union” and Participant 3 (2019) stated “Asian Coalition.” Both Participant 5 (2019) and Participant 6 (2020) stated involvement and meeting people in the “Chinese Student Association.”

Post COVID and Social Challenges (Code). Post COVID (meaning after COVID-19’s impact began in 2020) and the related social challenges, focused primarily on the phase 2 participants. Participant 7 (2020) described experience as:

Noticing how much hatred there is and just unilateral hatred regardless of who the person is...I just haven't encountered a very, very bad experience directed personally towards me, but I definitely notice a lot more.

Participant 9 (2020) described the experience as, “People would say something out of ignorance, and it is racist when they say it.” Of the participants, Participant 8 (2020) described the most challenging experiences:

[a friend told me] China might have started the Coronavirus as a form of biological warfare. I wasn't mentally prepared to hear that...I was scared because if I cough in a lecture or anywhere, people suddenly became super aware of where I was and what I was doing at all times.

Mental Health (Category/Theme 6)

The “Mental Health” theme included “MMCAC Environment Stressors” and “PWI Environment Stressors/Microaggressions/Discrimination,” “Self-Reported Symptoms Expressed,” “Barriers to Seeking Mental Health Services,” “Insights from Experience of Psychological Services Use,” and “Protective Factors for Mental Well-Being” as concepts.
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**MMCAC Environment Stressors (Concept).** The concept, “MMCAC Environment Stressors,” encompassed the following codes: “Academic Pressure within Community and Family Culture,” and “Awareness of injustices learned from family of outside experience.”

**Academic Pressure within Community and Family Culture (Code).** This code described the stressors in the previous MMCAC environment, particularly with academic pressure. For example, Participant 1 (2019) said “I felt a lot of pressure from being Chinese, like academically.” Participant 2 (2019) said “[Message from parents is] that you have to work harder,” which is consistent with Participant 4 (2019) which said “my parents...put a lot of pressure on us to succeed,” and Participant 6 (2020) who stated "Both of my parents pushed me." Participant 5 (2019) explained the pressure from parents on academics superseded other interests stating, “I wasn't able to continue on with art...to focus on academics.” Participant 7 (2020) encapsulated the experience as being “very, very stressful.”

**Awareness of injustices learned from family of outside experience (Code).** Since the experiences in the earlier MMCAC environment typically did not include strong negative experiences or injustices (as described in the Phenomenon Concept within the Previous MMCAC Environment Category), this code described the indirect and vicarious experiences through warnings from family, based on the history of discrimination. Participant 6 (2020) discussed being impacted by family history of injustices:

> My grandparents...actually faced more tangible discrimination when they immigrated here. They talked about how society has treated Asians unfairly. They brought it up so much in my childhood that I feel in a way it made me have this perception now of like, "Oh, I'll never be good enough in the eyes of this society because I'm an Asian as well."
Similarly, Participant 7 (2020) learned about negative experiences vicariously through family rather than their own, stating “when I speak Asian to my grandmother or my mom for instance, and people don't know, and they say a lot of racist comments to that end.”

**PWI Environment Stressors/Microaggressions/Discrimination (Concept).** The concept, “PWI Environment Stressors/Microaggressions/Discrimination,” encompassed the following codes: “Feeling Invalidated by peers that identify as White; attempts to define POC community and experience,” “‘Where are you really from?’ Microaggressions,” “Related to Gender Intersection,” “Stereotypes and Presumptions,” “Discrimination and Fears based on ethnic appearance, Race stereotypes, and “Model Minority Stress and Pressure.”

**Feeling Invalidated by peers that identify as White; attempts to define POC community and experience (Code).** This code described stressors/microaggressions/discrimination, particularly the feeling of invalidation by peers that identify as White, which arose from the data. For example, Participant 4 (2019) described the following experience:

> What I get most annoyed by is when someone asks me about what my experience is as a person of color who's also a woman, and I explain privilege and power dynamics and they're like, "Okay." Then, they completely then use their privilege to overpower me or invalidate me.

Participant 10 (2020) also described an invalidating experience by peers that identify as White stating, “In college, I had a debate with, two White guys about whether or not Asians are considered people of color… my opponent's main pushes on why Asians aren't considered people of color”. Participant 9 (2020) described a situation of being evaluated in terms of connectedness to ethnic culture, stating “[A peer that identifies as White] mentioned that she views me as a true Asian, because I am in touch with my roots as well as I can speak my mother
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tongue. She bashed the Asians that were from her city saying that they're whitewashed, they
don't speak their language."

"Where are you really from?" Microaggressions (Code). This code described the
experiences of microaggressions, in the form of perpetual questions on belongingness, due to
appearance of ethnic identity. For example, Participant 7 (2020) stated experiences of being
asked, "Oh, where are you from?" I'm like, "Oh, I'm from “[East coast city in US]”. They're like,
"Oh, but where are you really from?" I'm like, "[neighborhood in East coast city in US]." It's
like, "Well, where are your parents from?" I'm like, ‘Oh, you want my ethnicity? Say that
earlier.’” Similarly, Participant 3 (2019) stated, “If someone asks me where I'm from, I just say,
 “[West coast city in US].” Then if they go further, and they're like, "No, where are actually
from?" or "Where are you really from?" and I'm like, "Oh, my ethnicity?" I use the word. I'm
like, "My ethnicity is Chinese." Or I say, "My parents are from this place." Furthermore,
Participant 4 (2019) attributed the change to the PWI environment, “Since I came to
college...Anytime I meet anyone, their first question is like, "Where are you from?" or like, "Do
you speak Chinese?"

Related to Gender Intersection (Code). This code described stressors in regard to gender
intersection with ethnicity, and marginalization, which arose from the data. Participant 7 (2020)
described challenging experiences as “catcalling was exotic comments, because for some reason,
Asians are associated with exotism.” Participant 2 (2019) stated the “[Concern about the]
fetishization of Asian women. Just the history of Asian Americans across time.”

Stereotypes and Presumptions (Code). This code arose from two participants with
concerns of the negative stereotype of “eating dogs” as a presumption, solely because of their
identity. Participant 9 (2020) stated that in the PWI environment, “I'm afraid of, oh, them saying,
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‘Oh, your family is from China. Do they eat dogs?’” Participant 6 (2020), however, described a class where that topic came up in a reading, which became stressor as the only Chinese American person in that class, stating:

The reading itself was not racist in any way...The class was all White except for me and even the professor. When we had to discuss the reading, it became very awkward because I felt like the White people in the room they knew that there were some things that they couldn't say because of my presence.

**Discrimination and Fears based on ethnic appearance, Race stereotypes (Code).** This code described the microaggression and discrimination received based on ethnic appearance. For example, Participant 4 (2019) said “It's pretty frequent, probably a couple times a month where I'll get some street harassment and it will always be about my race.” Participant 7 (2020) said “I was walking with a Korean friend, and they were all like Chinese fried rice to both us...It's blind to ethnicity in a sense.” Participant 5 (2019) said, “microaggressions are super real...Just small things...I just feel like sometimes waitresses ...would get irritable or fed up with my appearance and their slow English.” Participant 9 (2020) said “I view microaggressions as backhanded compliments...like, "You're so pretty for an Asian."”

**Model Minority Stress and Pressure (Code).** The “model minority myth”, according to Lee et al. (2009), is the “Asian American stereotype of being smart and accomplished” (p. 145), which can be a stressor. This is consistent with participant’s understanding, as Participant 2 (2019) described their first awareness of this, “In my first year in university, I learned about it then and I think that's when I understood that these stereotypes of Asian "You're good at everything," isn't really good.” Participant 1 (2019) describes the impact of the myth from peers
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and the pressure, with “the main thing was definitely feeling like I had to be perfect because of
that model minority stereotype of being Chinese or Asian American.”
Participant 10 (2020)’s interaction with a peer highlights the “model minority myth” problem:
   A conversation I had with one of my new friends in college. We both are bio majors,
she's white, I'm Asian...I was doing a lot better than she was, and she made the point
saying that that's because I was Asian.
This interaction with their peer demonstrated the negative impact of the “model minority myth,”
showing that the stereotype of “smart and accomplished” (Lee et al. 2009, p. 145), which may
appear positive, can in fact, be invalidating and discounting to effort, and negatively impacts the
well-being and mental health of Chinese Americans.

**Self-Reported Symptoms Expressed (Concept).** The concept, “Self-Reported
Symptoms Expressed,” encompassed the following codes: “Self-worth, Self-esteem, Insecurity,”
“Depression, Suicidality,” and “Stress, Anxiety, Fears.” These codes are further described as
follows.

**Self-worth, Self-esteem, Insecurity (Code).** This code described symptoms of self-esteem
and self-worth challenges that arose and related to academics, both before and during college.
For example, Participant 1 (2019) described earlier experiences impacting self-worth:
   all my friends were on the honors math track or a year ahead entirely. Because of that, I
felt inferior to them... I'd be like, "I didn't get X score on whatever test. So, I'm
worthless." It's just a very straight jump to having no sense of self-worth at all.
Participant 6 (2020) described internal experience of “feeling inadequate” due to academic
pressures, and the impact of the model minority myth creating perceptions at the societal level:
I always feel inadequate. Even now I feel inadequate. I have a 3.95 GPA now, and I feel like I am scared I will not get into a good medical school because I don't have a 4.0 like I used to do in high school because I'm Asian and because all the other Asians have straight A's... It might be me just having a very biased view but I feel that way and I feel that I'm treated that way by society.

**Depression, Suicidality (Code).** This code described symptoms of Depression, Suicidality. Participant 1 (2019) reported symptoms of depression and the belief of the precipitating factors, stating, “for me, I was very depressed in middle school and high school. It was very much tied to that pressure to feel perfect.” Participant 4 (2019) reported a diagnosis of depression and anxiety, in the statement, “the beginning of high school is when I was first diagnosed with some sort of depression and anxiety disorder or illness, but I think my family was so ashamed and didn't really want to talk about it.” In addition, Participant 4 (2019) discussed the challenges with suicidality both in the previous community as well as in the new community, along with the precipitating factors:

I think my Chinese church, it's done a lot of really good things, but it's also done incredible harm...I think it's done more harm than good...the reason I think that is because there have been four completed suicides in our community since it began, and I'm sure many more attempts as I was one of the attempts...In my sophomore year of college...I attempted suicide. I was in the hospital for like two months, and it was just very, very bad...I was put on medication for it.\(^3\)

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\(^3\) [Note due to content, risk assessment was made: Participant denied SI at the time. Also, reminded participant of list of local/national psychological resources/hotlines provided]
Stress, Anxiety, Fears (Code). This code described symptoms of stress, anxiety, and fears. In terms of stress, and unaddressed anxiety, Participant 5 (2019) discussed symptoms predating college, due to the MMCAC environment academic pressure, which improved in college from expectation changes:

I think stress levels at home are the highest point, definitely, like a 9 or 10. It was really bad, like super anxious all the time...Now I'd say it ranges from 5 to an 8. Were my grades better or did I perform better when I was at home or in high school? Yes. I feel like I'm a lot happier now and a lot less stressed out.

However, participants experienced fears and anxiety related to the college transition stress with regard to meeting new people and making friends. Participant 6 (2020) described this:

I would say one of my biggest fears actually walking into college was not having friends. Also, I feel like, at a predominantly White institution, it's essential to be extroverted in a way. I feel like I feel a lot of anxiety. I was fearful of becoming the stereotype that people have of Asians as in a quiet, timid person who never says anything and just stays quiet and puts their head down. I didn't want to be that.

This demonstrated that the participant felt pressure to counteract the stereotype of the “timid” and “quiet” person and felt the need to change the personality trait described by the “essential to be extroverted” to address their “biggest fears”. Participant 3 (2019) attributed the transition stress to loss of support from being close to family, as well as discomfort from meeting new people:

Part of my higher levels of stress in [university/college] is because I'm not able to find comfort in my family because they're not here, partly because in my first year, there were
a lot of people that were very kind...but weren't people that I felt super comfortable with just at a base level.

Besides transition stress, Participant 6 (2020) described a pervasive worry, anxiety, and stress about the future due to indirect discrimination from his identity:

I always think about...where am I going to be later in life. It makes me worried every day thinking about that. I guess how my identity could potentially hurt me. I'm very worried that as an Asian applicant...might influence the likelihood of me getting to medical school someday. That does affect but more so out of, I guess, anxiety for the future. Because of that, I feel very stressed in many ways. Not even just talking about numbers or grades, even indirect discrimination, I guess that's ties into what I mentioned systemic or indirect discrimination.

[Note: All participants were reminded of list of local/national psychological resources/hotlines provided to utilize as needed]

**Barriers to Seeking Mental Health Services (Concept).** The concept, “Barriers to Seeking Mental Health Services,” encompassed the following codes: “External Factors: Stigma, Reputation, and Vulnerability as barriers,” and “Internal Factors as barriers.”

**External Factors: Stigma, Reputation, and Vulnerability as barriers (Code).** This code described the external barriers, from the community and culture that hindered seeking mental health for the MMCAC population. For example, Participant 5 (2019) stated, “there definitely is a stigma in the community at home. I think that's definitely a thing that I've noticed either showing weakness or like uncertainty.” The phrase “showing weakness or like uncertainty” (Participant 5, 2019) was similar to Participant 1 (2019)’s description of the reasons behind the
underserved nature of the population even in the earlier community with self-described symptoms of depression:

I think it's like a Chinese mentality that you don't want to show emotion or else you look vulnerable and weak. I never told anyone about it... I didn't want to tell my parents that I was feeling so depressed, and I didn't want to go to therapy and be like, "Oh, I'm seeing a therapist," like that connotation to it.

The reasons behind not wanting to tell family or not getting help was further described by Participant 4 (2019)’s description around reputation:

I think the reason is just the culture around shame and mental health where, one, shame being so powerful and then mental health being something you don't really talk about or don't acknowledge. Then, also, you don't want to ruin your reputation of being put together or your family's reputation.

Additionally, Participant 8 (2020) attributed the barriers to “fear of being judged” and not taught to express emotions in the statement, “something, I think...everywhere really is the fear of being judged really, confronting things that you don't really want. I don't think I was really taught that emotional stuff from a cultural standpoint.”

**Internal Factors as barriers (Code).** This code described the internal barriers to seeking mental health services. Participant 8 (2020) described the internal dialog of “I guess a little bit of stubbornness too and self-esteem, where like, ‘There's nothing wrong with me,’ or, ‘I can do this. I don't need help,’ mentality.” Participant 4 (2019) described the barrier to be characterized by procrastination or lack of priority, in the following statement, “I think what I learned was we as a demographic have really, really low help-seeking behavior, and usually, we push it until the very, very last minute where either you can't turn back or it's too late to seek help.” However,
Participant 6 (2020) mentioned having “anxiety for the future. Because of that, I feel very stressed in many ways”. Additionally, the internal dialogue about mental health service usage followed, which included content that minimizes their own self-reported symptoms:

I know a lot of friends who do use [psychological counseling services], and I do know it's a resource that I have access to... I don't know how much it would help me because I feel like all my fears are just very career-oriented. I know people who face actually more serious problems, in a sense. They have panic attacks or that kind of thing. I feel like I feel a lot of anxiety, but it's just career, academic-related anxiety that all students have which is why I haven't used it yet.

In addition, Participant 6 (2020) appeared to believe that mental health services would not be able to address the symptoms, as indicated by the statement, “worried every day,” due to their perspective of relative severity (mentioned above), compared to others.

Insights from Experience of Psychological Services Use (Concept). The concept, “Insights from Experience of Psychological Services Use,” encompasses the following codes: “Challenging Experiences of Psychological Services Use” and “An Overall Positive Experience of Psychological Services Use.”

Two of the 10 participants utilized psychological services, but their experiences varied. Participant 4 (2019) described challenging experiences, while Participant 8 (2020) described an overall positive experience.

Challenging Experiences of Psychological Services Use (Code). Participant 4 (2019) utilized services twice, with two different providers (both times different issues arose). In the first experience, the Participant 4 (2019) said the provider, identified as Asian American. However, Participant 4 (2019) stated “I think I expected that because he was Asian American I
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was like, ‘Finally, someone I can talk to who understands.’ Then when I walked into it, it just was DBT [Dialectical Behavior Therapy], but by a guy who looks similar to me.” The tone of this, and the subsequent statement, “It wasn't counseling with a guy who would relate to me or validate me or help me through the cultural issues that I was dealing with” (Participant 4, 2019), demonstrated common factors were missed despite the similar ethnic background.

The second provider that was utilized, Participant 4 (2019) said, “He was a White person and I tried to explain a lot of cultural stuff to him, but we never connected. He didn't seem to really, for me, understand what I was communicating.” Participant 4 (2019) attributed the miscommunication to culture and said, “They were times where he really frustrated me in terms of being not culturally sensitive, and so I just stopped seeing him."

After the experiences with the two providers, Participant 4 (2019) determined the needs and preferences were:

I think I needed a space to be validated, that what I was going through was real... The factors that go into a sense of belonging or a sense of community, having influence, having that shared emotional experience...that would have been much more healing rather than going through the steps and being, "All right, time's starting now. We're going through the steps, do this homework and now it's over."

Rather than finding a third provider, Participant 4 (2019) utilized community and faith, stating “I felt and like what pulled me out of that, the tribute to my faith and my community that I forced to be around me, and that community is the one I am in now.”

An Overall Positive Experience of Psychological Services Use (Code).

Although Participant 8 (2020) was very aware of the cultural barriers (“fear of being judged”) within the Chinese community to utilize mental health services, a protective factor that this
participant stated was “There's no stigma about it in my household from my family.” This exception for this participant led to early mental health service use around skill development of emotional awareness. Participant 8 (2020) described the experience, with “it helped a lot with my self-awareness, just an emotional awareness and also, emotional awareness of others was something I struggled a little bit growing up.”

Contrary to Participant 4 (2019)’s preference to have an unstructured approach with a focus on validation, Participant 8 (2020) had a positive experience with a more structured approach. Participant 8 (2020) stated “I definitely did learn about...CBT [Cognitive Behavioral Therapy]. Definitely helped overcome a lot of those challenges, to function a lot better.”

**Protective Factors for Mental Well-Being (Concept).** The concept, “Protective Factors for Mental Well-Being,” encompasses the following codes: “Institutional Support,” “Community Organizations Support,” and “Peer Support.”

The Protective Factors for Mental Well-Being concept consisted of institutional support, Community Organizations support, and Peer support codes based on the data.

**Institutional Support (Code).** This code described ways that the participants believed the PWI university/colleges have helped or can help support Chinese American students. Participant 7 (2020) described institutional support through policies against discrimination and stated, “there's a very zero-tolerance policy towards anyone that says anything bad about Asia.” Participant 10 (2020) provided a suggestion for institutions to gain awareness of their practices, and stated, “I don't want to be seen as a token student or to put a person of color on the brochure, so it'll look good for like the diversity statement of this college, but to accurately represent students of color.”
Community Organizations support (Code). This code described suggestions for community organizations on campus, including protective factors that provided a sense of belonging and support for mental health and well-being. Participant 2 (2019) stated, “[At the Asian union], we do a lot of advocacy work. We definitely touched on the surface level of how we would notice discrimination.” The cultural organizations provided a place for validation and peer support, especially after a negative challenging experience related to identity and marginalization. Participant 4 (2019) described informal sources of peer support from the community church at the university/college community:

Also, I think it's so important to acknowledge those informal sources of help and how good they can be. What I sought out was my community at [university/college] at my University Church, which was an informal way of seeking help. I think what saved my life, besides the ambulance and the people in the ambulance, I think what saved my life from a second [suicide] attempt was community and was my faith.

Participant 4 (2019) demonstrated the importance of community resources. Participant 4 (2019) attributed the lessening of the self-reported symptoms and risk factors related to suicidality and depression to their church community, from the support (after reporting challenges with utilization of formal services).

Peer support (Code). This code described the protective factors of peer support. Participant 6 (2020) described the relational support of peers to manage stress with the development of communication skills (i.e., emotional awareness) and the cultivation of openness for peer bonding:

I feel like I'm more open about the stress I feel and my own mental state now just because I have my close friends...I feel comfortable opening up to other people about this kind of
thing that I would have likely never done in high school. I would say because I feel relatively secure turning to my friends, I don't think I've ever had to use the psychological services here at [university/college].

Regarding peer support, Participant 7 (2020) stated, “I want a friend to take this class with me”, requiring support from a friend with a similar ethnic identity to take the same class, otherwise the participant would be the only Chinese American student in a class. Participant 10 (2020) described the feeling of receiving peer support from peers with a similar background as “it was very comforting knowing that other people like me exist.”
Discussion and Conclusion

Overview

This discussion and conclusions chapter is organized into five sections. The first section is the synthesis of the salient themes/categories in relation to literature (as well as the contributions). The second section describes the development of the substantive theory, based on the Conditional/Consequential Matrix Explanatory Paradigm for Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008). The third section addresses the Research Questions. This is followed by a section on the integration, refinement, and validation of the theory. Lastly, the conclusion includes a summary, implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Synthesis of the Descriptive Salient Themes/Categories

The synthesis of the themes/categories was an iterative process throughout the research. The data, codes, concepts, and salient themes/codes were compared and contrasted with literature. This process also provides a descriptive analysis of the target communities and experiences of the Chinese American participants who transitioned from the MMCAC environments to the PWI environments through six categories/themes: Previous MMCAC Environment; Identity; Values; New PWI Environment; Transition Experience; and Mental Health.

Previous MMCAC Environment

The “Previous MMCAC Environment” theme in the results illustrated the unique setting that the participants experienced, particularly with values and culture encompassed in the predominantly homogenous Chinese American community environment. The most salient characteristics of this theme was the significant emphasis on academic achievement and the associated pressures. The additional academic-related extracurricular activities (test prep, etc),
outside of regular school, demonstrated the intense focus on these values. This is consistent with
the literature as Park (2012) describes the “SAT Prep as a Rite of Passage” (p.626) for the East
Asian American community, specifically the Chinese American community. Furthermore, Zhou
and Kim (2006) describe the utilizations of Chinese-language schools, academic tutoring classes,
music, SAT Subject Test preparations to be a salient aspect of many Chinese American
communities, which led to the unintended consequences of tremendous pressures. The broader
literature supports the findings described in the Extra Academic Prep, Music, or Additional
School Culture Code, in the results chapter.

In terms of phenomena that arose within the MMCAC environment, a salient topic was
the notable lack of negative encounters related to ethnic background. This finding contrasts to
literature, described by Lee (2009), which found that isolation or “discrimination based on racial
or cultural backgrounds is a significant source of stress, particularly during high school” (p. 148)
for Asian Americans (including Chinese Americans). Furthermore, Lee (2009) and Gee et al.
(2007) indicated that discrimination can lead to the internalization of negative stereotypes, and
impact self-esteem. Whereas the unique environment for participants in this research study had a
contrasting experience. For example, Participant 9 (2020) said “in high school, I didn't really
experience any discrimination because I was in such a bubble where I had a lot of Asian friends.
I was very comfortable with myself.” Participant 7 (2020) reported “because we were all Asian, I
don't think there's a lot of racial issues.” These examples demonstrate the MMCAC environment
can be a protective factor against discrimination as well as the impact of self-esteem, as indicated
earlier.

Although daily interactions with people primarily of similar Chinese American
backgrounds limited identity reflection (due to lack of ethnic identity saliency from local
homogeneity), participants were still aware of their ethnic minority identities in the context of the broader predominantly White society overall. For example, Participant 1 (2019)’s statement of “I'd say I'm pretty proud. I'm happy to be Chinese American” was qualified with “Yes, the stereotypes that are associated with it sometimes aren't great. But I'm glad to have this heritage with me, to have the culture that I have.” While in the MMCAC environments, participants indicated they learned about stereotypes in direct ways, such as their study of American history (throughout time), or through the media (i.e. Participant 4 (2019) stated “Asian roles, the scant handful that existed were always the nerdy sidekick to the protagonist, that kind of thing, or the guy who's really good at math”).

Identity

The “Identity” theme arose after providing the participants an open opportunity to reflect upon factors they deemed as aspects of their identity. The two major concepts were the impact of “History and Heritage,” and “Self-Described Characteristics.” The codes under the History and Heritage (i.e. code including Rituals, Ceremonies, etc) concept were common amongst the participants. This consisted of seasonal events that demonstrated respect for ancestry, consistent with cultural practices including the “Mid-autumn festival” (based on the autumnal equinox symbolized by the mooncake; Cui, 2020) and “Hungry Ghosts Festival” (or “Zhongyuan” festival, analogous to Halloween or Day of the Dead) described in Zhang (2009) and Chung and Wegars (2005).

Within the “Self-Described Characteristics” concept, the “Description of Ethnic Identity” code provided participants an opportunity to self-report their ethnic identity. Although variations of descriptions included “Chinese” and “Asian”, the common identifier was “Chinese American”. The range of responses of ethnic self-identification are consistent with Kiang (2008),
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which found that Americans with Chinese ancestry primarily reported labels including “Chinese” (heritage national label), “Chinese American” (American added to heritage label), or “Asian American” (panethnic-American label).

Also, in the “Self-Described Characteristics” concept, the “Gender and Sexual Orientation” code, “Religious/spirituality”, and “SES Identity” varied widely but were grouped based on the similar content. This is expected, and within the Grounded Theory framework. Corbin and Strauss (2008) said that analysts will discover variation, along with general patterns. For the “Gender and Sexual Orientation” code, while participants predominantly identify as heterosexual, two participants self-identified as “bisexual” and “pansexual.” For the “Religious/spirituality” code, the participant responses ranged from Christianity (40%), not spiritual/religious (30%), and Buddhism (10%). The high percentage of participants identifying as Christians was salient. Upon further literature review on the topic of American born Chinese population and Christianity, Lim (2017) provided a broader statistic that 29% of Asian Americans attend church actively, as a point of reference.

The “SES Identity” code had a wide range of responses, such as “low to middle”, “upper-middle-class”, to high SES. This wide range is consistent with the literature Liang (2015) that demonstrated that the Chinese American community SES is not homogeneous, because the income range for the families vary (covering the spectrum of low and high income). Liang (2015) also states that the concept of “model minority” (Weinberg, 1997) may have historically arisen from the reputation of the subset of higher income professional Chinese American families, which did not accurately represent the various income ranges that exist within Chinese American communities.
Values

The “values” theme that arose encompassed traditional Chinese values as well as juxtapositions between the Chinese and American cultures. In terms of traditional Chinese values, salient topics amongst participants (Participant 6, 2020; Participant 9, 2020) included Confucian-based values and their impact on their interpersonal relationship with family members (and efforts in academics). According to Zhou and Kim (2006), Slate (2016), and Zhang (2014), Confucianism can be characterized as sets of values, rituals, morals, and ethics that influence culture based on emphasis on family honor, respect for authority, education, and discipline (self-restraint for endurance in long term goals). This can be a priority of parents (in the context of the collective) to correct behaviors to “avoid losing face” (Lau et al., 2011; Lieh-Mak et al., 1984), which also explains the work ethic and pressures to succeed (as a part of the community). This provides the context for parents’ participation for the focus on STEM subjects, described by An at el. (2019) and Tan and Goldberg (2009), which is prevalent for Chinese American communities (consistent with the demographics questionnaire of the results section). Additionally, Zhang (2014) described values, including emphasizing harmony. This is defined as obedience to social norms with respect to the maintenance of relationships (and the nature of interactions in a collectivistic manner; Bauman, 1976; Solomon, 1971; Zhang, 2014). This is consistent with the content of the results, where the participants were inclined to study STEM subjects. This was in part due to insistence from parents and their messages, as well as to adhere to the social norm and values within the Chinese American community.

New PWI Environment

The “PWI Environment” theme illustrated the new environment setting experienced, particularly with the demographic and culture. For the demographics, some participants
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(Participant 7, 2020; Participant 3, 2019) estimated that “70%” of their peers identify as White, Participant 1 (2019) provided an overestimate in stating “I would say, 90% White. No, wait. I would say 95% White.” However, the data (The Best Colleges in America, n.d.) aggregated from the Universities (that the participants attended), was found to have an average of 59.8%, with a range of 51-75%. The mismatch between perception of demographic surroundings and actual demographics is a notable finding.

The culture at the PWI environments were described as “liberal” and “very politically correct.” This is consistent with the literature (Delucchi, 1997; Haberberger, 2018; Sandy, 2013), which describes universities in Western democracies tending to have an ethos of respect for different opinions and critical thinking, characterizing the liberal environments the participants described.

Transition Experience

The “Transition Experience” theme captured the initial shift as well as reflections of the internal experiences over time due to the changes. The salient initial perspectives from the participants included being “shocked” from the drastic initial demographic changes. One of the reasons indicated was expressed by Participant 3 (2019) stating “I'm definitely not in-group when I'm here.”

Additionally, participants recognized that interactions with peers that identify as White, were impacted by cultural barriers, which mutually inhibited connections. For example, some participants (Participant 3, 2019; Participant 5, 2019; Participant 9, 2020) noticed behavioral and speech differences, including a tendency to be quiet and reserved in comparison to peers that identify as White. Furthermore, in terms of interactions, participants also mentioned the difficulty to connect to peers that identify as White was due to differences in preferences of
media consumption and the lack of mutual topics to discuss on those topics. The examples provided, by Participant 7 (2020), was “football, like American football, or like The Bachelor and just topics I can't associate with. Versus if, for example, like K-dramas, K-pop or anything along those lines, like Anime then I have a better chance of talking to you” and Participant 6 (2020) “Star Wars, that kind of thing, I've never been into that and I never grew up watching those things. It's so much easier to connect with Asians.” These differences in media genre consumption preferences (and use of different types of pop culture references) during conversations between Chinese American students and peers that identified as White were a challenge, described by the multiple participants. No current literature focused on these interpersonal barriers, which could be an area of future research.

The differences of cultural values were also found on the level of independence versus collectivism. For example, the expectations of either moving home or becoming more independent after college differed with peers that identify as White (Participant 3, 2019; Participant 9, 2020). An explanation of this can be found in the literature, where the cultural difference is due to Confucianism’s filial piety, which described the reverence of parents or elderly in the family unit (with the expectation that the children provide care for their parents or elder until the end; Chi et al., 2018; Nguyen & Seal, 2014).

The most salient aspect of the transition theme was the “Building New Peer Relationships – Two Group Paths” Code. The majority of the participants gradually sought and found Chinese American or Asian American peers in the PWI environment. A review of the literature did not find research on this phenomenon. In developing the substantive theory, this subgroup of participants, defined by Path #1, was identified to develop communities around peers that identify as Chinese or Asian American while in the PWI environment. For example, Participant 2
and Participant 6 (2020) both use the terminology “Asian Bubble” in seeking and developing their interpersonal surroundings. On the other hand, the less prominent subgroup, defined by Path #2, was also identified, where participants chose to receive support primarily from peers that identify as White. It is important to note that this occurred after acknowledgment (from the participants themselves) of the existence of Chinese American or Asian American peers in the PWI environment. This indicated that developing a community with primarily White peers was a choice, rather than being the case of the only option in the environment. The literature review did not provide clarity for either of these two paths nor on the broader topic. These two paths were the foundation for the substantial theory that is explored in the theory development section of the discussion.

The participants for path #2, expressed salient challenges in connecting with peers in the MMCAC community for different reasons. For Participant 4 (2019), it was the strong sense of mismatch of values between the individual and Chinese American community values, particularly in terms of academic performance. The immense pressure that led to self-described depression and suicidal ideation has received attention in the existing literature (Crystal et al., 1994; Hsieh & Bean, 2014). In addition, the lack of support and feelings of disconnection, from peers and religious leaders in the community with similar identity was described by Participant 4 (2019).

For Participant 10 (2020), the disconnection was related to the lack of depth for the relationships with peers in MMCAC environment, particularly around specific topics. Participant 10 (2020)’s realization came after the reflection of previous relationships. They were described as shallow, in comparison to the deep connections developed with peers that identify as White in the PWI college environment. The connections deepened from the ability to have open
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conversations, particularly related to sexual orientation identity ("pansexual"). Although
Morandini et al. (2017) and Rice (2015) conceptualized pansexuality as the attraction, regardless
of gender expression, gender identity, or biological sex, distinguished from bisexual identity’s
binary notion of attraction, Flanders et al. (2017) and Galupo et al. (2017) found overlaps for
people that identify as bisexual and pansexual. For clarification, Participant 10 (2020) defined
the self-identified “pansexual” as “I’m willing to go into a romantic and sexual relationship with
essentially anyone.” Participant 10 (2020)’s experience of not expressing this sexual identity in
the MMCAC environment is consistent with literature (albeit older research, as this intersection
of Chinese American and sexual identity is limited in the literature), which found that “any direct
and open discussion of sexuality is unusual in Chinese culture. Even among one's closest friends,
a discussion about sexuality is highly embarrassing at best and, at worst, strictly taboo” (Tsui,
1985, as cited in Chan, 1995, p. 95). Chan (1995) also stated that sexual identity is also a western
concept, and does not exist in the Chinese culture beyond family expectations of procreation.
This is also consistent with Adamczyk and Cheng (2015), which determined that the salient
reasons include family intactness for the lower tolerance of non-heterosexuality in societies with
Confucian values (as family cohesion is prioritized over individual needs; Chan, 1995).

However, Chan (1995) also stated that Asian Americans that were more open with their sexual
identity tended to be more acculturated and more influenced by Western or American culture.
Participant 10 (2020)’s experience of opening up to “close” college friends that identified as
White, but not in the MMCAC community is also consistent with Chan (1995)’s description of
opening up “only in safe (generally non-Asian) environments” (p. 99). Additionally, Chan
(1995) stated “respondents were more likely to come out to non-Asians than to other Asians
(reflecting the pressure to maintain privacy within the Asian culture), and many had not
disclosed their sexual identity to their parents” (p. 97). Participant 10 (2020) also said “for the most part, I do present myself as in a very straight way…when you think of queer people, you don't always think of non-White people.” This is also consistent with literature, which found that historically nontraditional sexual identities were viewed as a phenomenon for people primarily with the intersection with "White" identity, rather than as an intersection with persons of color (Chan, 1995; Espin, 1987; Greene, 1994; Morales, 1989).

The topic of disconnection due to incongruent values (while still identifying as part of the Chinese American community; Participant 4, 2019; Participant 10, 2020), is further explored in the substantive theory development section.

After the impact of the pandemic became prevalent in 2020 (due to COVID-19), new social challenges arose for the Chinese American student population in the research, particularly in Phase 2 (as Phase 1 of recruitment was before the pandemic). The experiences for the phase 2 participants were mixed (with direct microaggressions or had indirect exposure through the media). The negative perception and Xenophobia towards Asian Americans, especially due to the political rhetoric through media, has been well documented (Batasin, 2020; Wardell-Ghirarduzzi, 2020; Yan et al., 2020). This is consistent with the participants’ concerns, especially from phase 2 of our study (Participant 7, 2020; Participant 9, 2020; Participant 10, 2020). Furthermore, Participant 10 (2020) was concerned about the repeated history towards Asian Americans (such as the Japanese Internment camps of World War 2; Skiles & Clark, 2010). This concern was due to the negative political rhetoric, terminology, and the vernacular used towards the Chinese to describe COVID-19, and its impact on Chinese Americans (Wardell-Ghirarduzzi, 2020).
Mental Health

“Mental Health” was the most prominent theme, with the greatest number of categories, concepts, and codes. This demonstrated the prevalence of this topic within this population. However, in comparison to the literature and the historical context, Asian Americans have proportionately lower levels of mental health treatment utilization compared to other ethnic groups (Abe-Kim et al., 2002; Cheung & Snowden, 1990; Ying & Hu, 1994). The salient concepts and codes of the mental health theme are discussed below.

The prevalence of MMCAC environment stressors expressed by the participants, particularly with the academic pressure within the culture of the community and family are consistent with literature. Although the MMCAC environment was identified in the results section as a protective factor for this population (from discrimination based on ethnicity or race) based on the responses in the result, this population still faced challenges in terms of academic pressure. This is consistent with Lee et al. (2009)’s findings that the high academic achievement pressures from parental expectations were a significant source of stress that impacted the mental health for Asian Americans. The results section also emphasized comments by the participants regarding the academic pressure from within community and family culture.

Despite participants and literature earlier describing PWI university/college environments as “liberal,” participants still experienced stressors, microaggressions, and discrimination in the PWI environment. The most salient aspect was the feeling invalidated by peers that identify as White that attempted to define the Person of color (POC) community and experience. For example, Participant 10 (2020) was debating with “two White guys about whether or not Asians are considered people of color” and said, “because they often get higher-paying jobs than
sometimes White people and they also are fairly well-educated in the US.” This is an example of the negative effects of the model minority myth. The model minority myth is the assumption or perception is that all Asians are naturally gifted in academics, particularly in STEM fields (Lee, 1994; McGee et al., 2017), but hides the realities of challenges that inhibit upward mobility some Asians face. Also, the effects of prejudice and racial discrimination regardless of the appearance of success are also hidden (Sakamoto et al., 2012; Sue et al., 2007; Wong & Halgin, 2006). Despite the vulnerability to racial discrimination that Asians experience as a person of color, the model minority myth perpetuates the incorrect assumption that race is unrelated to the mental health of Asian Americans (Wong & Halgin, 2006).

The "Where are you really from?" microaggressions code demonstrated the type of questions participants (Participant 3, 2019; Participant 4, 2019; Participant 7, 2020) were asked based on the appearance of their identity. Due to the phenotype, Asian Americans, including Chinese Americans, that are born and raised in the US, regardless of the level of acculturation/assimilation, tend to be stereotyped and viewed as “forever foreigners” (Alvarez et al., 2006; McGee et al., 2017; Sue, et al., 2007; Tuan, 1999). Also described as “perpetual foreigners” (Goto, 2002; Kiang et al., 2016), Chinese Americans were grouped with international Asians, and faced xenophobia due to dissimilarity and perceived as less acculturated. This is the context behind the consistent “Where are you from?” or “Where are you really from?” questions. This could be considered as an invalidation of their American backgrounds, due to the status of perceived as a “perpetual foreigners,” regardless of immigration status/US citizenship (Junn & Masuoka, 2008; Kiang et al., 2016; Sue, 2010; Wong-Padoongpatt et al., 2017). These negative perceptions of a perpetual foreigner, and related microaggressions, such as inquiring about English abilities or nationality, were primarily by Americans that identify as White (Sue, 2015).
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Although these comments could be considered subtle, they have been found to be source of stress, and harmful to the mental health and physical wellbeing to Asian Americans in the form of marginalization (Geronimus, 1992; Ong et al., 2013; Tang & Richardson, 2013; Wong et al., 2013). Perpetual foreigner microaggressions were found to lower self-esteem (Sue, 2010), from the threatening of the American aspect for individuals that identity as Asian Americans (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). These microaggressions were also found to create physiological stress (Mereish et al., 2012), as well as internalizations to feel responsible for the situations, despite being the recipient (Mereish et al., 2012; Yoo et al., 2010). This demonstrates the importance of practitioners to assess the impact of experiences that may be characterized as a “perpetual foreigner” related microaggression.

The participants from our study described self-reported mental health related content, which led to codes including: self-worth, self-esteem, insecurity (Participant 1, 2019; Participant 6, 2020); depression (Participant 1, 2019), suicidality (Participant 4, 2019); and stress, anxiety, fears (Participant 3, 2019; Participant 5, 2019; Participant 6, 2020). The common precipitating factors reported for these symptoms were primarily around academic pressures. This is consistent with the literature (Crystal et al., 1994; Hsieh & Bean, 2014), which found an association between depressed moods, high stress levels, somatic complaints, and academic anxiety from academic pressures. More specifically, Hsieh and Bean (2014) described the burden of having families’ futures being placed on some Chinese American youth, which, without adequate resources, can lead to the manifestation of depressive symptoms. Participant 4 (2019)’s description of past suicidal behaviors, due to academic pressure, has precedence in the current scientific literature. Abright and Chung (2002) found that Chinese American youth had higher suicide rates, compared to Americans that identify as White, due to the high levels of stress from
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academic pressures, and the incongruent cultural values from family for academic achievement (in cases that have unsupportive parents, that also resulted with clinical depression symptoms). In addition, suicide has been the second leading cause of death amongst Asian and Pacific Islanders youth (Centers for Disease Control, 2001).

Although the majority of the self-reported symptoms referred to pressures in the MMCAC environment, Participant 3 (2019) and Participant 6 (2020) described challenges in the PWI environment (fears, anxieties, pressures), regarding socializing with peers that identify as White. For example, Participant 6 (2020) was fearful of “becoming the stereotype that people have of Asians as in a quiet, timid person who never says anything” and felt it was “essential to be extroverted.” Wei et al. (2013) found that emotional disclosure was believed to inhibit interpersonal harmony and does not negatively impact functioning within the Chinese American community (Butler et al., 2007; Soto et al., 2011), but literature does not address cross-cultural interactions outside of this community.

Despite college students that identified as Asian American reported higher levels of anxiety, depression, distress, and suicidal ideation, compared to students that identified as White (Eisenberg et al., 2007; Tummala-Narra et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2011; Young et al., 2010), Cheng et al. (2013) and Kim and Zane (2016) found Asian American students were amongst ethnic minorities that underutilize mental health services. This is consistent with the low number of participants that previously utilized services. The barriers were described to be due to reputation, vulnerability, and “stigma” (Participant 5, 2019), as well as Participant 1 (2019)’s explanation that “Chinese mentality that you don't want to show emotion or else you look vulnerable and weak.” This is consistent with Kim and Chiu (2011) and Gross and John (2003)’s finding that emotional restraint is encouraged in the Chinese American culture, and that Chinese
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Americans have the tendency for emotional suppression rather than expression compared to people from other cultures (Gross & John, 2003; Gross & Levenson, 1993; Soto et al., 2011).

However, in the current study, two participants (Participant 4, 2019; Participant 8, 2020) previously utilized mental health services and both described their experiences. Participant 4 (2019) described two challenging experiences, which included cultural insensitivity, and the preference of common factors to process feelings rather than the DBT structured approach. Alternatively, Participant 8 (2020) preferred the structured CBT approach. This is more consistent with Leong et al. (2006)’s finding that Asian Americans preferred highly structured therapeutic approaches (due to short term and problem focused frameworks, and the cultural value of respecting authority figures).

The protective factors for well-being were identified as: institutional support (Participant 7, 2020; Participant 10, 2020), community organizations’ support (Participant 2, 2019; Participant 4, 2019), and peer support (Participant 6, 2020; Participant 10, 2020). Although Zero Tolerance Task Force from American Psychological Association (APA) reviewed policies and implementation in schools, and found no improvement (American Psychological Association, 2008), Participant 7 (2020)’s perception was the zero tolerance policies have been helpful experientially, as a protective factor. Participant 10 (2020)’s anecdote about tokenism, was demonstrated by Chuck (2020) as a common experience in PWI environments. This suggests that institutions need to be genuine and mindful about plans to change representation across race and ethnicities. Community and peer support, which participants in our study stated were a protective factor, has been found to be the preferred alternative for Chinese and Asian Americans instead of professional mental health help (Lee et al., 2017; Ma et al., 2014). This demonstrated the importance of focusing on the development of social peer support in the PWI environment,
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which is the focus for the substantive theory development (the two pathways, based on the
gathered data from the results) discussed in the next section.

Substantive Theory Development

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the purpose of the grounded theory framework
was for the “discovery of theory from data” (p.1). Systematically, this was done through data
collection and analysis, using comparative analysis (coding, conceptualizing, and thematic
categorizing). Grounded theory needs to be initiated with substantive theory development
(described in this study), followed by a formal theory (in future studies, outside scope of this
study). Substantive theory, as opposed to a formal theory, is generated by a narrower focus on an
“empirical situation” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.33). A formal theory is more generalized and
“usually derived from investigations of a concept under a variety of different related topics and
conditions” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 56). However, since this current study provides the
initial investigation to develop a substantial theory based on a particular “empirical situation”
(transition of Chinese American students from predominantly Chinese American communities to
predominantly White university/college communities) a substantial theory will be developed. To
develop a substantial theory, the Matrix for Explanatory Paradigm for Grounded Theory (Corbin
& Strauss, 2008; Schatzman, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1989) was used.

The Matrix for Explanatory Paradigm for Grounded Theory

Corbin and Strauss (1989, 2008), Schatzman (1991), described the
Conditional/Consequential Matrix for Explanatory Paradigm as a tool to formulate a substantial
theory. This consists of the context and conditions, the action/interactions/emotional responses,
and consequences as described. However, due to the nonlinear process, the context will first be
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discussed, followed by the consequences, and the responses will be inferred to develop the substantial theory.

The context, as defined by Corbin and Strauss (2008), Strauss (1987), Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) are the structural conditions, such as situations, relationships, associations, or circumstances. The actions, interactions, and emotions of the individuals are examples of responses to the context, conditions, or events. The consequences are the outcomes of the responses.

Grounded Theory broadly describes context in terms of a range from macro level to micro level, and across time (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). However, this does not account for all the subsystems and influences for the two distinct geographical contexts the study of Chinese American students from MMCAC environment to the PWI environment in an organized manner. To capture the intricate factors and influences of the contexts, the framework adapted from Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979, 1986, 1994) ecological model was used. For the Conditional/Consequential Matrix (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1989), the individual’s consequences and responses were determined after the context and conditions were fully described.

Matrix – Context/Conditions Component: Context based on Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979, 1986, 1994) ecological model. Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979, 1986, 1992, 1994) ecological model provides a systematic framework to conceptualize an environment through embedded systems. This helped to thoroughly describe context through subsystems including microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and the chronosystem. Since the study covered multiple environments, multiple subsystems were implemented over a chronosystem. The common codes, concepts, and themes amongst the participants helped to define the
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subsystems, represented by concentric structures as shown in Figure 4. Two sets of subsystems, at time 1 in MMCAC (T1), and at time 2 in PWI community (T2) were linked with a cylinder, representing the connection over time.

**Figure 4**

*Context for MMCAC and PWI Based on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1992, 1994) Ecological Model*

The broadest scope of the Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1992, 1994) ecological model, Chronosystem, is first described, before narrowing down to the microsystem, describing the experiences from the individuals’ perspectives.
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**Chronosystem.** The Chronosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner (1992, 1994), describes the time dimension and environmental changes over sociohistorical conditions. For an individual, the transitions over the course of life were encapsulated in this subsystem. This aligns to this current research study, particularly because of the transitions (from the Chinese American students from MMCAC environment to PWI university/college environment). T1 was defined as Time 1 in the earlier MMCAC environment, while T2 was defined as Time 2 in the PWI university/college environment.

**Macrosystem.** The Macrosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1992) is the “consistency observed within a given culture or subculture in the form and content of its constituent microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystems, as well as any belief systems or ideology underlying such inconsistencies” (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 258). Essentially, the macrosystem encompasses the cultural beliefs in the highest level, but also subcultures for each subsystem. According to Lau and Ng (2014) both subcultural inconsistencies and consistencies with overarching culture are important. This includes the societal values, cultural beliefs, and political trends that influence relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Swick & Williams, 2006). Additionally, Cross and Hong (2012) and Patton et al. (2013) also explain that macrosystem can be the sociocultural context, cultural norms, or policies that influence lives and subsequent emotions.

The macrosystem T1 (at Time 1) was based on the data about the MMCAC environment settings. The majority minority Chinese American communities are embedded in the larger American city, state, and country environment, so individuals are culturally impacted by media, national/local news, politics, and events. Both Western American and Chinese values including holidays, as Participant 5 (2019) said “would celebrate Western holidays or Christian holidays
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like Easter and Christmas but we'd also hold celebrations for Chinese New Year and for Mid-Autumn Festival...just integrating, small things like integrating, generic like wrapping stuff with American food that happens a lot.” Additionally, cultural rituals and ceremonies that are influenced by ancestry, history, parent's origins, and family heritage. Locally, cultural expectations and behaviors, such as “Take off your shoes before you walk inside” (Participant 3, 2019) were shared in the community. The data also described Chinese American culture with influences from Confucian values, with filial piety and instilled strong work ethics. While having collectivistic values with family, peers, in the predominantly Chinese American community, at the same time, competition in the academic environment was also fostered. Also, the high expectations and emphasis on education, and value of accelerated programs were especially pronounced. The cultural expectation of having additional academic and test preparation outside of school were prevalent. Lastly, the cultural expectations around emotional expression were described by Participant 8 (2020) as “I was not taught that I had to express emotions in very specific ways in order to be traditionally respectful or anything like that from my Chinese culture, Asian heritage” and Participant 1 (2019) “At the very least, I think it's like a Chinese mentality that you don't want to show emotion or else you look vulnerable and weak.”

The macrosystem T2 (at Time 2) was based on the data about the PWI environment settings. Although the macrosystem of the PWI community at T2 is similarly embedded in the larger American town/city, state, and country environment as at T1, where the individuals are culturally impacted by media, national/local news, politics, and events, the local culture was the most salient to the participants. The PWI institutions were described to have a “liberal” (Participant 2, 2019; Participant 6, 2020) culture. Participant 3 (2019) further stated “everyone tries to be very politically correct so people are very afraid of crossing lines.” Another salient
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topic regarding the culture at the PWI was the independence of thought as Participant 1 (2019) said “one of my professors [said] "Yes. That's how your parents are seeing it but other people see it more like college is to help you grow as a person and part of growing is pursuing your interests." Additionally, Participant 3 (2019), Participant 4 (2019), and Participant 9 (2020), described discovering peers that identify as White as having cultural values independent from family after college, rather than moving home as expected as the participants described. Participants also described cultural barriers to connect with peers that identify as White. This was due to mismatch of media preferences, and shared topics of interest during earlier social development to connect. Participants also described the Code Switch Learning Curve, that people in the PWI communities were more extroverted. For example, Participant 5 (2019) “I noticed that I'm very reserved and definitely very quiet… Also harder for me to talk to people and connect with people just because I'm so used to the culture of like Asian-Americans” demonstrated the difference in macrosystem cultures.

**Exosystem.** The Exosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1992) refers to the settings that an individual that does not have active participation in, but the event in that setting impacts the individual. Swick and Williams (2006) further clarifies the exosystems to be psychological systems rather than physical systems. This means that the other setting has an impact psychologically. Also, the link between the two settings can be either through another person (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Patton et al., 2013), such as an individual child feeling parent’s stress from their work environment, or indirectly through media of the other environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

For this exosystem T1 (at Time 1), the “Awareness of injustices learned from family of outside experience” code within the MMCAC Environment Stressors concept was a good
representation. For example, although participants did not experience the racism or discrimination in the MMCAC environment, they heard anecdotes from relatives about the experiences of racism and discrimination, and vicariously felt the impact. The awareness of these negative experiences from relatives with similar ethnic identities, when outside the community, is one aspect of the exosystem. In addition, media portrayal of the Asian American stereotype was part of the exosystem. Despite being in the MMCAC environment, participants developed an understanding of how Chinese or Asian Americans are portrayed by the greater American society and are psychologically impacted. For example, Participant 4 (2019) said “Asian roles, the scant handful that existed were always the nerdy sidekick to the protagonist…or the guy who's really good at math.” The exosystem, with the psychological impact, was demonstrated when Participant 4 (2019) subsequently said “Honestly, I'm not good at math… It wasn't great to think that my identity was qualified by being academically successful, especially in math. I see how people would think that, but I don't think it's true.”

The exosystem T2 (at Time 2) was also primarily from media, especially during COVID. For example, Participant 7 (2020) stated “noticing how much hatred there is and just unilateral hatred regardless of who the person is, seeing something happen in, for example, Chinatown, and having only one modern newspaper report about an incident.” This indicated challenging events in other settings, which still psychologically impacted the individuals.

**Mesosystem.** The Mesosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979), described this as interrelations across multiple settings. Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined interrelations as indirect links, communication, or knowledge across settings. Indirect links describe established connections through a third-party person, creating the link between the two settings. Intersetting communications are unidirectional or bidirectional messages between settings, through various
direct and indirect means, either in person or through digital remote methods (including social media). For example, Participant 9 (2020) said “I feel like, just on Facebook, I see a lot of them, how their parents don't understand,” providing participants insight into other settings peers are in over Facebook social media. In addition, both Participant 1 (2019) and Participant 9 (2020) described joining a Facebook group called “Subtle Asian Traits”, which is a “world wide phenomenon among college Asian Americans where they post memes about their childhood or funny jokes that are bilingual. Things like that” (Participant 1, 2019). Participant 5 (2020) experienced “indirect discrimination on Facebook, for example. I feel like I haven't been negatively affected by this yet but I don't know,” which demonstrated the indirect impact across settings. Essentially, participants were impacted by messages regarding ethnic identity, from settings outside their immediate settings.

**Microsystem.** The microsystem, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979), provides a way to recognize aspects of the immediate environment for the phenomenological experience, with factors giving meaning to the individual. More specifically, microsystem is defined as a “pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics” (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 22). This means that the microsystem settings account for both the physical place as well as “face-to-face interaction” (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 22) from relationships.

The microsystem T1 (at Time 1) was based on the data about the MMCAC environment settings, which included interactions with people at home, school, as well as places for faith, and extracurricular activities. At home, interactions from relationships include parents, grandparents, and siblings. At school, interactions were from friendship groups, peers, and teachers. Interactions with people in similar situations were at places for extracurricular activities (outside
of school) that included academic prep courses, music classes, and Chinese school. The places for faith/spiritual community varied amongst participants that had practices, as some described going to the cemetery to respect ancestry annually with the extended family. Some participants that went to church described interactions with peers and church leaders. The descriptions of the demographic make up for all these locations were predominantly Chinese American, with similar values (as described in the results).

The microsystem T2, in the PWI environment, included interactions with people at the university/college campus, dorm/offsite apartment/house, and cultural organizations/clubs. Although, the PWI university/college campus setting statistically had peers that identify as White (59.8% on average as mentioned in the last chapter), the results of the current study show the majority of the participants (path #1 subgroup) interacted with a primary group of friends that identified as predominantly Chinese or Asian American. Additionally, for these participants, the living arrangement in dorms or off campus apartments/houses were mostly with peers with a similar identity. Furthermore, cultural organizations, clubs on campus, and advocacy organizations that participants were involved in, were mostly with interactions with Chinese or Asian American peers. However, less prominent participants (path #2 subgroup) had a different experience, as they sought out a group of friends that predominantly identify as White (and was clarified not due to the lack of opportunities; Participant 4, 2019; Participant 10, 2020). The two described subgroups, that accounted for the varying cases provided a more complete picture of the phenomenon. This had set the foundation for the use of the Matrix for Explanatory Paradigm for Grounded Theory, as discussed below (after describing the context; Corbin & Strauss, 1989, 2008; Schatzman, 1991).
Matrix - Consequences Component. After analyzing all the category/themes, concepts, codes, and quotes, a salient phenomenon arose from the data in terms of consequences, which “are outcomes of inter/actions or of emotional responses to events” (Corbin & Strauss, pg. 89, 2008). As alluded to earlier in the results and in the discussion, participants that came from MMCAC had two types of consequences, either a) Path #1, Gradually Finding/Seeking, Chinese American or Asian American Peers in PWI Environment or b) Path #2, Choosing Support Primarily from Peers that identify as White, after Acknowledgment Existence of Chinese American or Asian American Peers in the PWI Environment. The consequences were based on two subcodes, under the Building New Peer Relationships Code, the Notable Changes of Experiences Concept, and the Transition Experience Category/Theme.

Matrix - Response Component: Action/Interactions/Emotional Responses. After the context with embedded conditions were determined with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1992) ecological model, the salient consequences were identified from the results. Subsequently, the response component was analyzed within the Conditional/Consequential Matrix to develop the Explanatory Paradigm for development of the substantive theory.

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), the responses are actions/interactions/emotions carried out by individuals over time, which “involve sequences of different activities and interactions and emotional responses (though not always obvious) and have a sense of purpose and continuity” (p. 97). Essentially, the Matrix response is an action, interactions, or an emotional response for conditions or events within the context.

To determine the context and conditions that led to the two outcomes of consequences, all the categories/themes, concepts, codes, and quotes were analyzed for responses. The first consequence, path #1, where the 8 participants stated similar experiences including “I like to
surround myself in the Asian bubble, definitely” (Participant 2, 2019), and “I still tend to hang out with the predominantly Asians” (Participant 7, 2020), was a result of the responses including “I felt like it would be a lot easier to connect with people if we had that shared commonality of being Asian” (Participant 1, 2019) and “The Asian friend group, I don't really want to say this, but it's true, I tell them more truths or more personal stuff about my family and stuff” (Participant 9, 2020). These responses of the feeling of ease and deeper connections with Chinese American peers were based on the conditions described in the MMCAC context.

The response for the 2nd consequence (participants as chose Path #2: Choosing Support Primarily from Peers that identify as White, after Acknowledgment Existence of Chinese American or Asian American Peers in the PWI Environment) were exhibited by 2 participants. All the category/themes, concepts, codes, and quotes were analyzed for responses and conditions explained the Path #2 related consequence, which is an exception to the Path #1 conditions/response/consequences mentioned earlier.

Under the “MMCAC Environment Stressors” concept, grouped in “Salient Challenges in Connecting with Home Community, MMCAC” code, the related data theoretically explained the consequence of path #2. This was based on their conditions and responses. As the code implied, two participants had salient challenges in connecting with their home community. Although the MMCAC context was the same for all 10 participants, the idiosyncratic conditions and characteristics for 2 participants led to a different response and consequence, compared to the first subgroup of 8. Participant 4 (2019)’s challenges to connect with the home community were described as having inconsistent values with academics and feeling invalidated in the MMCAC environment, with Chinese American peers. Participant 10 (2020)’s challenges to connect with the home community were described as having inconsistent values with the expression of
nontraditional sexual orientations (or non-heteronormative), which inhibited the forming of deeper relationships with Chinese American peers in the previous MMCAC environment.

In both cases, the response emotions, actions, and interactions were forms of disconnection. Participant 4 (2019)’s statement of “Oh my god, my whole childhood, they're like you have to be good in school. You have to have your grades and stuff, and I had just neglected that. That just sent me on a deep dark spiral. I was just so alone and felt so lost, and no one looked at me, no one had the same values as me" demonstrated the response of disconnection from the MMCAC community. A similar response of disconnection from the MMCAC community from different challenges occurred for Participant 10 (2020) as described in, “I'm pansexual. My outward appearance doesn't really project that. I have not explicitly told [my parents] about it. [With the] friend group that I associate from my high school, I don't really look into my sexuality too much. I don't push that out as much as I normally would with my college friends, because I don't think I've ever told them that I was pansexual.” Participant 10 (2020)’s response was “It's not something that I'm explicitly open about, it's more something that I will open up to for close friends,” which led to path #2 consequences in the PWI environment. For both participants, friendships with peers that identify as White became their primary source of support. For clarity, despite being in the PWI environment with limited peers that identify as Chinese or Asian American (a consistent factor for all 10 participants), the two participants indicated they had deeper connections to peers that identify as White compared to their Chinese American peers in college/university.

Path #1 and Path #2 are described in the following Figure 5. The explanatory paradigm for substantive theory for the Chinese American population described is shown in Figure 5.
In Figure 5, the conditional/consequential matrix showed the conditions (congruent or incongruent values in MMCAC environment), responses (high or low level of connection to Chinese American peers), and consequences (develop community with peers that identify as Chinese American or White within the PWI environment). This substantive theory is very specifically developed based on the “empirical situation” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 33), which to be clear, is not a general theory and needs further research. However, this substantive theory describes the behaviors and explanations for the population of interest within context.
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Integration, Theory Refinement, and Validation

The integration referred to the incorporation of the reflexivity and theoretical memos. This is a part of the theory refinement, which Corbin and Strauss (2008) described to include the review for logic gaps, internal consistency, as well as validation.

Reflexivity

In terms of reflexivity, my own background as a Chinese American is acknowledged as a factor, described earlier in the Researcher Reflexivity Statement. Using the bracketing Speziale et al. (2011) cognitive process, I continuously noted my own experiences and identified my own judgements and pre-existing beliefs through memos. I noticed I made comparisons between my experience and the participants’ experiences and reflected on my personal biases. To address this, I became more mindful to have a “beginner’s mind” or analogous to having a “blank slate,” to ensure having open perspectives in gathering new information without preconceptions about topics. This allowed for exploration with novel narratives from initial descriptions that might have seemed similar. This strategy not only addressed my own reflected experiences, but also experiences across participants. Additionally, the bracketing preexisting beliefs enabled the process to be more objective in the analysis, and the development of the substantive theory.

Memos, Thought Process. While the memos demonstrated usefulness as a tool for reflexivity and the reflection progress, their power for the development of the substantive theory has been indispensable. Throughout the data collection, interviews, and analysis, the theoretical memos helped to organize the thoughts and to draw connections between the codes, concepts, and categories to formulate the substantive theory with the Conditional/Consequential Matrix Explanatory Paradigm for Grounded Theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). After metacognitively conceptualizing the overall structure of the substantive theory, a series of theoretical memos
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helped to recognize the salient consequences. To complete the Conditional/Consequential Matrix, the conditions and responses (shown in Figure 5) were found. More specifically, after identifying the prominent subgroup of participants that had one set of consequences (in contrast to a less prominent group of participants), the two subgroups’ conditions and response differences were investigated. The investigation dissected, compared, and contrasted the data with theoretical memos as well as tracked the systematic thought process. This led to the proposed substantive theory: The consequences of the ethnic background of the community support sought/developed in the PWI environment depended on the level of congruent values, the level of connectedness in MMCAC community. The matrix explanatory paradigm framework, used during the analysis of the theoretical concepts (and incremental memos), led to the development of the resulting substantive theory.

Validation

Three types of validations have been used in this research. The first method of validation was embedded in the grounded theory analysis process, with comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To develop the codes, concepts, and category/themes, comparing and contrasting data inherently provided validation with multiple confirmation of similar topics (as well as cross checking with literature). The codes, concepts, or categories/themes use new data in this validation process (confirmed or disconfirmed compared to existing data). The second method of validation was through the independent development and verification of codes from the raw data by the chair advisor. This included discussions and cross checks. Lastly, the third validation method focused on verifying the substantive theory with the participants during the follow up interview (for consistency with their experiences and perspectives).
Research Questions

The research questions “1) How do American born Chinese college students that moved from ethnically dense Chinese American communities to attend Predominantly White Institutions colleges/universities, make meaning of their identity(ies) before they moved?” and “2) …after they moved?” were explored in this research.

Before the participants moved, the participants described their identity through factors such as history and heritage (i.e. code including Rituals, Ceremonies, etc), their gender and sexual orientation identity, religion/spiritual identity, SES Identity, as well as their ethnic self-identification, such as “Chinese American” (American added to heritage label). They made meaning of being Chinese American in the MMCAC environment as a period with a lack of reflection of ethnic/racial identity (“...I didn't think too much about my Asian identity… all of my friends were Asian...” Participant 10, 2020; “I belong with the Chinese...I'm a majority. I didn't need to think about it” Participant 9, 2020). However, at the same time, they largely also shared similar values, primarily from Confucianism, when making meaning of their experiences in a predominately Chinese American cultural environment. For example, some of the values described, emphasized family honor, respect for authority, education, and self-discipline (work ethics). The participants also emphasized interpersonal relationships, which included parents (filial duties). Also, being a part of the community with Chinese American peers that mutually shared the same cultural values (heavy focus on academics, but also including interests, such as movies, etc) to easily connect to each other in the community, were prominent in the findings.

Identity Models with Regard to Within Group Variations

However, the level of connection to peers within the MMCAC environment was also found to be varied, which led to the discovery of within group differences. The substantive
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theory developed in this research demonstrated some variation on the meaning of the identities, which depended on: subgroup Path #1 or subgroup Path #2 (which was particularly salient after the environmental shift). The prominent subgroup Path #1 had no significant shifts (e.g. values or ethnic identity of peer support). Besides being away from parents in a liberal environment with more independence (choosing to major in non-STEM/double major), the identities for subgroup Path #1 that were developed in the MMCAC environment stayed intact (including being a part of a Chinese American peer community). This was not the case for the less prominent subgroup Path #2. Although subgroup Path #2 participants still identified as Chinese American in the PWI environment, they no longer sought Chinese American peers for support (and their group of friends primarily identified as White). Additionally, the participants in this subgroup shifted aspects of their values and identities including: 1) openly identifying with their sexual identity, 2) no longer having the Confucian based values as part of their identity (particularly lowering prioritization of academics compared to importance in previous communities). For participants in this subgroup, the meaning behind their Chinese American identities shifted from the incongruent values (from their previous MMCAC communities) to the more congruent values (in their new communities with peers that primarily identify as White).

**Incompatibility of the Identity Models from Literature.** This research also confirmed the incompatibility of the identity models initially explored in the literature review. Both Alvarez and Helms’ (2001) racial identity model and Phinney’s (1992) ethnic identity development theoretical models did not fit the population in this study, particularly in the MMCAC environment. For example, the Conformity stage (where a person identifies with White culture in America, in Alvarez and Helms’ [2001] racial identity model) and the Unexamined stage (where a person has not explored their ethnic identity, in Phinney’s [1992] ethnic identity development
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model) would not be applicable by participants from MMCAC environments. Due to the ethnically dense Chinese American environment, those identity models are hindered by the lack of exposure to other racial/ethnic groups.

**Adaptation Suggestions for Identity Models.** The current research provided insights to suggest adaptations for identity models, previously discussed, to better fit populations from MMCAC environments. One suggestion is to stratify certain stages (*Conformity stage;* Alvarez & Helms, 2001; *Unexamined stage;* Phinney, 1992), to be able to accommodate the predominantly Chinese American context. For example, Alvarez and Helms (2001)’s *conformity* stage can be broken down to include the level of exposure (and internalization) of White culture (as referenced in the stage), such as indirectly through media, rather than directly from peers and immediate environment. Similarly, Phinney (1992)’s *Unexamined stage* can be stratified to levels of exploration (rather than a binary unexamined or examined assessment), to consider the relative exposure and self-reflections of the broader culture beyond the immediate MMCAC environments. Another suggested modification, specifically for Phinney (1992)’s identity development model, is to have nonlinear stages, rather than the current stepwise incremental development perspective. Currently the last stage in this model, *Achievement* (the resolution stage is commitment to group membership; Phinney, 1992) can only be achieved linearly as the highest progression of the stages. However, it can appear to be reversed for some of the population in this research (having early commitment to a group), or can change over time after shifting environments (either maintaining commitments or shifting commitments to other groups). Having a nonlinear model would account for a flexible development path, especially across MMCAC and PWI environments.
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Association and Implications to Mental Health

The mental health implications for the current inability to measure ethnic identity development, is the risk of identity distress (Hernandez et al., 2006) and adjustment issues, during the transition to University (Sica et al., 2014). Identity distress impacts the ability or inability to cope with the transition to adulthood, including psychological functioning (e.g. social domain; Hernandez et al., 2006; Sica et al., 2014).

Conclusion

To conclude, the research is summarized and followed by a discussion on the implications. Additionally, the limitations and suggestions for future research are addressed.

Summary

This research aimed to fill the gap of experiences for American born Chinese college students that moved from ethnically dense MMCAC to attend PWI colleges/universities (related to their identities and experiences). After the critical literature review of the limited research, a qualitative study using Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1989, 2008; Schatzman, 1991), was developed to provide a descriptive representation for this population. The iterative process included participant recruitment, the data collection, and the analysis. The data collection encompassed the interviews for the ten recruited participants as well as background demographic information. The outcome of the analysis were descriptions of the population, through the six categories/themes, 17 concepts, and 48 codes from the data gathered from the interviews. The two settings across time, MMCAC at T1 and PWI at T2 along with the transition process were also described. Based on the salient topics, reflections from theoretical memos, and Conditional/Consequential Matrix Explanatory Paradigm for Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), a substantive theory was developed. This was based on the “empirical situation”
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(Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 33) for the parameters of research. The substantive theory developed in this research: American born Chinese from predominantly Chinese American communities develop support around peers that identify either as Chinese/Asian American or White, depending on level of congruent values, as well as the experience/level of connection to previous Chinese American community. This substantive theory was subsequently validated with multiple methods as described. The implications of these findings are described in the next section.

**Implications**

The implications of this study include the contribution to literature, as well as to practicing service providers. Since the population of Chinese Americans from MMCAC have been understudied, this research provided a description of common characteristics (for Chinese American students from MMCAC environments that moved to PWI universities/colleges). This knowledge enables providers to gain a better understanding of this population.

**Within Group Differences and Ethnic Identity Match (between Client/Therapists).**

Although the Chinese American student population (from MMCAC environments in this research study) is a subset of the overall Chinese American population in the United States, it was found not to be a homogenous group. This research demonstrated that within group differences existed, for the population studied. The Chinese American student population subgroups, adapted different strategies and behavioral outcomes (path #1 or path #2), depending on the subgroups' prior experiences and values. Path #1 and path #2 differed in preferences for peer support, in regards to their racial/ethnic background. This alludes to the within group differences for racial/ethnic matching, with mental health providers and clients.

The literature had mixed findings for racial/ethnic matching. For example, Kim and Kang (2018) found that racial/ethnic matching improved retention rates and improved overall global
functioning. In addition, Ziguras et al. (2003) found reduction of emergency service use, and Chao et al. (2012) found the working alliance was better for individuals with persistent and severe mental health illnesses, ethnically/racially matched. However, Cabral et al. (2011) and Shin et al. (2005) had opposite findings, and found no significant benefit in ethnic/racial matching. In addition, Hayes et al. (2016) found no differences between outcomes for racial/ethnic minorities compared to White peers that also used the services. Lastly, Karlsson (2005) found ethnic matching for psychotherapy to be inconclusive.

The findings for this current research demonstrated that the context of the Chinese American population, within MMCAC environment (of predominantly similar identifying peers and leaders in the community), does not necessarily lead to seeking support from people who identify similarly. For example, of the participants that received past mental health services, challenges arose in both cases: 1) when their therapist had a similar ethnic/racial background to the client (but had incongruent values), 2) as well as when another therapist had dissimilar backgrounds to the client (but demonstrated cultural insensitivity). This parallels the mixed findings that the literature indicated for racial/ethnic match preferences. The within group heterogeneity of the Chinese American population from the MMCAC environment demonstrated differences in their preferences of racial/ethnic for peer support, depending on their past history in the MMCAC environment. However, this research indicated the challenges arose for similar and dissimilar racial/ethnic backgrounds, the preferences for therapists were more focused on the framework utilized (structured vs unstructured services) and congruence of values.
Potential Interventions and Supports Adapted for Population

In the literature, Hall et al. (2019) and Kim and Zane (2016) demonstrated models that had been adapted for outreach and intervention for the broader Asian American group. For example, Hall et al. (2019)’s findings that gift giving, and indirect communication were focused for people of Japanese ancestry (and were generalized for people of Asian descent), may not be appropriate for the current population. The current literature does not exist for the specific population in this study (Chinese American students from MMCAC to PWI environments). While Hall et al. (2019)’s suggested adaptation included focusing on the interdependence of the communities, may help the current population, their generalization of the homogeneous preference of frameworks (solely CBT) may also not representative of clients’ preferences (demonstrated by the findings earlier from this current study, with the heterogeneous preference of frameworks to include both structured and unstructured approaches depending on the individuals).

Suggestions of interventions adapted for the current Chinese American population (from MMCAC to PWI environments) of the current study would be: 1) first assess the level of structure preferred, followed by 2) focusing on the preferred backgrounds of the peer support network. Mental health providers need to consider identifying the client’s historical relationships within the culture of the MMCAC environment, as well as their relationships across cultures in the PWI environment. As peer emotional support can be a protective factor for a wide range of presenting problems (including adjustment challenges to a new environment as detailed in the theme/categories), conducting an assessment of client’s appraisal of their relationships can be helpful in the determination of needs. Depending on the client’s perspective of previous relationships, and preferences for new relationships in the PWI environment, the findings from
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this research is to provide validation of preferences after insight. For example, if a client has a positive evaluation of the peers from the MMCAC environment, encouraging the retention of connections, while supporting the development and expansion of new relationships may be needed (e.g. emotional support, validation, addressing the intersection of culture with interpersonal social skills). However, if the client has a negative perspective of previous experiences, and prefers to be distant from the peers from the MMCAC, support of the on-going separation, as well as the support in the expansion or development of new relationships may also be needed.

Limitations

A limitation for this study is the scope of this study and the participant sample size. Due to the “empirical situation,” the conditions of participants Chinese Americans from MMCAC that shifted to a PWI university/college environment, the findings are limited to the conditions. Also, the analysis of identity development, using pre-existing identity models, were unable to be used due to the earlier discussed incompatibilities of the idiosyncratic nature of this population. Further research would be needed, including varying conditions, to develop a more generalized or formal theory.

Suggestions for Future Research

Since the research on Chinese American student population (from MMCAC in PWI environments) is limited, this study focused on using a qualitative method. This provided descriptive insights, along with a substantive theory based on a limitedly defined empirical situation/conditions. Also, to further expand on the substantive theory, the perceptions of group cohesion, the level of inclusiveness, and level of acculturation, could be measured as well. Suggestions for further research are to expand on the conditions of this research, with other,
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more general circumstances. At that point, quantitative measures could be used, with a focus on salient topics that arose. For example, due to the academic pressures found in the MMCAC environment, mental health measures that screen for anxiety, stress, and depression could be utilized.

**Longitudinal Study Suggestion.** Although this current research provides a description of the Chinese American students (that transitioned from MMCAC to PWI environments), rather than retrospectively capturing the narratives about their past, a longitudinal study would capture data during time periods as they occur. By studying this population over periods (such as during their youth, adulthood, or older adulthood), the trajectories of the path #1/path #2 phenomenon could be analyzed. The longitudinal study would provide data regarding any changes for preferences of peer support (over different time periods) to determine the consistency or flexibility of this phenomenon. In addition, this would provide insight to better understand the common internal and external experiences and challenges, throughout the lifespan, for this understudied population.
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doi:10.1023/A:1021076222321


[http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/MLR.0b013e31803bb4c1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/MLR.0b013e31803bb4c1)


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Paper delivered at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Society, San Francisco, California, August 13.

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Purpose and Background

Mr. Joseph Chung, a graduate student in the School of Nursing and Health Professions at the University of San Francisco is doing a study on the experiences of Chinese American students that recently moved from an community of people that predominantly identifies as Chinese-American, to live in a community at a University where majority of the students identify as White based on the demographics. I am being asked to participate because:

1. I am between 18-22 years of age
2. I was born in the United States
3. I identify as “Chinese” or “Chinese-American”
4. I am currently enrolled as a student at a University as a 1st or 2nd year student
5. Recently moved away from home to attend University (within the last 2 years)
6. Before attending college/University, I lived in an community predominantly community of people that predominantly identifies as Chinese-American
7. I currently attend a University with majority of the people identify as White

Procedures

If I agree to be a participant in the study, the following will happen:

1. I will complete a short questionnaire on giving basic information about me including my age, demographics, gender, race, and background of geographical communities.
2. I will participate in a 60 minute initial recorded interview.
3. I will participate in a 30 minute follow up recorded interview.
4. I will be recorded during my participation in the interviews for the study.

Risks and/or Discomforts

1. It is possible that some of the questions on the short questionnaire or during the interviews may make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

2. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept as confidential as is possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be coded and kept in locked files at all times. Only study personnel will have access to the files.

3. Because the time required for my participation may be up to 2 hours, I may become tired or bored.

Benefits

1. There will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study.
2. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of my identity and experiences as a Chinese American attending a University where the majority of the students identify as White.

Costs/Financial Considerations
1. There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

Payment/Reimbursement
- I will be given a total of $30.00 in Amazon gift cards for my participation in this study as follows:
  - A $15 Amazon gift card will be given after the 60 min initial interview
  - A $15 Amazon gift card will be given after the 30 min follow up interview
- I will be emailed the electronic Amazon gift card immediately after I have complete each interview.

If I decide to withdraw from the study before I have completed participating or the researchers decide to terminate my study participation, I will still receive full reimbursement. Questions I have talked to Mr. Chung or his research assistant about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may call him at (415) 322-0050.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with the researchers. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu. Consent I have been given a copy of the “Research Subject’s Bill of Rights” and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on my present or future status as a student or employee at USF. My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

Subject’s Signature __________________________ Date of Signature

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent __________________________ Date of Signature
### B. Proposed budget

<table>
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<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<td>Transcription Service $1 per minute for the two interviews (initial=60mins, follow up=30mins)</td>
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<td>12 participants (90 mins per participant)</td>
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<td>Recruitment using Facebook advertisement</td>
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<td>This is dependent on number of advertisements campaigns based on geographic areas and population characteristics based on inclusion criteria</td>
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<tr>
<td>The researcher will self-fund the cost for the research.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C. IRB Approval Forms/documentation

Exemption Notification - IRB ID: 1188

Richard Johnson <noreply@admentor.com>
Reply-To: Richard Johnson <rjohnson11@usfca.edu>
To: jcchung@usfca.edu

Protocol Exemption Notification

To: Joseph Chung  
From: Richard Johnson, IRB Chair  
Subject: Protocol #1188  
Date: 04/08/2019

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your project (IRB Protocol #1188) with the title Majority to Minority Shift: Experiences for American Born Chinese (ABC) College Students from Predominant Chinese-American Communities to Predominantly White Institution (PWI) Colleges/Universities has been approved by the University of San Francisco IRBPHS as Exempt according to 45 CFR 46.101(b). Your application for exemption has been verified because your project involves minimal risk to subjects as reviewed by the IRB on 04/08/2019.

Please note that changes to your protocol may affect its exempt status. Please submit a modification application within ten working days, indicating any changes to your research. Please include the Protocol number assigned to your application in your correspondence.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your endeavors.

Sincerely,

Dr. Richard Gregory Johnson III  
Professor & Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
University of San Francisco  
irbphs@usfca.edu  
IRBPHS Website
Downloadable Attachments:
Modification Approved - Exempt Application - IRB ID: 1188.pdf

To: Joseph Chung
From: Richard Gregory Johnson III, IRB Chair
Subject: Protocol #1188
Date: 04/22/2020

Dear Joseph Chung:

Your Amendment for research (IRB Protocol #1188) with the project title Majority to Minority Shift: Experiences for American Born Chinese (ABC) College Students from Predominantly Chinese-American Communities to Predominantly White Institution (PWI) Colleges/Universities has been approved by the IRB Chair on 04/22/2020.

Any modifications, adverse reactions or complications must be reported using a modification application to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS via email at IRBPHS@usfca.edu. Please include the Protocol number assigned to your application in your correspondence.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Richard Gregory Johnson III
Professor & Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
University of San Francisco
IRBPHS@usfca.edu
IRBPHS Website

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/1/?tab=ih&ui=2&shl=1&authuser=0&ik=fe6f8f9235&attredirects=0& Are you sure you want to delete this document? Deleting a document cannot be undone. Do you wish to continue?
D. Online Qualtrics Screener

Please fill out the 5 question Survey.

1) **Where did you hear about this?** Referral Source:
   a. (Recommendation from staff/peers, online ad, organizations, forum, Facebook group, listservs-AAPA, or other)

2) **Do you meet all of following criteria?** (YES / NO)
   a. I am between 18-22 years of age
   b. Identify as American Born Chinese (ABC) or Chinese/Chinese American born in the United States
   c. Currently attending a university/college in the United States, in a predominantly White institution (PWI)
   d. Prior to moving to university/college, I resided in a predominately Chinese American community (from preschool to 12th grade)

3) **Which university/college do you attend and where is it located?**

4) **What is your email?**
   a. Please fill in your email here:

5) **Do you agree to be contacted if you meet criteria?** (YES / NO)
   a. If you meet criteria, we will schedule a brief 5-10 min phone call to determine your eligibility to receive $30 in Amazon gift cards (after the completion of an initial interview- a $15 valued gift card for 60 mins and follow up- $15 valued gift card for 30 mins over online video chat or phone).
E. Phone Screen Guide

1. Briefly explain the study
2. Verify the criteria they entered to online screener (allow for details):
   1) **Between age 18-22 years old**
   2) **Identify as American Born Chinese (ABC) or Chinese/Chinese American born in the United States**
   3) **Currently attending a university/college in the United States, in a predominantly White institution (PWI)**
   4) **Prior to moving to university/college, resided in a predominately Chinese American community**

3. Determine details of their current neighbor/community demographics/setting.
   a. Would you describe the neighborhood/community you currently live are with people who predominantly identify as White?
      i. Attending a university in the United states in a predominantly White institution (PWI), which is “the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment” (Christopher Brown II & Elon Dancy II, 2010, p. 2).
   b. What percentage would you estimate demographics to be?

4. Determine details of living in an ethnically dense homogenous Chinese American community in their home town/city/neighborhood prior to moving away to college/university.
   a. Prior to attending University, did you move from a different community?
      i. Based on Shaw et al. (2012)’s meta-analysis, 50% is a conservative proportion of the local community to determine if a participant has been part of a high ethnic density population. Due to the possibility of limited availability to local census data, ask the participant to self-report if they believe at least 50% of the people in their neighborhood community were people who identify as Chinese American.
   b. Did you live in the same community from preschool/kindergarten to 12th grade?

5. Additional questions may be asked depending on data collection/analysis phase:
   a. If on initial open coding phase (use purposeful sampling)
      i. **Skip this section** for broader range of sample potential participants
   b. If on axial coding or selective coding phase (use theoretical sampling)
      i. Review analyzed data from open coding phase and review literature and additional general questions based in the domain of the
         1. Preliminary categories and Relationship amongst categories and saturation level
         2. Note systematically if categories are not relevant/applicable to the person

6. If criteria met:
   a. Explain the process of the study including a demographics questionnaire, initial interview, and follow up interview
   b. Determine their interest to become a participant
   c. Send out informed consent through email & demographics questionnaire
   d. Schedule an initial interview and preliminary date for the follow up interview.
   e. Determine best method for the interview (i.e. Zoom, Google Hangout, Skype, phone if necessary, etc.)
F. Demographics Questionnaire

1) Referral Source
   a. (Recommendation from staff/peers, online ad, organizations, forum, Facebook group, listservs-AAPA, or other )
2) First and Last Name
3) Email
4) Phone
5) Age
6) Gender
7) Which University do you attend?
   a. Degree / Major / Program Duration
   b. Current Year in University
8) Where were you born?
9) Are you the first to attend college?
10) What is the highest level of education for your father?
11) What is the highest level of education for your mother?
12) How many siblings do you have?
13) What is your estimated family household yearly income prior to your move to college?
14) What is your estimated current yearly income?
15) What language(s) do you speak?
   a. What is the primary language you speak prior to your move to college?
   b. What is the primary language you currently speak?
16) How do you identify in terms of ethnicity and race?
17) What is your approximate overall GPA prior to your move to college?
18) What is your current approximate overall GPA?
19) Have you ever received mental health services (i.e. individual or group psychotherapy)?
   If so, when?
G. Interview Guide

Background
1) Let’s start with some background.
2) Please tell me about yourself.
   a. How would you describe your identity in terms of gender, race, and cultural background?
      i. Is there another identity factor outside of these components important to you?
   b. How would you describe your family’s socioeconomic status (or social class)?
   c. What are you currently studying?

Context 1 - Based on the screener, you described you lived in a predominantly Chinese American community:
3) How would you describe the neighborhood or geographic area of the place you grew up in (preschool to high school)?
4) What institutions and organizations, were important to you inside your community?
   a. Why were they important to you?
   b. How about institutions and organizations outside your community, in your city, state, or interstate?
5) What did you, your family, and community value as important?
   a. How did this compare or contrast to your understanding of the values outside of your community?
   b. What motivated you and people in your community?
6) How would you describe your social groups?
   a. How would you describe your interpersonal interactions with people in your community?
7) How did you perceive your identity when you lived in that community? How did you perceive your peers? How did you perceive people outside your community?
   a. What experiences have you had that made you think about that when you lived in the community you described?
   b. Did you have contrasting experiences during the same time period?

Context 2 - Based on the screener, you described you are currently at a predominantly White institution (PWI) University (meaning people that identify as White account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment):
8) How would you describe geographic area you currently live in at your University?
9) What institutions and organizations are important to you inside your community?
   a. Why are they important to you?
   b. How about institutions and organizations outside your community, in your city, state, or interstate?
10) What do you and peers in your community value as important?
    c. How did this compare or contrast to your understanding of the values in your predominantly Chinese American community your childhood home.
d. What motivated you now? What do you think motivates the people in your community?

11) How would you describe your social groups?
   e. How would you describe your interpersonal interactions with people in your community?

12) How do you perceive your identity while you are at the University? How do you perceive your peers? How do you perceive people outside your community?
   f. What experiences have you had that made you think about how you identify?