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Exploring the Narratives of Underrepresented Southeast Asian Students in Higher Education

Donna Soukantouy

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Abstract

In my study, I examined how underrepresented Southeast Asian (SEA) students, specifically Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotian students, navigate college by exploring their personal narratives. The research question I used to inform my study was how could I represent and better support underrepresented SEA students in the surrounding San Diego, California colleges and universities? I found that the focus groups I facilitated contributed to meaningful engagement. Oftentimes SEA students are never in the same room with other students like themselves. Through interviews, interactive activities, and dialogue, I found that we need to provide spaces, platforms, and workshops for SEA students to speak their truths, share their stories, and validate their needs.

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Exploring the Narratives of Underrepresented Southeast Asian American Students in Higher Education

In the United States, on many of our nation's campuses, Asian Americans are leading the way in higher education, but the number of Southeast Asians students is low overall (Um, 2003). According to the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), Southeast Asian American (SEAA; e.g., Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese) students face multiple barriers to education. Schools and policymakers often lump SEAA students together with all other Asian American students, whose overall educational outcomes are much higher than average making SEAA students' experience invisible (SEARAC, 2013; see Appendices A, B, and C). Relatively little is known about their educational experiences in higher education when compared to students of color in general (Museus, 2013a; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ngo & Lee, 2007). I now know that my identities being a Lao American, Asian American, female, first-generation college student, and the eldest daughter of a refugee and immigrant made an impact on my lived experiences on higher education and society. Growing up, I told the world "I am Asian-American" and fell into the mold of the model minority, the stereotype which asserts that Asian Americans are able to make it on their own without special assistance (Ngo & Lee, 2007) and therefore hindering my identity as a Southeast Asian, Lao-American, and woman of color that rendered my experiences invisible.

In reality, I am another face of an Asian American model minority who has achieved a bachelor's degree and about to complete a master's program. Despite my formal education, this is a rare achievement for someone coming from an underserved community and underrepresented ethnic minority group of Asian Americans. I am, by far, not the model minority, despite how I am perceived by others in society. Navigating college was always

difficult. My parents never contributed to my education experiences because they lacked English proficiency and did not provide monetary assistance. I relied on financial aid, grants, and loans to pay for my expenses (e.g., cost of living, books, transportation, and global education fees to study abroad). As a result, my lived experiences have impacted me to pursue a degree in higher education. Southeast Asian Americans are severely underrepresented amongst college students and faculty and administrators in higher education (Suzuki, 2002), which is a prevalent issue in higher education and I hope to change that.

As I reflected on my graduate experiences at the University of San Diego (USD), where I pursued my Master's of Art in Higher Education Leadership program at the School of Leadership and Education Sciences starting in 2018, I became interested in SEAA students in higher education, because of my lived experiences. My coursework and my work as the Graduate Assistant for the University Center gave me a sense of self-awareness and how I can make a deeper impact in higher education, especially as an advocate for underserved Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) communities to build a more just and equitable society. As a higher education professional, I am committed to support underrepresented students in higher education that fosters academic success, professional development, and personal growth because I have a passion to educate, inspire, and empower students from diverse backgrounds. I have a personal connection to this topic because I identify as Lao-American. My program helped me reflected on my lived experiences by exploring my own narratives and how I navigated college. Thus, gave me the foundation of this study to begin exploring the narratives of underrepresented SEAA students because there is a lack of literature surrounding SEAA students' educational experience that retains imperfect descriptions of who these students are and what they face in different college environments. (Borromeo, 2018).

Research Questions

This research paper focused on the narrative data of underrepresented Southeast Asian American college students from different San Diego institutions. In my study, I examined how SEAA students navigate college by exploring Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotian students' narratives. The research questions that inform my study are:

1. How can I partner with peers and students to better highlight Asian diversity on campus?
2. How could I represent and better support underrepresented SEAA students in the surrounding San Diego colleges and universities?
3. How can I inform student affairs practitioners by becoming knowledgeable about the needs and experiences to support SEAA students?

Literature Review

This current study builds on previous research on Asian American Pacific Islander's (AAPI) and adds to the growing literature on SEAA students in higher education. Borromeo stated, "SEAA communities have been, and continue to be, an underrepresented and underserved population and the most invisible and marginalized groups in higher education" (Borromeo, 2018, p. 8). Among this community, there is a lack of college attendance across SEAA according to the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, 2013). As a result, SEAA college students are less likely to obtain a degree than other AAPI students. (Maramba, 2011). As I further explored the narratives of underrepresented Southeast Asian Students in higher education, I learned that future research need to examined the historical and social context and understand the history of the model minority myth and the importance of disaggregated data to see the discourse of Southeast Asians experiences in higher education.

Historical Context

Examining migration patterns of Cambodians, Hmong and Laotians in Southeast Asia to the United States is an important starting point for understanding some of the issues SEAA student face (Pharn, 2018) because they are descendants of refugees which included the ‘boat people’ from Vietnam, the survivors of the ‘killing fields’ during the Pol Pot period in Cambodia, the ‘swidden farmers from the lowland Lao and the highland Hmong’ (Pedraza & Rumbaut, 1996, p. 8). For the purpose of this study, I will focus on Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotians. I provided a context to their experiences below.

America’s secret war in Laos. According to an article for *Legacies of War*, Laos, a country that borders Vietnam, became entangled during Vietnam War, and covertly bombed by the United States, prompted a secret war in an attempt to destroy communist supply lines. From 1964 to 1973, the United States dropped more than two million tons of ordnance above Laos, rendering the nation per capita the most heavily bombed in history. Many villages have been destroyed by the bombings and hundreds of thousands of Lao people displaced over the nine years period (Legacies of War 2020).

Hmong diaspora. The Hmong are an Asian ethnic group and tribal people from the highlands of Laos (Gordon, 1987). During the the height of the Vietnam War and America’s secret war in Laos, the United States recruited the Hmong to fight on their side against the communist movement, Pathet Lao, who were threatening the political order in the area (Jacobs, 1996; Pedraza & Rumbaut, 1996). By the end of the war in 1975, the US withdrew, leaving its ally and the Hmong to fend for themselves after discovering that there was no chance of winning the war (Xiong, 2015) and because of their involvement with the United States, the New Lao Government declared the total elimination of the Hmong (Jacob, 1996). The Hmong feared

retribution, retaliation, and oppression (Yang, 2003) and more than 44,000 fled into Thailand to seek refugee (Jacobs, 1996).

Khmer Rouge. In the article for *History*, explained that the Khmer Rouge was a brutal regime that ruled Cambodia, now known as the Cambodian Genocide from 1975 to 1979. The effort to establish a colonial master race in Cambodia led by Marxist dictator, named Pol Pot, culminated over the deaths of 2 million people that were either executed as enemies of the regime or died of malnutrition, disease, or overwork (History, 2017). After the three year rule of the Khmer Rouge, the Cambodian survivors of the Pol Pot labor camps fled to the Thai border along with the increased flows of Hmong and other refugees from Laos (Pedraza & Rumbaut, 1996).

Southeast Asia exodus and social context. By 1975, the refugee exodus was shaped and as well over two million refugees fled Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (Pedraza & Rumbaut, 1996). Only one and half million of those refugees and immigrants resettled in the United States and put under federal welfare programs under the Indochina Migrant and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 after the governments of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia fell to communist forces (Gordon, 1987). Reseachers found that refugees quickly had to assimilate to their new American life and adjusted or adapted to a whole new environment and culture was challenging: many of them came from rural backgrounds, arrived with little education (Pedraza & Rumbaut, 1996), struggled with English proficiency (Her, 2014), lacked the job skills and qualifications that were transferable to job markets, settled for low-skilled or labor jobs, (Phapphayboun, 2003), faced mental health issues due to the trauma they faced from wars, genocides, extreme persecution (Lam and Hui, 2016), and endured prolonged stay in harsh conditions inside refugees camps (Pedraza & Rumbaut, 1996). Thus, they would not have any forms of capital (e.g., economic, cultural, social, and linguistic capital) to pass on to their children (Doublestein, 2017). Even to

this present day, children of refugees are at a disadvantage, lack the support and guidance they need from their parents, and are often the first in their families to attend college (Yang, 2004). Research shows that the Bachelor's degree levels are far lower among Southeast Asians than other Asian subgroups and the national overall average (Li, 2005; Museus, 2013). Yet, the struggles of SEAA educational attainment are largely ignored by policymakers who look at aggregate data on Asian Americans, which shows Asian Americans as a monolithic group doing so well that they are called the “model minority” (Pharn, 2019; Yang 2004).

The Model Minority Myth

Academic research found that the term “model minority” was first coined by Peterson which he praised the success of Chinese Americans who were moving upward towards social mobility all on their own, and later extended to other Asian subgroups such as Korean and Japanese (Li, 2005). As a result, the myth of the model minority was born which asserted that Asian-Americans were more successful academically and economically and one that stays out of trouble than other minorities in society (Cuddy, Galinsky, Maddux, & Polifroni, 2008). Through their hard work and education, the model minority myth highlights an image that Asians are the perfect example of a racial minority group that has “made it” in North America and therefore serves as a model for other racial minorities to follow (Wing, 2007, p. 456). In reality, the term model minority is a racial stereotype that describes Asian, as a monolithically hardworking racial group, whose high performances reinforces systemic racism and is used as a political wedge to pit other minority groups against each other such as African and Hispanic students but more notably among other Asian Americans subgroups who do not fit the stereotype (Li, 2005; Osajima, 2000).

In addition, Museus and Kiang (2009) found the model minority myth is another stereotype that perpetuates the narratives and misconceptions commonly associated with Asian and Pacific Islander American students: (a) Asian Americans are all the same, (b) Asian Americans are not really racially and ethnically minorities, (c) Asian Americans do not encounter major challenges because of their race, (d) Asian Americans do not seek or require resources and support, and (e) college degree completion is equivalent to success. Many scholars are engaged in debunking the myth of the model minority (Poon et al., 2015). Li (2005) argued that the term is an “inaccurate and invalid representation of many Asian students” (Li, 2005, p. 71). The myth puts all Asians into a monolithic category, which fails to recognize that the population encompass over 30 different Asian subgroups that differs tremendously in cultural background, histories, cultures, values, languages, religion, socioeconomic status, generational and migration patterns into the United States (Suzuki, 2002). Li (2005) also indicated that the myth of the model minority is seen at a micro level as a “destructive myth” for those underachieving Asian students who do not fit the stereotype and misleads policymakers to overlook their educational and psychological concerns and the necessary support services for students who need them. In addition, the stereotype holds many negative consequences that highlights Asian Americans academic achievements but promotes the invisibility that masks the challenges of underachieving Asians students (Li, 2005).

Studies shows that the model minority myth is a threat to underachieving Asians (Li, 2005). Museus and Kiang (2009) stated that “the myth can also be associated with negative individual consequences and social ramifications” (Museus & Kiang, 2009, p. 6). Suzuki (2002) explained that “Asian American students are often subjected to unrealistically high expectations by their parents, their instructors, and even their peers” (Suzuki, 2002, p. 27) to fit the model

minority stereotype. Due to this, Asian Americans are less likely to seek help or support (Li, 2005; Lorenzo, Pakiz, Reinherz, & Frost, 1995). Research found that Southeast Asian Americans “occupy a unique position in this discourse on Asian American success” (Museus, 2013a; Ngo & Lee, 2007, p. 416). “On one hand, SEAA students are regarded as hardworking and high achievers and at the same time are portrayed as dropouts, gangsters and welfare dependents” (Museus, 2013; Ngo, 2006; Ngo & Lee, 2007, p. 416). As a result, the model minority stereotype has negative implications for Asian Americans in higher education (Suzuki, 2002). Overall, the model minority myth is a false and invalid representation that Asian American are successful academically and socioeconomically that is solely based on aggregated data and statistics (Ngo & Lee, 2007).

The Importance of Disaggregated the Data

According to scholars, the lack of research data among AAPI college students, as well as for the case of SEAA, continue to be one of the most misunderstood and misrepresented populations in higher education (Maramba, 2011; Um, 2003) because their struggles have often been overshadowed by other Asian student success (Li, 2005) and their challenges are often shrouded by aggregate data that has been reinforced by the model minority stereotype as a result of the Asian racial category in the United States (Chang & Le, 2005; Pharn, 2018). However, researchers found that SEAA students exhibited some of the highest poverty rates, having less than a high school education was high, and obtaining a bachelor of arts degree or higher was extremely low (Doublestein, 2017; Maramba, 2011; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Pharn 2018). Utilizing AAPI Data, a project on demographic data and policy research on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, which is a program led by Karthick Ramakrishnan at the University of California, Riverside reported that the national average 53.5% of the Asian American held a bachelor’s

degree or higher compared to the the U.S. national average of 31.5% (AAPI Data, 2020). Pharn (2018) explained that these numbers are often used to describe the overall success of the Asian racial category but disaggregated data reveals the disparities and patterns that can be masked by larger, aggregate data. Disaggregated data, from AAPI Data, revealed a huge disparity among 18.3% of Cambodians, 19.8% of Hmong, and 16.6% of Laotians who obtain a bachelor degree or higher is significantly lower compared to the 53.5% Asian American and 31.5% U.S. national average. AAPI Data also revealed that SEAA has some of the highest income and poverty rates among 16.1% of Cambodians, 22.7% Hmong and 14.1% of Laotians compared to their Asian American communities' average of 11.5% or the U.S. national average of 14.1%. Moreover, SEAA students completing a high school degree shows 26.9% of Cambodians, 24.9% of Hmong, and 30.1% of Laotians compared to the average of the Asian American community of 14.8% and the U.S. national average of 27.1% (see Appendices A, B, and C).

In order to facilitate college access and success, scholars are calling for the improvement in data collection of disaggregated data among APPI and more specifically, SEAA (Maramba, 2011) because policymakers look at aggregate data to determine who gets resources. Researchers and policymakers often focus on African Americans, Latina/os, and Native Americans groups who remain underrepresented in postsecondary education when it comes to policy making decision of examining student needs from minority groups (Lee, 2006) and often exclude Asian Americans from their definitions of underrepresented of racial and ethnic minority groups, due to the widely misconceptions of the model minority myth suggesting that AAPIs do not face challenges similar to those of other minority population (Museus & Kiang, 2009). As a result, resources may not be allocated to Asian American students because aggregate data shows that they are doing well (Pharn, 2018). Thus, Lee (2006) argued that Asian Americans has been 'de-

minoritized' being defined that Asians are no longer seen as minorities because they are doing fine and no longer need minority services because the model minority myth challenges how Asian Americans fit into the higher education discussion since they are overrepresented, unlike other minority groups (Lee, 2006). Overall, the importance of critically disaggregating data is important because it can help make sure that resources are spent on students and in areas where they are most needed.

Gaps in literature

Asian Americans are of the largest and fastest growing population race group in the country, according to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau. Pedraza and Rumbaut (1996) added with over one million refugees and immigrants from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam resettling to the U.S, stated that "they are the newest Asian Americans" (p. 2). In the 1990s, SEA refugees and immigrants with their American-born children together represented more than 1 out of 7 Asian American (Pedraza & Rumbaut, 1996). Yet, despite their recent growth in population and added diversity to the Asian population, even after a decade of research among SEAA communities that they are severely underrepresented in higher education and the lowest to obtain a bachelor degree or higher (Palmer & Maramba, 2015). Thus, there is still a concern for the lack of data on SEAA students and not much is known about their experiences.

Context

The organizational setting for my research was the different institutions in the following San Diego area, the University of San Diego (USD), the University of California of San Diego (UCSD) and California State University of San Diego (SDSU). First, USD reported that the Asian student population is 8% on campus (USD quick facts for 2018). For UCSD, the UC disaggregated data of 2018 reported that the Asian student population is 18,232, but when I

disaggregate the data, it reported 23 Hmong, 165 Cambodians, and 88 Lao students enrolled at UCSD. This data means that Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian students make up less than 1% at UCSD of the Asian population on campus. For SDSU institution, the SDSU Common Data Set 2018-2019, reported that there are 4,800 Asian students seeking an undergraduate degree.

Theoretical Foundation

To understand the discourse of SEAA students and their unique experiences in higher education, I sought theoretical frameworks to help me make sense of each participant's narrative data and have a deeper understanding of their ethnic identity process since ethnicity is an important identity issue in minoritized students's lives (Phinney, 1993). I utilized Phinney's model of ethnic identity development and Kim's Asian American racial identity development model because I found that race and ethnicity are the contributing factors to Asian student college development for this study.

Phinney's model of ethnic identity development. Jean Phinney's model of ethnic identity development aims to explain the process that individuals undergo while discovering and embracing their ethnic identities. Phinney's theory presents how students gain a clear understanding of their ethnicity and then navigate the world with this awareness. Published in the book, *Student Development in College*, Phinney's (1993) three stage model of ethnic identity formation describes a linear model of ethnic identity achievement is described below:

Stage 1: Unexamined ethnic identity. This stage is characterized by an individual's lack of exploration of their ethnicity. Identity statuses can either be diffused or foreclosed. Diffused: an individual who has little to no understanding or interest in his or her ethnicity, and makes little to no effort to learn more about it. Foreclosed: individuals demonstrate pride and a sense of

belonging in their group, however these individuals have not explored or questioned the meaning of their group membership.

Stage 2: Ethnic identity search. In this stage, individuals become more interested in learning about and understanding their own ethnicity. Identity status is moratorium. Individuals are making (or have made) an effort to learn about and understand their ethnicity but are still unclear about their belonging among the group. This ethnic identity exploration continues throughout their lifetime.

Stage 3: Ethnic identity achievement. Identity status is achieved. In this stage, the individual has a clear definition of their ethnic identity and what that entails for their lived experiences. An individual's negative self-image regarding their ethnicity is replaced with acceptance, ownership, and self-confidence in their ethnic identity (Patton, Renn, Guido-DiBrito, & Quaye, 2016, p. 135-136).

Kim's Asian American racial identity development model. Kim created the theory of Asian American racial identity development (AARID), a model specifically emphasizes racial identity to highlight the social and psychological impact of being racially minoritized in the United States (Kim, 2012, p. 155). Also, published in the book, *Student Development in College*, the AARID "describes a developmental process through five stages of perception and relations to one's racial group and the dominant group" (Kim, 2012, p. 148-149):

Ethnic awareness stage. Starts in early childhood around age 3 or 4. At this stage the family serves as the significant ethnic group model and depending on the amount of ethnic expression in the household, positive or neutral attitudes are formed.

White identification stage. Begins once children enter school and peers and the school environment become key influences in propagating racial prejudice, which starts to negatively

impact self-esteem and identity. Becoming aware of their difference leads to wanting to identify with white society and distance themselves from their Asian heritage.

Awakening to social political consciousness stage. Means the start of a new perspective, usually associated with increased political awareness and an understanding of oppression and oppressed groups. The primary result is no longer wanting to identify with white society.

The redirection stage. Characterized by a reconnection and pride with one's Asian American heritage and culture. Anger about white racism may be a part of this stage.

Incorporation stage. Represents the highest form of identity evolution. It includes a positive and comfortable identity as Asian American and a respect for other racial/cultural groups. The feelings of association for or against white culture are no longer an issue (Patton et al., 2016, p. 109-110).

Methodology

According to McNiff (2016), this research approach places me at the center of my study with reflective work. Action research is an inquiry conducted by the self into the self, and then extends to supporting communities and organizations. I, as a practitioner, reflected about my own life and work, and involved asking myself why I do the things that I do, and why I am the way that I am, so that I could better understand others who share some similarities with me. This action research uses narrative methods that comprises storytelling from Southeast Asian American college students. I utilized storytelling through video recordings to document the narratives of SEAA students, in an effort to create a larger narrative and bring awareness and understanding about what institutions that serve this population do to support them.

The literature review and theoretical framework provided the structure for the methodology of my study to understand the narratives of SEAA students in higher education. I sought an active approach by utilizing Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI involves systematic discovery of what gives “life” to an organization or community (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2006, p. 278), and it allowed me to tap into the questions I was asking and envisioning the future.

AI consists of the 4-D cycle: discovery, dream, design, destiny (see Appendix D). The affirmative topic choice is the core of the AI cycle in which I choose to explore the narratives of Southeast Asians in higher education. Cooperrider and Whitney (2006) explain how AI topics become an agenda for learning, knowledge sharing, and action as they get written into questions for discovery interviews, serve as seeds for dreams, as arenas for crafting Design propositions and for taking action in the destiny phase. My research consisted of four cycles which gather the narrative data on SEAA students in higher education.

Cycle Overview

For this action research design, I used qualitative data which is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of narrative data to gain insight exploring the narratives of Southeast Asian students in higher education. I utilize AI 4-D cycle: discovery, dream, design, and destiny and collected data through critical conversations, video-recorded one-on-one interviews, focus groups, an activity, an assessment, an open dialogue, and a video recorded self-reflection of students experiences, and a short video film I made from the participants responses to show my peers. Table 1 shows an overview of my cycles.

Table 1

Overview of Cycles

Cycles	Appreciative Inquiry Phase	Data Collected
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Pre-Cycle	Phase 00: Needs Assessments	Critical Conversation
Cycle One	Phase 01: Discovery	Video Recorded Interviews
Cycle Two	Phase 02: Dream	Focus Groups, Activities, Dialogue
Cycle Three	Phase 03: Design	Video Reflection
Cycle Four	Phase 04: Destiny	Show SEAA narratives clips to peers and dialogue

Participants

The population of this action research are Southeast Asian students in college, specifically of Cambodian, Lao, and Hmong ethnicities. For this action research, I used convenience sampling in which I recruited people from my institution and communities in the San Diego area. I had a total of eight participants which included six graduate students, one undergraduate student, and one post-graduate student. Table 2 shows the list of students who participated in the study. My participants were all female. Three participants identified as Cambodian-American, one participant identified as Hmong-American, three identified as Lao-American and one participant identified as Lao-Chinese-American. Due to the leadership roles I had at the University of San Diego, 75% of my participants are from the University of San Diego. The other two participants are from the University of California San Diego (UCSD) and San Diego State University (SDSU).

Table 2

List of Participants and Data Analysis on Identity

Participants	Education	Year/Major or Program	Ethnicity	First-Generation College Student
Abby	UC San Diego	Recently Graduated/	Lao-American	Yes

Global Health				
Celia	University of San Diego	3rd year undergraduate	Lao-Chinese-American	Yes
Kate	University of San Diego	1st year/ Higher Education Leadership Program	Lao-American	Yes
Pauline	University of San Diego	1st year/ Master's of Education	Cambodian-Lao-Thai-American	Yes
Molly	University of San Diego	Nursing student	Lao-American	Yes
Zoe	University of San Diego	1st year/ Higher Education Leadership Program	Hmong-American	Yes
Rebecca	University of San Diego	2nd year/ Higher Education Leadership Program	Cambodian-American	Yes
Lizzie	San Diego State University	2nd year/ Postsecondary EDL: Specialization in Student Affairs	Cambodian-American	Yes

Needs Assessment

A lot of research has been done to the Asian and AAPI community, but there is scarce research on Southeast Asians/Americans students and their unique discourse to higher education. As part of the AI, I added a precycle. I found that the AI cycle can be as rapid and informal as a conversation with a friend or colleague and that there is no formula for AI since most change efforts flow through the 4-D cycle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2006, p. 278).

Pre-cycle – Critical conversations

I began my action research by emailing participants who I identified in the AAPI community to have a critical conversation about my action research. Prior to the start of the critical conversations, participants were given interview consent forms, name and video release

(see Appendix E). The critical conversation about my action research allowed participants to put themselves as the object of inquiry. McNiff (2016) informs that critical conversations about research take place at all stages, it refers to the conversation as a critique, when we problematize the issue and unpack them for hidden meanings and assumptions (p. 172). Critical conversation provided a foundation to my AI approach because the student became invested and interested in this study.

Cycle 1 – Discovery: Individual interviews

The first step of appreciative inquiry, Discovery, is “appreciating and valuing the best of what is” designed to meet the unique challenges of the communities involved which are mobilizing a whole system, multiple stakeholder inquiry into the positive core (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2006, p. 279). I was able to build on the present potential of a community, organization or situation which is finding spaces, platforms, and workshops for SEAA students to speak their truths, share their stories, and validate their needs. The discovery phase draws on the participant's to deeply reflect on their lived experiences in higher education and society by “making meaning” of their own identity. I formulated interview questions that would allow me to hear participant's narratives that started with an introduction of themselves, their culture, identity, and society (see Appendix F). I also found additional resources from Project Yellow Dress, a platform that allows storytelling which highlights the histories, voices, and experiences of Southeast Asian diaspora, that would benefit this action research and adapted a few interview questions (Project Yellow Dress, 2020). This interview was conversational and semi-structural. Depending on the flow of the interview, some questions were asked and some were not, each varied among participants and came out differently (see Appendix G). During this process, I recorded a video for my reference and documentary that is going to be used later in the action research process.

Cycle 2 – Dream – Focus group

The second phase of appreciative inquiry, is dream, which is creating a results-oriented vision based on discovered potential and questions of higher purpose, i.e., “What is the world calling us to become?” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2006, p. 279). The dream phase involves a focus group, creative activity, an assessment, and dialogue which allows participants to dig deeper and self-reflect on their identities. Due to each participant's commitment and time boundaries, I had to split the cycle into two focus groups.

Focus group 1. The first focus group met at USD. The focus group had five participants (see Appendix H). I began the focus group with a greeting and sharing the agenda action items. I started with an introduction of myself by sharing my name, my ethnicity, what school and programs I am attending. My introduction set an example for the other participants to follow as they introduced themselves one after the other. Afterwards, I moved on to established community guidelines with my participants and created a safe space for each of us which is followed as:

- Respect each other’s opinions
- No interruptions
- Share “air time”
- Be mindful
- What is said here, stays here. What is learned here, leaves here
- Use “I” statements

The main goal of the guidelines was to ensure that participants interact with each other respectfully and to set some boundaries. By creating a community guideline gives it an opportunity to let participants know what kind of community they can expect and how to behave in the short amount of time together, especially since the only mutual person they know in the

room is the facilitator, which was me. After participants fully came to the agreement of the community guidelines, we moved forward to our next agenda.

Tree of life activity. I used the “Tree of Life” as an exercise based on the idea of using the tree as a metaphor to tell stories about one's life. Participants were invited to think of a tree, its roots, trunk, branches, leaves, and imagine that each part of the Tree represents something about their life. I learned about this exercise from my Gender and Leadership class - formerly known as Woman and Leadership, and saw how impactful this exercise was to hear stories from other students. The activity started out with me explaining more in depth about the activity by showing my participants an example of my own Tree of Life that I did in my gender and leadership class.

Roots: the roots of the tree are a prompt for participants to think about and write on their tree what are their most importance values

Trunk: the trunk of the tree is an opportunity for participants to write their skills and abilities (i.e., skills of caring, loving, kindness) and most positive words they can give themselves.

Branches: the branches of the tree are where participants write their identities (i.e., Asian-American, daughter, student, first-generation college student, learner)

Leaves: the leaves of the tree represent the significant identities that ties to their branches (i.e., the leaf to their Asian American identity could be Lao American, Cambodian American, or Hmong American)

Afterwards, participants shared their drawing, identities, the importance of their values, and positive words of themselves. Each participant showed their tree to the entire group and spent about roughly 10-15 minutes talking about themselves (see Appendix I). Once everyone

was done with their tree's, I invited them to work together on another activity that addressed four different questions written on four giant blank white paper (see Appendix J):

1. What can you say about the model minority myth? Has it played a part in your lives?
2. What does success mean to you? What does success mean to your parents?
3. How can we examine the (Re)-model minority and explore social issues young Asian Americans face today, specifically SEA?
4. Why is there a need to support Asians or SEA at institutions? How can we support them? What has your school done to support Asian/SEA on campus? How can we create these programs?

I asked these questions so that it would guide participants to develop a deeper meaning and understanding what they already know, understand, and what they can do with their knowledge on how to support SEAA students in higher education after examining our own narratives and hearing similar stories. Lastly, I ended the cycle with a dialogue to provide a space for reflection. The purpose of the dialogue is to discover the richness of other SEAA students' perceptions that create a shared meaning that emerges from a group through inquiry and reflection. I asked questions three questions that guided the dialogue:

1. What did you learn from this focus group?
2. Did anything stand out?
3. Did anything surprise you?

Focus group 2. Due to the implications of COVID-19, I had to change everything to an online platform for this cycle and only had three participants: Eliza, Molly, and Rebecca. This focus group completed within the time boundary and was held virtually over Zoom, an online

media conference platform. I followed the same procedure as Focus Group 1 with greetings, introductions, and community guidelines which is listed as follows:

- Understand each others lived experiences and know we are different Asian Americans
- What is said here stays here, what learn here leaves here
- Share air time
- Holding complexing, even after this activity we may have more questions

For the Tree of Life activity (see Appendix K), I was unable to provide supplies for the participants to draw their tree. Instead, I emailed participants to have color pens and a blank of white piece paper ready beforehand. In the next activity (see Appendix L), I had participants go into a shared google doc and wrote down their thoughts with the four questions I provided.

Afterwards, I ended the focus group discussion with a dialogue.

Cycle 3 - Design

The third phase of AI is Design, which is creating possibility propositions of the ideal organization or community (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2006, p. 279). At the end of the focus groups, I asked students to either do a video or written reflection to describe their experience during this AR process and why they think sharing their narratives is important. I did this to help participants build upon emotional self-awareness to gain a better understanding of their emotions, strengths, weaknesses and driving factors in higher education.

Cycle 4 - Destiny

The fourth phase of AI is Destiny, which is strengthening the capability to build hope and sustain momentum for ongoing positive change and high performance (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2006, p. 279). With all the video recordings I documented, I created a series of short clips to show to a handful to my peers that address the narratives of Southeast Asian Americans students

as they explored their identities in higher education, tackled the model minority myth, shared their first-generation college student experience, and how they are currently making a deeper impact on higher education. I did this to see how well informed my peers knew about this specific population and what we can do as student affairs practitioners to support the needs and experiences of SEAA students. I invited my peers over zoom and had three participants from the higher educationa leadership program.

Findings and Outcomes

Beginning with the pre-cycle, I found that having a critical conversation about my action research with my participants proved that the topic of SEAA students in higher education is a much needed discussion. Participants revealed that they have many SEAA friends but they are the only one that identifies as Cambdoain, Hmong or Lao in their classrooms. Participants demonstrated frustration because they know that these groups of Asian students (Cambodian, Hmong, and Lao) just don't go to college for said unknown reasons, but in reality, they do know the reasons among the lack of representation among SEAA students in college when it was revealed later in the cycles.

Cycle 1

Cycle 1 revealed themes of self- awareness, combined with ethnic-awareness and growth emerged in each participants' narratives. I started each interview with the question "Tell me about yourself" and participants had their unique ways of sharing their stories. Participants revealed that it was hard to find the right words to clearly express their feelings and admitted it was challenging for them because they do not often openly reflect about their daily lives vocally. Overall, participants exhibit and dove deeper into their cultural, historical, and social backgrounds, coupled with their complex experiences at educational institutions.

From daughters of refugees and immigrants to low income first-generation college students. A significant finding of this study was that participants are daughters of refugees and immigrants from the Indochina Wars—a series of wars in Southeast Asia. Abby, who is of Southeast Asian descent expressed in some ways that “they (Hmong/Cambodian/Lao) are a newer established generation so of course little is known about their experiences.” Participants are the first in their family to attend college as First-Generation college students. The University of San Diego defines first-generation students in the following way: At the time you completed high school or high school equivalency, neither of your custodial parent(s) or legal guardian(s) earned a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Parent(s) expected them to go to college. However, coming from low-income neighborhoods, money was always a huge factor and part of their everyday lives. Participants knew education was the key to be successful but realized they could not go to college far away from family. For example, Abby explained why she chose UCSD over UC Davis.

I got into UC Davis and UCSD. My first choice was UC Davis. But I lived in Temecula and UCSD was closer. I chose UCSD to be closer to family, because family is important to me, but partly to save money.

Zoe also explained how her university’s close proximity to home influenced her decision-making. She said,

I went to a four year public university in Minnesota, so about an hour away from home, which was a good distance for me as I began my college experience, not too far away from home, where going home wasn’t too impossible, and far enough that I don’t go home in away forced me to have indepenence.

Like Zoe, Lizzie choose to stay closer to family and said,

I was blessed to receive a scholarship from UC San Diego. I was born and raised in San Diego. I didn't want to stay here. However, because our family didn't have money, there was no way from me to take out loans, being in debt. Money has always been an important issue our entire lives growing up and so I was like I have to stay here, even though I didn't want to. I was not happy when I intended to enroll. But at the end of the day I am happy I graduated debt free.

Like myself, participants indicated that their parents never contributed to their education experiences nor provided monetary assistance which made navigating college challenging.

Rebecca said,

As a first generation student, it was extremely difficult for my undergraduate experience because both my parents didn't graduate from high school. I think that was a limitation for me because they didn't know how to apply for FAFSA, how to fill out UC applications vs private school applications vs Cal State applications vs community college applications. My parents didn't know how to go through these processes but expected me to go college. So having that pressure was difficult for me. (Rebecca)

Lizzie mentioned how her parents high expectations to go to college and said,

My parents expected me to go to school. When they immigrated here to the US. They told me people can take things away from you. They can take your money, they can take your house, they can take your job, your car. Everything. They can strip you from everything besides your education. They stress that knowledge is power and instill me and my siblings to go to college. They didn't know how to get us there, but they're like we are here now, we are here in America so figure it out. (Lizzie)

Celia mentioned the language barriers between herself and her parents affected her education,

Since I'm a first gen student, it was hard getting help at home with my school work. I had siblings but they were much older than me by 16 years. For example, math and English was a big struggle for me. For English, my parents never spoke English with me, it was either Lao or Chinese. So I had always had a struggle in my writing and speaking skills. For math, my parents didn't have the same education as I do here. They grew up in Laos and I would assume that the education there during that time wasn't the best. Applying to colleges and going through the whole process with financial aid was hard too. Two of my siblings never finished or went to a 4 year university, so I couldn't ask them for any advice. (Celia)

Asian American identity crisis. A significant finding was that a handful of participants experienced an Asian American identity crisis. Kim (2012) says Asian students must address how they come to terms with their racial identity and resolve racial conflicts in a society dominated by White perspectives. In addition, Kim's Asian American racial identity development model addressed how Asian Americans may reject their ethnic identity in favor of their racial identity (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012).

In Zoe's case where she studied abroad in Seoul for a year, people pointed out that she will always be different from the rest of society, even outside the US. In Seoul, for the first time, she felt like she was the majority. In terms of social safety, when she is not speaking, because her American accent would give her away, she said she would look like everyone else and could easily blend in the crowds which made her feel really safe being in a foreign country. However, when it came to talking about her nationality and US citizenship, and being Hmong made her realize how the world sees her.

I remember it vividly. Another student, with no ill intent, asked me. Explaining how I am Asian-American for the very first time made me take a step back about how the world sees me because when you think of US Americans, you don't think of somebody who looks like me. Then, having to further explain what was Hmong, really broke my heart because they couldn't comprehend me being Hmong without having a country. So, studying abroad made me think a lot deeper on my identities, and what they mean to me, and how people perceive me before they get to know who I am. (Zoe)

For Rebecca, she identifies as Cambodian Chinese and is multilingual in English, Khmer, and Mandarin. Going to an Asian predominantly institution like UC Irvine, she got to see other students with similar identities like herself who were East Asian and spoke Mandarin, making her feel that there was a place for her. However, she soon realized her experiences were not the same as other East Asian students as she navigated college being a Southeast Asian student and at the same time facing racism.

People in my class, there were a lot of Chinese, and although I'm Cambodian Chinese, the language commonly spoken among my peers in my courses were Mandarin and even though I can kinda understand it, it felt like I wasn't included all the way. I think it was a growing point for me in my undergraduate experience, I found myself trying to fit into the Chinese crowd but being told that I was too dark to be accepted as Chinese or trying to fit into the Cambodian student association, but being too light for that community and so that was a challenge for me trying to figure out what identity hold close to my experiences. (Rebecca)

In another case, Lizzie provided insight of grappling between her two different identities being Asian American and Cambodian American, making her reject her ethnic identity.

Growing up, I was never proud to be Cambodian American because I never knew anyone else that was Cambodian. People knew I was Asian, but they didn't know what I was right. So when I would say I am Cambodian American, I would get responses like 'Wait, I thought you were Asian' and I'm like I am Asian! And you know for me, I felt like because people didn't know what my identity was, what my culture was, never heard of my ethnicity, or where my family was from, so I was never really proud of being Cambodian American. (Lizzie)

Similar to Lizzie's case, Molly identifies herself as a Laotian American but found herself rejecting her ethnic identity when she went to UCLA for undergraduate school because she was the only Lao person among her peers.

I actually identified more to be Thai American when I was at UCLA because there was a large Thai population on campus. My father is Thai, my last name is Thai, so I'm like I am Thai! But when somebody asked me . . . it's really interesting. Being Laotian was actually the last thing I would say-even though culturally I was more engaged and competent in the Lao culture . . . And looking back at it made me doubt who I am, what I was, where I stand as an individual, racial individual, and where I come from. And I think that can mess with somebody at a really young age, especially when you're immersed in an environment that you don't fully fit in, that is new, and harder to adapt to. (Molly)

I found that an Asian-American woman of Laotian heritage may express a stronger connection with her ethnic identity as Laotian when interacting with her families, but express a stronger racial identity as an Asian American person when interacting with her White peers in class or in society dominated by the majority. For Kate, she said she always knew she was Southeast Asian and Lao, but never really favored that identity overall.

I was never really attached to my identity when I was younger just because no one really knew what I was. Whenever I told people I was Laos, people would give me a double look and ask me “what's that?” And so, I really struggle trying to explain myself. I didn't feel connected or identified more with my culture because I didn't know how to explain to people, I didn't know how to tell people because every time someone asked me, they wouldn't know Lao was and didn't know how to explain it. So I wouldn't tell people I am Lao because I knew I would get more questions that I didn't know how to answer or explain. (Kate)

In Pauline's case, she brings in a unique narrative having an identity crisis growing up coming from a multi-cultural family background. She perceived her background complicated because both her parents are bi-racial, her mom is Thai-Cambodian and her dad is Lao-Thai, but she is estranged to both her birth parents and never really knowing them. Instead, she was raised by someone she quotes to be an incredible person who she considers him as a father figure who identifies as Filipino. She mentioned that she is not like other Southeast Asian kids who grew up learning about their cultural language from their family because she never had that. Growing up, she only knew English, which made her feel excluded from other kids who were bi-lingual and if they were not, they at least understood some of their cultural language. Pauline also remembered that because her parents were never around, she never discovered her ethnic heritage because no one taught it to her, thus grappling with identity crises. She explained, “So growing up I did have an identity crisis where I didn't know what ethnicity I sided with.”

Confidence in one's Asian American identity. Despite their identity crisis, participants became more self-aware of their ethnic identity once they entered college establishing a sense of self pride. Participants found that college provided a space that allowed them to share their

experiences and to examine their multiple intersecting identities and how they make meaning in society. This transition occurs with the support of family, friends, peers, mentors, and the Asian American Community, as well as through exploration of self and Asian culture, history, and heritage (Patton et al., 2016, p. 109-110).

Rebecca revealed that being among people who are also figuring out their identities as well made her feel more calm:

Through the program I am currently in, is the first time I explored more in depth of my identities and connecting with folks who are exploring their identities and I think this has allowed me to be vulnerable and talk about it with my peers, mentors, and supervisors, and being able to grow from that...and feeling supported among my peers in my program.

Participants revealed that their college success stemmed from student engagements and leadership provided by workshops, services, and student organizations that support AAPI students. All participants were either engaged in a sport or specific affinity student organizations like the Hmong Student Association or the Camodian Student Association and even became allies to other AAPI identified student organizations.

It really wasn't until I went to college at UC San Diego that I came across the Cambodian Student Association, that I felt very proud to be Cambodian American. I met other like minded folks, met other people who had similar stories, that their parents were also refugees, being able to share stories and having people understand that, where it was coming from, was really when I came into that identity, and I thank the Cambodian Student Association for that. (Sam)

Pauline explained that she did find any students organizations that could connect her to her cultural background and looked at outside community for cultural events,

It started off in high school attending more cultural events in the Lao, Thai, Cambodian community, but it wasn't until going to college that I began identifying myself more as Thai/ Cambodian/ Lao and learning more about my ethnicity and heritage through friends who identified liked me. (Pauline)

Participants also revealed that their ethnic studies courses provided a safe academic space for them to learn about their histories and cultures. One participant explained that the course gave them a strong foundation in research, writing, and oral skills to really help navigate and understand who they are as an individual.

I think it became more apparent that I came from a different background than most people I went to college with. I knew I was always Southeast Asian and I knew I was always Lao, and it became more apparent in college because I didn't have people who had the same identities as me or could identify like me. I became prideful of who I was when I went to college. I learned about being Lao and being Lao American, what that meant for me and my community. I can do it [explain] better now. (Kate)

While in undergraduate school, Zoe became more connected with her identity as a Lao person, I started exploring my identities once I was in college and was able to put words to my identities is what helped me explore it because growing up I knew I was different from all the other students in my highschool which had like 2000 students and less than 20 Hmong students. When I came to college- learning about race and ethnicity, and being able to put words to what I am feeling, and sharing my stories about my experience in highschool, was when I really began exploring my identities and actually claimed my identity and learned more about myself. (Zoe)

Eliza also feels confident with her own identity as she got more involved with her community, in which she says,

It was after college. I think I am more confident that I used to be before now that I returned home. I got involved with the Lao community, going to the temple, wearing a sinh (women Lao traditional clothing), that allowed me to immerse myself in my own culture and being more engaged made me realize how important it is. With that involvement, I became more confident in saying I'm Lao American. (Eliza)

The impact of the model minority myth. The most significant problem with the “model minority” label is its effect on Asian American students. Participants indicated that the impact on the model minority myth and hearing stereotypes about them only exhausted them. Rebecca quoted “Half my identity holds privilege and the other half does not. I think it's a weird dynamic to have.” She expressed how growing up multiracial, she grew up in a community where she was not Chinese enough and she was not Cambodian enough or she had to pick and choose one race over the other that would benefit her. For example, she explained that there are not a lot of SEAA scholarships for students to apply for, but because she is Chinese, she is able to apply to these Chinese scholarships.

Meanwhile, Abby felt that the model minority myth played with her mental health in which she said,

In high school, all the white people would say Asians are smart. Well, I was all in advancement placement classes so it kinda fed the model minority myth and I kinda felt weird about it cause I was still struggling in those classes. When I went to college, I felt dumb but people told me I would do fine because they believed I was super smart so that

gave me pressure to do well which deteriorated my mental health because I was trying to live up to that pressure. (Abby)

Celia expressed that there was some sort of status quo she had to follow,

People just assume I'm really smart or that I'm good at something: art, dance, play an instrument. But like I'm totally opposite. I feel like I don't fit into those categories Yet, I do get those stereotypical comments in class 'oh you must be so smart', especially my math class. Like I'm pretty average. Maybe above average. (Celia)

Due to the model minority assumptions, Zoe expressed she was overlooked in classes when reality she needed help,

The model minority myth. That is like saying we do well academically when it comes to math, reading, and science. They excel at that. But I actually struggled a lot with math and science. There was no additional attention given towards me because it was assumed that I was doing well in those classes. (Zoe)

Lizzie made an interesting point. She stated, "Again, there is this model minority myth that not too many people know about which is extremely surprising." Two participants who are graduate students did not know the term model minority myth. One wrote: "I am not familiar with the model minority myth" (see Appendix L) and another participant wrote something similar: "I have never heard of the model minority myth" (see Appendix J). After learning about it, they realized they have known about the stereotypes and did not know there was a term for it and how that would negatively impact them. Other participants became familiarized with the term due to pursuing higher education and postsecondary education in leadership studies. This significant finding shows us that there could still be a lot of people, Asians or non-Asians, who do not know about the model minority myth and how it can have a negative impact on Asian

Ethnic minorities. By creating this space, it provided the awareness for students to learn more about the model minority myth when institutions do not.

Cycle 2

In Cycle 2 revealed powerful personal narratives and provided insights for the need to support SEAA students.

Tree of life activity. The tree of life activity revealed storytelling a powerful tool for learning, especially for the individual and the students. I found that the focus group provided a space for students to share their experiences and voices that gave them affirmation and made them feel represented and validated. The power of storytelling revealed common narratives, imperfections and showed vulnerability connected students to a deeper engagement and dialogue.

Focus Group 1 revealed five different categories in the Tree of Life activity: relationships, love, transparency, cultural competency and education were found as common themes that emerged in this activity. At the heart of relationships, students value their family, friends, and students mentors/mentees in set with the theme love, they expressed how the importance of this value is the route for honesty and compassion to be true to oneself and those around them. Tying in the theme of transparency connects the other two themes because communication and listening is important for all relationships to be mentally well. Students were able to connect on each other's level of education and cultural competency from being multicultural, bilingual/ multilingual, first-generation college students, and obtaining degree(s).

As for Focus Group 2, similar to the first cycle, I found relationships, community, resilience, and cultural competence emerged as common themes for the Tree of life activity. Participants value their friends and family the most because being surrounded with their loved

ones offers support and comfort in both times of joy and distress. Community is another value participants believe to be important because their communities make them grow and be stronger as individuals as they continue to learn about themselves in those communities. Resilience and perseverance are strong values as participants discussed the struggles and challenges they overcome to be at graduate school that can never be forgotten. Students were also able to connect on each other's level of education and cultural competency from being multicultural, bilingual/multilingual, first-generation college students, and obtaining degree(s).

In our second activity, students came together to find ways to support SEAA students and the APPI community. They examined what their institution was doing and how it could benefit other institutions in the surrounding area. Together, we found that UCSD has the Asian & Pacific-Islander Student Alliance (APSA) built upon four pillars: cultural, academic, political, and social awareness and action that supports the Asian and Pacific Islander communities. At SDSU, they have a workshop series weekly called (AAPI)phany which provides AAPI identifying students, faculty, and staff the opportunity to share, express, and learn about their AAPI identity through presentations on history, challenges, triumphs, culture, arts, and other topics among AAPI identity. USD, on the other end, is slowly progressing the work being done on AAPI students as they are still establishing their first APIDA committee among a group of administrators and graduate studies within the APPI community. Currently, USD has a graduate student organization called Asian Students in Alliance (A.S.I.A.) where students are doing the work to support AAPI students and allies while supporting small owned businesses in San Diego through their events.

Students shared that these significant outcomes from these programming provides students with a sense of belonging, community, support, mentor-peer connections, and

networking. The specific programming and events towards the APIDA community had made a successful impact on their student engagement, thus leading students stronger leadership roles and representing their communities.

Cycle 3

After reviewing the recorded video reflections, I found that participants enjoyed the Tree of Life activity because they really got to know everyone at a personal level in a short amount of time. They appreciate that the focus group allowed them to have a space to share their unique and powerful stories. Participants felt like it was empowering to be in a room filled with other women of color who identified as SEAA and learning about each other's narratives. It was also empowering for participants to even share their stories because they felt that their voice was getting stronger and that they can better narrate their stories. I found that the student's individual video reflection was really strong. I believe that they found their voices in themselves and others to create meanings to their words to help make sense of their lived experiences. I felt as if their voices were so empowering that it even uplifted my voice to narrate my own story more clearly.

Cycle 4

Cycle 4, similar to cycle 2, revealed how digital storytelling was used for learning for other students. I showed SEAA narratives clips to peers and had a dialogue. I found that my peers were surprised that Southeast Asian Americans have the lowest high school graduation and bachelor degree rates, in which one of my peers mentioned that "their [SEAA] bachelors rates are lower than both Latinos and African Americans." Peers were able to resonate with participants in the clips when it came to terms about exploring their ethnic identity development. One of my peers mentioned that being a first generation college student seems to be a common narrative among students of color from different ethnic backgrounds. The question that prompted

our discussion was “Why are the Southeast Asian Americans’ graduation rates so low?” and “Why is there a huge disparity and gap among Southeast Asian American students?” After having a dialogue about the model minority myth and SEAA students being a newer established generation in the United States, the overall question was how can we as future student affairs practitioners support this population now that we are informed about the SEAA students’ experience in higher education.

We found out that we need to talk about it in classes. One of my peers mentioned they learned about Asian students in higher education for the first time this year through another group's presentation in one of our classes. He admitted that he didn't know the critical issues that AAPI students faced in institutions. Just like a couple of my participants, one of my peers is unaware of the model minority myth until they saw clippings of SEAA student narratives.

My peers found the cycle very informative because they did not know that other Asians sub groups are underachieving in college because they have been conditioned to believe ‘All Asian are smart’ due to the model minority. Samatha said in her video reflection that “Not too many people do not know about the model minority,” It is interesting to learn from my peers that even entering college for the first time that we don't often know we are first-generation college students until we learned about it or someone tells us that we are considered first generation college students. This could be an important factor when institutions collect data because it fails to recognize that not many students are aware what it means to be a first generation college student.

My peers and I came to the conclusion that it is not just the students’ responsibility, but student affairs educators responsibility as well for facilitating dialogues, hosting programs, and allowing a safe environment for students where issues can be addressed and create awareness

among AAPI students. We even discussed how representation plays a huge role in students' lives because when they become role models who look like us, that empowers us, and creates connections with us on a more personal level because there is the potential for a deeper, more meaningful relationship to form. Lastly, we discussed how it is important to keep funding student organizations that offer a space for Asian students who can share their voices if institutions cannot give them a physical space. We strongly believe that if there is not enough space to provide students with a physical space then institutions need to keep funding student organizations that are doing the work to increase Asian students' sense of belonging and empowering them to be leaders on campus and advocating for social justice.

Limitations

There were a few limitations to this study. The most significant limitation is that there was no male representation. Southeast Asian males are constantly left out and often forgotten because they are not visible and when they are, they are umbrella under the term “Asian.” We do not know their stories and we will continue to not know their stories when Asians are all lumped together, skewing the data that perpetuates Asians are doing academically fine. This study only represents a few narratives of first-generation Southeast Asian women in higher education and does not represent the entire Southeast Asian American community.

Another limitation is that the 1:1 interviews were semistructured. I did not get to ask each participant every question I had because each storytelling was unique and different yet similar in ways that I jumped around asking Questions 1 and 2 to Questions 11, 18, or 29 that there was no longer enough time to ask the remaining questions or that there was no need.

Having narrative research as part of my research methods was a limitation itself. A handful of participants were able to storytell really well and a couple had trouble fine tuning their

stories. Celia , the only undergraduate student in my study, found it really hard to tell her story because she is currently in the process of navigating college and making meaning of her own lived experiences. She is yet to find the words to put in her mouth what she is feeling compared to other participants who are all graduate students, who have already gone through that process and can articulate their stories.

Another limitation is translating their narratives. It is important that participants' experiences be fully interpreted, in order to expose the complexities of their lives in order to portray their stories correctly. This means we need to take account of their intersectionality, cultural beliefs, personal and lived experiences, as well as examining the historical context of their families. Nonetheless, it is therefore challenging and outside the scope of the research to identify all the influences that affect the experience of an individual and follow a script. In addition, it was a challenge to get equal representation of each Southeast Asian ethnicity of the Cambodian, Hmong, and Lao students. I only had three Cambodian-American identified participants in which all identified multiculturally but strongly chose Cambodian as their ethnic identity. I had four Lao-American identified participants, in which two identified multiculturally, but identified strongly as Lao and only one Hmong-American identified participant. A participant expressed that just because there is one Hmong student in the study does not mean it represents the entire Hmong student population. Other students agreed with the statements that it is important to look at students individually and get equal representation to explore the narratives of Southeast Asians further.

Significance to Higher Education

Exploring the narratives of SEAA students is significant in higher education because it allows institutions to address the achievement gap among Asian students on campus. As research

states, these groups of Asian American, Southeast Asian students, are severely underrepresented in higher education and we need to change that. The widely held misconception that Asian students know how to handle themselves in school is known as the model minority stereotype in which Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Southeast Asian Students are being grouped together despite their diverse backgrounds. The ramifications of the model minority myth masks the challenges of underachieving Asian students and then causes institutions to overlook them while college support services and outreach programs will continue to focus largely on black, Hispanic, and low-income students.

Recommendations

As an advocate to the Asian Pacific Islander Desi American community, I seek to see more equitable opportunities for Asian students with the goal of supporting and promoting diversity within the community by enhancing educational and personal growth through collaboration. For that reason, my recommendations are as follows:

1. Disaggregate the data. Disaggregating the data allows institutions to see the individual needs of different communities based on ethnic differences by breaking down data. In doing so, policymakers can allocate and distribute resources to students in need.
2. Move beyond the Asian checkbox. Institutions' improvement on data collections needs to disaggregate within the "Asian" and "Native Hawaiian" or "Other Pacific Islander" categories which can avoid lumping Asians students together and reveal the difference disparities.
3. Outreach and recruitment. Institutions that are nestled in a large Southeast Asian population, like San Diego, should increase outreach and recruitment with the primary objective to increase the enrollment of Southeast Asian students. The outreach and

recruitment purpose is to execute programs and events that recruit and prepare SEAA students for university enrollment, provide informational workshops and resources with the goal of student advisement and guidance.

4. Keep funding student organizations. It is necessary to continue funding and promoting student organizations, workshops, services and communities that supports AAPI students because they do well to recruit & retain underrepresented students. Student organizations and communities are the key to successes of SEAA students and provide student connections that are significant and lead to guiding students' confidence and sense of identity and belonging, imposter syndrome and engagement in campus issues.

These recommendations are based on my participants' narratives, activities, and readings. I hope that these recommendations will provide more SEAA students enrollment on campus, increase in educational attainment obtaining a bachelor degree or higher, and provide resources that allow them to engage with academics and campus life.

Personal Learning and Reflection

I found that storytelling can be such an amazing and power tool for learning, especially for the individual and students. I found that telling my stories improved my communication skills, especially for public speaking, a skill I know I lack. I lacked communication in storytelling because I never shared them. I started sharing my story when I fully became aware of and comfortable with calling myself Lao-American and took pride in all my identities. I found that higher education provided a place for me and others like me, to feel validated as we each begin exploring our identities. College made me realize that I was not alone and that other people are exploring themselves as well. Students, like myself, heavily relied on student support

services and leaned on the programming and events that their department provided because we need a system of support and network of like minded individuals.

This action research provided me an insight that hearing other SEAA narratives can be so powerful, uplifting, and inspiring me to empower others to explore their narratives and stories. So, I continue to advocate for Southeast Asian Americans. I must do the best I can as a higher education professional to provide insight on the lives of Southeast Asian American students. We are not a monolithic group and institutions must recognize our differences. I learned that I am dedicated to bringing diverse communities together and create spaces to share narratives to build a sense of belonging among students, especially in the APIDA community. I believe exploring a student narrative and storytelling is an effective pedagogical tool that can help enhance student learning, become more aware of their identities, and give insight that SEAA students need help and support like any other minority group in higher education.

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Appendix A

AAPI Data on Southeast Asian Subgroup

Education	Cambodian	Hmong	Laotian
Bachelor's degree or higher	18.3%	19.8%	16.6%
High school degree or equivalent	26.9%	24.9%	30.1%
Less than a high school degree	30.6%	25.1%	27.3%
Income & Poverty	Cambodian	Hmong	Laotian
Share in poverty overall	16.1%	22.7%	14.1%
Share of seniors in poverty	19.4%	17.9%	16.9%
Share of children in poverty	20.1%	29.8%	20.5%

Sources

Estimate	Source
Education	Bureau of the Census, Analysis of PUMS Data ACS 5-Year Estimates
Income and Poverty	Bureau of the Census, Analysis of PUMS Data ACS 5-Year Estimates

Note. Adapted from AAPI Data. Copyright 2020 by <http://facts.aapidata.com/nationaldata>

Appendix B

AAPI Data on Asian Americans

Education	Asian American
Bachelor's degree or higher	53.5%
High school degree or equivalent	14.8%
Less than a high school degree	13.2%
Income & Poverty	Asian American
Share in poverty overall	11.5%
Share of seniors in poverty	1.5%
Share of children in poverty	2.3%

Estimate	Source
Education	Bureau of the Census, Analysis of PUMS Data ACS 5-Year Estimates
Income and Poverty	Bureau of the Census, Analysis of PUMS Data ACS 5-Year Estimates

Note. Adapted from AAPI Data. Copyright 2020 by <http://facts.aapidata.com/nationaldata>

Appendix C

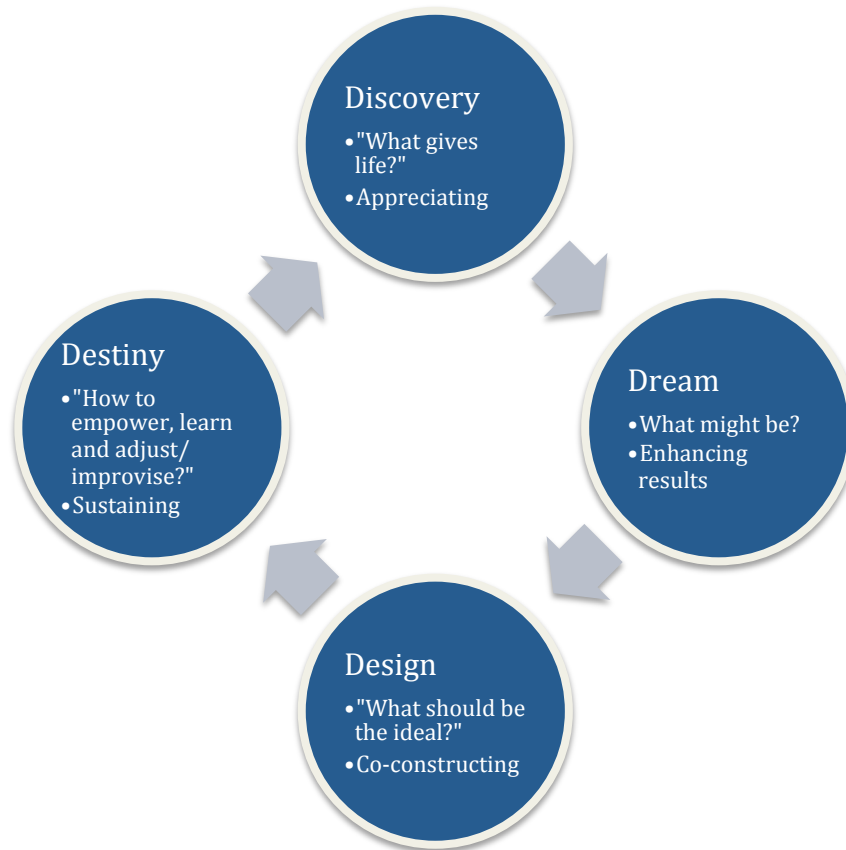
AAPI DATA U.S. Total Population

Education	US Total
Bachelor's degree or higher	31.5%
High school degree or equivalent	27.1%
Less than a high school degree	12.3%
Income & Poverty	US Total
Share in poverty overall	14.1%
Share of seniors in poverty	1.4%
Share of children in poverty	4.5%
Estimate	Source
Education	Bureau of the Census, Analysis of PUMS Data ACS 5-Year Estimates
Income and Poverty	Bureau of the Census, Analysis of PUMS Data ACS 5-Year Estimates

Note. Adapted from AAPI Data. Copyright 2020 by <http://facts.aapidata.com/nationaldata>

APPENDIX D

Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle



Note. Adapted from Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999, p. 279. Copyright 2005 by David L Cooperrider and Diana Whitney.

Appendix E

Interview Consent Forms

University of San Diego**Institutional Review Board****Research Participant Consent Form**

For the research study entitled: Exploring the Narratives of Underrepresented Southeast Asian Students in Higher Education

I. Purpose of the research study

Donna Soukantouy is a graduate student in the Higher Education Leadership program at the University of San Diego (USD). You are invited to participate in a research study she is conducting. The purpose of this research study is to facilitate and exploring the narratives of underrepresented Southeast Asian Students in Higher Education in Universities surrounding San Diego.

II. What you will be asked to do

If you decide to be in this study you will be asked to participate in a documentary.

- Take part in a 60 minute focus group.
- Take part of two 30 minute activities.
- Take part in 45 minute dialogue. These opportunities will conclude with a dialogue session, to provide a space for reflection.
- Complete a 60-minute individual interview reflecting on your experience.

The focus group, participation reflections, and individual interview sessions will be recorded, filmed, and presented by the end of the year. Otherwise, notes will be taken during all sessions and you will be the first to see the documentary.

Your participation in this study can range from 3-5 total hours, over the span of the 2019-2020 academic year, depending on the number of times we need to be filmed.

III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts

This study involves no more risk than the risks you encounter in daily life. However, there is a potential for you to experience some negative emotions, considering that you will be asked to reflect on your college experience has for you.

If for any reason you experience negative emotions, feel free to contact the University of San Diego's Counseling Center at (619) 240-4655, or visit their office in Serra Hall 300.

IV. Benefits

While there may be no direct benefits to you from participating in this research there are indirect benefits. Participation in this research project will add to the understanding and potential of community engagement within the SOLES graduate student population.

V. Confidentiality

Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years. All data collected from you will be coded with a number or pseudonym (fake name).

Your real name will not be used. The results of this research project may be made public and information quoted in professional journals and meetings, but information from this study will only be reported as a group, and not individually.

VI. Compensation

You will receive no compensation for your participation in this study.

VII. Voluntary Nature of this Research

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to do this, and you can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

VIII. Contact Information

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact either:

1) Donna Soukantouy
Email: dsoukantouy@sandiego.edu
Phone: 619-220-2727

2) Cheryl Getz
Email: cgetz@sandiego.edu
Phone: 619-260-4289

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

Signature of Investigator _____

Date _____

Video Recording: Additional Consent

A video recording may be made of you during your participation in the study. We may wish to present some of the video recordings from this study at professional meetings or as demonstrations in classrooms. Your face and voice will be used and you potentially could be recognizable by a viewer of the video recording.

In addition to consenting to participate in the research study, you may choose to sign or NOT sign either of the statements below.

1) I hereby give permission for the video recording made for this research study to be also used for **professional meetings**, such as being shown to professors and researchers at a scientific conference.

Signature of Research Participant

2) I hereby give permission for the video recording made for this research study to be also used for **educational purposes**, such as being shown to students in a classroom or available for viewing by students via a password protected file which cannot be copied or downloaded.

Signature of Research Participant

Appendix F

Interview Questions

General Interview Questions and Scripts

1. Tell me about yourself?
 - a. Please include your college, year, program.
 - b. Where are you currently working? Do you have any graduate assistantships or leadership roles on campus?
2. Tell me about your social and academic experiences on campus?
 - a. What did you like or not like about it?
 - b. Were there any barriers or challenges to your success?
 - c. What led you to higher education now?

Additional Interviews Questions for Undergraduate Students:

1. Why did you choose this college?
2. What do you hope to do after college?
3. Are you involved in co-curricular activities? What motivated you to get involved?
4. If you're not involved, what is preventing you from participating?
5. What is the highest level of education of your parents? How has your parents' education affected your education goals?
6. Do you belong to a program on campus that provides academic/mentoring support? If yes, what program and what type of support?
7. Tell me about your social and academic experiences on campus? How do you like college so far? Do you feel like you fit in?

Additional Interviews Questions Graduate / Graduated Students:

1. When did you start your freshman year in college? When did you graduate from college?
2. Are you involved in co-curricular activities? What motivated you to get involved?
3. If you're not involved, what prevented you from participating?
4. What is the highest level of education of your parents? How has your parents' education affected your education goals?
5. Tell me about your experiences in undergrad. What would you do differently?

Questions for Culture and Identity

1. Which words or pictures arise when you hear the word "Southeast Asian?"
2. Are you a child of immigrants or refugees?
3. Are there stereotypes that you hear or have faced as Southeast Asian and Asian American? Are there any stereotypes you have heard of?
4. What would you say about the "Model Minority Myth?" Has it played a part in your lives?
5. What was it like for you growing up Southeast Asian American?

6. Is there a lot of Southeast Asians/American student population on campus? Explain.
7. Do your parents or your culture shape your identity? Explain in what ways.
8. Have you ever felt extremely ashamed or/and extremely proud to be Southeast Asian?
9. Have you ever visited Southeast Asia? Have your parents ever visited back home? If so, what were your impressions? If not, if you wanted to travel there, would you go, where would you go, and why? What about your parents?

Questions for Society Experiences

1. Was there a support program or services for Asian American/ Southeast Asian at your schools?
2. If no, what are your thoughts on the lack of Asian American/Southeast Asian American/Ethnic programming in most schools?
3. Do you feel like there is a need for student support services geared towards Asian American/ Southeast Asian at your schools?
4. What would be the benefits of these programs? How would it help the students in those populations?
5. Mainstream media has often been criticized for its lack of portrayal of Asians and Asian Americans. How do you feel about this? Who was the first Asian or Asian American actor or media personality you remember seeing on TV or in the movies? Who are your favorite Asian or Asian American actors? Can you name any Southeast Asian actors?
6. Was there any Asians or Southeast Asian Americans faculty, supervisor, or administrator who identify as you?
7. Do you feel that representation is important? Explain.

Note. Adapted from Project Yellow Dress. Copyright 2020 by

<http://www.projectyellowdress.com/resources>

Appendix G

Participants, Interview length, and Questions Answered Analysis

Participants	Interview Length (h/min/sec)	Questions Answered
Abby	00:47:16	1, 2, 11, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 29, 30
Celia	00:45:23	1,2, 10,11, 15,18,19,20,28,29
Kate	00:48:34	1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 18, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30
Pauline	00:32:02	1, 2, 10,11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20,
Eliza	00:42:08	1, 2, 11, 18, 20, 21,23, 26, 29, 30
Zoe	00:45:04	1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 18, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30
Rebecca	00:55:32	1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 18, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30
Lizzie	1:06:33	1, 2, 17, 18, 21,22, 27,28,29,30

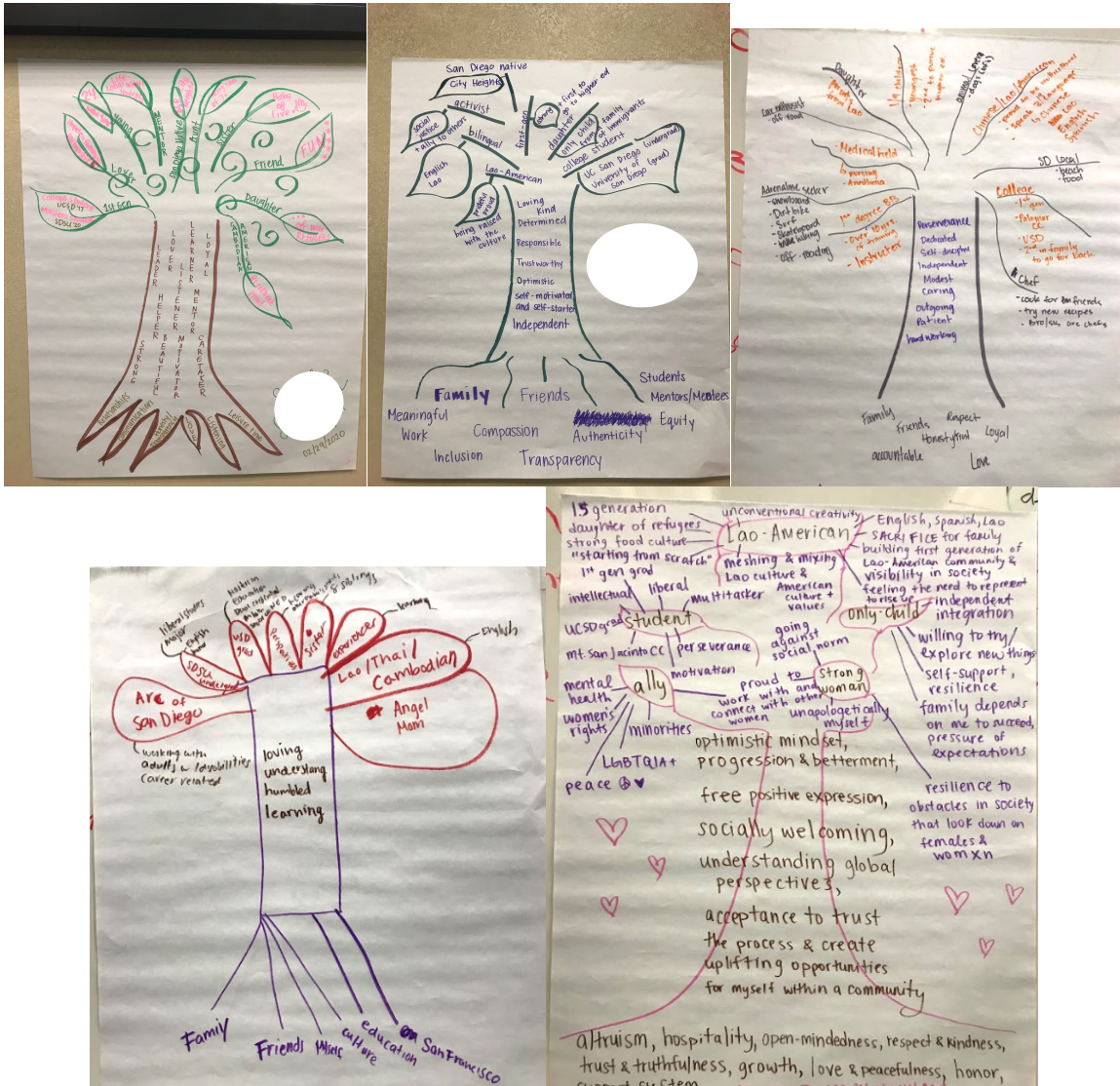
Appendix H

Focus Group 1 Participants, College, and Major

Abby	UCSD - Global Health Major
Celia	USD Undergraduate - Psychology
Kate	USD Graduate - Higher Education Leadership
Pauline	USD Graduate - Dual Credential
Lizzie	SDSU Graduate - Postsecondary EDL: Specialization in Student Affairs

Appendix I

Focus Group 1 Tree of Life Activity



Appendix J

Focus Group Assessment 1

What does success mean to you? What does success mean for your parents?

Success to me means what if you are happy in what you are doing to give success to my parent it means to make money so you don't have to struggle.

*recognizing and
 success to me: utilizing my potential to grow as an individual happily; also creating meaningful positive impact in a community that matters.
 success to my parents: Money (or), being safe, know that I can support them & myself financially despite hardships

Myself - being happy and financially stable; independent and my own person
 Parents - being educated and having degrees; financially supportive

Myself
 • Happy
 • Loved
 • Applying myself

Parents
 • I am happy
 • Being kind
 • Being selfless

Parents -
 • Married
 • Having kids
 • Buying them a house
 • Making \$\$\$

Myself -
 • Happy
 • Healthy
 • Authentic

Why is there a need to support Asians/SEA's in higher education? What has your school done to support this population? How can we create these programs

• Asians/SEA's feel underrepresented in higher ed.
 USD - A.S.F.A club. UCSD - APSA (student org)
 SDSU - A.S.P.A club
 - we could create these programs through hearing student voices

- SEA generation in America is newer so we lack resources thus lack visibility; most come from lower-income/marginalized communities.

I feel like some asian specifically Chinese are you usually the group to go for higher ed. You don't hear much about SEA's. SEA's have so much to offer but we are being underrepresented.

UCSD: Joseph Banwitz implementing Lao curriculum/Lao author required reading in class. Asians & SEA's are not always seen as a minoritized group, thus their struggles continue to be ignored or generalized.
 UCSD created APIMSEA, SDSU is creating an APISA center that has awardship series called (APP)Phany.

"Asian" encompasses a lot of different groups of people and different type of resources and support in higher ed; ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL!

Students are the ones who are expected to create the space and resource themselves; the university/institution needs to be held accountable

How can we examine the (Re-model) minority and explore the social issues young Asian Americans faced today, specifically, SEAs?

- create our own niche groups & communities to build; highlight other SEA's work to bring representation in education + media
- Having a space that we ~~can~~ have for ourselves as SEAs to create a dialogue about the identities we hold
- Creating a resource center specifically for Asian Americans.
- address mental health issues specific to SEA because our families' experiences are unique VS other Asian Americans (we're a newer established generation of "Asian" in America).
- Understanding the different race/ethnic identities that we and others hold; while we share similarities, we are also different
 - Having classes/ programs about Asians/SEA's.

- Provide more space/platforms/workshops that allow SEA people/students to speak their truth, share their stories, be heard & validate their needs.

What can you say about the model minority myth? Has it played a part of your lives?

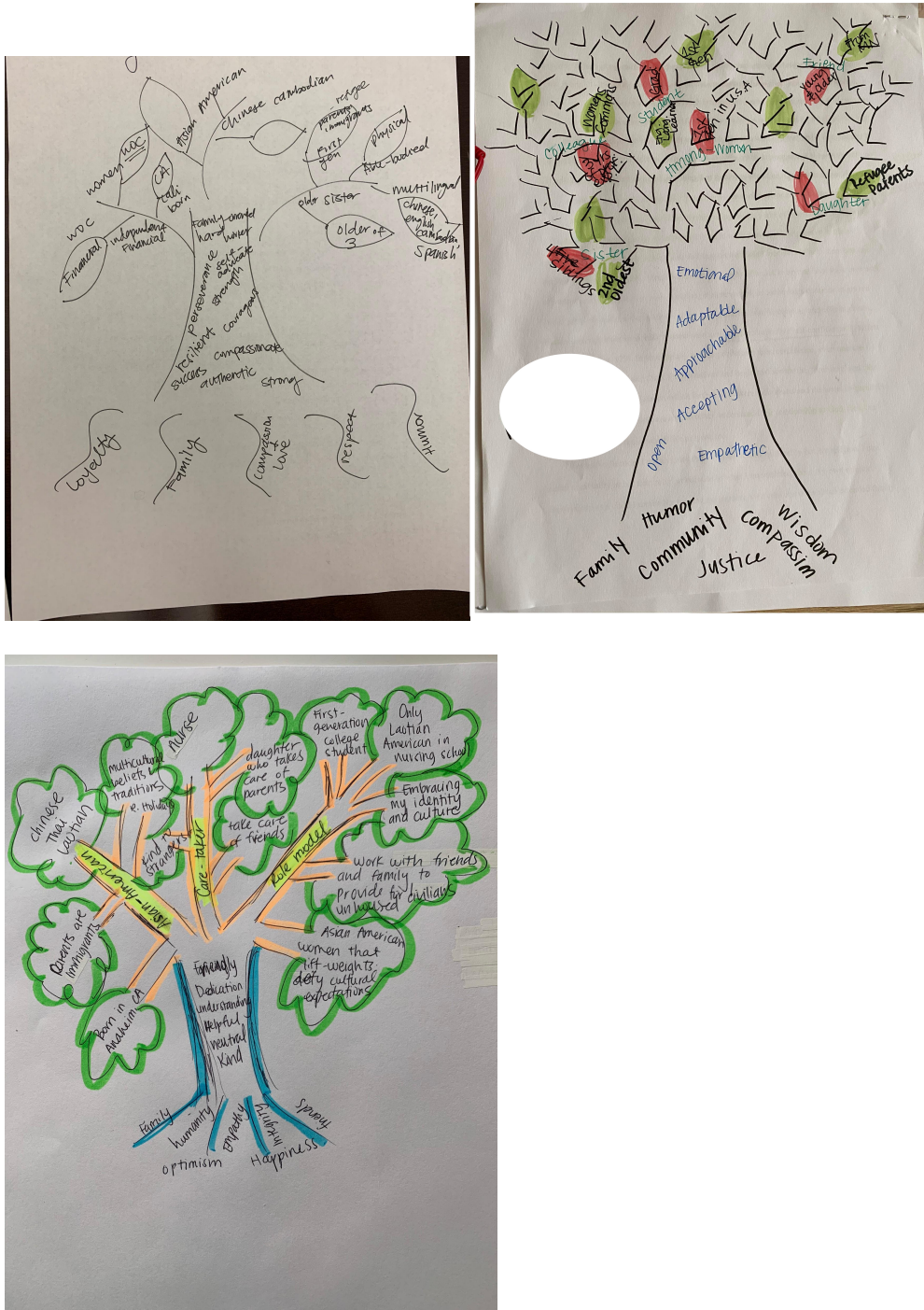
- It groups all Asian ethnic groups under one term ("Asian") and it is assumed that we do not need resources or support
- I feel marginalized with an already marginalized identity
- this concept internalizes a competitive spirit & battles against other minorities to "outbeat" each other; a "war" amongst ourselves as minorities already when we should be supporting each other despite our (lack of) "successes"
- I have never heard of the model minority myths.

People label "Asians" as all the same. But in reality some of us struggle more than others. Yes it played a part in my life. Ex. "I'm Asian, I must be smart"

- we need to re-model this myth! It continues to group Asian Americans together & doesn't allow each group to show their unique qualities/stories/experiences because of this myth, both my institutions & I did not believe we needed a resource center for AA because the data, the aggregated data, shows Asian Americans are doing well academically & thus do not need the support. We are not all the same

Appendix K

Focus Group 2 Tree of Life Activity



Appendix L

Focus Group 2 Assessment

Questions	Participant’s Answers
<p>What can you say about the model minority myth? Has it played a part in your lives?</p>	<p>I did not learn about the model minority myth until college and how detrimental it was to my K-12 upbringing. I was an English second-language learner. I suck at Math (even though I really wish I was actually good at it) and never seeked out tutoring. I do not identify well within the Asian-American ID because of the model-minority myth. Breaking apart the data, Hmong-American students graduate at one of the lowest rates from high school. Despite this statistic, resources are not allocated well.</p> <p>I am not familiar with the model minority myth.</p> <p>I learned about the model minority myth more in depth during my first year in my graduate program. I felt like I have been exposed to the concept earlier but have not really taken the time to reflect on what that means for me, until grad school. To me the model minority myth is a myth towards asian american culture. I think it is a myth that sets barriers and boundaries for asian americans to seek support, whether it is mental health support or financial support in higher education, because we are assumed to have “everything together”. My experience asking for support with counselors has been different than my peers asking for support because they assume that I should not have anything to worry about since I seemed like I came from a “Stable background”. I think this phrases are misleading and limit support given to people who fall into the model minority myth.</p>
<p>How can we examine the (Re)-model minority & explore social issues young Asian Americans face today, specifically SEA?</p>	<p>I am not familiar with the re-model minority myth, I would like to learn more. In redefining the model minority myth, I would coin an entirely different word or just get rid of it all together because it continues to limit our varied experiences of being Asian-American.</p> <p>The new model needs to include issues of mental health and the generational trauma many SE Asian communities carry. We have a better chance in ending the cycle of hurt when we can acknowledge the trauma and create intentional spaces for us to share and validate our experiences.</p> <p>Even for high-achieving students, we do not acknowledge the amount of stress and pressure they endure.</p> <p>I think a way for us to re-image the model minority and further</p>

	<p>explore social issues in asian american cultures is to give space to those who are experiencing these social issues and provide a space where they are able to share their narrative. I think it starts by simply negating the assumption that asian Americans are the models of all minorities because our cultures and experiences are different. I think it goes both ways in that we need voices to be heard and encouraging voices.</p> <p>Redefine generalization of “asian-americans” and look at subgroups. For example, chinese-americans vs. laotian americans vs. japanese americans. Provide more education to future generations about this myth and the detrimental effects of racial generalizations.</p>
<p>What does success mean to you? What does success mean to your parents?</p>	<p>Success to me means that I am happy regardless of monetary means or materials in my life. Success to me means that I have fulfilled my own destiny and that I can truly say to myself that I am proud of myself and the work that I do brings me and those around me joy. My parents would define success as having alot of money And bringing honor to the family by completing their wishes and aspirations. I think my definition of success is a combination of what I believe success is and my parents. I think true success needs to have compromise.</p> <p>Success to me means being able to live a life where I am thriving and not just surviving. Hmong people have been hurting for a very long time and I now have the privilege to change the cycle. It seems so simple and generic but as a 1st generation born in the US it has been such a luxury to have an education and independence, especially as a Hmong-Womxn. Success to my parents also means living a life without burden. They have never pressured us siblings to pursue high paying jobs like a doctor, lawyer, etc because they understand how stressful those jobs are in reality. They have always raised us to prioritize our wellness and time spent with family. I sincerely want to be able to buy a house for my parents so all of the income they make, they can just keep for themselves.</p> <p>Success is finding happiness in life without external stressors. These stressors can be physical stressors such as living in a high crime neighborhood, financial stressor which is not making enough money to feed my family, or emotional stressors which can include having a destructive relationship with no emotional support from my loved ones. Success to my parents is being rich. Although being rich can combat financial stressors in my life, it is not the only means to being me happiness.</p>
<p>Why is there a need to</p>	<p>SEA students often tend to be the 1st generation for many</p>

<p>support Asians or SEA at institutions? How can we support them? What has your school done to support Asian/SEA on campus? How can we create these programs?</p>	<p>experiences so they cannot continue to be summed up together with other Asian identities who are 3rd/4th US generation. All of our experiences are valid and real, however, how we navigate different spaces may be different. For myself, I do not see my community well-reflected in academia or research. We are either never included in textbooks or when we are, it is from a deficit model. What am I supposed to think about myself when I only hear about how much our community is lacking in comparison to others? We are strong and resilient in our own way.</p> <p>To better support SEA students, I think it is important to heighten their voices in experiences in the classroom, based on their willingness to share. Validate story-telling is a form of historical and true data.</p> <p>My higher education experiences have allowed me to reconnect with my culture and its beauty. They have also created spaces for me to connect with other SEA students. This is great, but more is needed.</p> <p>To create these programs we have to allow those with these identities to lead the space since the SEA experience is so hidden due to the model minority myth. We are not “voiceless” we are just being ignored.</p> <p>I think there is a need to support Asians at institutions because there is a lack of resources out there that supports them in the first place. With the model minority myth in place and the need to save face, higher education is limited on the resources that they provide for Asian american students because they do not understand the community nor do they do a great job at seeking ways to understand these communities. I think higher educational professionals like myself can support these students by continuing the work, getting into positions of power and making change. I think it is important to be a role model to other asians and use the privilege that we have in our careers to further advocate for spaces where asians can tell their stories. At a PWI , our school is slow on creating spaces for different identities. We have started creating spaces for APIDA groups recently and WOC small groups. Other than that I do not see many resources out there since the incident in HK happened and now COVID. To create these programs I think it's important to encourage those representing identity spaces to unit and show that they are not alone. And for those who have privilege to step back and allow space for voices to be heard.</p> <p>I think it is important for SEA students to be supported in our community and at our institution because there are very few SEA</p>
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	<p>students at USD and few SEA that pursue higher education in the community. Representation is important because it creates a sense of belonging, brings comfort during difficult times, and is a reminder that they are not alone. The sense of loneliness can initiate in students that are first-generation college students which is common amongst many SEA students. With many adversities at home, the added stress at school in addition to internal identity conflicts and shame can bring more stress to the students.</p> <p>Ways that we can increase representation in the institution is to first promote expression and pride in our identities and to ensure that our campus and our community is a safe place for students to accomplish this.</p> <p>We can work with the admissions office to increase acceptances to SEA students who are excelling in their school/careers.</p> <p>Provide scholarships and additional financial aid to low-income SEA students because many of these students will not be able to afford attending expensive institutions.</p> <p>Provide career panels and focus groups that discuss myths of pursuing higher education and attaining a high paying job (such as paying taxes etc.) to break down barriers to prevent future generations from resorting to welfare assistance and medical benefits.</p>
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