



eCOMMONS

Loyola University Chicago  
Loyola eCommons

---

School of Education: Faculty Publications and  
Other Works

Faculty Publications

---

2013

# Beyond Tiger Mom Anxiety: Ethnic, Gender and Generational Differences in Asian American College Access and Choices

OiYan Poon

*Loyola University Chicago*, [opoon@luc.edu](mailto:opoon@luc.edu)

Ajani Byrd

*Loyola University Chicago*

---

## Recommended Citation

Poon, O and A Byrd. "Beyond Tiger Mom Anxiety: Ethnic, Gender and Generational Differences in Asian American College Access and Choices." *Journal of College Admission*, 2013.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Publications at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in School of Education: Faculty Publications and Other Works by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact [ecommons@luc.edu](mailto:ecommons@luc.edu).

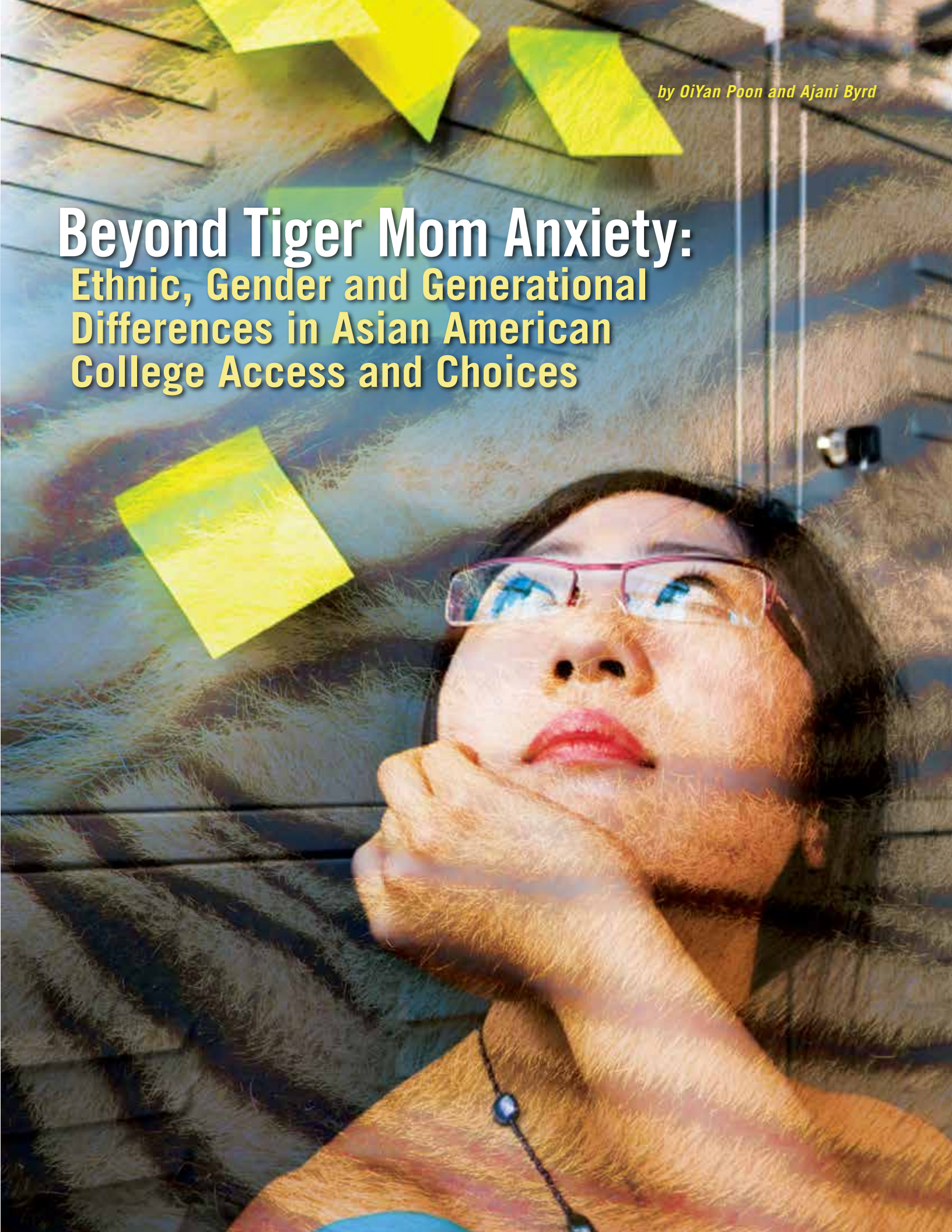


This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

© NACAC, 2013.

*by OiYan Poon and Ajani Byrd*

# Beyond Tiger Mom Anxiety: Ethnic, Gender and Generational Differences in Asian American College Access and Choices





Dr. Poon would like to acknowledge and thank the University of Massachusetts Boston's Asian American Student Success Program for providing a research grant and support for this study.

*A lot of people wonder how Chinese parents raise such stereotypically successful kids. They wonder what these parents do to produce so many math whizzes and music prodigies, what it's like inside the family, and whether they could do it too. Well, I can tell them, because I've done it.*

—Amy Chua, “Why Chinese Mothers are Superior,” (2011)

With these words, Chua set off a frenzied national debate over culture, child rearing and Asian American educational attainment trends (Pan 2011). The resulting mainstream discourse evoked racial stereotypes, “...suggesting not only that most Asian Americans are high-achieving, but also that their achievements are due to overbearing parents” (Chang 2011). While Chua and public discourse stereotyped and framed Chinese American, and by extension, immigrant Asian American parental behaviors as diametrically opposed to American norms, a parallel narrative of Tiger parenting’s negative consequences arose with Wesley Yang’s “Paper Tigers” diatribe in the May 2011 issue of *New York Magazine*.

The Tiger Mom phenomenon suggests two types of anxiety related to selective college admission. The first is a mainstream US anxiety about Asian Americans, a racialized “other,” eclipsing white dominance in the nation’s elite colleges, paralleling fears of Asian economic competition on the world stage (Poon 2011). The second is the anxiety and pressures potentially experienced by Asian American children of so-called Tiger parents.

Focusing on the second type of anxiety related to the Tiger parenting phenomenon, we contend that it is important to understand the diversity of experiences among Asian Americans in college admission. The study presented, like others (Louie 2004; Lew 2006), suggests that while immigrant parents may play important roles in the college choice process of Asian Americans, their varying levels of capital, resources and familiarity with college access can limit their capacity to directly influence and support their children’s pathways to college. More specifically, the study found that Asian American college choice experiences differed by ethnicity, gender and college-going generation.

This study focuses on the experiences of second-generation and 1.5-generation Asian American youth in the college choice process. The term 1.5-generation refers to people who immigrated to the US as young children or adolescents, while second generation Asian Americans were born in the US to immigrant parents. Using survey and interview data, we discuss how different social identities shape Asian American college choice contexts and decisions. We specifically explore how 1.5- and second-generation Asian Americans are informed about applying to and enrolling in college, guided by the following research questions:

- What/who are the most important influences and information sources for Asian Americans in the college choice process?
- Are there significant differences in the importance of influences and information sources in the college choice process for diverse Asian American students?

Our findings indicate that there are statistically significant differences in influences and information sources in the Asian American college choice process by ethnicity, gender and college-going generation. Indeed, Asian American college choices are about much more than Tiger parent influences.

#### **The College Choice Model and Asian Americans**

The college choice model is a useful conceptual lens through which to understand how individuals experience college-going pathways. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) define college choice as comprised of three stages, which include 1) emerging interests in attending postsecondary education (predisposition), 2) gathering information through various resources about potential schools to

attend (search) and 3) ultimately choosing an institution to attend (choice). Research has shown how the predisposition phase is significantly shaped by variables such as socioeconomic status (SES), academic achievement and value placed on higher education (Cabrera and La Nasa 2000; Perna and Titus 2005). Parental involvement has also been found to be one of the more important factors leading to college enrollment (Hossler, Schmit and Vesper 1999; Perna 2000). Following predisposition, students determine a set of postsecondary institutions to which to apply in the search phase. Students in this phase begin to determine which colleges and universities are realistic for their college-going goals and trajectories. Commonly, students' performance on academic measures, coupled with an assessment of personal access to financial support, heavily influence this second step (Kim, DesJardins and McCall 2009). Once college applicants are notified of their offers of admission, they enter the final stage of the process—choice. Students use the information and culminating experiences they have ascertained from the two previous phases to make a final decision for enrollment. Students' experiences at each phase can be affected by a multitude of SES variables, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and class.

The college choice model is an important foundational framework through which to understand Asian American college-going outcomes, which are very diverse. Counter to stereotypes that the majority of Asian American college students enroll at the nation's most elite institutions, Asian American educational attainment levels greatly vary by ethnic sub-group with nearly half enrolled in community colleges (CARE 2011). Applying the college choice model, we contribute toward knowledge on variations in Asian American college choice.

### Literature Review

Within the research literature on college choice presenting racial analyses, Asian Americans are frequently left out from the discussion or coupled with white students due to their aggregate achievement status (Teranishi 2002). A thorough review of published literature on college choice reveals a few, but interesting, observations about Asian American college choice experiences. Broadly, research has found that Asian Americans utilize a strategic adaptation approach to education; meaning that within a society riddled with inequalities, Asian Americans place a significant emphasis on educational attainment as one of the only realistic pathways to mobility (An 2010; Xie and Goyette 2003; Sue and Okazaki 1995).

Generally, research has found significant differences by race in college preparation, college application and enrollment

behaviors (Hurtado et al. 1997). Specific to Asian Americans, they have, on average, been found to be more likely than African Americans and Latinos to attend college (Hurtado et al. 1997), and more likely than whites to apply to selective colleges and universities (An 2010). However, Asian Americans aspiring to attend elite institutions have also been found to be less likely than comparable white students to be admitted at their first-choice institutions (Espenshade and Radford 2009; Hurtado et al. 1997). For Asian Americans, financial aid is an especially influential element of the search and choice phases of the college choice process. Relative to their Latino and African American peers, financial aid packages (i.e., expected loan burden and scholarship grants) more significantly affected Asian Americans' enrollment choices (Kim, DesJardins, and McCall 2009).

Research conducted using ethnically disaggregated data has also found significant differences in college choice patterns among Asian Americans by ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Teranishi et al. 2004). Teranishi and colleagues (2004) also found that social networks play significant roles in Asian American college choice processes. Specifically, Filipino Americans and Southeast Asian American students were found to be more influenced by their relatives' views and the proximity of colleges to home in the final stage of college choice (Teranishi et al. 2004). On the other hand, some second generation Chinese Americans and Korean Americans can find significant support and capital for college-going from their religious communities (Park 2012). Kim and Gasman's (2011) qualitative study at an elite northeastern US university similarly concluded that social networks (e.g., family and friends) were the most influential factors in the college choice process. Their study also found that high school attended and external media information sources serve as critical influences in the college choice processes of Asian Americans enrolled at an elite private university (Kim and Gasman 2011).

Asian Americans represent the fastest growing racial group of American undergraduates, but research has not kept pace with this population's rapid growth since the 1970s (Chang et al. 2007). In addition to a need for more studies that recognize the significant disparities in college access and attainment among Asian American ethnic groups (CARE 2008), little research has presented a close examination of Asian American college choice experiences from students' perspectives. This study provides the perspectives and voices of Asian Americans to gain a more complex understanding of the influences shaping their college-going experiences.

### Study Background and Methods

The current study aimed to identify key influences and information sources for Asian Americans in the college choice process. We entered the study curious about the influence of parents relative to other influences, information sources and contexts of college choice. In addition to collecting survey data from a national sample of currently and recently enrolled Asian American college students, individual interviews were conducted.

The study began with the national distribution of a questionnaire via Survey Monkey. The survey was distributed to email listservs, Twitter and Facebook pages belonging to a variety of Asian American organizations and networks related to higher education, including the Asian Pacific Islanders in Higher Education network, the East Coast Asian American Student Union (ECAASU), the Midwest Asian American Student Union (MAASU), the Boston Asian American Student Intercollegiate Coalition (BAASIC), the ACPA Asian Pacific American Network, and the NASPA Asian Pacific Islander Knowledge Community. Additionally, the survey was posted to popular Asian American blogs targeting young adults including Angry Asian Man ([www.angryasianman.com](http://www.angryasianman.com)), 8Asians ([www.8asians.com](http://www.8asians.com)), Sepia Mutiny ([www.sepiamutiny.com](http://www.sepiamutiny.com)), and Hyphen ([www.hyphenmagazine.com](http://www.hyphenmagazine.com)). Respondents who completed the survey had the option to enter a drawing to win one of five gift cards, each worth \$20, by providing their email addresses at the end of the survey. Recruitment materials invited individuals enrolled in college in the last two years, who identified as 1.5- and second-generation Asian American, to complete the online survey. We were collected 409 completed surveys.

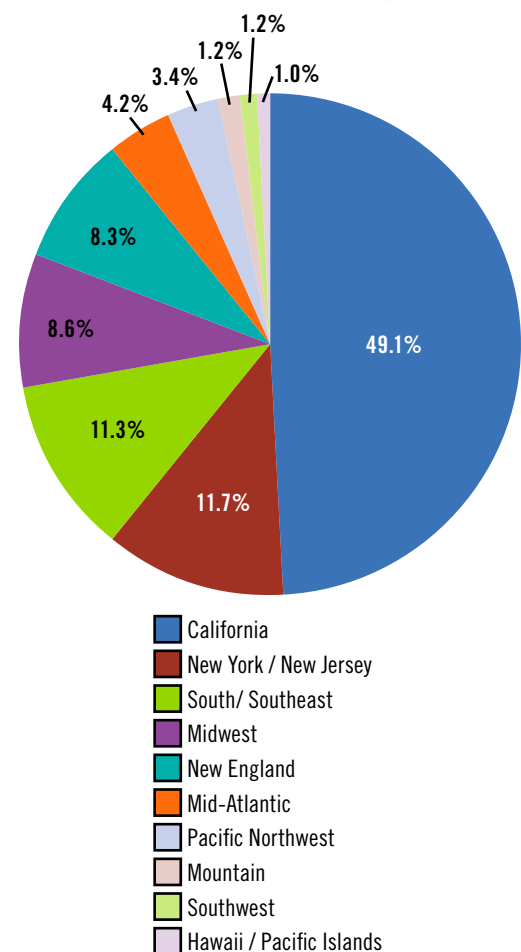
The survey subjects represented a diversity of backgrounds, allowing us to conduct our analysis of survey data with an eye for a number of variables. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics on the respondents' demographic information. Figure 1 illustrates the geographic distribution of our survey subjects. With the exception of gender, our sample is reflective of the overall demographics of Asian Americans as reported by a variety of demographic profile reports (Chang et al. 2007; CARE 2008; APALC 2006).

By focusing our interviews on students from one state, we were able to conduct an in-depth analysis of college choice controlling for geographic location and the state context of secondary education systems (Turley 2009). Table 2 provides a demographic profile of the 10 interview subjects. To establish trustworthiness of data, member checking and review methods were utilized (Creswell and Miller 2000). During the interviews, the interviewer summarized and mirrored students' responses to questions, verifying and confirming understandings of responses. Following the transcription of interviews, participants were also provided with the opportunity to review their interview transcripts for accuracy.

**Table 1: Survey Respondents' Demographic Statistics**

Total n: 409		
Race/Ethnicity	n	% of Sample
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, Japanese)	255	62.3
Southeast Asian (e.g. Vietnamese, Lao, Cambodian, Hmong, Thai)	94	23.0
Filipino	46	11.2
South Asian	14	3.4
Mixed race (inclusive of individuals identifying as EA, SEA, SA, and Filipino)	21	5.1
Gender		
Female	295	72.1
Male	113	27.6
Other	1	0.2
Immigrant Status		
US Born	344	84.1
Foreign Born	65	15.9
College-going Generation		
First generation	159	38.9
Not first generation	250	61.1

**Figure 1: Regional Origin of Sample (n=409)**



**Table 2: Profile of Interview Participants (all names are pseudonyms)**

Participant	Gender	Immigrant Generation	Ethnicity	First Generation College Going	Type of H.S. Attended	College/ University Attended
Diana	F	2nd	Chinese American	Yes	Private	Wellesley College
Elizabeth	F	2nd	Korean American	Yes	Public^	UMass Amherst
Calvin	M	2nd	Korean, Chamorro and white	No	Private	Midwestern State
Brandon	M	2nd	Chinese American	No	Public*	Dartmouth
Andrew	M	2nd	Chinese American	No	Public	Boston University
Yun	M	1.5	Chinese American	No	Public*	Hampshire College
Caitlin	F	2nd	Cambodian American	Yes	Public	Tufts University
James	M	2.5	Chinese American	No	Public	Boston University
Kerry	F	2nd	Chinese American	No	Public	Northeastern
Thomas	M	2nd	Cambodian American	Yes	Public	Tufts University
^ Low Resource public high school						
* High Resource public high school						

Interviews were coded and analyzed for themes identifying key influences and information sources affecting interview participants' college choice process at various phases. Interview data was also analyzed to understand how and why identified influences and information sources played significant roles in the students' college choice processes.

**Results**

The results from the study indicated that a number of influences, both individuals and various interests, played significant roles in shaping Asian American students' college choice process. Table 3 summarizes the results from the survey identifying influential factors without our analysis of differences by ethnicity, college-going generation and gender.

**Table 3: Importance of Factors in College Choice Process (1: very important; 4: not important)**

Factor	M	SD	SE
Academic reputation	1.46	0.706	0.035
Family approval	1.82	0.947	0.047
Affordability	1.98	1.159	0.057
Career plans	1.98	1.115	0.055
Institutional co-curricular offerings	1.99	1.136	0.056
Expected academic major	2.00	1.108	0.055
Institutional ranking	2.07	1.107	0.055
Advice from friends	2.45	0.967	0.048
Campus visits	2.59	1.52	0.075
Alumni success	2.75	1.241	0.061
Knows someone who attends/attended institution	2.76	1.355	0.067
Advice from teachers	2.77	1.075	0.053
Advice from counselors	2.89	1.183	0.058
Close to home	2.99	1.23	0.061

These results suggest that an institution's academic reputation, family approval, affordability, and career plans were the most important factors to Asian American college choice processes. When asked which individuals' opinions were most important, survey results affirmed the importance of parental opinions in Asian American college-choice processes. Table 4 details the results from the question, "How important were the opinions of the following list of individuals in your college choice process?"

**Table 4: Importance of Individuals' Opinions (1: very important; 4: not important)**

Individuals	M	SD	SE
Parent(s)	1.73	0.925	0.046
Friend(s)	2.38	0.905	0.045
Teacher(s)	2.73	1.012	0.05
Sibling(s)	2.88	0.925	0.067
High School Counselor	2.92	1.106	0.055

When asked to identify the "most influential person" in their college choice process, the majority of survey respondents identified that parents (52.3 percent) were the most influential, followed by siblings (13.2 percent), high school counselors (7.6 percent) and teachers (3.4 percent). When asked to identify where they received information relevant to college-going, survey respondents indicated a number of information sources, summarized in Table 5. Interestingly, high school counselors (67.6 percent) play a key role in providing information to prospective Asian American college students, followed closely by family members (67 percent), and teachers (59.7 percent).

**Table 5: Sources of Information for the College Choice Process**

Source	% Respondents Acknowledging Source
High School Counselors	67.6%
Family members	65.0%
Teachers	59.7%
College representatives/recruiters	36.1%
College fairs	28.7%
Friends	23.0%
Other adult mentors	14.9%
College preparation program	11.7%
Internet	7.4%

Analysis of survey data suggests that multiple people and factors play important roles in providing information and shaping Asian American college choice processes. However, we also found significant and nuanced differences in the magnitude of importance of influences and information sources by ethnicity, college-going generation and gender. While there were statistical differences found within the survey data by these three factors, the most salient differences in the interview narratives were found by gender and college-going generation.

#### *Ethnicity*

Some ethnic differences emerged in how important various factors and individuals were in the Asian American college choice process, according to analysis of survey data. College ranking was significantly more important to East Asian Americans ( $\bar{x}$  =1.95;  $p < .05$ ) than the overall sample. Additionally, being close to home is less important to East Asian Americans ( $\bar{x}$  =3.14;  $p < .05$ ) than for other ethnic groups. Filipino Americans ( $\bar{x}$  =2.37;  $p < .05$ ) identified teachers' advice to be more important than for other students. For East Asian Americans ( $\bar{x}$  =3.03;  $p < .05$ ) high school counselors' opinions were less important than for other students. There were, interestingly, no differences in sources of college choice information by ethnicity.

#### *College-Going Generation*

Significant differences in influences and information sources were found by college-going generation. Family approval ( $\bar{x}$  =2.02;  $p < .01$ ), institutional rankings ( $\bar{x}$  =2.25;  $p < .05$ ) and college alumni success ( $\bar{x}$  =2.99;  $p < .01$ ) were significantly less important to first-generation students in their college choice process. While the opinions of parents were less important to first-generation students ( $\bar{x}$  =1.92;  $p < .01$ ) than to their peers, first-generation students reported that teachers' opinions ( $\bar{x}$  =2.57;  $p < .05$ ) were more important in navigating their college-going process. First-generation

students (39 percent) were also significantly less likely to name a parent as the most influential individual in their process than other students (60.8 percent). Moreover, while only 4.8 percent of non-first generation students named their high school counselors as the most influential person in their college-going process, 11.9 percent of first-generation students identified their counselors as most influential. First-generation students (50.3 percent) were also, understandably, significantly less likely than other students (74 percent) to turn to family members as sources of information for their college-going process ( $p < .01$ ).

The importance of high school counselors for first-generation students was highlighted in various interviews, especially among women. Caitlin, a Southeast Asian American female, first-generation college student who enrolled at Tufts University (MA) after graduating from her high school located in a suburban community south of Boston shared how her high school counselor played a very important role in her college choice process. She stated, "I was really close with [my counselor] and when senior year came around and it was time to apply for to colleges, I would be in her office every week, if not twice a week. She was Latina, so I felt like she could relate to my experiences a lot more than my teachers who were all white." Caitlin found a connection with her high school counselor, naming shared racial minority experiences as key to developing an affinity with her. Later in the interview, Caitlin explained that her counselor provided support for her college choice process that her mother could not. Specific to the search phase, Caitlin shared,

In terms of picking college, my mom obviously never applied to college. She did a year at Bunker Hill [Community College] and so she never really applied to college. She knew that I had to [apply], she just didn't know how. So that was more of my guidance counselor's thing. [She showed me] here is a Common Application and here's how you write your essay.

While her mother knew there was an application process and system, she was not aware of the specific mechanics of the college application process, further highlighting the important role of the high school counselor in supporting first-generation students' college choice process.

Elizabeth, another female first-generation college student, who identified as Korean American from the central region of Massachusetts, emphasized the important role that her teachers played in encouraging and supporting her in her college application process. She explained,

My AP (Advanced Placement) class teachers definitely made it clear that going to college was the next logical step. I mean they



never said that not going to college was bad, but it was definitely pressed upon to every student that the next step was college and you should go and that is why you are taking AP classes and that's important. In my AP [literature] class my teacher for a good month or two focused on personal essays.

As an AP student, Elizabeth benefited from a college-going culture (McDonough, 1997) within her college oriented classes. The support she received from her teachers was especially important given the burden she felt in being the first in her family to go to college. Describing what it meant to be a first-generation college student, she shared,

I feel like it's a really big burden on me because I am the oldest in my family and extended family [to go to college]. So it is pretty intense. My parents don't say that they completely depend on me to succeed, but I feel like that expectation is still there.

### Gender

An analysis of survey and interview data also resulted in significant differences in college choice experiences by gender. While there were no statistical differences between women and men in naming the most influential person in the college choice process, there remained differences in how important various factors and individuals' opinions were in their experiences. Survey data analysis showed that a college's academic reputation ( $\bar{x}=1.39$ ;  $p<.01$ ), family approval ( $\bar{x}=1.75$ ;  $p<.05$ ) and a college's co-curricular offerings ( $\bar{x}=1.9$ ;  $p<.01$ ) were significantly more important for women than for men. Moreover, parent's opinions ( $\bar{x}=1.66$ ;  $p<.05$ ) and siblings' opinions ( $\bar{x}=2.79$ ;  $p<.05$ ) were more important for women's college choice process. Interestingly, men (83.2 percent) were more likely than women (74.9 percent) to name friends as informants in their college choice process.

Generally, women were found to be more influenced by their interpersonal relationships in the college choice process than their male peers. Four of the six men interviewed specified that they themselves were central to their college choice processes. Even after discussing how other individuals, such as parents or counselors played roles in influencing the approach to the college choice process, each of the four male students returned to restate the centrality of their own views and decision-making process.

For example, even though Calvin, a mixed-race male student from central Massachusetts who enrolled at a Midwestern state university, discussed throughout his interview how much he respected the opinions of his Korean and Chamorro immigrant father and how he benefited from his college professor mother's guidance through the college choice process, he asserted,

I don't really feel like I was influenced by any other people about my choice. To be honest, it was kind of when I went to visit the campuses that I really got the idea if I wanted to go there. Because I got a feeling of the area and the school and you know. I mean my parents have always supported me. I discuss a lot of stuff with them but I don't think there was an inspirational someone who really helped guide me [in deciding which colleges to apply to or attend].

Even though his parents were the ones to plan campus visits across the country for him, and discussed their financial capacity for college, Calvin insisted that his college choice process was primarily guided by his own academic interests in engineering and music. Similarly, in answering the question, "Whose opinion was most important in your college choice process?" Brandon, a second generation Chinese American male student who attended a high achieving public high school and Dartmouth College (NH) stated,

It would probably be my own. I mean my mom and my dad obviously were always in the process and they were always guiding; maybe even played mind tricks on me, but I think that at the end of the day it was me.

Like Calvin and Brandon, Andrew asserted that he was not influenced by others' opinions and actions in his college-going process. Growing up in the Merrimack Valley in Massachusetts, Andrew was one of a handful of non-white students in his high school. A second-generation Chinese American, Andrew was unique from the other interview subjects in that he was the only interviewed student to state that he had only begun thinking about college when he started high school. All of the other interview subjects explained that their aspirations for college-going began much earlier in their academic careers. Andrew also was unique in that he had an individualized education plan (IEP) and met with a school psychologist and his high school counselor on a regular basis. Because of the IEP, school staff often prevented him from enrolling in a very rigorous course of study. However, throughout the interview he described his father as a strong advocate for his academic progress. In addition to arguing with school staff to allow Andrew to enroll in more advanced classes, his father enrolled him in several summer school programs at Yale (CT) and Cornell (NY) Universities. And when it came time to apply to colleges, Andrew shared,

My dad actually really wanted me to apply to Cornell. I was actually very hesitant about that; I was very reluctant to apply to Cornell because I didn't think I was good enough to get into that school. Well, initially I didn't want to apply to Cornell. Also my counselors disagreed [with my dad wanting me to apply to Cornell]. But my dad was saying to me just try to apply to Cornell. And he gave me the application form and told me to fill it out.



Even though Andrew describes his father as giving him the Cornell application, and arguing with his school counselors in the matter, Andrew asserted that his college choice process was, “mainly driven by myself actually. To be honest, it was mostly self-driven.”

In contrast, women were more likely to name individuals other than themselves as important players in their college choice process. Kerry, a second-generation Chinese American female from the Merrimack Valley region of Massachusetts studying pharmacy at Northeastern University (MA), discussed a strong admiration for her father. Her high level of respect for her father was similar to that of Calvin’s regard for his father. However, unlike Calvin, Kerry named her father as the most influential person in her college choice process. She shared that even though her parents hired a private college counselor, she primarily followed her father’s advice, “Because I have such trust in him, that he knows me really well... He would talk to the college counselor and we would discuss things.”

*Even though students in this study indicated that parents’ opinions remain most important, first-generation college students could not depend entirely on their parents to guide them on their college pathways since their parents were not as familiar with the process.*

Danielle also discussed the influential role that her parents played in her college choice process. A second-generation Chinese American female from Boston, she attended Wellesley College (MA). As a first-generation college student with immigrant parents who spoke little English, Danielle’s college choice process was significantly supported by her elite private high school, which selected her as a promising low-income student for a full scholarship. Through her high school, she participated in multiple tours of elite colleges across the nation and benefited from a very supportive college-going culture that provided her with rich college counseling resources. Through the school’s counseling services, Danielle developed a detailed list of college search criteria, “I wanted a green, lush campus and a college feel. I visited Harvard (MA) a lot so I wanted that feel—old brick buildings, a quad. I wanted to be close to the city and have small classes. I wanted accessible professors who were doing their research on things I was interested in. I wanted to learn Mandarin and a diverse community. Something far away.” During a college tour coordinated by the high school, she “saw all these different colleges and I started envisioning what my perfect college would be and what I didn’t want. And [the

college counselors] guided us in questions we should ask the colleges in info sessions.” As a talented student at a rigorous and supportive high school, Danielle was able to gain entrance to many highly selective postsecondary institutions across the country. Even though she wanted to attend college far away from home, she explained, “My parents took out a map and drew a 20 mile circle and told me the schools in the circle were the ones I could go to. They wanted me to stay close to home. They didn’t understand why I wanted to leave Boston.” In the end, she decided to stay close to home, enrolling at Wellesley.

### Implications

Dominant mass media continues to portray Asian Americans as a monolithically high-achieving population collectively invading the nation’s most elite colleges and universities, driven by domineering Tiger parents. However, this study challenges these stereotypes by presenting a more complicated picture. According to our findings, ethnicity, college-going generation

and gender play intermediate roles in how influential individuals and information sources can be in Asian American college choice experiences. Even though students in this study indicated that parents’ opinions remain most important, first-generation college students could not depend entirely on their parents to guide them on their college pathways since their parents were not as familiar with the process. Men were also less likely to acknowledge their parents as playing important roles in their processes. Throughout the study, it was clear that teachers and school counselors also played key roles in students’ college choice process, reminding us that parents are not the only influential actors in Asian American college choice experiences. Indeed, Tiger Mom is not always queen.

Several practical implications emerged from this study. Although Asian Americans are stereotyped as self-sufficiently over-achieving students, many are the first in their families to attend college. Therefore, it is important to consider ways to support diverse needs, approaches to college choice, and experiences of Asian American college bound students, particularly by college-going generation, ethnic diversity and gender.

### *Providing Support*

More than 42 percent of Asian American college students are first-generation college students (Saenz et al. 2007). There remain significant differences in resources and supports available to first-generation Asian American college students and diverse ethnic subgroups of Asian Americans for navigating college pathways. Therefore, teachers and counselors play key roles in providing first-generation Asian American students with guidance in navigating the mechanics of college preparation, search, admission, and enrollment. Despite their status as the first in their families to attend college, many of these students face an additional racial barrier of stereotypes that can mislead educators to believe that all Asian Americans are well resourced and informed in the college-going process (Yeh 2002). Therefore, even though first-generation students also indicated that their parents' opinions were very important, how directly parents can influence their children's college pathways is mediated by their class status.

### *Understanding Ethnic Subpopulations*

Challenges faced by first-generation college-goers are quite common among certain Asian American ethnic groups, particularly Southeast Asian Americans who nationally have among the lowest rates of bachelor's degree attainment (CARE 2010). In practice, college admission staff and enrollment management professionals interested in recruiting a more diverse population of Asian American students should pay attention to how different factors shape the ways these diverse students navigate the college opportunity system. Admission counselors should be aware of the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity (namely first-generation college-going status) among prospective Asian American college students.

### *Recognizing Gender Differences*

The ways women and men understand their experiences within the phases of the college choice model present interesting and significant differences. While various individuals, including family members, teachers, counselors, and others can play important roles in Asian American college choice experiences, men tended not to consciously recognize the ways in which they are influenced. This might be indicative of the ways in which young men are socialized in the US. Future research should focus on identifying and understanding underlying conditions and factors that lead to these gender differences.

### **Limitations**

The findings presented were constrained by some research limitations. The current analysis does not provide an intersectional understanding of how the different variables of ethnicity, college-going generation and gender interact to contribute toward the

students' college choice experiences. How one background variable contributes above and beyond what other variables explain in Asian American college choice experiences is yet to be determined. Further analysis of data can provide a more in-depth analysis of these types of interactions. Overall, more detailed analysis of both survey and interview data may reveal additional findings.

Even though the survey reflected the overall ethnic demographics of Asian Americans in the US (APALC and AAJC 2011), our survey consisted of a relatively small national sample. Additionally, our findings were only applicable to college-going experiences of Asian American students who chose to attend four-year institutions. No community college bound students participated in the survey. However, 47.3 percent of all Asian American college students are enrolled in community colleges (CARE 2010). Additional research attention should focus on this segment of students.

### **Conclusion**

Asian American students value their parents' opinions, but other individuals and factors also play important roles in their college choice processes. The amount of influence immigrant Asian parents have on their children's college choice process varies significantly. This study found key differences in the different roles and levels of importance various influences and information sources played, by ethnicity, college-going generation and gender. While parental opinions mattered, how their opinions mattered and affected their children's college choice processes differed significantly. For first-generation college-going students, their parents' limited knowledge about college opportunities did not allow them to be as involved as college-educated parents. In these cases teachers and high school counselors played more significant roles. Gender also plays an important role. While women acknowledged the important roles their parents played in their college pathways, male students were less likely to name their parents as playing important roles.

Mainstream media presents a questionable view on Asian Americans and the college admission process as dominated by Tiger parents. While Tiger Mom Amy Chua classified her style of parenting as culturally Chinese, some would argue that her approach could be more appropriately characterized as an American stereotype of Chinese parenting (Poon 2011). In fact the book cover of *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* in Chinese language markets depicts Chua in front of the US flag selling her memoir as an American mother. We challenge stereotypical views on Asian Americans and immigrant Asian parental behaviors, and argue that admission counselors and others should be mindful of diversity among Asian Americans and their experiences of pathways to college.



**OIYAN POON** is an assistant professor of higher education at Loyola University Chicago (IL). Her research interests include college access and admission policies, college student activism and community-based research methods. She earned her PhD in race and ethnic studies in education with a certificate in Asian American studies from University of California—Los Angeles (UCLA).



**AJANI BYRD** is a second-year PhD student in the higher education program at Loyola University Chicago (IL). He is currently a graduate assistant within the Office of the Vice President for Student Development. His research interests focus on students of color and their transition from two-year to four-year institutions.

## REFERENCES

- An, Brian P. "The Relations between Race, Family Characteristics, and Where Students Apply to College." *Social Science Research* 39, no. 2 (March 2010): 310–323.
- APALC and AAJC. *A community of contrasts: Asian Americans in the United States: 2011*. Los Angeles: Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2011. <http://www.advancingjustice.org/publication/community-contrasts-asian-americans-us-2011>
- Cabrera, Alberto F., and Steven M. La Nasa. "Understanding the College-Choice Process." *New Directions for Institutional Research* 2000, no. 107 (2000): 5–22.
- CARE. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders facts, not fiction: Setting the record straight. New York: National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2008.
- CARE. Federal Higher Education Policy Priorities and the Asian American and Pacific Islander Community. New York: National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2010.
- CARE. The relevance of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the college completion agenda. New York: National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2011.
- Chua, Amy. "Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior." *The Wall Street Journal*. January 8, 2011, sec. The Saturday Essay. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB1000142405274870411504576059713528698754.html>.
- Chang, Mitchell J. "Battle hymn of the model minority myth." *Amerasia* 37, no. 2 (2011): 137-143.
- Chang, M. J., Park, J. J., Lin, M. H., Poon, O. A., Nakanishi, D. T. Beyond myths: The growth and diversity of Asian American college freshmen, 1971- 2005. Los Angeles: UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, 2007.
- Creswell, John W., and Dana L. Miller. "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry." *Theory into Practice* 39, no. 3 (2000): 124–130.
- Espenshade, Thomas J., and Alexandria Walton Radford. *No Longer Separate, Not Yet Equal: Race and Class in Elite College Admission and Campus Life*. Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Hossler, Don, and Karen S. Gallagher. "Studying Student College Choice: A Three-Phase Model and the Implications for Policymakers." *College and University* 62, no. 3 (1987): 207–21.
- Hossler, Don, Jack L. Schmit, and Nick Vesper. *Going to College: How Social, Economic, and Educational Factors Influence the Decisions Students Make*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
- Hurtado, Sylvia, Karen Kurotsuchi Inkelas, Charlotte Briggs, and Byung-Shik Rhee. "Differences in College Access and Choice Among Racial/Ethnic Groups: Identifying Continuing Barriers." *Research in Higher Education* 38, no. 1 (1997): 43–75.
- Kim, Jiyun, Stephen L. DesJardins, and Brian P. McCall. "Exploring the Effects of Student Expectations about Financial Aid on Postsecondary Choice: A Focus on Income and Racial/Ethnic Differences." *Research in Higher Education* 50, no. 8 (December 2009): 741–774.
- Kim, Jessica K., and Marybeth Gasman. "In Search of a 'Good College': Decisions and Determinations Behind Asian American Students' College Choice." *Journal of College Student Development* 52, no. 6 (2011): 706–728.
- Lew, Jamie. *Asian Americans in Class: Charting the Achievement Gap among Korean American Youth*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2006.
- Louie, Vivian. *Compelled to Excel: Immigration, Education, and Opportunity among Chinese Americans*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- McDonough, Patricia M. *Choosing Colleges: How Social Class and Schools Structure Opportunity*. SUNY Press, 1997.
- Pan, Arnold. "The year of the tiger mom." *Amerasia Journal: Asian American/Pacific Islander/Transcultural Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011): 121-122.
- Park, Julie J. "It Takes a Village (or an Ethnic Economy): The Varying Roles of Socioeconomic Status, Religion, and Social Capital in SAT Preparation for Chinese and Korean American Students." *American Educational Research Journal* 49, no. 4 (August 2012): 624–650.
- Perna, Laura Walter. "Differences in the Decision to Attend College among African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites." *The Journal of Higher Education* 71, no. 2 (March 2000): 17-141.
- Perna, Laura Walter, and Marvin A. Titus. "The Relationship between Parental Involvement as Social Capital and College Enrollment: An Examination of Racial/Ethnic Group Differences." *The Journal of Higher Education* 76, no. 5 (October 2005): 485–518.
- Poon, Oiyen A. "Ching Chongs and Tiger Moms: The 'Asian Invasion' in U.S. Higher Education." *Amerasia Journal* 37, no. 2 (2011): 144-150.
- Saenz, Victor B., Sylvia Hurtado, Doug Barrera, De'Sha Wolf, and Fanny Yeung. *First in My Family: A Profile of First Generation College Students at Four-Year Institutions since 1971*. Los Angeles: UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, 2007.
- Sue, Stan, and Sumie Okazaki. "Asian American educational achievements: A phenomenon in search of an explanation." In *The Asian American Educational Experience: A Sourcebook*, edited by Don T. Nakanishi and Tina Y. Nishida, 133 - 145. New York: Routledge.
- Teranishi, Robert T. "Asian Pacific Americans and Critical Race Theory: An Examination of School Racial Climate." *Equity and Excellence in Education* 35, no. 2 (2002): 144–154.
- Teranishi, Robert T., Miguel Ceja, Anthony Iising Antonio, Walter R. Allen, and Patricia M. McDonough. "The College-Choice Process for Asian Pacific Americans: Ethnicity and Socioeconomic class in context." *The Review of Higher Education* 27, no. 4 (2004): 527-551.
- Turley, Ruth N. López. "College Proximity: Mapping Access to Opportunity." *Sociology of Education* 82, no. 2 (April 1, 2009): 126–146.
- Xie, Yu, and Kimberly Goyette. "Social Mobility and the Educational Choices of Asian Americans." *Social Science Research* 32, no. 3 (September 2003): 467–498.
- Yeh, Theresa Ling. "Asian American College Students Who Are Educationally at Risk." *New Directions for Student Services* 2002, no. 97 (2002): 61–72.