College choice and documented Chinese immigrant community college students in Massachusetts

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COLLEGE CHOICE AND DOCUMENTED CHINESE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS IN MASSACHUSETTS

Dissertation by

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submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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College Choice and Documented Chinese Immigrant Community College Students in Massachusetts

By

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ABSTRACT

College-choice studies have long been conducted to help colleges improve their recruitment strategies (Chapman, 1981; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Jackson, 1982; Litten, 1982). The dominant college-choice models and studies have, however, focused solely on traditional aged students seeking to enroll in four-year colleges/universities upon high school completion (Bers & Smith, 1987; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Neglected from these established models has been the other student populations enrolled in other sectors of higher education in the U.S., specifically the community colleges.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provided the conceptual framework for this qualitative study that explored the college-choice phenomenon for a group of documented Chinese immigrant students at one urban public community college. This study examined the participants’ experiences to determine factors that contributed to their college-choice decision making.

The stories shared by a sample of 16 participants (ages 19 to 39) revealed four overarching factors that impacted their college-choice decision making: 1) their experiences as immigrants in the U.S.; 2) their experiences as members of the working class in the U.S.; 3) their educational experiences prior to their immigration to the U.S.; 4) their educational experiences while in the U.S., which raised concerns about equity in access to college knowledge. Participants negotiated all these factors to decide that they would enroll at a community college. The findings from this study contributed to the literature of college-choice from the perspective
of a group of documented Chinese immigrants. In part, participants reported they chose to enroll at community college because they wanted a college that offered them opportunities to improve their English language skills; was affordable; conveniently located; had a community of Chinese/API immigrant students. Overwhelmingly, participants chose to attend a community college because they were not informed that there were other options.
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To my family, thank you for your love and support. To my parents (爸爸和媽媽) who made the difficult decision and sacrifice to immigrate to the U.S. so that my siblings and I could have opportunities for social and economic mobility, 謝謝. I am especially grateful to my oldest sister whose college-choice experience inspired me to do this study. Through hard work and perseverance, she completed her college education. She was the first in our family to earn a college degree. For the many times she said she was proud of me for having come this far in my education, I am extremely proud of her for being our “pioneer” and model.
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PREFACE

I got the idea for this study about documented Chinese immigrant community college students from personal interest and curiosity after reflecting on my own college-choice experience and that of my siblings and other immigrants with whom I had the pleasure of interacting. It also had to do with my own feelings about social injustices. It did not make sense to me why the college-choice process was more difficult than I know it should have been for my siblings and me. It did not make sense to me why getting admitted to and going to college was a “rite of passage” for some and a hard-earned reward for others. It made me sad and angry that immigrants whose native tongue was not English was ridiculed or dismissed because of either limited English proficiency or because they spoke with a non-western accent. It was not fair that our social and educational structures did not adequately prepare our students for college. How was it that I, as a Chinese immigrant from a low socio-economic background, got through graduate school and some other immigrants struggled to get through community college? Some of the information I am about to share is also discussed in the researcher positionality section in Chapter 3.

I am a Chinese immigrant who graduated from American public primary and secondary schools before completing my undergraduate and graduate degrees from two selective private universities in the US. Growing up, I always knew I would go to “college” (“tai hok” in Cantonese Chinese, which literally translates into “big school”) because that was the natural educational pathway. It was as if your education was not complete until you graduated from this “big school.” I did not know about associate degrees or two-year/community colleges because they did not exist in Hong Kong back then. I did not know about community colleges and what
they did until I worked at Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC), after I had earned my bachelor’s degree.

I graduated from a selective public high school. During our junior and senior years, our school asked us to come up with a list of colleges to apply to: our college set. We had to pick at least three: one “safety;” one “reach;” one with no set criterion. Those were the instructions we were given. I tried to follow these instructions without really knowing what “safety” or “reach” meant. I assumed “safety” referred to a college that I knew I would get accepted into and “reach” would be one whose admission criteria were more selective and would have been a challenge for me. My assumptions were confirmed by my friends. A public university was the safety for many of the students at our high school. Since I did fairly well in high school, I figured that must have been my safety school too. I was not given information about what to look for in a college, e.g., campus environment, choice of majors, college facilities, and support services. I did not know about the financial aid process. My oldest sister told me and helped me complete the complicated financial aid application. No teacher or administrator at school asked me about my interests or aspirations. I had not visited a college campus. My reach school was one that a classmate told me about because I happened to ask her to what colleges she was applying. The third college I applied to was one I knew about because my brother was enrolled there at the time.

I ended up applying to a fourth private university because one of my teachers asked me to. I looked at the application process which was very simple. I applied; got accepted; and enrolled. Prior to applying this fourth university, I had never heard of its name. I was actually planning to go to the public university because I would not have had to pay. I ended up matriculating at the private university because my brother told me his friend’s brother was
enrolled there and said it was a good school and better than the public university. I got a very
generous financial aid award from this private university but did not know it at the time because
I did not know how to interpret the financial aid award letter. A classmate taught me.
Community colleges were never on my radar screen. I never considered applying to them
because I did not know they existed. This experience led me to think, years after the fact,
perhaps some of the community college students were there because they did not know they had
other college options. I also wondered: if I got such limited college information from a selective
public high school, what type of information would students at non-selective high schools get?

In hindsight, I have to wonder how it was that I never knew about community colleges
and what they did. I went by BHCC enough times because I used to work at an afterschool
program near the college. My oldest sister graduated from a two-year college and transferred
into a four-year university when I was still in middle school. I just did not know it. Back then, I
only knew that she was enrolled at a “tai hok.” I thought she switched schools; not transferred to
a four-year university to get another degree. To me, she always just “fahn hok” (went to
school).

Throughout my academic and professional experiences in higher education, I periodically
questioned how I got to graduate from selective universities and some other immigrants did not.
Thinking about my own family, I wondered why my oldest sister was the only one who enrolled
at a two-year college. My two other siblings went to selective four-year colleges right after high
school.

To satisfy my own curiosity, I asked my oldest sister to see how she found out about the
two-year college. In response, she told me about her college-choice experience. After we
arrived in the U.S., my sister went to a public high school whose student body comprised largely
new immigrants from low-income families. Gang activity was not uncommon at her school. Her teachers did not talk much about college. Some of her classmates did and invited her to apply to a two-year college with them. Like me, she did not know about community colleges then but she went along with her friends. Her high school did take students to The Education Research Institute (TERI) center for a field trip. TERI is a nonprofit organization that “promotes access to education at all levels for students of all ages and backgrounds” (TERI, 2010).

It must be noted that my sister did not want to go to college when she was in high school. She wanted to be a hair stylist. She went along with her friends to TERI just to see what they offered. She also knew that our father wanted her to go to college.

It was at a TERI center where my sister got some information about colleges and help completing the financial aid application. She went along and applied to her college set because they were the names suggested by TERI and her friends, which included both two-year and four-year non-selective colleges. My sister ended up selecting a particular two-year college because its tuition was the cheapest. She did not know anything about the college aside from its urban location. She was told by our father that she needed to study accounting because “all girls need to be an accountant.” I had no idea that my father felt that way about gender and college because that was never imposed upon me. I always thought you studied what you wanted. My sister hated accounting and eventually switched to finance. Our father did not know. We do not think he knows now what major she completed. My sister concluded that in the end, she thinks all that our father really cared about was that she graduated from college.

My sister does well professionally now. I do not think it is fair though that she did not have the same opportunities that her siblings had. It did not make sense to me why an intelligent student/woman from the same family had a much longer and harder path to get to where she is
today than her siblings. I was lucky. Even though I did not completely know what I was doing in my own college-choice experience, I ended up fine too. My feeling is that it should not be luck. In general, an impetus for research is to help inform other researchers and policy makers on how to improve certain practices or policies. There is research on Chinese immigrants and there is research on college-choice. There is no research, however, on college-choice for Chinese immigrants. This study is the first attempt to research the college-choice phenomenon for a group of documented Chinese immigrants who enrolled at a community college. What can we learn about and from these individuals and their college-choice experiences to hopefully improve the experiences for other Chinese immigrants who might consider going to college so that they make an informed decision to get to the “right” college, whether the destination would be a community college or a four-year college/university?
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview of the study

In the Preface, I spoke about how I got the inspiration to conduct this study about college-choice for a group of documented Chinese immigrants. In this chapter, I introduce the study providing a background for the study, statement of the problem including the primary research question, and the significance of the study. In Chapter 2, I provide a review of selected literature relevant to this study including research on the community college, college-choice models, Asian Pacific Islander (APIs), Chinese immigrants, and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Chapter 3 covers the methodology for this study. Topics discussed include researcher positionality, research design and information about my experience with the topic that informed this study. I also discuss recruitment of participants for this study, data collection, data analysis, and limitations to the study. In Chapter 4, I present the findings of how a group of documented Chinese immigrants chose to attend a community college and identify major themes that emerged. In Chapter 5, I discuss these findings and their implications. I also present my suggestions for future research and make recommendations for improvement before offering some final thoughts about the study.

Background

Student college-choice research is important because it lets high schools, colleges, and policy makers know how students make the decision to attend college and the considerations they make to determine which college to attend. Most of the research about college-choice to date was modeled for the normative population of traditional age students in high schools considering enrollment in four-year colleges/universities right after high school completion. Of the existing models, the one that has received the most attention is Hossler and Gallagher’s
(1987): three interactive stages of predisposition, search, and choice. Other commonly cited models included Jackson’s (1982) three-stage joint economic and sociological model of preference, exclusion, and evaluation; Litten’s (1982) sociological model focused on the search part of the process; and Chapman’s (1981) model looked at college-choice factors as they inform the improvement of recruitment strategies at colleges.

Even though there are other types of students, e.g., nontraditional, minority, low-income, and other types of institutions, e.g., community colleges, there is but a short list of in-depth research available about the college-choice experiences involving the diverse student populations and institutions compared to the vast list available on traditional students in traditional college settings. There is no established college-choice model for a continuously growing population of nontraditional students who enroll in community colleges.

The abovementioned short list of studies, which will be discussed in Chapter 2, included works by Bers and Smith (1987) and Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) who studied college-choice for nontraditional students; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, and Rhee (1997) who studied student access and choice for different racial/ethnic groups; Somers, Haines, Keene, Bauer, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle, & Sparks (2006) who proposed a model for community college choice. Another set of researchers began to examine the choice process for specific ethnic groups because they recognized the diversity and heterogeneity that existed across and within racial and ethnic groups. Teranishi (2004) looked at choice from the perspective of Hmong and Vietnamese American high school students. Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen and McDonough (2004) studied the choice process among six Asian Pacific Islander (API) ethnic groups. Teranishi (2004) and Teranishi et al. (2004) clearly illustrated the diversity of their API ethnic participants’ experiences that would suggest further research with API ethnic groups is
warranted. Their findings also further challenged the model minority myth that assumed a homogeneous API race had assimilated to be “American” enough to gain academic and economic success, but not enough to be considered an “American” because they were still “minorities.” The proposed study was intended to build on their efforts. To that end, this study examined the college-choice experiences of a group of documented Chinese immigrants, i.e., legal residents, at a Boston community college. The goal was not to broadly generalize the findings; rather it was to share the students’ experiences to contribute to college-choice research through their own voices, one of the tenets of the Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Critical Race Theory provided the conceptual framework for this study shaping the methods used in data collection and analysis. This study examined the participants’ experiences to determine factors that contributed to their college-choice decision making. It was the expectation that the participants, as ethnic minorities who were not part of the dominant discourse as per CRT, would have college-choice experiences that varied from the experiences reported in normative studies of college-choice models which were focused on traditional students.

The findings of this study are limited to this group of documented Chinese immigrants. Components of the findings might be relevant to a wider audience where segments of the participants’ experiences could be shared by other immigrant populations, API ethnic subgroups, and/or working class individuals living in the United States.

Statement of the problem

The founding of Joliet Junior College in Illinois in 1901 in addition to economic factors and the rise in need to serve local communities contributed to founding of the beginning community colleges (AACC, 2009). Since then a network of colleges expanded to become the
community college system of today. There were 180 community colleges by 1930 and over 1,000 in 2009. Today, community colleges enroll 11.7 million students making up over 40% of all U.S. undergraduate students (AACC, 2009). Thirty-six percent of the community college enrollment was made up of ethnic minorities: 13% Black, making up 52% of all Black undergraduate enrollment in the U.S.; 16% Hispanic, making up 52% of all Hispanic undergraduate enrollment in the U.S.; 7% Asian Pacific Islander, making up 45% of all API undergraduate enrollment in the U.S.; and 1% Native American, making up 52% of all Native American undergraduate enrollment in the U.S. (AACC, 2009). Despite their long history and high enrollments, community colleges had not enjoyed a wealth of research except in the areas of being criticized for their missions and functions because of low retention and transfer rates. There was little to no research to understand how students decided to enroll in community colleges.

To learn how students enrolled at community colleges, it would be important to look at research on college-choice. A major limitation to this approach alone, however, was that the existing college-choice models are narrowly focused, as noted above. With the diversity in our undergraduate student body as a whole, there needs to be studies conducted to learn about the experiences of the non-dominant groups, e.g., ethnic minorities in community colleges. As noted above, community colleges enrolled 45% of all API students in the U.S. in 2009 (AACC, 2009). In a country that often speaks of the APIs as the model minority enjoying academic and economic success, who are these individuals who make up 45% of the country’s API undergraduate population and have selected the community college?

For centuries, the Asian Pacific Islanders were seen as one group. The U.S. Bureau of Census did not make a distinction on race for people of Asian descent in 1790. The Bureau
started collecting data on the Chinese, the first API ethnic group to immigrate to the U.S. in large numbers, in 1860. The Japanese were added as a category in 1870. Filipinos and Koreans were added in 1910. These additions followed the immigration history and patterns of the API ethnic groups. Data on other API ethnic groups were not systematically collected through the 1970 census. Asian Indians were classified as White and Vietnamese as “Other” in the 1970 census. The 1980 and 1990 censuses added six subcategories to the larger Asian category: Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese. In the 2000 census, there were 24 distinct API categories in addition to a separate “Other Asian” option provided to allow residents to write in their own responses. 2000 census data showed that the six largest API subgroups were as follows starting with the largest group: Chinese, except Taiwanese (2.31 million); Filipino (1.85 million); Asian Indian (1.67 million); Vietnamese (1.12 million); Korean (1.07 million); Japanese (0.79 million). The rest of the groups had less than 175,000 members each.

The APIs had also been viewed and studied by some as one homogenous group in education. Most of the time when APIs were included in the discourse, they were used to compare the purported success of a homogeneous API race with other ethnic minority groups or to study how they achieved their purported success (Ogbu, 1974; Sue & Okazaki, 1990). Neo-conservatives used the “Asian American Admissions” debate/controversy to attack affirmative action.

The Chinese, with the longest API immigration history in the U.S., were the largest API ethnic group in the U.S. at 2.31 million in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). In 2007, the Chinese population grew to an estimated 3.54 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). The Chinese also made up the largest API ethnic group in Massachusetts in 2009: 82,028 of the 238,124 APIs in the Commonwealth self-identified as Chinese (University of Massachusetts Institute of Asian
American Studies, 2009). Aside from knowing their population size, there was not much information or datum on the group. When you visit Bunker Hill Community College in Charlestown, Massachusetts, you will see many Chinese and other API students. How did these students make the decision to enroll at this particular community college out of the state’s 15 community colleges or the state’s 122 degree granting colleges/universities?

This study focused on documented Chinese immigrant community college students and their individual experiences with the college-choice process. How did their identities, their experiences as documented Chinese immigrants, their experiences with language, education, culture, and family contribute to their decision-making process?

The research topic and participants for this study were chosen in part out of researcher interest. Chinese community college students were also chosen to dispel the model minority myth of a homogeneous API population overrepresented in selective four-year colleges/universities. Only Chinese students were chosen because they were part of the two groups originally described as model minorities. The Chinese were chosen also because they made up the largest API subgroup in Massachusetts and the United States in 2009. Only documented immigrants were chosen because undocumented immigrants would surely have different experiences, e.g., worrying about deportation, that would be beyond the scope of this study.

The primary research question for this study was: How did a group of documented Chinese immigrant students choose to attend Bunker Hill Community College? Guiding questions that contributed to answering the primary question were:

1. How did the participants decide that they were going to college?
2. How did the participants find out about colleges/universities?
3. What factors contributed, positively or negatively, to the participants’ college decision-making process?

4. Did their immigrant status impact their college-choice process? If so, how?

5. How satisfied were the participants with their college choice?

**Significance of the study**

As mentioned earlier, there are high enrollments in community colleges and a fairly large population of Chinese residents in the U.S. Yet, there is no study that looks at Chinese students in community colleges. This study is the first to examine the college-choice process for documented Chinese immigrant community college students.

Through this study, the voices and the lived experiences with the college-choice process of a group of documented Chinese immigrant community college students were shared. These voices had been silent in the current body of literature about community college, college-choice, and college students. Their narratives painted a different picture from the model minority myth; firstly by the fact that the participants were from working class families and not enrolled in selective colleges or universities. By sharing their experiences and examining them, the findings would contribute to the literature about college-choice from the perspective of a group of documented Chinese immigrant students. The study would provide another example to discredit the model minority myth. Lastly, the participants’ stories would shed light on how and why they chose a community college to gain upward mobility when community colleges had been reported to have low graduation and transfer rates.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter reviews bodies of literature in the following topics to provide a foundation for this study. Starting with a review on community colleges, I provide historical background for the college system and the debates surrounding the college’s activities to set the stage for why it is important and relevant to conduct a study using the community college as a field site. Next, a review of college-choice models shows that it is important to consider a model and choice factors for populations other than traditional students seeking enrollment at four-year institutions because no such model exists. Third, a review of the Asian Pacific Islander (API) and Chinese immigration history in the United States and in higher education provided historical information relevant to the participant group. Lastly, I present a review of Critical Race Theory (CRT) which was the conceptual framework for this study guiding the research questions.

Community College

There had been many debates over the role and mission of community colleges. Advocates of the two-year college defended its dedication to access to educational opportunities, especially for those who have been underserved. Critics argued against the community colleges’ lack of commitment to fulfill their primary mission of collegiate education because of low retention, transfer, and graduation rates.

Community colleges were founded for various reasons, but ultimately the goal was to provide a public good, which was not different from other higher education institutions. To meet economic and local demands for training and education, the early community colleges in the early 20th century enrolled local high school graduates who did not want to go to college far away from home [AACC, 2009]. It is important to note that at the time when it was uncommon for women to enroll in four-year colleges, women were enrolled at community colleges to
receive training to be K-8 teachers in some states that did not require their teachers to have a bachelor’s degree [AACC, 2009].

The roles and activities of the community had since evolved along with society, politics, and the economy in response to increasing demands for postsecondary education and job training. As a result, additional colleges were established. By 1930, there were 180 community colleges (AACC, 2007). During the Depression in the 1930s, the 238 community colleges responded to high unemployment rates by taking on a vocational role. A decade later, the return of military personnel from World War II created a high demand for education to readjust to civilian life. Many of them enrolled at community colleges to continue their education or for job training. In 1944, Congress passed the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, commonly known as the G.I. Bill, to provide financial assistance to veterans who wished to further their education. Three years later, the 1947 report by the Truman Commission on Higher Education for American Democracy supported the community college mission of educational access and recommended that everyone should have access to education (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). Specifically, the Truman Commission urged an enrollment increase in higher education from over 2 million to more than 4 million, a growth that could only be met with the expansion of the community colleges (Brint & Karabel, 1989) and American higher education as a whole. Important events in the 1960s in the U.S. further contributed to a boom in college enrollment. Among others included a dramatic increase in college-aged students from the Baby Boom. The Vocational Education Act of 1963 reinforced the importance of vocational education. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, sex, gender, or national origin, made it illegal for colleges to deny women and ethnic minorities a college education. The Higher Education Act of 1965 provided unprecedented funding to the country’s colleges and
universities and financial aid to students. Community colleges amended their activities to accommodate the needs of the new surge of students: offering vocational education, undergraduate certificates, associate degrees, and offering general studies tailored for students who wanted to transfer to a four-year college.

Throughout their history, community colleges’ aim was to provide educational opportunities to everyone who sought them through their open access policy. Open access fostered the American ideal that everyone deserved opportunities for upward social mobility through education (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). Community colleges provided education that was responsive to their multiple stakeholders whose needs might conflict at times. In 2010, community colleges continued to shift their activities to meet the demands of their local, state, and federal constituencies. Community colleges nationwide varied in the types of programs they offered and the activities and the constituencies they served. This list included: academic programs that lead to undergraduate certificates and associate degrees; terminal vocational education programs; English-as-a-Second Language courses and programs; remedial/developmental education; liberal arts/general studies for students to transfer to a four-year college/university; non-credit courses and programs; workforce development; dual enrollment agreements that allowed high school students to enroll at a community college to earn college credits; reverse transfer for students enrolled at one college/university and take course(s) at a community college to transfer the credits into their program of study; non-matriculated casual course-takers. An example of a conflict in the community colleges’ activities involved the curriculum: some educators wanted to advance liberal arts and improve opportunities for baccalaureate attainment; some businesses wanted more job training focusing on vocational
education. These conflicts led some critics to argue that the colleges’ activities were not aligned with their mission (Dougherty, 1994).

Critical views of the community college

Critics of the community college, especially the earlier ones, insisted that community colleges reproduced social class differences and prohibited, not promoted social mobility (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Clark, 1960a, 1960b, 1980; Dougherty, 1987, 1994). Other topics of criticism included persistence and retention, transfer function, and remedial/developmental education.

Clark (1960a, 1960b) conducted a case study that examined the transfer function of one two-year college in San Jose, California. He collected responses to questionnaires he mailed to the college, memorandums and meeting minutes, and observed teachers, students, and counselors. The data he found showed that students who intended to earn a baccalaureate degree at time of enrolling at the community college, i.e., in the transfer track, did not transfer to a four-year college or university. Clark insisted that while American higher education preached democracy and opportunities for socioeconomic mobility with open access admissions at community colleges, it ultimately used community colleges as a system to weed out students from entering four-year institutions by enforcing the destined and “structured” failure of students with “little academic ability” (Clark, 1960b, p. 571).

Using the findings from this case study, Clark (1960a) argued that community colleges perpetuated the students’ low socioeconomic status because they have institutionalized sequential steps to “cool out” students’ aspirations for a baccalaureate degree. The premise was that there was a positive correlation between education and income: the higher the degree level earned, the higher the income. According to Clark, the community college created procedures to “channel students out of transfer programs and into curricula that terminated in the community
college” (Clark, 1980, p. 16). Clark suggested five steps by which community colleges prevented students from going into the academic track to transfer to a four-year institution: the “reorienting process” which was synonymous with the “cooling out function.”

Clark (1960a) insisted that the cooling out process began with pre-enrollment. Community colleges tested students’ levels of proficiency in reading, writing, math to place the low-scorers into remedial education prolonging their initial plans of a two-year education. After these “latent terminal students” enrolled, they were advised and guided by counselors to either go into or stay in the vocational track. Clark labeled students who originally indicated they wanted to pursue a baccalaureate degree but ended up terminating their education at the community college level as “latent terminal students.” Upon enrollment and as part of their orientation, students were told to take assessments and interest inventories which told students that their areas of interest rested in the vocational track. After they started classes, counselors documented these students’ academic progress with the “need for improvement notices.” In so doing, counselors could “prove” their point and to detach personal ties and emotions when the time came to dismiss a student. Prior to dismissal, students were placed on academic probation. According to Clark (1960a), “probationary status is the final blow to hopes of transferring” (p. 574).

As Clark (1960b) reported in his study, transfer rates from San Jose Junior College to four-year institutions were low: 24.1% compared to 22.0% for the state of California in 1955-1956. When a primary function of the community college was to prepare students to transfer to four-year institutions, the expectation was that more students should have transferred. Decades later, national transfer rates from community colleges to four-year institutions continued to be low, especially for ethnic minority students (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). A National Center for
Education Statistics (2005) report that drew from the 1995-96 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study data showed that the national transfer rate from community colleges to four-year institutions was 28.2%. For White, non-Hispanics, the transfer rate was 32.8%; Black, non-Hispanics at 14.2%; Hispanics at 9.5%. The sample size for Asian Pacific Islanders and American Indians/Alaskan Natives was too small to be included in the statistical findings. In 2005, the transfer rate for Massachusetts community colleges to Massachusetts state four-year colleges was 51.7%, which was still not high enough for some educators and policy makers (Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, 2007b).

Clark’s (1960a, 1960b) conclusions from his study had serious limitations. For one, Clark generalized findings from one community college in one city in California to all community colleges nationwide. When he revisited his 1960 work, Clark (1980) argued that the generalization was justified because he found that the cooling out process was a result of the community college system’s open access policy. Other limitations to Clark’s (1960a, 1960b) findings include the fact that the social and economic realities of the 1960s in the U.S. were not considered. Specifically, back in the 1960’s, women and minorities were not encouraged to seek professional careers. It could have been the case that some students ended up not pursuing a baccalaureate degree because of social, economic, and racial pressures. The 1960s were also marked with a high demand for vocational education. The demand was so high that states took greater control over community colleges’ occupational education emphasizing this form of education was “absolutely central to the community college’s mission” (Dougherty, 1994, p. 220). There could also be the possibility that a student originally intended to be in the transfer track but later changed her/his mind for a myriad of reasons that were not results of the community college’s system efforts. One such example could be that a student discontinues
her/his studies because a job opportunity became available. In Jackson’s (1982) college choice model, which will be discussed later, he proposed that employment could be a factor that could encourage or discourage a student from pursuing college.

Clark (1960a, 1960b) reported a positive correlation between students’ socio-economic background and academic preparation and transfer rate but did not discuss this finding. He used the data that low-income students did not transfer to assert that community colleges, as a system, perpetuated their low socio-economic status. The study also did not account for other factors that could have deterred the latent terminal student from transferring to a four-year college, e.g., sudden loss of income, poor health, life changes (London, 1978) because college aspiration alone did not ensure persistence and degree completion (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). What were the students’ other reasons and motivations for attending a community college? Astin’s (1999) theory of involvement talked about the importance of student involvement in the college community as a factor of persistence. How involved were the participants with campus life and activities? Makuakane-Dreschsel and Hagedorn (2000) proposed four significant factors that promoted persistence for API students in their study: cumulative grade point average, financial aid, average number of credit hours attempted and location of the institution. What types of financial and moral support did Clark’s participants have to continue their studies? What other factors affected their persistence and eventual transfer? It would have also been helpful to have had a discussion as to why Clark suggested that an educational system would intentionally deter students from transferring? Whose idea was it to implement these “systemic efforts” to prevent upward mobility?

Similar to Clark’s (1960a, 1960b, 1980) findings, Karabel (1986) who studied the community college system since his 1972 thesis concluded that community colleges tracked
students and reinforced social stratification in the 1980s. As a continuation of his research on community colleges, Karabel with Brint (1989) co-published historical research on the community college and a case study on Massachusetts community colleges. Together, the authors asserted that community colleges “diverted” students’ “dreams” for upward mobility by diverting their academic goals for a baccalaureate degree to a terminal vocational degree.

Taking a sociological approach, Brint and Karabel (1989) examined the history and growth of the community college system nationally between 1900 and 1985 and the Massachusetts community colleges in particular. The authors maintained that community colleges, through their programs and staff, deterred students from transferring and earning a baccalaureate degree because they were advocates for vocational education. Vocational education was made the community college’s niche because that was the only way national leaders felt the community colleges could have a place in American higher education (Brint & Karabel). This was the case in Massachusetts. In a state known for its elite and private colleges/universities, like Harvard University and Massachusetts of Institute of Technology, Massachusetts did not establish its first public community college until after the passing of the Furcolo’s Community College Bill of 1958, which called for the need of community colleges to meet the demands from expansion of residents to provide skilled labor.

Whereas this “niche” had been perceived negatively by those who believed community colleges’ role was the collegiate function, more people have come to recognize the importance of this niche in today’s economy. Given a shortage in skilled labor that requires an associate degree or undergraduate certificate, community colleges were sought out to provide additional specialized training (Lassen, 2007), especially in the fields of allied health. President Obama’s 2009 American Graduation Initiative also spoke to the importance of producing more college
graduates and workforce development and training at community colleges. To that end, the President pledged an investment of $12 billion over 10 years in community college reform: conferring an additional 5 million community college degrees and certificates by 2020; improving college completion rates; striking up new partnerships with business and industry to offer more training; renewing college facilities; creating new online skills laboratory (United States Office of the Press Secretary, 2009).

*Alternative views of the community college*

In a different approach to examine the community college, Dougherty (1994) provided views that were in support and those that criticized the community college on three key issues: the impact of the community college; the origins of the community college; the reason why the community college became “so strongly vocational” (p. 7). Dougherty concluded that the assertions made by both supporters and critics were incomplete because they did not take into consideration the full picture of the complex community college system. The community college, unlike the four-year college, had and continued to be more directly and heavily influenced by its constituencies, especially the local and federal governments because they are its greatest funding sources. In 2009, state appropriations were the most significant funding source for the public community colleges at 38%, followed by 20% from tuition and fees and 17% from local appropriations (AACC, 2009). Dougherty introduced the theory of “relative autonomy of the state” in an attempt to explain the “contradictory” nature of the community college because the college was “shaped” by its many stakeholders coming from both the private and public sectors (p. 8). Mentioned earlier were some of the many activities in which community colleges are engaged: ranging from academic programs for transfer to terminal vocation education to workforce development.
Dougherty (1984) provided some insights into some of the criticism about the community college. In response to critics’ claims that community colleges’ institutional features hinder baccalaureate attainment, Dougherty offered other reasons for the low transfer rate, e.g., loss of interest in transferring because of a difficult process; loss of credits upon transfer; life events; insufficient funds; and fear of adjustment as all possible contributors to the low transfer rate. There was also attrition after transfer because students had trouble adjusting to the four-year colleges which did not provide adequate support or opportunities for social and academic integration.

In describing the origins of the community college and its development through time, Dougherty emphasized the different roles of the community college. These roles were initiated by different groups. The community college was founded in part to provide general education as the lower division of a four-year baccalaureate education. The college then took on the role of providing community and vocational education which would mean no transferring to a four-year college/university. The rise in remedial education prolonged the anticipated two-year education before potentially transferring into a four-year. In some cases, remediation deterred students from pursuing their degree. From this regard, Dougherty concluded that the community colleges were both democratizing and anti-democratizing. They were democratizing because community colleges’ open access admissions policy provided educational opportunities. At the same time, community colleges were anti-democratizing because of their execution of the remedial education program and their focus on vocational education deterring students from transferring to a four-year college/university.

Dougherty (1994) added that critics, like Clark (1960a, 1960b, 1980) and Brint and Karabel (1989), might have falsely assumed low transfer rates were direct results of deliberate
actions by community colleges. Dougherty cautioned that this assumption was a mistake. It was not so much that the community college intentionally prohibited baccalaureate attainment; rather, the community college inadvertently produced this effect because of its “attempt to reconcile many different and often antithetical goals. It has contradictory effects because it has contradictory goals” (Dougherty, 1994, p. 106).

In an attempt to reconcile the contradictory goals and improve education, Dougherty (1994) made a proposal for the future of community colleges. Dougherty recommended major educational policy changes and to increase scholarship on educational change. Dougherty insisted community colleges maintain an academic connection to four-year colleges/universities and, therefore, should provide more than vocational education. Like Clark (1980), Dougherty also proposed the idea to convert the community college into a four-year college. Miami Dade Community College was an example of this conversion. In 2003, Miami Dade Community College became Miami Dade College and began offering the community college baccalaureate, i.e., “a baccalaureate awarded by the community college” (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Edison Community College became Edison College and offered a baccalaureate degree in Public Safety Management. Increasingly, community colleges were granted permission to offer baccalaureate degrees, but only in selected disciplines. There were 31 public and 52 independent community colleges that confer bachelor’s degrees in 2009 (AACC, 2009). Presumably, offering baccalaureate degrees at the community college would increase baccalaureate attainment. This new function, however, added to the ongoing debate of the role of the community college.

Dougherty also suggested making the community college a part of the state university system to help ease the transfer process. A consideration he did not make was to develop
stronger and better articulation agreements between the community college and the state four-year institution.

Critics who focused heavily on low baccalaureate attainment for community college students neglected to evaluate the entirety of the student college experience: student experience with college-choice; their transition to the four-year receiving institution; their experience while enrolled; their plans for departure (graduation or attrition) and subsequent to departure. Largely, attrition rates are impacted by the experience while the student is enrolled, but that experience is influenced by the reasons for attending college (Astin, 1999).

*Persistence, retention, and remedial education*

Clark (1960a), Brint and Karabel (1989), and Dougherty (1994) have contributed positively to community college research having brought to the public’s attention that there was a problem at the community college: low transfer rates. Factors associated with low transfer rates were the community college’s remedial education function and their low retention rates. Clark (1960a) proposed that community colleges tested students when they first enrolled to place low achievers into remedial education. He maintained that remedial education serves to “weed” out these students from pursuing liberal arts education and might even discourage persistence (p. 163). Similarly, Dougherty (1994) stated remedial education could serve as a deterrent for a student to persist and transfer because it prolonged her/his years of study.

The rise in scrutiny in remedial education began in the 1980s when the government and the general public began to seek more accountability from the higher education system. What some critics neglected to realize was that these students did not start at the community college. Students had to have proven completion of high school or high school equivalency before admission to the community college. Some community colleges enrolled students without these
diplomas if they knew that these students could “benefit” from the education at their institutions as prescribed by the Ability to Benefit legislation executed by the U.S. Department of Education. In order to prepare students to succeed in college-level coursework, community colleges enrolled students in remedial courses based on their academic skills proficiency. The fact was students come into college with varying levels of academic preparedness. Students who were academically underprepared require remedial support. Students who completed high school where instruction was not in English require instruction and support to acquire English language skills, without which would be impossible to succeed in college-level work in the U.S.

Statistics showed that remedial education was necessary. State and college officials knew from the National Center for Education Statistics (2004) data that over 40% of first-time community college students required remedial/developmental education compared to 28% in all postsecondary education institutions. The conundrum was: four-year colleges/universities did not want to provide remedial education because of cost and because they did not want to “water down” the academic rigors of their curricula. At the same time, they criticize community colleges for serving this much needed function because remedial education was linked to low retention and transfer rates (Vaughan, 1992). The fundamental question was “who should provide postsecondary remedial/developmental education?” (Ignash, 1997)

In 1996, the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education passed remedial education policy reform with the impetus to improve academic standards across the four-year public college system. This policy capped the state’s public four-year colleges/universities’ admission of new students who needed remedial education to 10% in 1997 and 5% in 1998 (Mazzeo, 2002). Remedial education was to be provided by community colleges for the rest of the students who needed it. In response to this new policy, some institutions like the University of Massachusetts
Lowell and Middlesex Community College created a partnership called the Lowell Connections. Under this partnership, students who needed remedial education were allowed to live on the University of Massachusetts Lowell campus while they completed their remedial work at Middlesex Community College. Upon completion of the remedial work, students would begin their college-level curriculum at the University. In 2001, the City University of New York (CUNY) fully implemented their plans to eliminate most remedial classes at their eleven senior colleges (Hebel, 2002).

In a country with its roots in immigration and in a society that promotes the idea of upward mobility through the “open door college,” such remedial education policies essentially shut the doors to advancement opportunities in the U.S. by not providing adequate remedial education. Eliminating remedial education hurt immigrants and students with limited English proficiency (Hebel, 2002).

Community colleges’ reputation

All the criticisms against the community college pointed to the perception that community colleges were on the low end of the higher education hierarchy (Vaughan, 1992). Vaughan (1992) called the community colleges “prisoners of elitism” in higher education. He explained that there was this “myth” that community colleges were not as good as four-year institutions, when in fact they were two different education systems serving different populations. All of Vaughan’s suggestions for why this myth persisted stemmed from the societally imparted importance of research in academe. Vaughan insisted that instead of defending themselves for not being research institutions, which encouraged the debate to determine whether teaching or research was more important, community colleges should self-
identify their role in higher education to educate society that “scholarship” did not equal research only.

Vaughan (1992) had provided a seldom openly discussed idea of the lack of stature and respect that community colleges, their faculty, staff and students have. He contributed to an also seldom discussed view that scholarship could and should be more than research. Boyer (1990) proposed a similar notion emphasizing the importance of considering scholarship for faculty in various forms. Specifically, Boyer asserted that teaching was a form of scholarship that was particularly appropriate for community colleges. Furthermore, teaching could be enhanced with research.

How the community college is perceived could be an important factor in college-choice because some prospective students consider the reputation of the institution in coming up with their list of colleges to which they would like to apply (Teranishi et al., 2004). Chapman (1981), Jackson (1982), Litten (1982), and Hossler and Gallagher (1987), among others, have attempted to study the college-choice phenomenon to understand how students chose to enroll in a particular college and how institutions could improve their recruitment strategies.

This review of the community college provided the history of the growth of the community college system in the U.S. as well as the controversies that surround them. The debates over the community college’s collegiate function and the proposed systemic efforts the college system exerts to reify social stratification (Clark, 1960a, 1960b, 1980) are of particular interest and importance to this study. Specifically, assuming it were true that reputation matters as a college choice factor, I wanted to see if these controversies and debates about community colleges affect the college choice experience for a group of working class immigrants.

**College-choice models**
College-choice for traditional students in four-year colleges/universities

For each of the college-choice models that will be reviewed here, the intent was to develop an understanding of each model to identify factors that each author or set of authors proposed to then determine how well they fit or not fit the participants of this study.

Chapman (1981)

Chapman (1981) was interested in trying to understand students’ choice of which college to attend and not their college aspirations because he wanted to know how to help college recruiters improve their recruitment strategies and policies during a time when undergraduate college enrollments were declining. To that end, Chapman reviewed existing literature and the use of printed marketing materials to develop a college-choice model that looked at both student characteristics and external factors. Chapman insisted that 1) student characteristics, such as socioeconomic status (SES), aptitude, aspirations and expectations, and high school performance, taken into consideration with 2) external factors like influence of significant others (family and peers), somewhat fixed college characteristics (location, cost, program offerings), and the colleges’ efforts to communicate with students, and 3) the student’s expectations of college life would yield the student’s decision to choose to attend a particular college. Through his analyses of existing literature, Chapman found that a student’s SES had an impact on her/his college aspirations and expectations. SES had a positive relationship with educational aspirations and expectations. Family income, as a proxy for SES, influenced the type of institution to a student attended: more high income students attended four-year colleges and universities than low income students. Chapman also found that printed marketing materials were important in affecting whether or not a student would attend a particular college, but that the significance was not as high as colleges believed, especially because the materials were
written at a higher level than the students could understand. His findings, although limited because he studied only traditional students in the U.S., were significant as they were provided a basis for other researchers to use in their studies of college-choice.

*Jackson (1982)*

Like Chapman (1981), Jackson (1982) introduced a college-choice model that was also focused on traditional students and out of concerns of low enrollment in postsecondary education. In addition, Jackson was concerned about student persistence and its subsequent effects on the economy. Jackson’s goal was to inform public policy. In doing so, he analyzed two common “complementary” choice models: sociological and economic. The sociological model focused on college aspirations while the economic model focused on the outcome of choice, as a process of elimination based on constraints and evaluation. Through his “judgmental research” where he examined both models and other literature, Jackson used “indirect evidence and some subjective judgment to rank typical enrollment-directed tactics according to their efficiency” (Jackson, 1982: 238). He would then propose his combined college-choice model with three phases: preference, exclusion, evaluation. He identified different variables that he considered part of each phase and evaluated the strength of their effects on college-choice.

“Preference,” from a sociological model, referred to the students’ educational or career aspirations while in high school. Jackson proposed that aspirations were linked to the students’ high school academic achievement, their social network (e.g., friends, peers, neighborhoods), and their family backgrounds, which helped determine if the student wanted to pursue a college education. “Exclusion,” from the economic perspective, spoke to the factors that would prevent students from attending college. Specifically, Jackson talked about the importance of geography
as it related to finances. A student might not be able to attend college if s/he could not afford to travel to an institution or reside there. Other exclusion factors included information (e.g., how much relevant information did the student have to make a choice that would be most beneficial) and academic experience (e.g., whether they were academically or vocationally driven). Lastly, “evaluation” spoke to the process with which students considered the factors in the preference and exclusion phases to make a decision about attending a particular college. Jackson asserted that the most important factor in evaluation was the net cost of attending a particular college. Preference and exclusion variables only informed the college set, i.e., set of colleges to apply to. From these three phases and referencing statistical findings from his 1977 thesis that were not included in his article, Jackson concluded that family background, academic experience, geographical location and college costs were the strongest variables that contributed to college-choice.

With these findings, Jackson identified nine varied tactics that could influence enrollment, with a goal of not only increasing incoming enrollment but also maintaining it because he felt that the issue of persistence was not receiving adequate attention. Jackson stated that his choice of the nine tactics was “arbitrary” but insisted that they were representative of “important college-oriented tactics” (p. 242). The nine tactic names that he chose were “mnemonic” (p. 242) and were as follows: school quality; college offerings; college location; academic help; public subsidy; general aid; targeted aid; general information; specific information.

Jackson evaluated the costs-benefits for each tactic to determine the most efficient one using his judgment from experience and prior fieldwork. He proposed a formula to assess efficiency. Efficiency was determined by a measure of the impact (yield of students who
selected to attend a particular college) over a measure of cost (resources used to fund the tactic). Jackson concluded that improving the academic experience was the best tactic to “ensure maximum social gain for minimum social expenditure” (p. 246). Programs like Upward Bound, a federally funded program that provided eligible students support and resources to attend college, would improve the academic experience. Other tactics included providing financial aid or information about college. In the end, Jackson made a strong push to improve the academic experience before and after college enrollment because of its influences on choice which affected enrollment which, in turn, impacted persistence and then the economy through the labor force.

Jackson encouraged education administrators and policy makers to explore the tactics he proposed to find one that would work for them. It was unclear if Jackson intended for them to test each tactic or to come up with others because as he stated, the nine he identified were arbitrary. Other limitations to Jackson’s study had to do with his limited focus on traditional students only. Lastly, there was no empirical research that was presented to justify his findings. Jackson tried to justify his “crude, exploratory analysis” which was based on “judgmental research” without “hard” data because his “soft” analyses were done systematically. To his credit, nevertheless, the factors and the tactics he identified made logical sense that they would impact a student’s college-choice process. The same factors, e.g., family background, academic experience, location of institution, and cost, had been identified in other literature on college-choice. This was his argument in providing “soft” systematic analyses. Jackson also included a factor that other authors had not at the time: job characteristics. A student’s college-choice process could be influenced by how attractive she/he thought a particular job was and could choose to work instead of going to college.

*Litten (1982)*
Litten (1982) reviewed three studies on college-choice to propose his own model and to make recommendations to college administrators on recruitment strategies. He looked at 1) Gilmour, Spiro, and Dolich’s 1978 study, who interviewed 100 students from Penn State’s six campuses and seniors from nearby high schools to ask them about how they searched for colleges and how they decided on which college to attend; 2) Lewis and Morrison’s 1975 study, who interviewed 144 students asking questions about search and choice, similar to Gilmour, Spiro, and Dolich; and 3) the 1979 College Board and Carleton College with Litten, Sullivan, Brodigan, and Morris study1, who collected survey data about the college-choice process from market research in six metropolitan areas.

In his review, Litten (1982) focused on the “college-choice process and personal and social phenomena that affect the way it is conducted” (p. 384) and not the outcome. He wanted to see which factors affected which segments of the population to support his claim that marketing needed to be directed at a targeted audience in order for college administrators to maximize their recruitment efforts. To do so, it was important to understand the audience.

Litten suggested modifying college-choice models to include various social factors to better understand the audience. His three phase model started with a student’s desire to attend college and a decision to attend college; followed by the student’s investigation of institutions seeking information; followed by the student’s decision to apply and then enroll in college. He considered social factors like race, sex, academic ability, parental education, and geography. Litten found from his study that overall there were not many differences across the groups. At the same time, Litten recognized that his study was limited and required further investigation. He found that parental education was positively correlated with productive and successful searches and had stronger effects on the college search and selection process than other factors,

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1 This study was not published at the time Litten wrote the 1982 article.
like race or gender. A successful search was one measured by accurate identification and
efficient use of resources, e.g., college guides and campus visits.

Litten proposed to include the social factors in his college-choice model because the then
existing models were “highly generalized” and assumed one homogeneous audience. At the
same time, Litten only focused on traditional students.

*Hossler and Gallagher (1987)*

Using the findings from Jackson (1982) and Litten (1982), Hossler and Gallagher (1987)
created a model that took into consideration of factors that had been identified as contributors to
college-choice, e.g., parental encouragement, academic performance, and cost. Hossler and
Gallagher (1987) reviewed additional literature on college-choice including Chapman (1981) to
propose a new model with three interactive stages that covered the areas of college aspirations
through college enrollment to help inform colleges and universities with recruitment strategies:
predisposition, search, and choice.

“Predisposition” referred to students’ college and/or work plans for after high school.
These plans were influenced by the students’ background: socioeconomic status; academic
abilities; parents; peers; program of study (track) at the high school, e.g., academic or vocational.

“Search” referred to the proactive steps students would take to research and determine the types
and names of colleges to pursue. Similar to a Litten (1982) finding about search that Black
students yielded less productive searches than White students, Hossler and Gallagher asserted
that the search was not always productive. Hossler and Gallagher found that students from low
socioeconomic backgrounds with parents who did not attend college spend more time searching
but yielded less useful information. The authors also found that it was more important for
students in the search phase to have information on different types of institutions than
information on specific institutions because students mistakenly self-select out of applying to a particular college “due to a lack of awareness of the range of institutions as well as the accurate information about institutions” (p. 215). Having more general information would allow the students to determine which type of institution and then which specific institutions to pursue. A major factor in the search phase was net cost of college attendance. “Choice” referred to the student evaluation of the “college set,” i.e., the set of colleges from which to choose to attend. Hossler and Gallagher pointed out that the college set varied with socio-economic background and parents’ education because choice was heavily impacted by search. Among the key factors of choice were the institution’s reputation and financial consideration. These were two factors that both Chapman (1981) and Jackson (1982) also identified as having impact on college-choice.

For each of the three stages, Hossler and Gallagher indicated the typical level of involvement colleges/universities had in the process to determine their level of influence in student decision-making. A limitation in Hossler and Gallagher’s article was they did not identify implications for policymakers as they indicated they would. Simply stating that state and federal agencies needed to pay attention to how students choose college was not enough to provide recommendations for improvement. Knowing that parental involvement was a highly significant contributor to college aspiration and enrollment was not enough to develop systems that could increase and improve such involvement. Similarly, knowing that financial aid was a key factor in the decision-making process was not enough to enhance the U.S. financial aid system to better serve students. Nevertheless, Hossler and Gallagher provided a great overview of their college-choice model and recommendations for recruiting, e.g., asking faculty to send welcome letters to accepted students to provide a personal touch and connection.
Of the four college-choice models reviewed here, I found that Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) model was most comprehensive. It provided a logical set of stages to explain the college choice process taking into account a multitude of factors which included social factors that Litten (1982) argued had been missing in earlier models. Litten (1982) asserted that models that did not consider social factors, like race and socioeconomic status, assumed a homogeneous student population. For these reasons, Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) model and the longitudinal study that examined their model (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999) helped guide this study.

_Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999)_

In an attempt to put Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) model to work, Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999) conducted a longitudinal study between 1986 and 1994 following students since their freshman year in high school in Indiana. The authors chose to relate their findings through stories of eight participants. Without explicitly stating why and how they were chosen, the authors said these selected participants were representative of the student population.

Hossler et al.’s (1999) study attempted to answer six overarching research questions:

1) How do students develop postsecondary educational aspirations?

2) How do students find out about colleges?

3) How do students choose a college?

4) How do tuition costs and financial aid influence the college decision-making process?

5) Do students realize their postsecondary educational aspirations?

6) What is the parents’ role in students’ college-choices? (p. 10)

The study began with a survey of 4,923 students and their parents in January 1987. Eight follow-up surveys were administered to these students and parents between 1987 and 1990.
Nine in-depth interviews were conducted with a subsample of 56 students and their parents between 1989 and 1994. All participants lived in Indiana and attended high schools in different areas of the state.

This nine-year study informed about the characteristics for the three stages of the Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) college-choice model. Hossler et al.’s (1999) approach to data collection and analyses focused on the “chronological development of the postsecondary plans and aspirations of high school students” (p. 83) and their contributing factors.

In the end, Hossler et al. (1999) found that parental encouragement was the most important, but not only, factor that contributed to the predisposition stage of the college decision-making process. The predisposition stage occurred during the ninth grade. For the search stage, which took place in the participants’ tenth and eleventh grades in high school, the authors found that the one significant contributor to college aspiration stability was the student’s level of engagement in gathering information about college. The authors neglected to explain why other factors, like parental encouragement which was a strong predictor of college aspirations in the predisposition stage, were not a strong factor in the search stage. It was at the choice stage (grade 12) where all factors interacted with each other and consequently contributed to college aspirations and plans to enroll. Parental, peer, teacher, and counselor support affected whether or not students attended college and the type of college they attended. Consistent parental involvement and encouragement throughout high school was especially important in student persistence.

Similar to Jackson’s (1982) and Litten’s (1982) model, Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987), as exemplified through the study by Hossler et al. (1999), was also based on studies with traditional students, i.e., those who were finishing high school in the United States and
considering enrolling in postsecondary education after graduation. The models did not consider other student populations. The interactive stages corresponded with specific high school grade levels, which were not easily applicable or transferable to “nontraditional” students without modification or further examination with different populations (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). By definition, nontraditional students included students who might have delayed enrollment by not entering postsecondary education the year after graduating from high school; could be adult learners; could be enrolled part-time; could work full-time; could be financially independent according to financial aid requirements; could be a parent or guardian responsible as a caregiver; could be a single parent; could not have a high school diploma or equivalent (Choy, 2002). To fill this void, Bers and Smith (1987) attempted to study college-choice for nontraditional students, especially adult learners.

*College-choice for nontraditional students in community colleges*

*Bers and Smith (1987)*

Bers and Smith (1987) recognized that existing literature on college-choice process focused on traditional students while the nontraditional student population continued to grow. The authors cited Hossler’s work which indicated that although Hossler suspected the college-choice process would be different for students entering a two-year versus four-year institution, the phenomenon had not be studied. Bers and Smith decided to conduct a study on college-choice for nontraditional students at a public suburban community college. The authors did not define what they considered as nontraditional students. Based on the criteria used for participation in their study, their definition would have included adult learners who delayed their seeking postsecondary education.
Bers and Smith recruited and conducted four focus group interviews with 70 nontraditional students: three focus groups with a total of 55 women and one focus group with 15 men. Bers and Smith divided the college-choice process into three parts: reasons for returning to college (motivation); search and decision processes; retention. The authors found gender differences in the motivations for going to college: women were more likely to cite life transitions, e.g., divorce, children grew up; men were more likely to cite job-related reasons, such as job required additional training. Contrary to Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) model, Bers and Smith found that a majority of these nontraditional students did not engage in stages: predisposition, search, and choice. Instead, they found that these participants searched for and decided which college to attend at the same time, which the authors interpreted as Hossler and Gallagher’s search and choice stages were combined as one for these nontraditional students. It was unclear, however, what the authors actually meant that two stages were combined into one. Important factors that impacted the participants’ search and decision processes were convenience of the college location and cost, two factors that have been noted as significant for community college seekers which are relevant for my study. A major factor that influenced the participants’ retention was support from faculty. For the women participants, this was crucial because they came to college intimidated by the younger students doubting their own academic abilities.

Bers and Smith contributed to a start in examining college-choice models for a population outside of the current research of traditional college students. The demographic background of the participants were unclear aside from their gender and that they fit the criteria to participate in the study: at least 25 years old; enrolled in the fall 1985 term as their first term of enrollment; completed at least 15 credits by the time the focus groups were conducted in spring 1985. Because the nontraditional student population in general varied in their
characteristics, e.g., length of gap between high school completion and college enrollment, it was not possible to get more meaning out of Bers and Smith’s study other than what they have presented. A major finding from their study was that their participants searched and chose a particular college at the same time. This finding would have contributed even more to the literature had an explanation of how this happened and reasons for it been provided.

*Somers, Haines, Keene, Bauer, Pfeiffer et al. (2006)*

Somers et al. (2006) attempted to create a college-choice model for community colleges because they recognized even though community college enrollments were very high, over 40% of all undergraduate students, current college-choice models focused only on traditional students who were White and were going to four-year institutions. Moreover, the authors insisted that college-choice models were not one-size-fits-all.

Somers et al. intended to begin a long-term research endeavor starting with this study. They conducted focus groups with 223 community college students across five two-year colleges in one state to try to understand why they chose to attend a two-year college. The authors identified six themes that spoke to different experiences of the participants. Some participants were discouraged to seek a college education. College options were limited for some who did not have information about their options. Some participants wanted to work, study, and live in the same area so location was very important. Price, specifically, “sticker price” was more important than “net price.” Net price was the final price after deductions from financial aid, loans, grants and/or scholarships. For some participants, this was because they did not qualify for aid. Some only qualified for loans, which meant a debt they would have incurred and would have to repay. This information about cost should inform college and policy makers to be wary when setting tuition costs and discounting through financial aid packages or scholarships.
With these findings, Somers et al. proposed their preliminary framework for community college-choice which included 10 factors that fell into three categories: aspirations and encouragement, institutional characteristics, and finances. Instead of stages or phases in college choice models like those proposed by Chapman (1981), Jackson (1982), Litten (1982), and Hossler and Gallagher (1987), Somers et al. insisted that the interplay of these 10 factors contributed to college-choice considerations for community college. Although many of these factors closely resembled those already identified by other authors, e.g., location, financial aid, and aspirations, there was a notable difference. Instead of using “student background” which included attributes like student’s family and SES as a factor, Somers et al. proposed “family encouragement” and “peer information and encouragement” in their model. Not including SES was of particular interest especially because Somers et al. found that their participants were concerned about cost of attendance and mentioned in their discussion that one African-American participant reported “wealthier white students in his high school received very different messages about attending college” (p. 64). Moreover, existing research showed that SES was a factor. Cabrera and LaNasa’s (2000) analyses of the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) data showed SES was a significant factor that affected how likely a student would apply to and enroll at a four-year college/university. Chapman (1981) found that students from low SES backgrounds enrolled at two-year colleges more than their peers from higher SES backgrounds, who tended to enroll at four-year colleges.

Somers et al.’s (2006) provided important findings having painted a picture of the college choice experience for nontraditional students that varied from that of traditional students. In addition to the variation in use of “student background” as just described, Somers et al.’s (2006) finding that nontraditional students viewed stickers price was more important than net price
contradicted what Jackson (1982) and Hossler and Gallagher (1987) found from their traditional students who placed more importance on the net price.

Missing from the studies by Bers and Smith (1987), Somers et al. (2006), and many other studies were considerations of race in college-choice, as well as factors like age, English language proficiency, and immigrant status. Perna (2000) who analyzed 1990-1994 NELS data, found huge gaps in college enrollment across racial and ethnic groups where Black and Hispanic students were far less likely than their White and API peers to enroll in four-year institutions. As a result of these findings, Perna argued for research and college choice models that would examine these differences across racial and ethnic groups. Similarly, Hurtado et al.’s (1997) statistical analyses on 1988-1992 NELS data and the Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study data (BPS: 90/92) revealed that African-American and Latinos had lower educational aspirations and were less likely to enroll at their first college-choice than their White and API peers.

*College-choice for racial groups*

In an attempt to understand the college-choice process for selected racial and ethnic groups, Teranishi (2004) and Teranishi et al. (2004) conducted studies on selected API ethnic subgroups. Selected subgroups were chosen because the authors did not want to contribute to generalizations made about the APIs as a homogeneous group.

*Teranishi (2004)*

Teranishi (2004) studied the college-choice experience, with a focus on college aspirations and expectations, for a group of Hmong refugee and Vietnamese immigrant and refugee high school students in California. He started off by providing a background of the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* case to set the stage that the court had ruled
that separate did not mean equal confirming that there were racial inequalities in the U.S. With this in mind, Teranishi took a qualitative approach to study ethnic enclaves, e.g., “Chinatown,” “Japantown,” and “Little Phnom Penh,” as a form of racial residential segregation to see if they influenced college aspirations and outcomes for his participants.

Through in-person interviews, Teranishi (2004) learned that cost of college attendance in relation to poverty, language, specifically linguistic discrimination, and family affected the participants’ college decision-making. He found that not unlike other immigrant students, his participants had to manage dual identities: API ethnic identity and “American” identity (Chou & Feagin, 2008). The Hmong and Vietnamese participants also juggled expectations of the home and school which affected their college choice. Vietnamese participants reported their parents wanted them to attend more selective colleges and universities. Hmong students indicated their parents wanted them to attend colleges close to home regardless of selectivity. Also not uncommon in immigrant families, the young Hmong participants felt that there was a role reversal at home because they became the interpreters for the parents and had to take care of matters in the household, especially those that required English. Teranishi’s findings challenged the myth of APIs as the model minority which assumed a homogeneous API race that enjoyed academic success in selective colleges/universities. Teranishi gave a voice to the participants whose stories had not been told. He encouraged further college-choice studies to examine the role of racial and ethnic segregation in the context of language, culture, immigration history, and socio-economic background because he had found that these factors were different for different API ethnic groups he studied.

Teranishi et al. (2004) conducted an exploratory study to examine the effect of class and ethnicity on the college choice decision-making process and outcomes for five API ethnic groups: Chinese American, Filipino American, Japanese American, Korean American, and Southeast Asian American. The authors extracted a subset of data from the 1997 Freshman Survey, sponsored by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the University of California, Los Angeles. Specifically, they looked at the responses from API first-year, first-time freshmen (n=18,106) at four-year institutions to showcase the diversity in the API population.

The authors approached this study because they did not support the normative idea that the API population was a homogeneous group. They were also interested in contributing to the literature about API education achievements. They referenced work by other researchers who attempted to explain API educational achievements but fell short because, in part, they assumed a homogeneous API population. Of note was John Ogbu’s 1974 work that the authors cited. Specifically, Ogbu attributed API educational achievements to their social status as immigrants who came to the U.S. willingly versus those who entered the country as a result of their home countries and people being conquered, colonized or enslaved by the U.S. Teranishi et al. also cited Sue and Okazaki’s 1990 theory that attributed API educational achievements to parents who pushed their children to succeed in school as a way to gain upward social mobility because they did not have these opportunities outside of education.

Teranishi et al. (2004) found these theories and existing studies on API educational achievement limiting because they did not account for the various levels of achievements within the API population. The authors ran descriptive analyses to present a profile of the student
groups then ran regression analyses in three stages to determine which factors contributed to the students’ college-choice processes and destinations.

Through their study, the authors presented the diversity across and within the API ethnic groups and the impact these differences had on their college-choice process and college destination (level of selectivity, public versus private four-year college versus university). Here are samples of their findings that showcased the differences in college destinations based on ethnicity and class (as determined by parental income):

- Controlling for parental income,
  - Chinese (34.6%) and Korean (38.1%) students attended highly selective colleges at a higher rate than the other API ethnic groups.
  - Southeast Asian students (43.0%) and Filipino students (40.6%) were more likely to attend 4-year public colleges than the other API ethnic groups.
  - Japanese (37.7%) and Korean (22.1%) students were more likely to attend 4-year private colleges than the other API ethnic groups.
- Chinese students whose parental income was less than $25,000 (24.5%) were less likely to attend institutions of highly selective institutions than their peers with parental income of more than $75,000 (49.5%).
- Chinese students whose parental income was less than $25,000 were more likely to attend a four-year public college (39.5%) than a private one (11.4%).
- Filipino students (88.8%) and Southeast Asian students (84.3%) whose family incomes were less than $25,000 were more likely to attend less selective
institutions. Korean students (29.5%) and Chinese students (24.5%) from the same income bracket selected to attend highly selective institutions.

Students reported differences in factors that impacted their college decision-making: information and guidance, influences of cost and aid, influences of prestige/reputation of the college/university.

- Controlling for parental income,
  - More Southeast Asian students (11.3%) than Chinese students (7.3%) reported seeking information and guidance from high school counselors.
  - More Filipino students (33.3%) than Japanese students (22.7%) thought low tuition was important.
  - More Korean students (56.2%) than Japanese students (55.6%) thought the academic reputation of the institution was important.
  - More Chinese students (54.6%) than Southeast Asian students (30.7%) applied to five or more schools.
  - Inversely, more Southeast Asian students (22.3%) than Chinese students (11.8%) applied to only one school.

- Chinese students whose parental income was less than $25,000 (10.5%) were more likely than their peers with parental income of more than $75,000 (5.3%) to seek information and guidance from their high school counselors.

- Korean students (43.4%) and Southeast Asian students (30.7%) whose parental incomes were less than $25,000 were more likely to consider low tuition as an important factor than the other API ethnic groups from the same income bracket.
Southeast Asian students (68.8%) with parental income of more than $75,000 reported the institution’s academic reputation as an important factor, compared with 55.2% of Korean students with parental income of less than $25,000.

Through the three levels of analyses, Teranishi et al. (2004) found differences among the choice process for the different API ethnic groups studied. Additionally, there were differences within each API ethnic group. The authors’ findings further challenged the claims of the model minority myth and dominant discourse that all APIs were the same and have the same experience. More research should be conducted to learn about the students’ qualitative experiences to help explain the differences found in the study.

Teranishi et al.’s research was the first attempt to study the college-choice process specifically for Asian Pacific Islanders. Their findings showcased the diversity that exists across and within API ethnic groups.

**Historical Context of Asian Pacific Islanders in America**

In order to appreciate the diversity of the APIs in America, it would be fitting to provide a historical context to present a broad picture of their struggles and successes with immigration and life in the U.S.

Despite a long history since the first wave of API immigration which started in the mid-1800s, there is a lack of research about APIs in America. It was not until the last few decades when attention was paid to this population in areas of psychology and psychiatry in an attempt to study cultural differences as reasons that kept Chinese and other API ethnic groups from seeking psychiatric help (Kim & Omizo, 2003; Tata & Leong, 1994). Other hot topics in psychology focused on the acculturation/assimilation process of APIs (Miller, 2005) and formation of racial and ethnic identity (Ibrahim, Ohnishi, & Sandhu, 1997). Research on APIs in education did not
emerge until the heat of affirmative action debates back in the 1990s. The mention of API “success” was a tool to reify the model minority myth by suggesting an “overrepresentation” of API students in higher education, especially in the top ranking institutions. Not only did this myth deny individual identities of the API groups, it also masked the historical challenges that the first API immigrants faced in the U.S.

API immigration to the U.S.

The Chinese were the first group of immigrants from Asia who came to the United States in mass. The early years of the California gold rush sparked the interest of a few hundred Chinese, most of whom were merchants. Between 1850 and 1882, tens of thousands of Chinese arrived at “Gum Shan,” a name they used to refer to California, which literally translated into “Gold Mountain.” Their journey to the U.S. was not solely for economic reasons; they were also in search of a better political and social environment.

Contrary to the belief of many whites that the Chinese were a threat to the U.S. labor force, many of these early Chinese immigrants planned to earn money in America and return to China to be with family or to start a family. For many, these plans were tragically disrupted. The typical Chinese immigrants before the 1900s were males from poor families in the southern province of Guangdong (Dudley, 1997). These men often had to borrow money from brokers (i.e., modern-day “loan sharks”) to pay for their passage to America. They were supposed to pay the brokers back with the money they earned in the U.S. Forced to work long hours in horrific conditions with little pay, however, many of these Chinese never made enough money to return home.

Because of the impoverished conditions in China, their men continued to immigrate to the U.S. still in hopes of something better. In the mid-1860s, the Chinese were imported to work
on the transcontinental railroad. More Chinese entered the U.S. in the 1870s to work on the southern plantations. During this same period, the New England states also took advantage of this cheap source of labor (Takaki, 1989). Calvin T. Sampson employed 75 Chinese from San Francisco to work in his shoe factory in North Adams, Massachusetts. Sampson hired these Chinese to replace his workers who had gone on strike. These “strikebreakers” were met with hostility, as reported by *The Nation*, where the white union strikers “hooted them, hustled them somewhat, and threw stones at them” (Takaki, 1989). Sampson only hired 75 because he was not sure if these “celestials” would work well. Within three months, Sampson knew his “experiment” was a success: the 75 Chinese had produced more shoes than 75 of their predecessors. Sampson had calculated that the Chinese labor would save him $69,594 a week (Takaki, 1989). Sampson’s success story was highly publicized in the newspapers. The *Scriber’s Monthly* wrote that the “heathen Chinese” were seen as the “final solution” to the labor problem in America (Takaki, 1989). Soon after, companies in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and elsewhere sought the labor of the Chinese.

Not unlike the subsequent groups of API immigrants, the arrival of the Chinese was met with both relief and anger. On one hand, white merchants, manufacturers, and plantation owners enjoyed this new source of cheap labor, as illustrated in the above example of Calvin Sampson. Before Sampson, there was William Hooper, a businessman, who was sent to Hawaii to learn about sugar plantations in 1835. After Hooper observed a few Chinese who worked on a sugar mill in Hawaii for six days a week with no complaints, he reported to his company “Slavery is nothing compared to it!” (Takaki, 1989). On the other hand, the white laborers saw them as a threat because the Chinese worked for less and therefore were hired in their place. As a result, many of the Chinese suffered brutal and violent attacks. The government did not come to defend
these immigrants. Worse, the U.S. government set laws and policies that clearly discriminated against the Chinese.

One of the most notorious anti-Chinese acts was the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first and only law in U.S. history that explicitly targeted one ethnic group. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers to the U.S.; only a restricted number of Chinese merchants or scholars were allowed entry. Other horrendous events that targeted the Chinese included the decision of People v. Hall (1854) which prohibited the Chinese from testifying in court against a white person; the 1875 Page Law which inadvertently prevented Chinese wives to join their husbands in the U.S.; the 1913 Alien Land Law which prohibited APIs from owning or leasing land for more than three years; legal practices that restricted the Chinese and other API children access to public education. The Chinese population, made primarily of bachelors at the time, was stagnant. At their core, these activities denied the Chinese immigrants opportunities for life, liberty, property, and pursuit of happiness, the presumed rights of Americans.

Very simplistically, without taking into consideration the many complex facets associated with immigration, such as U.S. views on immigration, the U.S. economy, U.S. politics, and international relations (Espenshade & Hempstead, 1996), what I have just presented about the Chinese described a cycle of API ethnic group immigration to the U.S. An API ethnic group was recruited to meet a U.S. labor demand. While in the country, the group suffered acts of racism and violence. The government then issued legislation that restricted further immigration and/or opportunities to participate fully in American society. When the group could no longer satisfy the labor demand, another API group was recruited.
After the Chinese, the Japanese immigrated to the U.S. and worked on sugar plantations in Hawaii. The 1924 National Origins Act prohibited Japanese immigration and set a quota of 150,000 new European immigrants a year. It also barred the entry of women from China, Japan, Korea, and India. During World War II, when China was an U.S. ally against the Japanese, Japanese Americans, two-thirds of whom were American-born citizens at the time, were arrested and placed in internment camps. The Filipinos replaced the Japanese on the plantations.

The Koreans who immigrated to the U.S. around the same time as the Filipinos had a different immigration experience from their predecessors. Unlike the Chinese and Japanese of the time who were primarily laborers, this group of Korean immigrants represented different professions, e.g., laborers, students, policemen, government clerks, and miners. Educationally, the Koreans as a whole were more advanced with about 70% of them literate. Many Koreans also immigrated as families. The 1910s saw the immigration of over a thousand Korean women who were picture brides (Takaki, 1989).

*Impact of politics on immigration*

The social status of the Chinese, Japanese and Filipinos changed during World War II. For the Chinese and Filipinos, it was for the better because both China and the Philippines were U.S. allies against Japan. To show the comradeship, the U.S. government repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 because the “‘salvation of the white race’ depended significantly on continued Chinese friendship and military cooperation” (Takaki, 1989). In its place, a quota was set to allow a token 105 new Chinese immigrants annually. Additionally, the law permitted the Chinese aliens to become naturalized U.S. citizens. A similar legislation was passed for the Filipinos and East Indians in 1946 which set the immigration quota at 100 for each group. The
The 1952 McCarran-Walter Act removed racial barriers to naturalization, giving the right to all immigrants but with restrictive quotas.

Two years after the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the U.S. government enacted the War Brides Act of 1945 which allowed the immigration of Chinese and Filipino wives and children of U.S. war veterans. These women and children were not included in the quota system set in 1943. Formerly known as the “bachelor’s society,” the Chinese population saw a dramatic positive change. Between 1945 and 1952, 89.9% of the new Chinese immigrants were female, which in turn yielded the birth of 20,000 Chinese American babies by the mid-1950s. Similarly, 71% of the Filipino immigrants between 1951 and 1960 were female (Fong, 2000; Takaki, 1989).

World War II saw the growth in Chinese, Filipino, and East Indian immigration. Similarly, the Korean War resulted in many Korean women being brought to America by U.S. servicemen as wives. These interracial marriages were possible after the passing of the anti-miscegenation laws in 1948 by the California Supreme Court. Furthermore, these unions contributed significantly to the growth of the biracial API American population.

The benefits of being U.S. allies were soon retracted after Communist China intervened in the Korean War. Once again the Chinese Americans were distrusted and targeted. This time around they were the “yellow peril” and were seen as Communists. In fact, many Chinese Americans were against Communism. “In 1951, the newly formed Anti-Communist Committee for Free China declared its unequivocal loyalty to the United States and denounced Communism as antithetical to Chinese culture” (Takaki, 1989).

The Immigration Act of 1965 abolished the immigration quota system entirely and gave high priority to the reunification of families and skilled workers (Dudley, 1997). Since then, the
United States has seen dramatic growth in the immigrant population, many from Asian countries. Since 1975 large numbers of Southeast Asian refugees entered the U.S. Unlike the other Asian immigrants who were arriving post 1965, Southeast Asian refugees (majority of whom were Vietnamese, with smaller numbers of Cambodians and Laotians) came from impoverished conditions. Moreover, many came with uneducated backgrounds.

Emigrants from API countries and others across the globe continued to come to the U.S. in search of economic opportunities for their families and them. U.S. Census 2000 reported an API population of 11.9 million (4.2%) out of a total U.S. population of 281.4 million. Of the 11.9 million, the Chinese were the largest API ethnic group with 2.7 million residents (22.98%). There were 2.4 million Filipino; 1.9 million Asian Indian; 1.2 million Korean; 1.2 million Vietnamese; 1.1 million Japanese. The other API ethnic groups, e.g., Cambodian, Hmong, Pakistani, and Thai all had less than one million residents in the U.S. The American Community Survey (ACS) later estimated that there were 15.2 million APIs in the U.S. in July 2007 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). The Chinese still made up the largest API ethnic group with 3.54 million, followed by 3.05 million Filipinos, 2.77 million Asian Indians, 1.64 million Vietnamese, 1.56 million Koreans, and 1.22 million Japanese (Census 2000 Gateway).

The Chinese also made up the largest API ethnic group in Massachusetts according to Census 2000 data. Of the 238,124 APIs in the Commonwealth, 82,028 were Chinese; 43,801 were Asian Indians, the second largest group; followed by 33,962 Vietnamese rounding out the top three largest API ethnic groups in the Commonwealth (University of Massachusetts Institute of Asian American Studies, 2009).

*Education for the Asian/Pacific Islander Americans*
The previous section provided a brief history of APIs in America where the primary foci were API immigration history and some of the social and legal injustices endured by API newcomers. We now focus on the history of API immigrants in U.S. education, specifically, higher education.

API college enrollment and degree attainment grew as a result of various factors. Of prominence were the following: the Immigration Act of 1965 which allowed for an increase in the population size; the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which outlawed racial segregation in education; the Higher Education Act of 1965 which provided federal funding to colleges and to students to attend college. API college enrollment increased also because higher education was largely regarded as the “way out of the hard life of laborers, service workers, and small shopkeepers” (Hsia, 1988). Furthermore, education had long been associated with status and respect in most Asian societies (Hsia & Hirano-Nakanishi, 1989). In pursuit of a better life, many API students sought advancement through education (Louie, 2005). Education was positively correlated with earning power, although there was evidence of disparities across racial groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

In terms of educational attainment, 80.4% of the Asians\(^2\), as defined by the U.S. Census 2000, and 78.3% of Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders had completed high school or more compared to the national average across all races at 80.4% and Whites at 83.6%. 64.6% of Asians and 44.6% of Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders completed some college compared to a national average of 51.8% and 54.1% for Whites. These numbers demonstrated

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\(^2\)“The term ‘Asian’ refers to people having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent (for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam). Asian Groups are not limited to nationalities, but include ethnic terms, as well.” Census 2000 Brief: The Asian Population 2000
the difference in educational attainment between the Asians and the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders who collectively made up the Asian/Pacific Islander population.

Table 1: Educational Attainment of the Population 25 Years and Over by Selected Race: 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Population 25 and over</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High school graduate of more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (in U.S.)</td>
<td>182,211,639</td>
<td>80.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>143,085,659</td>
<td>83.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>6,640,671</td>
<td>80.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>206,675</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The 2007 American Community Survey estimated that in 2007, 86% of Asians (using U.S. Census 2000 definitions) 25 years and older had at least a high school diploma or equivalent compared to national average of 85%. Fifty percent of Asians had a bachelor’s degree or higher compared with 28% national average; 20% with graduate or professional degrees compared to an estimated national average of 10%. Reports on disaggregated data revealed the discrepancy in educational attainment among the Asian subgroups: 68% of Asian Indians in this age group had at least a bachelor’s degree compared to 27% of Vietnamese-Americans. Similarly, 38% of Asian Indians had a graduate or professional degree when only 8% of Vietnamese-Americans did. For the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders groups, 84% had at least a high school diploma or equivalent; 15% had at least a bachelor’s degree; 4% had a graduate or professional degree.

These disaggregated data provided a glimpse of the heterogeneity that exists in the API populations but did not show the differences within each API ethnic group. As Teranishi et al. (2004) have demonstrated, students from the same ethnic background attended different 4-year
institutions in part as a result of their parental income. Aggregated data masked problems that members within an ethnic group face. Some of the most common problems have to do with access, persistence to degree attainment, equity and equality upon graduation, which might vary as a result of factors like immigration status, parental income, highest level of parental education, and influence by family and peers. Not unlike the first Chinese immigrants who were enrolled in Asiatic schools, modern day ethnic minorities from low socio-economic background tend to be enrolled in somewhat segregated schools – the urban public schools populated by the disadvantaged which are underfunded and understaffed. Upon graduation, many do attend some form of postsecondary institution. The difference in the types of institutions they attend yield different educational experiences and subsequent earning power.

Some APIs do make it to the selective, even highly selective colleges/universities but not everyone does. Some would argue that more API students should have been admitted because admissions records between 1981 and 1987 showed that API applicants with higher academic qualifications than white applicants had lower admissions rates than the white applicants (Nakanishi, 1989). The series of events that transpired surrounding API admission into Ivy League institutions were part of the “Asian American Admissions” controversy of the 1980s.

*Asian American Admissions controversy and the model minority myth*

In the beginning years of the Asian American Admissions controversy, student groups and task forces accused universities of discrimination against APIs. The Asian American Task Force on University Admissions (AATFUA) charged that the University of California system deliberately enacted regulations that would reduce the number of admitted APIs. One of the charges criticized UC’s instituting a minimum verbal score of 400 for immigrants on the Standard Aptitude Test (SAT) knowing that many of the immigrants in California during that era
were from non-English speaking countries, primarily from Asia. Furthermore, UC officials automatically redirected Asian applicants eligible for the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) to other less selective or non-selective UC campuses. UC supported their decision to disqualify API applicants for the EOP because they did not consider APIs “underrepresented minorities.” The message this new policy sent was that APIs were good students, but not good enough (Takagi, 1992).

The Asian American Admissions controversy was arguably fueled by and then perpetuated the model minority myth that API students were overrepresented at selective four-year universities. The term, model minority, originated in a 1966 *New York Times Magazine* article by sociologist William Petersen who told the success story of the Japanese in America. The Japanese had overcome racism to succeed in this country through “hard work, uncomplaining perseverance, and quiet accommodations” (Suzuki, 1989) and adherence to their cultural beliefs of filial piety and morality. Later that year, *U.S. News and World Report* also published a story applauding the Chinese Americans for their achievements (Osajima, 2000). The reporters claimed API victory was based on data that indicated high levels of educational attainment for Chinese and Japanese Americans. Additionally, the two groups worked in some professional fields holding managerial and supervisory roles. This label would soon be extended to include all APIs, lumping all peoples of API descent into one broadly generalized category with the assumption that they all have the same background, opportunities, abilities, resources, achievements, and the same experience.

Seemingly a positive stereotype, in contrast with the stereotypes about lazy African-Americans and Chicanos, the model minority myth is yet another example of social stratification (Chang, 1999). It is important to be reminded that the model minority myth is a recent
stereotype. The early Chinese immigrants were called coolies who were mysterious, uncivilized outsiders of a “degraded race” who “invaded” the U.S. (Chang, 2003). As noted earlier, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 ended all Chinese immigration. Similarly, the 1924 National Origins Act ended all Japanese immigration and set a quota of 150,000 new European immigrants a year. This Act also barred entry of women from China, Japan, Korea and India.

Not unlike the negative stereotypes about the early API immigrants, the model minority myth also harms APIs and other racially oppressed people, but in a different way. By posing the success of selected subgroups as the success of an entire race, the needs of other subgroups are masked and made invisible: 16.2% of APIs in Massachusetts were in poverty compared to 29.8% Hispanic/Latinos, 21.2% Blacks, and 7.0% Whites (University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Asian American Studies, 2009). Moreover, this purported “success” could be viewed as an indication that these minorities do not face significant racial barriers which, in turn, denies the racial hostility and discrimination that the many API ethnic subgroups suffered (Chou & Feagin, 2008).

There is empirical evidence that discredits the model minority myth. Data have proven that APIs were not a homogeneous group. In Los Angeles County alone, there were great distinctions among the 19 reported API ethnic groups’ level of educational attainment (Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California, 2004). According to this Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California (APALC) report, 56% of the Cambodian Americans 25 years or older in the county had less than a high school degree while only 7% of the Japanese Americans in the same age group had not finished secondary schooling. Overall, the highest level of education for half of the
Pacific Islanders in LA county was a high school degree. Only 19% of the Pacific Islanders had a bachelor’s degree or higher.

A New York University, the College Board, and the National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education (CARE) report, authored by Teranishi (2008), provided factual data to dispel the model minority myth. Data from sources like the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Census Bureau were used to provide facts to invalidate claims like “AAPI [Asian American Pacific Islander] students are ‘taking over’ U.S. higher education” (p. 4), “AAPIs are concentrated only in selective four-year institutions” (p.8), and “AAPIs are a homogeneous racial group with uniformity in educational and financial attainment, culture, religion, and histories” (p. 15).

Despite empirical evidence that debunks the myth, the monolith lives on.

**Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is grounded in the social belief that values the lived experiences of people of color and their historical and social context. CRT challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism that claims “neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy” (Matsuda et al., p. 6) by examining how the current structures reify white supremacy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

CRT has earned increasing popularity in critical research over the last two decades. Yet, the exact beginning of critical race theory is unclear. One popular belief was that CRT began as a political movement in the legal academy born from critical legal studies in the late 1970s because people were dissatisfied with the Civil Rights Movement’s slow pace of bringing about racial justice (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Matsuda et al. 1993). They believed that this slow pace
was a product of the judicial principles set by the White dominant power structures which did not allow progressive advances and denied the existence and influence of racial prejudices in the design and execution of the law. Another belief was that CRT had roots at the Harvard Law School where some students were outraged at the administration’s perceived lack of concern for diversity and racial equality (Matsuda et al., 1993). Regardless of how critical race theory began exactly, it is important to recognize it began out of struggles toward social and racial justice.

There are six defining elements (tenets) that describe critical race theory (Matsuda et al., 1993).

1. Critical race scholars recognize that racism is prevalent in America. They want to examine and challenge our institutions because the scholars believe these institutions perpetuate current structures of oppression.

2. Critical race scholars question the “dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness and meritocracy” in legal statutes and practices (Matsuda et al., 1993: 6).

3. Critical race scholars recognize the importance of history and historical and social context.

4. Critical race scholars recognize the importance of experiential knowledge of people of color. Specifically, critical race scholars believe that using the stories of the people of color could help eliminate racism by putting in the forefront their real stories of oppression. The premise is that because people of color have been silenced, their struggles have not been heard or recognized, which then makes it possible for the dominant group to ignore them. The model minority myth, as described above, is an example that speaks to the importance of using stories of the API to tell the truth about some of their struggles.
5. CRT takes an interdisciplinary and, thereby, multiple combined approaches to evaluate race/racism. Critical race scholars recognize the intersectionality of other forms of oppression: gender, class, ability.

6. Critical race scholars want to eliminate racial oppression as part of their ultimate goal of ending all forms of subordination.

There are empirical data that support the tenets of CRT. People of color have suffered from injustice, violence and killings because they were people of color. Women have suffered. The poor have suffered.

In legislation, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 barred Chinese immigration to the U.S. The 1924 National Origins Act barred Japanese immigration to the U.S. and set a quota for new European immigrants. The Jim Crow laws and the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) case upheld “separate but equal” was constitutional. Prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, racial segregation was legal.

African-Americans were enslaved for over two centuries in the U.S. In the Snake River Massacre of 1887, thirty-one Chinese miners in Hell’s Canyon, Oregon were “robbed, killed, and mutilated by a group of white ranchers and schoolboys” who wanted to steal their gold and “cleanse the region of their presence” (Chang, 2003: 134). In 1987, Navroze Mody, a 30 year-old Asian Indian bank manager, was beaten to death in Jersey City by a gang who called themselves “Dotbusters.” In 2010, Black high school students bullied and attacked 50 API students, injuring 30: they threw things at the API students; hit and punch them and yelled racial epithets, “Hey, Chinese!” and "Yo, Dragon Ball!" (Walters, 2010).

African-American and Hispanic students enrolled in college at much lower rates than their White and API peers (Hurtado et al., 2004; Perna, 2000). Census 2000 data reported 83%
of Whites in America have graduated from high school or more compared to 72.3% for Black or African Americans; 70.9% American Indian or Native Alaskan; 80.4% Asian; 78.3% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (Census 2000 Gateway). Twenty-six point one (26.1) percent of White Americans have earned a bachelor’s degree or more compared to 14.3% of Black or African Americans; 11.5% of American Indians or Alaskan Natives; 44.1% of Asians; 13.8% of Native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders (Census 2000 Gateway).

The median income for a White household in America was $44,687 compared to $29,423 for Black or African American; $30,599 for American Indian or Alaska Native; $51,908 for Asian; $42,717 for Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (Census 2000 Gateway). Women in 2008 were earning 80% of their male counterparts (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009).

**CRT in education**

Adapting the original six elements to define CRT in education, Solórzano and Yosso (2001) presented five themes.

1. “The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination.”
   - CRT in education recognizes that race, class and gender are interrelated. As such, racism is not only about race; it also has to do with gender and class. Racism is about institutional power and hegemony. Similarly, classism is not only about class; it also has to do with race and gender.

2. “The challenge to dominant ideology.”
   - CRT in education examines and challenges claims by the traditional dominant educational system that their institutions foster objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity.
3. “The commitment to social justice.”
   - CRT in education is committed to social justice. As such, it develops curricula that encourage individual and social transformations.

4. “The centrality of experiential knowledge.”
   - In light of the fact that much of our educational research is based on White students, a CRT in education recognizes the importance of the personal experiences of students of color. These experiences and their knowledge are seen as strengths and assets to understanding subordination of students of color in education.

5. “The transdisciplinary perspective.”
   - CRT in education examines race and racism and other forms of subordination in education both in their historical and contemporary context while borrowing methods of examination and understanding from other disciplines.

The underlying belief of CRT is that the current structures (e.g., education, government, and laws), which were designed by and for the privileged, white males, perpetuate all forms of subordination in America. CRT maintains that the white upper/middle class males would have all of America believe that the “norm” is White (Yosso, 2002). Anything that deviates from the norm is abnormal or bad (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The first step to pursue racial justice is to expose America to the reality that race matters and racism exists. Accordingly, CRT puts at its center race and racism as “analytical tools to account for glaring inequalities that permeate our social institutions” (Lynn & Adams, 2002, p. 87). Through narratives, storytelling, and counter-storytelling (Delgado, 1989), the oppressed share their lived experiences with subordination towards this goal. Telling stories give the storytellers a voice that has often been muted in
dominant society and, in turn, exposed “deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 23).

With regards to race, it must be noted that “race” in discourse had historically been used to refer to Blacks (African Americans) and Whites (Caucasians) (Chang, 1999). With changing demographics over the last decade, Hispanics and Latinos had since been added to the discourse. The rise of Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) contributed positively to including Hispanics and Latinos in discussions about race/racism because they were often the victims of racism and institutionalized oppression. Among the racial groups missing from the discourse were Native Americans and Asian/Pacific Islanders.

In an attempt to address the invisibility of the APIs in the race/racism discourse, Chang (1999) introduced Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit). Similar to scholars of LatCrit, Chang believed that focusing only on the Black/White dichotomy failed to take into consideration all aspects of race and law because it neglected other races. “To focus on the black-white racial paradigm is to misunderstand the complicated racial situation in the U.S.” (Chang, 1999: 60). Chang (1993, 1999) insisted that in order to have APIs be part of the critical discourse and scholarship, their voices must be heard. Their stories must be told. The prejudice and violence they endured, like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1822 and the murder of Vincent Chin, must not be forgotten.

Chang (1999) developed AsianCrit with the following goals: 1) To make known that Asian Pacific Islanders have a different history from the other disempowered groups. Their immigration patterns and status, their reasons for coming to America, and their personal backgrounds differed from other groups of people of color. Chang would like to expand the discourse to include comparisons of the experiences of APIs with other races as well as within
the API ethnic groups. 2) To learn the similarities in all oppressed people in order to bring them
together to participate in each other’s struggles. 3) To include API voices in legal scholarship to
combat exclusion, with the understanding that without voice, APIs would be “invisible” (Chang,
1993) and be further disempowered. 4) To use API narratives in law review articles and
scholarship in order to persuade decision-makers, practitioners and law professors and students
that their experiences were real. Use these narratives to combat subordination.

Critical race theory, including LatCrit and AsianCrit, reinforces the importance of
recognizing the strengths of lived experiences to bring forth the realities of oppression and to
dispel claims of meritocracy. When talking about APIs and other racial groups, it is incorrect to
assume they are all the same. It is also wrong to assume that any person’s lack of “success”
(which is subjective) is solely and simply a direct result of his/her culture or biology as
advocated by Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003). In a place where the voices of people of color
were silenced, Critical Race Theory urges that the silenced be heard.

A common struggle among immigrant groups and those whose native language is not
English is language discrimination, linguicism (Teranishi, 2004). Phillipson (1992) explained
English linguistic imperialism, i.e., English linguicism, is the assertion of the English language
by the dominant group to maintain and reconstitute it as part of “structural and cultural
inequalities between English and other languages” (Phillipson, 1992: 47). Phillipson posited that
a sub-type of linguicism is anglo-centricity, which judges other cultures by the standards of those
of the Anglo-Saxons. All forms of linguicism are related to racism, which is the dominant
group’s self-promotion and aggrandizement of their “idealistic image of self”; the dominant
group debasing the other groups, their culture, life-style, and ideas (Phillipson, 1992).
Ultimately, the dominant group (White) reinforces the idea that anything not ascribed by the dominant group is inferior.

Linguicism as a form of oppression is especially relevant to the Chinese immigrant participants in the study, as will be discussed later. Chinese was the most commonly spoken language in the U.S. household next to English and Spanish: 2.5 million people ages five and older spoke Chinese at home in 2007 (Census 2000 Gateway). More than one million people in the same age group spoke Tagalog, Vietnamese, or Korean at home (Census 2000 Gateway).

Summary

The review of literature presented in this chapter started with an overview of the history of the community colleges in the United States. Community colleges have enjoyed tremendous growth over the past century. Since the 1960s, community colleges had been criticized for their low retention and transfer rates. When education was believed to be the means of upward mobility (Hsia, 1988), community colleges have thus been accused of perpetuating social stratification and the students’ low socioeconomic status.

Despite the community college reputation for low retention and transfer rates, 44% of all U.S. undergraduate students were community college students (AACC, 2009). Four commonly cited college-choice models (Chapman, 1981; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Jackson, 1982; Litten, 1982) were reviewed to provide a sample of the factors and steps that students took to develop their college aspirations, to search for colleges, and then to decide on which college to attend. These models were intended for traditional students seeking enrollment at four-year institutions and, thus, their findings were limited to their participant groups. Hossler et al. (1999) tested Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model and found that the three stages of the
model corresponded with high school grade levels. The research questions that Hossler et al.

used in their study were adapted to develop the guiding questions of this study.

Two sets of authors (Bers & Smith, 1987; Somers et al., 2006) proposed college-choice

models for nontraditional students enrolled at community colleges. These authors did not

consider the students’ race or SES when there was evidence that these two factors impacted

college choice and attainment (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Chapman, 1981; Hurtado et al., 1997;

Perna, 2000). Hurtado et al. (1997) and Perna (2000) found racial disparities in college

enrollment at four-year institutions but did not look at the disparities within racial groups.

Teranishi (2004, 2008) and Teranishi et al. (2004) provided empirical data that demonstrated the
diversity across and within selected API ethnic groups to inform about their college choice
decision making and challenged the model minority myth.

The myth, nevertheless, is still used to portray all APIs, who were previously seen as
evildoers (Bigler, 1852). This monolith, like other racial stereotypes, is harmful because it
dismisses the experiences especially of the people who do not fit the stereotype. The participants
in this study, legal Chinese immigrant community college students, were not the high academic
achievers at selective four-year institutions as generalized by the myth. Their experiences as

Chinese immigrants in the United States who sought an education at a community college have
not been represented in current literature.

Using Critical Race Theory as the conceptual framework for this study, the assumption

was that given the participants of this study were ethnic minorities enrolled at a community
college, their college-choice experience would differ from the normative experience. There is
evidence that such a difference exists: as described earlier, Somers et al. (2006) found their
community college participants thought the sticker price of college cost was important in
contrast to traditional students who thought net price was important (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Jackson, 1982). In designing and analyzing this study, I focused on the tenets that spoke to the importance of recognizing the lived experiences of people of color and challenge the dominant ideology that claims the traditional dominant educational system fosters objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). If all things were equal, then why
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Methodology and Researcher Reflections

An examination of the literature review unveiled the lack of an established model on community college-choice. Furthermore, there is no such model or study for the documented Chinese immigrant population. I approached this qualitative study with the tenets of Critical Race Theory to explore the phenomenon of college-choice through the lived experiences of a group of documented Chinese immigrant community college students in Massachusetts. The goal was to contribute to college-choice literature through systematic collection and analysis of data about the phenomenon for this particular group of participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). One way to capture and to emphasize the importance of experiential knowledge of people of color is through their spoken words, their stories (Matsuda et al., 1993). To that end, I interviewed each participant individually. I wanted to learn from each participant their lived experiences to answer the primary research question of this study: how did a group of documented Chinese immigrant students choose to attend Bunker Hill Community College?

Researcher positionality

My personal background is both similar to and different from the life histories of the 16 participants in this study. Like my participants, I too am a Chinese immigrant residing legally in the United States. I come from a low socioeconomic background. My family lived in affordable housing for the first decade we lived in the country. I am a first generation college student. My father, who achieved a higher level of education than my mother, finished middle school in China. I am fluent in conversational Cantonese Chinese. This is where the similarities end for the most part.
The main difference between my participants and me is that I have had more opportunities to achieve more academically. I have earned a Bachelor’s degree, a Master’s degree and am now pursuing a doctoral degree in the United States. Because I was young when my family immigrated, I went through the Boston Public Schools system from second grade onward. I graduated from an examination high school in Boston. One participant, Kai, also started in elementary school in fourth grade and attended the same elementary school from which I graduated but then did not attend the same middle or high school as I. Two others, Liva and Yan, started their U.S. education in high school. Christina completed high school in China and then again in the U.S. Sky started in middle school in the U.S. The other 12 participants completed their K-12 education in China.

Being aware of the similarities and differences, I was careful not to make assumptions about their experiences based on my own which made seeking clarification and verification throughout the interviews and bracketing all the more important. Conversely, I had to make sure that the participants did not make assumptions that I automatically understood their experiences or what they were saying because I am Chinese. When participant Xin Ho was trying to explain to me why she and her friends did not complain about a staff member who was rude to them, she said, “You know how the Chinese are.” It was my responsibility to ask follow-up questions to ask for examples of what that means. Similarly, when another participant, Stephen, said “You know what I mean?” I sought to confirm what he intended to convey.

Being an “insider” because of the similarities gave me advantages. It did make it easier to build rapport because I am Chinese and I speak the language. I lived and am still living the documented Chinese immigrant experience. I lived through the fears of not knowing and having to learn English and the struggles of language discrimination. I understood some of the struggles
of living in a low-income household. I went through my own college-choice process as a first
generation college student and could draw on some similar aspects of the experience, e.g., lack
of information about colleges and college options. The main disadvantage about being an insider
had to do with assumptions, as just discussed. Another disadvantage, I think, was that because
they were comfortable with me that they sometimes digressed and asked me questions that did
not necessarily have to do with the study itself. A few participants asked me about other colleges
or for advice about BHCC policies because they knew I currently work in higher education and
used to work at BHCC. During those moments, I was no longer only the interviewer, I was also
a resource. In response, I would answer their questions; reminded them that we could talk more
about their questions after the interview; and returned to the questions I needed to ask for the
study. Answering their questions did help build rapport.

It was in part because the participants recognized the need to improve the college-choice
experience for Chinese immigrants that encouraged some of them to participate in the study. I
remember when I was recruiting in one of the English-as-a-Second Language classes that one of
the participants, Stacey, said to her classmates “You have to sign up to participate. You’re a
Chinese immigrant yourself. It is your responsibility to help others.” She was my champion.
Largely, the participants chose to be a part of this study because they believed that by sharing
their stories and through their voices, I could make a difference and contribute to positive
changes in the college-choice process for future Chinese immigrants. This point was evident
when I tried to pay them for their participation at the end of the second interview. The vast
majority of the participants refused to receive the $20.00 compensation³. I had to repeatedly say

³ When I amended the recruitment strategy to include monetary compensation for participation, I was mindful of
participants’ motivation to participate. At no point did I think that the participants’ responses were affected. In the
end, when so many of the participants refused payment, it was reaffirmed that monetary compensation did not
matter for them in their participation or responses. In hindsight, I think that if I had visited with the classes and
that it was part of the research protocol and I had to give it to them. It was not until I told them that I would get in trouble for violating research protocol if they did not receive the payment that they took it.

Some of the potential participants who were hesitant or declined to participate said they could not do so because they did not have the time. After I explained the time commitment and how we would meet at their convenience, one agreed to participate. The others said their work and family commitments did not allow for time to participate in a study. Some did not participate because they did not know who I was and did not want to talk to me.

In the end, I am certain that the advantages of being an insider outweighed the disadvantages because I was able to control them as a researcher.

Research design

This phenomenological study was in an attempt to understand the “meaning” and “essence” (Creswell, 2007) of the individually lived experiences of a group of documented Chinese immigrants’ decision-making process to attend a community college. I designed an interview guide for semi-structured interviews that were informed by tenets of CRT, Hossler and Gallagher (1987), Hossler et al.’s (1989) college choice study, and findings from prior fieldwork. Conducting semi-structured interviews was important because I wanted to have some structure in these conversations while also allowing for the free flowing of information like a typical conversation. I developed questions that addressed the following main areas to study the college-choice phenomenon:

- Participant’s background information to help us get to know these participants, e.g., age, residency status, educational background

reached out to the Community Center first, because I yielded the most participants from those two efforts, I most likely would not have needed to add the monetary compensation for participation.
• Experience with the college-choice process
  o Influences on the process
  o Race and racial relations, e.g., model minority myth

During the interview, I employed Fraenkel and Wallen’s (2006) recommendation of asking the same question in different ways to check for accurate interpretation and understanding. I needed to be certain that the meaning I found was truly representative of the participants’ experiences and not my own because the participants and I share characteristics in our demographic background, as already described in the researcher positionality. Throughout the interview, I also periodically paraphrased or summarized what I thought the participant said or meant to seek confirmation or clarification. After I completed verbatim transcription of the first interview/conversation and reviewed it, I conducted a second interview with participants. The traditional way of member checking in qualitative research, that is to give a transcription of the interview to the participants to check for accuracy, was not implemented because of the participants’ low English proficiency skills. In its place, I held second interviews to seek additional confirmation or clarification that I selected. The second interview also provided an opportunity to ask additional questions that I thought were relevant based on the first interview, e.g., more questions about race.

Field site

This study was conducted at Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC), a public urban community college in Charlestown, Massachusetts. On May 11, 2007, BHCC’s then Executive Dean of Institutional Effectiveness provided written confirmation in support of this study and verbal agreement for me to identify the institution by its name, which was reconfirmed on February 19, 2010.
Bunker Hill Community College

Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) has multiple campus and satellite locations. Its main campus is in Charlestown, Massachusetts, visible from the Interstate 93 highway and accessible on public transportation. A second campus is in Chelsea, Massachusetts. Satellite campuses are located in Cambridge, East Boston, Somerville, Boston’s South End, and most recently in Malden, Massachusetts.

Founded in 1973 by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Bunker Hill Community College’s 2007-2008 enrollment headcount exceeded 13,500 students. The College offers day, evening, weekend, web-based and distance learning courses and programs. This past fall 2009 semester, the College became the first community college in Massachusetts to offer classes overnight where class began shortly before midnight and extended to 2:30AM (Ngowi, 2009). The College performs a variety of activities, most of which were discussed by Dougherty (1994). BHCC offers more than 68 associate degree and certificate programs with course offerings that include English-as-a-Second Language (ESL), remedial education, and college-level course work. The College is also engaged in workforce development.

Because of its location and accessibility by public transportation, Bunker Hill Community College attracts many ethnic minority students. The College’s enrollment grew steadily. Here is a snapshot of their enrollment trends between 2006 and 2008.

- In fall 2006 alone, BHCC’s enrollment was 8,212: 30% (2216) Black; 15% (1090) Hispanic; 14% (1038) API. The average age of all students was 28. The majority of all students work while enrolled.

- Total fall 2007 enrollment alone was 8,806: 26% (1974) Black; 16% (1247) Hispanic; 16% (1234) API. Average age of all students was 28.
In fall 2008 alone, the college reported an increased enrollment of 9,497: 27% (2210) were Black; 18% (1472) Hispanic; 14% (1189) API. The average age for this group was 27. Like the 2006 cohort, the 2008 group also worked while enrolled.

Table 2: 2006 – 2008 BHCC enrollment data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2006</th>
<th>Fall 2007</th>
<th>Fall 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total College Enrollment</td>
<td>8212</td>
<td>8806</td>
<td>9497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>API enrollment</td>
<td>14% (1038)</td>
<td>16% (1234)</td>
<td>14% (1189)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black enrollment</td>
<td>30% (2216)</td>
<td>26% (1974)</td>
<td>27% (2210)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic enrollment</td>
<td>15% (1090)</td>
<td>16% (1247)</td>
<td>18% (1472)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid recipients at College</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age of all students</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work while enrolled (all students)</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 2003, among the state’s 15 community colleges, BHCC conferred the most degrees to API students. Eighty-eight of their 602 conferred degrees were awarded to API students, out of a total API student population of approximately 1,200. That same year, Massachusetts community colleges as a whole conferred a total of 289 degrees to API students (Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, 2004).

Over the last few years, Massachusetts community colleges had been criticized for their low graduation rates (Vaznis, 2007). Bunker Hill Community College and Roxbury Community College (RCC) reported the lowest rates in the state for 2005 at 13% and 5%, respectively. It must be noted that while BHCC and RCC graduation rates were the lowest in the state in 2005, they “disproportionately serve more non-traditional age students, students with limited English proficiency, and students of color than other Massachusetts community colleges” (Lassen, 2007: 8). Nontraditional age, limited English proficiency and racial/ethnic identity and socio-economic
status were all risk factors that could threaten student persistence and graduation (Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, 2007a). These were important characteristics to note because the participants of the study shared these attributes.

Between Fiscal Year (FY) 2004 and 2009, BHCC’s percentage of students who were “either academically or disadvantaged or both” was fairly consistent at 70% or more. The College defined academically disadvantaged as students who have enrolled in one or more developmental courses and/or English-as-a-Second Language courses. Students were “economically disadvantaged” at BHCC if they were federal financial aid recipients or were federally-determined as coming from a low-income household. In FY 2009, 85% of the API students were either academically disadvantaged or economically disadvantaged or both.

Table 3: Graduation rate*: FY 2003-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bunker Hill Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (2007b)

* “Graduation rate” is a calculation, as determined by IPEDS, of first time, full-time, degree-seeking students who complete their associate degree within 3 years.

It should also be noted that the traditional measure of graduation rate, as developed by the national Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which tracks an entering fall cohort of first time, full-time, degree-seeking students to see if they completed their degree or certificate “within 150 percent of ‘normal time of completion’ at the same institution at which they initially enrolled” (Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, 2007a), was not the most accurate measure because it was not uncommon for community college students to interrupt their
enrollment for various reasons. A more accurate measure would be extending time for degree
completion to six years especially in light of the fact that more than 61% of all community
college students require remedial/developmental education which prolongs degree completion
(Lassen, 2007).

Sample and Sampling

I wanted to focus only on one API ethnic subgroup, the Chinese, because there were
differences in culture and lived experiences within the API population. It is important not to
contribute to the dominant discourse that lumps all people of API descent into one category and
assume they were one and the same (Louie, 2005; Teranishi, 2004). I chose the Chinese
because, among the APIs, they have the longest immigration history in the United States and
were the largest API ethnic subgroup in Massachusetts and U.S. I also chose the Chinese
because I wanted to discredit the model minority myth with data from a group that was originally
used to derive the myth. Lastly, I chose the Chinese student population because I too am a
Chinese immigrant and I wanted to understand how and why their college-choice outcomes
differed from mine.

Sample

Participants for this study were immigrants of Chinese descent residing legally in the
United States. As stated earlier, only documented residents were included in the study to avoid
making claims on undocumented residents whose experiences and needs were different.
Selected participants were enrolled at BHCC at the time of the first interview. Initially,
participants were expected to be in their first term of enrollment at BHCC. As will be explained
later in this chapter, the sampling had to be expanded due to a low participant response rate. Age
was not a criterion; neither was gender, years of legal residency in the U.S., citizenship, or
English language proficiency because I wanted to learn from the participants to see if age, gender, years of residency in the U.S., citizenship, or English language proficiency would be considered a college choice factor by the participants. Existing college choice research did not identify them as factors.

Respondents were given the option to interview in English or Chinese (Cantonese) as I am fluent in both. Students were given this option to use their primary language because for the cases where students have limited English proficiency, e.g., those enrolled in the introductory levels of English-as-a-Second Language courses, an interview would not be possible otherwise. For students with English proficiency or fluency but more comfortable in Chinese, it was important that they were able to express themselves freely in a language with which they were most comfortable. As Spradley (1979) reminded researchers, it is important to recognize the power and use of language to “describe a (concept/phenomenon) in its own terms” (p. 18). Through this ability to capture the participants’ stories in their own words (be it in Chinese or English), I was better able to capture the essence of the meanings of their experiences.

The original intent was to interview 15 to 25 students, until data saturation, during the fall 2007 semester at Bunker Hill Community College. Students were identified with the help of the host institution. BHCC provided a list of students who had applied and declared their intent to enroll in fall 2007. An invitation letter in both English and Chinese on Boston College letterhead was mailed to students who had self-identified as Asian Pacific Islander and had recognizable Chinese last names, e.g., Chen, Huang, Situ, Tan, and Wu. Purposive sampling was chosen because I was interested in a particular profile of participants: Chinese, documented immigrant, and enrolled at BHCC.

*Sampling: Recruitment*
There were three steps to initial recruitment plan. I first mailed the invitation letter in September 2007 to a list of 127 students provided by BHCC, as described above. This letter introduced the study and invited them to participate in addition to providing information on how to contact me (Appendix A). Participation was completely voluntary with no compensation. For participants’ convenience, I made arrangements with the College to have a drop-off location on-campus for students to return their responses. Step two was to send a reminder email to non-respondents two weeks after the mailing. Step three was to make a follow-up telephone call the following week to non-responders.

One person who did not give me his name called me after receiving the letter stating he was calling for his sister who was a BHCC student to inquire about the study. I did not hear from him or his sister after that call. Another student contacted me and became the first participant in the study. I did not receive any more responses to the invitation. I later learned from one participant who said that she would not have responded to the invitation letter because it was too long; it was on Boston College letterhead, instead of BHCC; and she did not know who I was.

Neither steps 2 nor 3 of the original recruitment plan were executed because the College informed me that they were not at liberty to release their email or telephone information. This, along with a low response rate, added to the need to adjust the recruitment plan. To that end, I consulted with BHCC to see how I could visit with the Asian Students Association and classes to try to recruit additional participants. The College put me in touch with the president of the student club. I was invited to attend a club meeting to introduce my study. From that meeting, I yielded three participants out of ten members. Of the ten, I was not able to tell how many would
have been eligible to participate as there were both API and non-API students. I conducted four first interviews in the fall 2007 term.

In spring 2008, I amended my initial proposal to the Boston College Institutional Review Board twice to expand the participation eligibility and recruiting strategies, again because of the low response rates to previous recruitment attempts. The first amendment was to include monetary compensation ($20.00 USD) to be given at the end of the second interview as a token of gratitude for participation. The respondents, who agreed to participate in this study prior to the first IRB amendment, were given the update that they would be compensated after the second interview.

The second IRB amendment expanded the participant pool to include all documented Chinese immigrant students at BHCC and not just those in their first year of enrollment. This amendment was made not with the intent to reach out to all Chinese immigrant BHCC students, because there was no way of identifying all of them with available resources; rather, it was because I was anticipating to meet and recruit students who were enrolled at BHCC for more than one term when I visited classes.

As part of this second IRB amendment, I also sought permission to enlist the assistance from a Boston Chinatown community center which offers Adult Basic Education and English-as-a-Second Language programs to recommend graduates from their programs who they think might be enrolled at BHCC. Through this community center, I connected with five more participants. To every student whom I introduced the study, I asked if she/he had friends or knew someone who might be eligible to participate and be interested. One of these five participants introduced her friend to my study. The friend agreed to participate. At the same time, I was working with BHCC to identify additional potential participants. To that end, the
College ran statistical analyses on the number of students who self-identified as API per each instructor. Immigrant status was not identifiable based on the enrollment data extraction the College pulled. My plan was to go to these classes to introduce this study and recruit.

Based on the enrollment results, I contacted the department chairs and instructors. I first visited with a psychology class because the instructor had 7 API students enrolled in her classes. The instructor and I corresponded on how best to present the information. We agreed that I would turn it into a classroom lesson because the students were learning about research methods and protocols. I presented my study to the students talking about the Institutional Review Board process and difficulties I have had with recruiting. In small groups, the students were asked to come up with additional recruiting strategies and to provide a rationale for them. The class reconvened to discuss the different strategies that each group suggested. I found some of the suggestions to be interesting and would have liked to be able to implement if resources had allowed, e.g., hosting a party to recruit; designing and hanging large banners across campus. The students believed food and fun attract people. No one in the psychology class was eligible to participate because the API students in this class were either American-born or not of Chinese descent.

I then visited with three English-as-a-Second Language classes and yielded seven participants. From an evolving set of recruitment strategies which employed purposive sampling, convenience sampling, and snowball sampling, I ended up with a total of 17 participants for this study. No additional participants were sought at this point because by then the stories I was hearing from the participants were largely consistent.

Table 4: Student participants and characteristics at time of first interview
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Years of permanent residency in US</th>
<th>Employment status</th>
<th>First generation college student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xin Ho</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fong</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mei</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liva</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si Man</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pui Yin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shuk Hua</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>separated</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wei Man</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwan Lai</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kai</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacey</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attrition**

Two of the original 17 participants did not respond to follow-up inquiries for a second interview. There was one participant, Jessy, who had to be removed from the participant list because she actually was not eligible to participate.

When participants signed up to participate in the study, they were informed of the eligibility requirements: Chinese; legal immigrant in the US; enrolled at BHCC. After transcribing the first interview with Jessy, I questioned her eligibility because she mentioned that her father was a U.S. citizen living abroad. Although she was born and raised overseas, she was already a U.S. citizen because of her father’s citizenship. As such, she did not immigrate to the U.S. to study at BHCC. To be 100% sure, I asked her to clarify her background in our second
interview and confirmed that she was not an immigrant. As a result I removed her from the participant list. In the end, this study had 16 participants.

Data Collection

Prior fieldwork

The interview guide for the first interview of the study, to be described fully later in this chapter, was partly informed by results of prior fieldwork I did in March and April of 2007. I met and spoke with a selected group of matriculated BHCC students who were recommended to me by the aforementioned Boston Chinatown community center. I was interested in exploring how some students chose BHCC and the Center was interested in learning from their graduates about how well they thought the English language programs prepared them for college. I had one-on-one conversations with four students in Cantonese Chinese. One of the four students introduced me to another three students who were never enrolled at the Community center. I met with them as a group in English. I experimented with the two different formats to determine which would better fit the needs of the study. I decided on individual interviews because this format allowed me to build rapport with the respondent quicker to allow for more candid and uninterrupted conversation. I determined that the group meeting was not as effective because the students were talking over each other at different points. One student then was hesitant to respond until she knew the others were not going to speak. There were times when the students made facial expressions after hearing a particular response from another student which could affect group dynamic and individual willingness to respond.

The conversations I had with all seven students were semi-structured using questions that were informed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987). (See Appendix B.) I chose to use this set of questions because I wanted to see if and how a mainstream model of college-choice would be
applicable to my intended participant group for my dissertation. There were both open-ended and closed-ended questions with a heavy emphasis on open-ended questions. The primary questions were open-ended to explore the topic with the respondents offering the opportunity to provide more dialogue than would closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions were used largely to confirm or verify responses, e.g., “so you mean…; did I hear you say…”

The responses from these conversations further reinforced the importance of conducting this study because the college-choice experiences the respondents described varied greatly from those described in existing research and did not resemble the model that Hossler and Gallagher (1987) described. None of the existing models of college choice speak specifically to the impact that the immigrant experience has on college choice. None speaks to the influence of the model minority myth. None accounts for the dynamics of race and racial relations. None speaks openly or critically about the role of language/linguistic discrimination. The data I collected through this prior fieldwork helped me develop questions for the first interview with these points in mind, e.g., was English language proficiency or immigrant status a factor in college-choice? I also sought feedback from each respondent to evaluate the conversations themselves.

After each meeting with the students, I emailed each respondent to ask them five questions to get their feedback on the questions that I asked them:

1. Did the questions make sense?
2. Were there any that I should change, like using different words or phrases?
3. Did you have trouble understanding me? (I asked this question because I was concerned about how well I could articulate the questions in Chinese.)
4. Was the number of questions I asked too many, too little or just right?
5. Do you have suggestions for me in terms of asking additional questions to help me get information about how someone chooses to attend a community college?

From their feedback, it was reaffirmed that I should conduct the interview in the language with which the participant was most comfortable because they were able to express their ideas without hesitation as a result of language difference. During the four individual meetings, each person chose to communicate in Chinese to be sure they could understand me and be able to articulate their responses. All the students understood the questions and thought that they were appropriate questions to try to understand why those chose BHCC. The length of the conversation which was about 45 minutes was acceptable. One respondent indicated that even if the interview went on longer, it would have been fine because he recognized my goal of the study to help other immigrants with college-choice and he wanted to help me.

Several themes emerged from these conversations. In this small sample, all the respondents felt that as immigrants they needed to go to college in order to “survive” in the United States. Some chose to attend BHCC in part because they did not know about other colleges or college/education options. Some chose BHCC because that was where their friends went or go.

First interview

The semi-structured first interview included 43 questions and several sub-questions that fell into four categories: participant background (15 questions); college-choice experiences (17 questions); family influence in college-choice (6 questions); and model minority myth as a college-choice factor (5 questions). (See Appendix C.)

Of the initial 17 interviews, 12 were conducted in Cantonese Chinese; 3 in English; and 2 in a combination of Cantonese Chinese and English. All but three interviews took place at
BHCC: two were at Northeastern University and one at the aforementioned Boston Chinatown community center. Each interview was audio-taped with the participant’s written permission. I took notes throughout the interviews. I employed Fraenkel and Wallen’s (2006) recommendation of asking the same question in different ways during the interview to check for accurate interpretation and understanding. I found this recommendation very useful because there were instances when the participant would vary the answer to the way the same question was asked, prompting for more clarification. I asked some questions in both English and Chinese. The complete set of first interviews yielded slightly over 26 hours of recording, with an average of a little more than 1.5 hours per interview. Translations and transcriptions took close to 80 hours.

Second interview

The purpose of conducting a second interview was to seek clarification from responses in the first interview and to ask new questions. What I learned from the first interviews was that I would have liked more information about their thoughts and experiences with language discrimination and race relations in the United States because many described experiences that suggested linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). To that end, I asked two new questions about power and their preferred racial group to belong to if they had a choice to see if their views on race and race dynamics in the U.S. had an impact on their college-choice experiences.

The original intent was to conduct the second interview after I transcribed the first interview within three months. I underestimated how long it would take to translate and transcribe. I also overestimated how much time I would be able to devote to this. On average, there was a nine month gap between the first and second interview. I did stay in touch with the participants to let them know that I was running behind with my transcriptions. Each
acknowledged my email and stated that she/he awaited the second interview. When it came time to schedule the second interview, however, only 15 of the 17 participants responded. The two who were not interviewed a second time initially responded to say they were busy and asked that I contact them at another specified time. When I followed up, I either did not get a response or was told they were busy. I followed up a couple more times through email and phone with no response.

The longer than anticipated gap in-between the interviews concerned me initially because I suspected the elapsed time would affect the participants’ memory of their responses in the first interview. Each participant remembered the vast majority if not all of what she/he said in the first interview. In the end, I think it worked out well that there was a longer than anticipated time gap between the interviews because for some participants, they admitted that their opinions about race evolved as they got more exposure to life in the United States. These differences in opinions were duly noted in data collection and analyses. Responses about race and race relations informed me about the importance of diversity as it affected the college-choice process, to be further discussed in Chapter 5. These opinions had an impact on their daily life and, thus, their views about college and college choice experience.

The complete set of second interviews took 13 months from May 2008 to June 2009. Like the first interview, the second interview was also audio-taped with the participant’s permission. In all, there were around nine hours of recording, averaging slightly more than half an hour for each interview. Translations and transcriptions took close to 30 hours. All transcriptions were done by November 2009.

Artifacts
In addition to interview transcriptions, I also referred to artifacts collected at the college for analyses. Examples include the College website and catalogs. One of the questions in the first interview was about the steps to enrollment at BHCC. Comparing the participants’ responses to the actual steps informed me about their understanding of the procedures. The information also provided the basis for an evaluation of the procedures for the College.

Data Analysis

After the interview data were collected, I transcribed all the interviews. I initially attempted to use a speech recognition software for the interviews conducted in English but the program was not able to capture all that was said due to volume, accent, and pace of the speech. I read each transcription multiple times, each with an open eye/ear to seek “what meaning and structures emerge” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998: 184) and begin the coding process.

Coding

Coding is the process by which data get simplified and complicated because it is about “breaking the data apart in analytically relevant ways in order to lead toward further questions about the data” (Strauss, 1987 as cited in Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Doing line-by-line analyses (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I started with open coding to name and categorize the data.

“Predisposition,” for example, was a category used to mark participant responses about factors that impacted this phase in the college-choice process. “HS role” was a code in “predisposition” to mark participant responses about impact of their high schools on their college-choice process. “HS role” was also used as an initial code in the other two phases of the college-choice process: “search” and “choice,” both of which were categories in this study.

Whenever possible, I assigned in vivo codes derived from the terms and language used by the participants to stay true to their stories and voices as much as possible (Strauss, 1987 as
cited in Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I then approached the data again to identify themes and reassigned categories, as needed. For each category/theme identified, I coded axially to examine each theme and to see if there were links to other themes from the interplay of the various aspects of the participants’ experiences. The third step in my coding was to code selectively to narrow them down to create a core code. I selected quotes that were representative of the codes and themes.

Throughout the coding and data analyses process, I followed Glaser & Strauss’ (1967) constant comparative method of qualitative analysis. While coding and analyzing the data, I also paid close attention to “bracketing” personal experiences and judgment, i.e., to suspend my presumptions and prejudgments about the phenomenon of college-choice. To ensure confidentiality, all participants’ names were masked with pseudonyms. Participants who did not choose their own pseudonym were assigned one.

Research records have been kept in a locked file. I kept the participant information sheets which have the participants’ names and pseudonyms separate from the rest of the research data. I password protected all electronic information. Only I have access to the digital recordings of the interviews and transcriptions. All research data will be destroyed and disposed three years after the study is complete.

*Analyzing artifacts*

As stated earlier, one of the interview questions was about the participants’ understanding of the College’s admission process. I reviewed the College’s website (BHCC, 2008) to see if information about the process was posted. I reviewed the College catalog. The goal of this exercise was two-fold. One was to verify the participants’ understanding of the process. Second
was to use the findings about how well they understood and followed the instructions to evaluate if recommendations for improvement were warranted.

**Limitations**

Even with “translation competence” where I am able to translate meanings of ideas from one culture (Chinese) into a form that is appropriate to another culture (“American”), I have to be mindful that certain terms and phrases do not have direct translations (Spradley, 1979: 19).

As such, there were times when I had to interpret what was said in Chinese and translated it into comprehensible English. This was most commonplace with Chinese slang, clichés or idioms. In Cantonese Chinese, there is a slang that says “lai bahn xia chiu.” This sentence literally translates into English as “You pretend to be boneless sparerib” when its interpreted English translation is “You pretend to be something better than you actually are.” Another popular slang that was used in all the interviews conducted in Chinese was “tai lok” which literally translates into “big land” and is used to reference mainland China.

Aside from language and its interpretation, another potential limitation that had to do with my positionality was the unknown extent to which my own background and experiences influenced the conversations in the questions posed and my responses to the participants’ answers. Because the interviews were conducted in the form of a conversation, as we freely exchanged information I suspect I could have responded to their answers based on my own opinions and beliefs. The participants did ask questions of my responses if they did not understand and corrected me when I misunderstood their responses. Had another person conducted the interview, however, especially someone who was not an “insider” as I am, I would imagine the conversations would have elicited different responses and subsequent different interpretations.
Because I was asking the participants about things that have happened in the past, there was the obvious limitation of the participants potentially not remembering or misremembering. During the interviews, the participants told me what they did remember and told me when they did not remember something. When I asked Fong, for example, about her grades at high school graduation, she said “That was a long time ago. It’s not too bad. I know I was fine in math but the literature pieces I didn’t do as well in.”

Lastly, because I had employed a non-probability sampling, purposive sampling, the findings of this study were not intended to be broadly generalizable beyond the scope of this study, its participants and their circumstances. I was not, however, concerned with this particular limitation. The primary goal of the study was to contribute to literature about the college-choice experiences from the perspective of a selected group of documented Chinese immigrant community college students. Secondly, it was to add to the literature that challenged the model minority myth. I wanted to focus on the individual experiences of the participants recognizing there were commonalities and differences in their demographical backgrounds. Common characteristics included their identities as Chinese immigrants, community college students, from low income families, and have low proficiency in English language skills. Differences included their first generation college student status, age, and educational background. I was interested in emphasizing the participants’ background characteristics of one API ethnic subgroup and tell their stories to inform the dominant discourse about them and their college-choice process.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings from this study to answer the primary research question: How did a group of documented Chinese immigrants choose to attend Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC)? I wanted to learn from the participants the steps they took and the factors they considered to decide to attend BHCC. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the 16 participants, 14 of whom were interviewed a second time for data clarification. The interview protocol for the first interview was informed by my previous fieldwork, Hossler & Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model, Hossler et al.’s (1999) college choice study, and Critical Race Theory.

To start, I present a profile of the 16 participants. I then share their stories about their experiences with their immigration journey to the United States and their college choice journey to Bunker Hill Community College. The four major themes that emerged from the stories were: 1) “Immigrant experience” included discussions about reasons for immigration and life in the U.S. 2) “Reasons for going to college” referred to the factors that contributed to the participants’ college aspirations and expectations. In addition to typical reasons for going to college, e.g., upward mobility, these participants spoke about the importance of other factors like English language acquisition, family and peer influence from the perspective of an immigrant, their academic experience. 3) “access to college knowledge” disclosed the factors that negatively impacted the participants’ college-choice process. 4) “Negotiations” as their method of deciding to attend BHCC. Like “reasons for going to college,” here too participants identified factors that had not been typically in college-choice research, e.g., sense of community, racial stereotypes.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings before proceeding to a discussion of the findings and their implications in Chapter 5.
It was the intent of this study to provide a platform for the participants’ voices to be heard. Accordingly, the quotes used are provided verbatim if they were said in English and as close as possible to a verbatim translation if they were spoken in Chinese. Unless otherwise noted, the quotes presented are from the first interview with each participant.

**Participant profiles**

The 16 participant group in the study was made up of 13 females and 3 males. At the time of the first interview, the average age was 27.75, ranging from 19 to 39. Seven of the participants were married; one separated; eight single. Two were naturalized U.S. citizens; 14 were documented permanent residents. All but three used Cantonese as their native Chinese dialect; the others used Mandarin. Fifteen of the participants were first generation college students – their parents’ highest level of education earned was high school or below. The father of the one participant who was not a first generation college student graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in China. Six participants enrolled full-time and 10 part-time at Bunker Hill Community College. Five worked full-time; 5 part-time; 6 did not work while enrolled. All but three participants were federal financial aid recipients. Nine participants aspired to earn a bachelor’s degree as their highest desired degree; 3 preferred an associate degree; 2 would like to earn a Master’s degree; 1 was interested in earning certification for employment; 1 was unsure at the time of the interview. Areas of program of study interests included: education, allied health, business, criminal justice, and general studies.

Twelve of the participants completed high school or more in Hong Kong or China. Of this group, one completed an associate degree equivalent; another earned a three-year bachelor’s degree in China; a third completed the first year of an associate degree equivalent. A total of five participants graduated from Massachusetts public high schools. There were five because
even though Christina had already completed high school in China, she repeated grades 10 through 12 in the U.S. because she was not able to provide documentation of her high school completion.

Below are profiles of the participants in this study.

- **Xin Ho**, 24, came to the U.S. with her family. Her parents could not adjust to a new life in the U.S. and returned to China. Xin Ho lived with her aunt who sponsored her family’s immigration. Xin Ho first enrolled at a community center to improve her English and was introduced to BHCC. Her uncle thought BHCC was a good idea. She applied and had been studying in pursuit of an accounting degree. She worked full-time before being laid off not long before our second interview. She was enrolled in a job training program as part of her unemployment benefits. She planned to and was looking forward to transferring but was afraid she might lose credits upon transfer.

- **Fong**, 29, came to the U.S. partly out of curiosity. She wanted to see why people in China made a big deal about immigrating to the U.S. She was disappointed upon arrival. She felt lonely and was bored with no social life. All she did for a while was work full-time at a restaurant. She took some English classes at a community center and then left for BHCC because teachers at the community center and her sister asked her to consider it. Her sister was previously enrolled at the community center before moving on to BHCC herself. Fong chose BHCC because she wanted to learn English. Life got better for Fong as her circle of friends expanded. She was happy at BHCC but would choose another college if she could. She was working towards a degree in elementary education.

- **Yan**, 19, came to the US to be reunited with her father. Yan did not want to go to a community college because she wanted to go to Northeastern University to study
business. Because her high school guidance counselor did not provide her with the correct information about the application process, she missed her opportunity. Her father was very insistent that she did not take a break from her education. He knew about BHCC because he used to live near the college so he told Yan to apply. She was hesitant. He gave her the application. She put it aside. When he followed up with her about it, she would say she was looking into it with no true intention to enroll. Her father took her to BHCC. She found out about the admission process and completed it. She was embarrassed to be enrolled at BHCC. “BHCC is not a ‘regular’ school.” She was very much looking forward to transferring out.

- **Mei**, 29, was very unhappy soon after her arrival in the U.S. to marry her husband. She did not have a strong network of support. Growing up, she always felt that she was not the “college type.” She did not do well in school in Hong Kong and did not consider going to college. She said that she barely wanted to go to college in the U.S. but felt she had to. In her words, “you either go to school or work.” Without a postsecondary degree and limited English skills, her job prospects were limited. She tried working at Dunkin Donuts and decided the amount of money earned was not worth the effort. She tried other jobs but did not like those either. She stopped working. Using her own logic about school or work, she went to school. She started to learn English at a community center. There, she was recommended to consider BHCC. She made some friends but found that difficult too because she did not trust people. After our first meeting, Mei returned to Hong Kong and stopped responding to my inquiries and requests for a second meeting.

- **Liva**, 20, completed her high school career in the U.S. Some of her high school teachers recognized her strong academic strengths and spoke with her often about going to
college. One teacher in particular asked her if she wanted to go to a four-year college or to learn English at a community college. Even though Liva wanted to go to a four-year college, she really wanted to improve her English. She was under the impression that learning English meant going to a community college. She did not know her options. Her teacher printed out the BHCC application for her. She completed the process and was accepted. Liva worked hard spending hours on homework and reviewing course materials. She liked BHCC. She was looking forward to transferring to the University of Massachusetts - Boston.

- **Si Man**, 24, came to the U.S. to join her aunt and uncle. Her parents who immigrated with her returned to China because they did not like life in the U.S. She worked full-time as a waitress in a restaurant. She chose BHCC because her friends and teachers from her community center recommended it. Her friends suggested that they all enroll at BHCC together. Si Man agreed. She wanted an education so that she could get out of working at the restaurant and in a better paying “9-5” position. She was happy in the U.S. and at BHCC. She made friends and was enjoying her independence. At the time of our second interview, Si Man was still deciding between majoring in accounting and nursing.

- **Pui Yin**, 30, immigrated to the U.S. to join her husband and to start a family. They have one young son. In addition to balancing school and family, Pui Yin also worked multiple part-time jobs during the week. She worked as a tutor in a couple of programs and a teacher in another. She started learning English at a community center and really enjoyed her time. She felt that her English skills improved as a result of the program. She was grateful to them for introducing her to BHCC. At the same time, she also wished the center would have provided her with more information about college options. At the
time of our second interview, Pui Yin took on another job to care for young children in Winchester, Massachusetts.

- **Shuk Hua**, 35, came to the U.S. to join her husband. She was introduced to BHCC by her friends and the community center where she was enrolled. She chose BHCC because she wanted to learn English and to earn a degree. Her husband was fully supportive of her going to college but her mother-in-law was not and made a comment to that fact. Her mother-in-law told her husband that going to college was a waste of time if she already had a job. Shuk Hua was bothered by it but decided she would not be able to change her mother-in-law’s point of view. Like Xin Ho, Shuk Hua was also laid off from the same company where they worked full-time and was enrolled in the same job training program. Although Shuk Hua declared accounting as her major, she really wanted to study fashion design. She did not like math even though she was good at it. Because she recognized job prospects were much better for someone with an accounting degree than fashion design, she decided on accounting. She was looking forward to getting back into the workforce to earn money after she finished her job training program.

- **Stephen**, 35, came to the U.S. to care for his mother. He did not really want to be in the U.S. or go to college. He was never the studious type. He said that while he was in high school in Hong Kong, he spent his time hanging out with friends. It was not until he entered the workforce that he regretted not having been a better student and gone to college. In Hong Kong, he was not qualified for a lot of work. He took what he could: temporary assignments with delivery or moving. Eventually, he landed a job as a buyer for Macy’s in Hong Kong. He came to the U.S. with hopes that he would be able to work at Macy’s in Boston. To his disappointment and puzzlement, he was not hired. “They
[Macy’s] wouldn’t even consider me for a sales job.” His recommendations from his Hong Kong supervisors were not recognized. He was working as a tour guide for a Chinese-owned travel agency. Again, he did not really want to go to college but felt he had to. He had to earn a degree in order to earn a better living. At the time of the second interview, he and his wife bought a new home. He was busy fixing it up on his own.

**Grace**, 39, came to the U.S. with her husband with high hopes for a better life. She had always wanted to go to college. It was her dream. She could not go when she was in China because she did not qualify. She also had family troubles that interfered with her studies. She thought coming to the U.S. would allow her a fresh start. She was pregnant not long after arriving in the U.S. Because it was a high risk pregnancy, she was bedridden for most of the pregnancy, which delayed her plans to enroll in college. She was delighted to have her daughter. She was ready to start college. Through recommendations from friends from church, Grace found and enrolled at BHCC. Her husband told her that as long as she could still take care of their daughter and pay for college herself, she could go. As a way to show his support, her husband agreed to take care of their daughter while she was in class during his lunch hour. He worked near BHCC. At the time of my first meeting with Grace, her husband had already told Grace that he wanted to divorce her. She did not tell me until our second interview. When we met the second time, Grace’s husband left her and their daughter. She pushed on and continued her studies because she knew that she needed to improve her English and earn a degree so that she could get a good job to support her daughter.

**Wei Man**, 39, came to the U.S. to join her husband and started a family. They have four young boys. Soon after arriving in the U.S., she started looking for places to learn
English. She also needed a job. Her husband, through friends, recommended a community center. It was free and it was convenient. She got a job as a food server at a restaurant. She started both the job and the class but stopped six months later when she got pregnant. After giving birth, she had to care for the child. They had three more kids. Wei Man had not worked since she quit the food server job. She learned through her friends that another community center also offered English courses that allowed her to bring your children. She enrolled. At this community center, she learned about BHCC. She wanted to study early childhood development because she wanted to work at a day care facility. She also heard about the Urban College but decided against it because their early childhood development program was offered in Chinese. Wei Man felt at the time that instruction in English would be better making her more marketable in her future job search. At the time of our second interview, she was working at home day care. She left BHCC and was enrolled at Urban College in the Chinese language childhood development program. She made the switch because her new employer recommended it. She also figured she would be able to continue her studies to develop her English skills after she was done with the Urban College program.

- **Christina**, 22, thought coming to the U.S. would mean more opportunities in general for her. Her family who immigrated with her felt the same way. Christina wanted to go to college ever since elementary school. She did not have the opportunity to in China because soon after she graduated from high school, she immigrated to the U.S. Her grades were also not high enough for her to go to college. When she got to the U.S., she and her aunt thought it would be a good idea for her to repeat some of her high school education since they were not able to prove her high school completion in China. She
decided that she would repeat high school in the U.S. to develop her English language skills. Her aunt and the high school counselor picked 10th grade for her but did not tell her why. Christina started in mid-year of the 10th grade. She was not happy in this high school. She said because she was shy and did not speak or understand English well, she did not have friends. She survived high school and did not think about going to college until after high school graduation. Her older sister was already enrolled at BHCC at the time and told Christina to do the same. While at BHCC, Christina was introduced to God by a classmate. She accepted Christ and was happier since. At our second meeting, Christina was leaning towards studying elementary education.

- **Kwan Lai**, 29, immigrated to the U.S. to be with her husband and to start a family. They have two young children. Going to college for Kwan Lai was not only good because she got to learn, she also saw it as a mental break from being a parent and wife. The years when her only work was as a housewife, she felt trapped. She said that going to BHCC was really her husband’s choice but she was fine with it because she was happy there. She made friends and was progressing nicely in her certification program. At our second interview, Kwan Lai was also working in a clinic. She said it was hard work but fulfilling because she was doing work that was related to her field of study.

- **Kai**, 20, had an interesting story about why his parents immigrated to the US without him and then spent most of the next decade trying to sponsor his immigration. According to Kai, it was Kai’s maternal grandfather who told his mother not to include him on her immigration application. His grandfather thought it would jeopardize her chances of immigrating. The parents successfully immigrated to the U.S. and soon started the paperwork to reunite with Kai. The immigration officials were suspicious because there
was never any mention of a son in their applications. For ten years, the parents spoke with embassy officials to try to get Kai to the U.S. While in China, Kai’s grandparents took care of him. His father would return to China to see Kai whenever he could. His mother could not return because she had to work. His father suffered from a disability and could not work. Kai would start a grade in elementary school in China and be pulled out when his father heard that the immigration application was approved only to find later that it was not approved. This happened for six years. This was why Kai never completed a full year of schooling when he was in China. He kept getting promoted because his grandparents paid the schools. Kai’s immigration application finally got approved and he rejoined his parents and little brother in the U.S. at age 10. Kai struggled in the 4th grade when he got to the U.S. In addition to living out the stresses of being a teenager, Kai also played a different role at home. His little brother has a learning disability. Kai looked after him most of the time. Kai also was the one placed into the position of having to tell his parents how to treat and teach his brother. He had no formal training or experience. He just told his parents based on his own opinions.

Kai was not a strong academic performer. His English proficiency skills were not strong. He could carry on a casual conversation with sparse grammatical errors. He did not understand the importance of a college education so he did not consider going. His friend told him about the benefits of college in grade 11 and he started considering it. Kai applied to BHCC because his teacher recommended it and said it would be a good way for him to find out if college was a good fit. He was initially a bit embarrassed to have to tell people that he was enrolled at BHCC because his friends and relatives said “Bunker Hill sucks.” He soon accepted that he need not be embarrassed. He was happy
at BHCC. He made a lot of friends. He found most of his instructors helpful and personable. He was enjoying his college experience.

- **Stacey**, 30, called herself a “follower” who would do whatever her friends said. Her friends said to go to BHCC. She went. When pressed to answer why she chose BHCC, she said it was actually because she wanted to learn English and to earn a degree. She was initially enrolled at a community center which introduced BHCC to her. She left there for BHCC because she thought there would be no additional educational opportunities at the community center after she was done with their English language program. She wanted to have the option to continue. In general, she has a supportive husband and father who wanted her to do well in college and be happy. At our second interview, Stacey was pregnant with her first child. She planned to continue her studies with a decreased course load if her health allowed.

- **Sky**, 20, started his U.S. education in middle school in New York. This was where he and his parents landed and settled upon arrival in the country to join his uncle who sponsored their immigration. While in middle school, his uncle and his mother told him to go to college when he was old enough. Sky had not thought about going to college prior to that moment and said that he would try. He did not decide to go to college until after he graduated from a public high school in Massachusetts. Sky said that he wanted to go to college so that he would not have to work at manual labor intensive jobs. His teacher told him about BHCC so that Sky could try college – to see if college was a good fit and to test out different programs of study. It was hard to tell if college was a good fit at the time of our interview. Sky was on academic probation because he failed one course and did not know he had to officially withdraw from another course. He just
stopped going and received a failing grade. Sky did say that he was feeling good about his studies at the time of our meeting. At the end of the first meeting, he thanked me for the opportunity to share his experience. I did not hear from him after that point. He stopped responding to my phone calls and emails for a second meeting.

**Theme 1: Immigrant experience**

The “immigrant experience” provided a background of the participants and the factors that directly or indirectly impacted their college-choice decision-making. Because of the age difference among the participants, there were two sets of experiences that overlapped at times, especially early after initial arrival. The four young adult participants, Yan, Kai, Sky, and Liva were 19 or 20 years-old at the time of the first interview and completed high school in the U.S. The fifth young adult participant, Christina, 22 years-old, completed high school in China and then repeated grades 10 through 12 in the U.S. The other 11 participants, 24 years-old or older, completed high school or more in China.

All 16 participants of this study immigrated to the U.S. under the reunification of families provision of the 1965 Immigration Act: 5 (Yan, Kai, Si Man, Fong, and Stephen) joined immediate family or relatives who were already in the country; 4 (Xin Ho, Christina, Sky, and Liva) immigrated as a family sponsored by relatives; 7 (Mei, Stacey, Pui Yin, Kwan Lai, Shuk Hua, Grace, and Wei Man) came to be with their husbands. All participants, except one (Stephen) believed that America would have more opportunities for them for advancement. Two specifically indicated they wanted to pursue educational opportunities. For the older adult participants who were planning to have children, they immigrated so that future generations could have more opportunities for education. They knew that China’s education system was
significantly more restrictive and competitive which limited their access to a college education. Opportunities for upward mobility were important for these working class participants.

Leaving their home country was difficult for all participants and especially for the three (Stephen, Fong, and Kai) who really did not want to leave because they enjoyed their lives in China. With the exception of Stephen, Fong, Kai, and Yan, the other participants talked about the excitement they felt once their immigration application was approved juxtaposed by the hesitation to leave their home, their friends and all that they knew. Yan was the only participant who said that she did not have time to “feel.” As soon as her application was approved, she was too busy making arrangements to leave.

Stephen told me that the only reason he immigrated to the U.S. was to take care of his aging mother. He preferred to have either stayed in Hong Kong or moved to mainland China where there would be more work opportunities for him. He did not think he would have the same opportunities in the U.S. because he was at a disadvantage as a Chinese immigrant in a White dominant country. Fong decided to immigrate to the U.S. after much vacillation. She had a good job and comfortable life in China and was hesitant to uproot herself. She finally decided to come to reunite with her sister and because she wanted to go to college and to satisfy her curiosity to see what life in the U.S. would be like. Kai who immigrated as a young boy did not want to leave the only family he knew, his grandparents in China. At the same time, he wanted to be reunited with his parents in the U.S.

*Early adjustment*

Life was not easy for any of the immigrants when they arrived in the U.S. Participants expressed emotions of loneliness, anxiety and fear because they were strangers in a foreign land, unfamiliar with the new country’s language, customs, food, and life style. Everyone missed their
friends, family members, and life back home. All, except one of the participants (Grace), had to live with people in the U.S. they had not lived with before. For some, it was with relatives. For others, it was with their new husbands. For Kai, it was with his parents and younger brother whom he met a few times during his father’s visits to China. For Yan, it was leaving her mother in China and reuniting with her father whom she had not seen for five years. All the participants had to rely heavily on their immigration sponsors (family or relatives) for just about everything, including love and support and daily necessities, like food and shelter.

As mentioned earlier, Fong came to the U.S. in part because she was curious about life in the U.S. Not long after her arrival, Fong questioned and doubted her decision to come: “It [decision to come to the U.S.] is really fighting in my mind. I don’t know. I want to see how come the U.S. living is everyone say the U.S. is very good, the gold dream. After I come, it’s very different in my mind…China is not very different.” It was her sister and her family who provided her comfort when she felt poorly about being in the U.S.

Mei, who came to the U.S. with the original intent to be on vacation, unexpectedly got married to her husband. They filed her immigration application which was approved a few months later. She admitted regretting getting married: “I don’t know why we decided to get married. Went crazy, and just did it.” By the time Mei and I met for the first interview, Mei was married for over a year. She was very unhappy in the U.S. “I feel like an orphan all alone. I don’t have family or relatives here…I have no one and nothing here.” Apparently, she did not consider her husband “family.” She did say that he was supportive but they did not really connect. Mei thought life in the U.S. was “boring” with no social life. Because of her own fears and stereotypes about other racial groups, specifically African-Americans, Mei would not go to Roxbury, Massachusetts even though there was a class there that she was interested in taking.
She heard there were a lot of “black ghosts” (literal Chinese translation of a racially derogatory term for African-Americans) and was afraid to be robbed or assaulted by them. She did not go out in the dark unless she was escorted by a driver. Adjusting to life in the U.S. was difficult for Mei also because she was a highly independent woman in Hong Kong, who now had to rely on others. She had difficulty making friends because she did not know whom to trust. She would go to the few friends she did trust for help before considering consulting with her husband.

After Sky and his family arrived in New York, he was enrolled at a local middle school. Sky talked about how he felt when he was picked on by Russian students at school and no one came to his aid: “I just felt that I was a stranger in a strange land so I didn’t expect anything else.” Similarly, Christina felt very lonely in her high school in Massachusetts because she did not have any friends and the “black ghosts” picked on her. One called her stupid; another touched her. She told her teacher, who was also African-American, but the teacher “pretended not to hear me [her].” The only person she could count on was her older sister who helped console her.

In addition to the fears of being in a new country, some of the older adult participants were anxious about the prospects of securing work they knew they needed to make a living. For the young adult participants, they were anxious about going to a new school, meeting new people, and making the grade. With these emotions, the participants carried on because they knew they must as part of their transition to a new life.

The older adult participants

For five of the older adult participants, the immediacy was to start earning money even though they knew they needed to have English language skills to “survive” in the U.S. They just could not afford to delay working at the time. With the help of family and sometimes their
friends, they landed full-time jobs. Fong’s brother-in-law introduced her to her job at a Japanese restaurant. Si Man’s uncle got her a job at a Chinese restaurant. Stephen’s aunt referred him to work at a factory. Stacey’s husband’s friends suggested she work at a facial salon in Boston Chinatown. Wei Man’s husband’s friend informed her of a job opening at a Chinese restaurant.

It was during their time working when Fong, Si Man, Stephen, Stacey, and Wei Man realized that they could not put off learning English because they needed it in order to have a better paying job. The inability to communicate effectively with English speaking clients/customers combined with their dissatisfaction with long work hours and the type of work they were doing served as the impetus for these five participants to seek English language classes. The five other older adult participants (Xin Ho, Mei, Pui Yin, Shuk Hua, and Kwan Lai), who had the option of delaying full-time work went to learn English first. Shuk Hua was working part-time as a cashier with flexible hours that allowed her to study.

All ten of these older adult participants found their way to their local community center to learn English. Two were in Boston Chinatown; one in Malden, Massachusetts; another in Quincy, Massachusetts. It should be noted that all three neighborhoods have high concentrations of API residents. Mei learned about her community center through the Chinese language newspaper. The other participants received their information from and through family. Pui Yin said, “My husband’s friend made the recommendation [to go to the community center]. When I first arrived, I didn’t know anything. His friend told us that I can learn English at the [name of community center].”

With the exception of Stephen, the community center was more than just a place to learn English for free for these participants; it was also a place to network and socialize. These participants made friends and began to build their own communities and networks of support,
which helped them start to feel better about a new life in the U.S. They built confidence as they improved their English language skills.

Stephen who completed the first year of an associate’s degree equivalent in Hong Kong did not find the community center he went to in Quincy helpful at all. He found the materials covered in the English language class too basic. He stopped attending after the first class and returned to his family and friends to find out about alternative learning opportunities. He was also using the internet to search for information, using keywords like education, college, English class.

**The young adult participants**

The families and relatives of the young adult participants helped enroll them in public school. Kai went to an urban elementary school in Massachusetts; Sky went to urban middle school in New York; Yan went to a suburban high school in Massachusetts; Christina and Liva went to a high school in a small city in Massachusetts.

Kai came to the U.S. when he was ten years-old. It was not an easy transition for him. He learned very quickly a lesson of American etiquette in fourth grade at his new elementary school. “In China, I could sometimes spit. Spat whenever I like to. In the U.S., it is not possible to spit. Once, I did not know and spat. Spat and being seen by my teacher. He yelled at me: ‘You bastard country boy.’ He then punished me. I had to copy an ancient Chinese fable multiple times.” Academically, Kai had a lot of learning to do too. Without a firm foundation of the primary years of schooling because had had never completed a full year of school in China, Kai’s academic skills were deficient. He remembered how hard it was for him to be expected to understand a concept but did not. His teacher publicly humiliated him for his poor math skills.
Because he was in bilingual education in a school with a large population of Chinese students, Kai made friends fairly quickly as he was able to communicate with them.

Sky was the one who was picked on by some Russian classmates in school. Aside from that incident, Sky thought his first year in a U.S. middle school was fine. He kept to himself and watched out for himself. He could not count on his classmates at school or the teachers. He did not have “friends.” I asked if his classmates were his friends or acquaintances, he said they were “in-between.” He figured he would not have to see the Russian students anymore after middle school. He was right because his family moved to Boston after he graduated from middle school.

Christina was seriously affected by her interactions with the African-American students in her high school who picked on her. When we met for our second interview, three years after the incidents, Christina still held on to the distaste she felt for those boys and had transferred that feeling toward all African-Americans. Christina was miserable in high school. She did not have friends. If it were not for the support of her older sister, she would not know how she would have survived high school.

Yan started the 9th grade in one high school and then transferred to another after she and her father moved to another suburb. They moved again after she graduated from high school. She reported that all her transitions were fine. She was anxious about going to the first school but quickly adjusted, meeting friends. She liked her 2nd high school even though she was among a handful of API students. She enjoyed the attention she got. Boys went up to her and told her she was pretty.

**Theme 2: Reasons for going to college**
The participants’ “reasons for going to college” described their college aspirations and expectations. While there were overlaps in how the older and young adult participants developed their college aspirations and expectations, there were also clear distinctions based on their educational backgrounds. All 16 participants wanted to go to college to continue to improve their English language studies after leaving the community center or high schools. For some, better English skills were a means to secure a better paying job. For others, they wanted improved English skills so that they would not be picked on or discriminated against because of low English proficiency. For 15 of the 16 participants, going to college was important for financial stability and upward mobility. Of these 15, four also said going to college was important to learn. Pui Yin was the 16th and only participant who responded going to college was important for learning to gain knowledge alone. Fong said, “In my country, everyone have a future have a good job right. If you have a higher education, you can get a good job. It’s easier. That’s why I go to college.” Fong then added, “I want to [go to college] because if you want your knowledge, to improve yourself or something.”

The older adult participants

College aspirations and expectations were formed twice for some of the older adult participants. The first time was when they were young growing up in China. The second time was after they immigrated to the U.S. For those who did not aspire to go to college while in China, they decided to after they arrived in the U.S.

Aspirations in China

Eight of the 12 participants who completed high school in China developed their college aspirations well before high school: Shuk Hua and Christina wanted to go to college when they were in elementary school. Christina is included in this “adult participant” section and in the
following “young adult participant” section because she completed high school both in China and the U.S., which made her situation unique compared to the other participants. Xin Ho, Fong, Si Man, Pui Yin, Grace and Stacey decided they wanted to go to college when they were in middle school. Mei and Stephen did not want to go to college because they did not enjoy school. Stephen realized the economic value of a college education after he graduated from high school in Hong Kong and entered the work force. For Wei Man and Kwan Lai, it was not that they did not want to go to college growing up; rather, it was because they knew that their families could not afford it. Both women knew that they would need to get a job as soon as possible to help offset family financial responsibilities.

The revealing story that these participants shared was the influence of the Chinese education system on their college aspirations and expectations. All 12 participants who went through the K-12 system in China told me that students in China were tracked using test scores. While in elementary school, students were required to take exams to determine which middle schools they would attend. Students in high performing middle schools were prepared to test to get into the academically tracked high schools. The expectation was that students in the academic high schools would then be prepared to score high in the college entrance exams, which not only determined whether or not they could go to a college but the subjects in which they were qualified to study. Going to college meant going to a four-year college for these Chinese students.

Middle school students who did not score high enough to get into the academically tracked high schools attended the vocationally tracked ones. In addition, there were specialized high schools that trained future teachers and nurses into which students could test. High schools were ranked based in part on the number of their graduates who gained college acceptance.
Students enrolled in the top specialized high schools were guaranteed a job with the government upon graduation. Students in the vocational high schools were expected to find a job and work after graduation. There were no guarantees for job placement.

The education system was a little different in Hong Kong, where Mei and Stephen went. Hong Kong did not have specialized high schools that guaranteed a government job upon graduation.

Because of the Chinese education system and its competitive nature, the 12 participants started hearing about college early on which contributed to the early development of college aspirations for most of them. “Everybody goes to college” was a common response shared by 8 of the participants when asked why they wanted to go to college. Fong added, “I just knew the point of going to school is to one day go to college.” The participants were told repeatedly by their teachers and families about the importance of doing well in school so that they could get into college. The expectation the teachers set for them was that a college education yielded economic gains and prestige.

Just as the Chinese education system encouraged early college aspirations for some participants, it also discouraged college going for others. By middle school, Wei Man already knew that she would not make it to college. She did not score high enough to get into a good middle school. The low score combined with her family’s need to have extra income led Wei Man to decide that college was not in her future. She focused instead on finishing middle and high school so that she could get a job. Kwan Lai who was also from a working class family in China never considered going to college when she was young. She wanted to get into the specialized high schools instead because it was more important to her and her family that she was guaranteed a job after graduation.
Of these 8 participants who wanted to go to college when they were young, not one scored high enough to get into an academic track college. Only two went on to complete postsecondary education degrees in China. Xin Ho completed an associate’s degree equivalent. Fong completed a three-year bachelor degree equivalent program. She scored high enough to get into a professional school for business even though she wanted to study education. Because she was not able to study what she wanted in China, Fong chose to immigrate to the U.S. with the hope that she could have a second chance of going to college so that she could pursue education as a field of study. The other participants either did not test well enough to get into an academic track high school or tested into the specialized high schools. After high school, they went to work.

Aspirations in the U.S.

College aspirations were rekindled for some and ignited for the first time for others after the participants immigrated to the U.S. For all the participants who wanted to go to college when they were young, but could not, the U.S. offered them a second chance at college. Xin Ho and Pui Yin knew that they would go to college in the U.S. after their immigration applications were approved. Fong, Shuk Hua, and Grace decided that they would go to college in the U.S. soon after arrival. For Grace, going to college had always been her dream, “it still is my dream.” She did not get to go to college when she was in China because of low scholastics and family issues. Grace was desperately hoping that she could fulfill this “dream” in the U.S.

Stacey’s college aspirations were renewed when she was enrolled in the English language program at the community center. Stephen decided to enroll in college for the first time shortly after arriving in the U.S. Mei, Si Man, Wei Man, and Kwan Lai, who did not want to go to college when they were in China, elected to go to college in the U.S. during their time in
their English language programs at community centers. In general, families were supportive of the participants’ decision to go to college. Wei Man’s husband agreed to take on more responsibilities with housework and taking care of their four young boys. Stacey’s husband and father were supportive of her, but in a way that could be interpreted to be not selfless support. They told Stacey going to college was important so that she could serve as their interpreter. They even insisted on the major that she would choose, accounting, so that she could help with the accounting in her husband’s new restaurant business.

Family and friends were not always supportive. Shuk Hua’s mother-in-law disapproved of her decision to go to college. As mentioned in her profile, Shuk Hua’s mother-in-law told her husband that it was a waste of time and money to go to college. Some of Si Man’s friends tried to discourage her from going to college. They threatened that the amount of work required for college “would kill you [Si Man].” Grace’s “friends” from church questioned her multiple times when she was going to school instead of working. They insisted that she should be earning money to support her child instead of wanting to go to college. Some of Wei Man’s (former) friends mocked her for wanting to continue her studies after the community center: “They taunted me for going to school. They asked for how much longer I would have to be in school; that I don’t go to work….They just said that, ooh after you’re done with school, you’ll work in an office, make lots of money.” She then added, “This is why one of my friends did not tell people she goes to school.” It was unclear if the comments that Shuk Hua, Si Man, Grace, and Wei Man received had anything to do with their gender. I raise the question because some Chinese people do believe that girls and women should not go to school. Westerners believed this too. I posed the question to the women but they had not considered the comments as gendered and could not answer to confirm or disconfirm.
Despite the disapproval, the threat, the questioning, and the taunting, all four women continued their pursuits of a college education. Essentially, these women chose to ignore the negativity and focused on the reasons they have identified for themselves to want to go to college. Si Man decided to go to college so that she could get out of her waitressing job and to not to have to feel bad every time someone spoke English to her and she did not understand.

In addition to family, friends and community centers played a vital role in some of the participants’ college aspirations. Some participants reported they decided to go to college at the urging of friends, some of whom they met at the community centers. The teachers at the centers strongly encouraged their students to continue their studies whether it was in college or in other training programs. For participants who went to one particular community center in Boston Chinatown, going to college translated into going to Bunker Hill Community College. This will be further explored later in this chapter.

The same message that the participants received growing up about the economic benefits of a college education resonated even more loudly with these immigrants. When they were young, they wanted to go to college because they wanted the economic benefits of a college education. It was also because they desired to go to college to learn. The difference this time in the U.S. was that they felt they needed to. Many still desired to but they all felt they needed to in order to survive in the U.S. Mei and Stephen, who did not enjoy school, said they pursued college because they would have no opportunities for mobility in the U.S. without it.

Interestingly, this “need” was not only for a college education for economic gains, it was also to improve their English language skills, without which they felt they could not “survive.” The expectation that some of the participants had was going to college in the U.S. meant learning
In sum, for the older participants of this study, their early college aspirations in China were heavily influenced by the Chinese education system, their teachers, and their families. After they immigrated to the U.S., their college aspirations were renewed or initiated by the need to learn English and to earn a college degree for employment, by the encouragement of friends and families, and by the community centers for those who enrolled in them.

A missing factor in current college-choice models is the educational background and experiences of immigrant students who completed primary, secondary or more education overseas. As was just described, these non-U.S. experiences significantly influenced the participants’ college aspirations and expectations.

The young adult participants

Although all the young adult participants who completed high school in the U.S. also completed parts of their education in China, only one developed her college aspirations early. Liva knew that she wanted to go to college when she was in elementary school in China. She remembered the repeated messages of going to college for social and economic mobility. When she started high school in the U.S., she knew that she wanted to go to college upon graduation because she wanted to learn and because she knew she needed a college degree to make a “good” living. Liva’s family and relatives supported her decision to go to college. She also received encouragement from her high school teachers because they saw she was performing well academically.

Yan wanted to go to college near the end of the 11th grade in the U.S. at the behest of her father and encouragement by her high school teachers. Yan recognized that going to college was
important for economic gains. She wanted a “comfortable life,” one which allowed her the leisure of traveling and enjoying life. Because it was expected that students in her high school would go on to college that there was really no talk about why students should go to college or to which colleges to apply. Yan, being a new immigrant, did not understand the college system in the U.S. and would have benefited greatly from those conversations and information. Instead, she was only given information on how to apply to college. Unfortunately, that did not work out for her because her guidance counselor did not tell her requirements of the application process for non-native English speakers.

Sky did not decide that he wanted to go to college until after he graduated from high school even though he promised his uncle and mother when he was 13 that he would try to get into college. He wanted to go to college to make money to take care of his mother. His high school held college fairs but did not really provide a lot of information about college. He said that his counselor and some teachers talked about college: “They said if you really want to go college, you must work hard.” It was unclear what contributed to the gap in Sky’s college aspirations. This would have been a question that I would have asked him had we met a second time.

Christina, whose original college aspirations were developed when she was in elementary school in China, did not want to go to college until after she graduated from her U.S. high school. After she immigrated to the U.S., Christina had a tough time adjusting, as described earlier. She did not know the requirements for going to college. She did not consider going to college until her sister encouraged her. Her high school guidance counselor did not approach her nor did her teachers talk to her about going to college. When Christina made an appointment to
see her high school guidance counselor about college after her sister told her about BHCC, the
counselor told her to pick a college that was “cheap and convenient.”

Kai’s college aspirations were initiated near the end of 12th grade. In hindsight, Kai
recognized that he decided quite late but explained, “because I did not know what a college was.
Why I should go to a college? Later on my friends and teachers explained to me that college was
very important. If I was not going to a college, I would not be able to find any good job. That
was what they told me about good job. I asked what a good job was. During that time, I did not
know what my interest was.”

In sum, factors that contributed to these young adult participants’ college aspirations
were family and friends, their high schools, their desire to improve their English skills and for
economic gains.

**Theme 3: Access to college knowledge in the U.S.**

As part of the college-choice process, these participants were deciding whether or not to
go to college and which college to attend in the U.S. They developed their list of college
considerations that were important to them and got information about college from various
sources.

All participants cited more than one source. The top three most cited resources for the
older adult participants were: friends (10 participants); community centers (9); family (4). For
the young adult participants, their top three resources were: high school (4 participants); friends
(3); family (3); college fairs (2).

Now that these participants had expanded their own network of support, they did not
need to rely as heavily on their family as they did when they first arrived in the country. Friends
have become their most important resource. Both Si Man and Stacey were strongly influenced
by their friends’ decisions to go to college. Stacey said that she was going to college in part because her friends were. Si Man expressed a similar sentiment: “If my friends go, I go.” For many of the participants in this study, they met their friends at the community centers where they enrolled in English language programs. For the young adult participants, they relied on their high schools for information. Friends were important to them as well.

Three of the five young adult participants (60%) reported their families as a resource compared to 36% of the older adult participants. Because the young adult participants were still dependent on their parents, it was not surprising. Also not a surprise but worth noting was that Kai and Sky did not reach out to their families as a resource. Kai said that he did not talk to anyone in his family about going to college because he did not think any of them could help him. He was the eldest son. The highest level of education that both his father and mother earned was elementary school in China. Kai did not have relatives who could help him. Christina, who was also a first generation college-student, was able to get help from her older sister who was already enrolled at BHCC.

Table 5: Participants’ college search resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Older adult</th>
<th>Young adult</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community center</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College fairs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College guide</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the participants tapped into different resources for information, they shared a common experience: they all received inadequate information and even misinformation about college going, e.g., types of colleges, specific colleges, application process, and financial aid...
process. These participants’ stories brought to light questions about the equity in access to college knowledge, without which negatively affected their college-choice process. College knowledge is the relevant information that students need to make an informed decision about going to college and information on getting into the college of choice. The important point to note here, as was made by McDonough, Korn, and Yamasaki (1997), is that it is more than just information. It is tacit knowledge that makes sense to the students that they can use to their advantage in the college application process. Publicly funded social structures, such as high schools, community centers, and government agencies that should have aided their college-choice process did not.

**College search factors**

Without guidance or assistance, the participants came up with several factors they considered as qualities they wanted and needed in a college. The top three commonly cited important factors for the older adult participants were: cost (10 participants); location (10); a lot of Chinese/API immigrants at the college (7); having friends at the college (4), opportunities to learn English (4), and flexible schedule (4) round off the top three factors. For the young adult participants, their top three factors were: cost (5 participants); location (3); transferability (2).

Table 6 lists all the search factors that the participants identified.

*Table 6: Participants’ college search factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Older adult</th>
<th>Young adult</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordability</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of Chinese/API immigrants</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferability</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most important factor for both the older and young adult participants was affordability, a factor that has been identified in existing research (Bers & Smith, 1987; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Jackson, 1982; Somers et al., 2006; Teranishi, 2004). Given that all the participants in this study were from working class backgrounds, they would and could only go to a college that they could afford. Affordability for some participants was determined by the sticker price of college cost, similar to what Somers et al. (2006) found. Stacey was the only one who did not consider cost as a search factor because she was more concerned about having friends at the college and a convenient location. Of the group, I speculated that her family was beginning to do a little better financially. She was a recipient of federal financial aid and state public subsidies at the time of our first interview. Her husband just opened his own restaurant by the time of our second interview.

As Stacey had reported, location was a big factor in her college considerations. Nine other older adult participants and 3 young adult participants agreed. Location was another factor that researchers have found to be an important college choice factor (Bers and Smith, 1987; Jackson, 1982; Litten, 1982; Somers et al., 2006). These participants wanted an easy commute between home, school, and work for those who were working. Fong and Si Man both worked and lived close to an Orange line MBTA stop. As soon as they got out of class, they took the subway to get to work. Some of the participants did not have access to cars so driving to a farther location was not an option.
A factor that was very important for 7 of the older adult participants that was not important for the young adult participants was the desire to have a lot of other students at the college with similar qualities, Chinese or API immigrants. Wei Man said having a large population of other immigrants was comforting. Pui Yin said, “I think that the fact that there are so many Chinese people here impacted my decision to come here too. I’ve heard from friends that the higher level you are in, there aren’t many Chinese. They lament that it’s difficult to find someone to talk to at that level.” Xin Ho similarly said she would feel a natural bond and a sense of comfort to be with other Chinese/API immigrant students. Yan, a younger participant, did not find a need to be among other Chinese/API immigrant students because she was used to being with non-API students – she was among a handful of API students in her high school. She also said that she made friends easily regardless of their race.

Associated with the desire to be with other Chinese/API immigrant students was the preference to have friends who were enrolled at the same college. Four of the older adult participants cited friends as an important factor in their considerations of college. Pui Yin said, “As a new immigrant, you want a sense of community to feel safe so you go with your friends.” Having friends at the college was the most important factor for Stacey. Five of the participants (4 older adult and 1 young adult participants) said that the college they would consider must offer the opportunity to develop their English language skills. The level of the English courses was not specified.

*The older adult participants*

*Community centers*

As stated earlier, for the participants who enrolled at the community centers (except Stephen), the centers played a very important role in developing their college aspirations. The
centers also had played a crucial role in their college search process. As recent immigrants, the participants relied on the community centers for information. The Centers represented authority. It was the participants’ teachers, the only teachers they had in the U.S. up to that point, who were kind to them and encouraged them to go to college. These teachers were people the participants respected and trusted. The assumption was that the Centers would provide the information the participants needed with good intentions.

This strong and positive relationship between the community centers and their students was very real at one Boston Chinatown community center, hereinafter referred to as “API Community Center.” This was the center where I did my prior fieldwork and then helped me recruit participants for this study. When I was planning the calls to students that API Community Center recommended for the prior fieldwork, as discussed in Chapter 3, I was informed by the program director to start by telling the students that he gave me their names and the reason I was calling. All except one of the students I called agreed to meet with me: “If [program director] told you to call me, then it must be legitimate.”

When teachers at API Community Center encouraged students to go to college, they talked about the importance of furthering their education. The teachers wanted the students to continue developing their English, academic, or vocational skills, with preference for the former two types of skills. To introduce college, the teachers asked their program graduates who were college students to return and speak with the students. The API Community Center also sought the assistance of a The Education Resources Institute (TERI) representative who met with the students about applying to college and specifically for financial aid.

Eight of the participants for this study enrolled at API Community Center. Fong, Mei, Pui Yin, Kwan Lai, Wei Man, Stacey, and Si Man (7 of 8 API Community Center students)
unearthed their common experience that not one of them was given much information about colleges except for Bunker Hill Community College. Participants reported they received information about BHCC at every level of their Adult-Basic-Education program. Mei said, “Everyone [in the program] said to come to this college [BHCC]. I actually don’t know why because there should be more choices. There was a lot of information about BHCC available.”

Participants who enrolled at API Community Center had the impression that going to BHCC was the natural next step in their education path because most of the people they know who enrolled at the Center went on to BHCC. When asked if she thought API Community Center contributed to her decision to attend BHCC, Pui Yin responded, “Yes, because so many of the [API Community Center] students end up at BHCC. API Community Center really only talks about BHCCC.” Other participants remembered hearing about the University of Massachusetts – Boston as well. Other colleges that they heard about through the Center were Roxbury Community College (RCC) and Quincy College.

Participants also heard about other colleges like Boston College, Boston University, Bentley, Simmons, Harvard, and MIT from friends and family. They did not, however, consider any of these colleges because they thought they were not qualified academically and would not be able to pay their tuition.

At a time when participants were looking for information about where to go for college, they received limited information from a resource they respected and trusted and, thus, expected to get good information. Participants reported that the community center did not ask nor guide them in developing their set of college search factors; they identified them on their own. They were not informed by the community center what they should expect life would be like in college except they would have to continue to work hard to develop their English skills. Most of the API
Community Center program graduates who came back to talk to the students were enrolled at BHCC and spoke about the application process, with emphasis on the College’s intake assessment test. Mei recalled meeting a graduate who was enrolled at the University of Massachusetts – Boston but could not remember much of what was said but remembered the many talks her class had with BHCC students.

Participants were not given information from the community center about the different types of college in the U.S.: two-year versus four-year; public versus private. Out of the 11 older adult participants, 8 did not know that there were other college types and options. Seven of these 8 were enrolled at community centers. As discussed in Chapter 2, Hossler & Gallagher (1987) found in their research that it was more important for students in the search phase to have information on different types of institutions than information on specific institutions because they might mistakenly self-select out of applying to a particular institution that could be a good fit without the proper information. When Pui Yin learned this new information from our interview, she was a little shocked at first and then responded, “You don’t know what you don’t know. If I know that there are options, I would compare the information about the different colleges: what resources they have. Long-term, how can this college help you after graduation?” Shuk Hua who was enrolled at a different community center was also only introduced to BHCC as a college option. She also did not know there were different types of colleges or other colleges.

The two API Community Center students (Xin Ho and Fong) who did know about other college types and colleges found out from friends and family. Interestingly, Xin Ho and Fong both preferred to enroll at a four-year college but self-selected out of applying because they feared that their English skills were not strong enough and that they would not be able to afford
it. Neither knew that some four-year colleges offered English-as-a-Second Language and remedial English courses. They also did not know that financial aid could potentially cover the cost of attendance at a four-year institution.

Mei interpreted the information she received from API Community Center to suggest going to college meant going to BHCC. This was why she only applied to BHCC. Not one of the 11 older adult participants applied to a college other than BHCC.

Application and financial aid process

All eleven older adult participants had decided to apply to Bunker Hill Community College. Some asked their friends or families to help with the application process. Some got help from the API Community Center. Some received assistance from the TERI representative. Only one participant, Xin Ho, knew the actual admission application process. The others said the process was easy and thought they knew it. When I compared their account of the steps they took with the information BHCC published on their website, I learned they really did not know the process.

The step that was missed most often was supplying proof of high school completion. Many of the participants thought that proof of high school was part of the financial aid application and not admission to BHCC. Pui Yin and Stephen were enrolled for more than one term before they were asked to submit their high school diploma when they submitted their application for financial aid. Stephen said, “I was actually never told I had to submit that [high school diploma]. When I applied for financial aid, I handed in my high school diploma.” Stephen thought that because he took the intake skills assessment test and the College let him continue taking courses that he successfully completed the admission process. He figured that as
long as he kept taking courses to satisfy the curriculum requirements, he would get his degree.

He did not know nor understand the meaning of or steps to matriculation.

All eleven participants remembered taking the intake skills assessment test. A lot of emphasis was placed on this because it was an English language test. Some of the participants, like Stacey, thought that it was an admissions test. She thought that if failed this test, she would not be allowed to take classes at BHCC. In actuality, this was a course placement test. Although some participants mentioned that they were told that BHCC was “easy to get into,” they did not know that this was because of the College’s open access admission policy.

All eleven participants also remembered meeting with a staff member who gave them their placement test results; completed a form to select course(s); went to pay for the course(s). These were steps to enrollment only and not matriculation.

Participants knew that they could apply for federal financial aid because they were either informed by the TERI representative, family, friends, or BHCC staff. The TERI representative met individually with many of the API Community Center students about college and specifically to complete the financial aid application because it is a complicated application. Instead of explaining the steps to the financial aid process, however, participants reported that the TERI representative asked them for information and completed the form for them. On one hand, it was nice for the participants to have someone who knew the process to complete the form so that they knew it was done correctly. On the other hand, the participants did not learn how to do it, which could be a problem when they had to reapply in the future if they wanted aid. Xin Ho was the only one who was able to complete most of the form on her own because of her accounting background. Even still, she had questions and sought the assistance of the TERI representative and the financial aid office at BHCC.
Some participants stated that when they met with the TERI representative, they remembered her talking primarily about BHCC as well. Some said she also talked about RCC, Quincy College, and the University of Massachusetts – Boston, but most of the focus was on BHCC. For these participants, it reaffirmed for them that BHCC was the college for them. They had heard the same message from both their API Community Center and a TERI representative.

The young adult participants

High schools

One hundred percent (5 out of 5) of the young adult participants reported they received information from their high schools about going to college. The level and type of information they each received varied.

Yan, who went to a high school where most of its graduates continued on to college, did not hear about going to college from her guidance counselor until near the end of 11th grade. It was based on this conversation that started her thinking about going to college. Her counselor gave her a website to search for colleges and told her to pay attention to the majors that the colleges offered, their campus environment and safety, and the size of the institutions. Yan followed the instructions and came up with a list of colleges that she considered applying to: Northeastern University, Suffolk University, Framingham State University and Newbury College. When she told her counselor about these colleges, the counselor told her not to apply to Newbury College because “it was not good” but did not explain why. Yan accepted the suggestion especially since she did not know much about Newbury except that it was in the city and convenient to get to. She then decided against Framingham State because it was too far and she did not have a car. With her counselor, she decided to apply to Northeastern and Suffolk.
Northeastern was her first choice. She knew that she wanted to go to a four-year institution because the college’s reputation mattered to her.

The counselor worked with Yan on the application process. They did everything right except for a major requirement for non-native English speakers. The counselor did not inform Yan that she needed to take the Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) as part of the application process. As a new immigrant, Yan did not know that she needed to take both the SAT and the TOEFL. It was her friend who told her about the TOEFL. When Yan told her counselor about this requirement, the counselor was surprised. By then, it was too late to take the TOEFL to qualify for admission in the upcoming fall semester. Yan reasoned that the counselor probably did not know about the TOEFL because she was among a handful of API students in the high school. This lack of information was costly for Yan.

The counselor was not able to offer Yan any more information or assistance at that point. Yan thought that she would take a break from school after high school and apply the following year. The counselor thought it was a good idea. Yan’s father did not. It was Yan’s father who introduced her to BHCC and then strongly urged her to go persistently. He even took her to campus. Yan did not want to go to BHCC because she thought that “two-year colleges are not good.” She said that she would rather go to a bad four-year college instead of a good two-year one where she could learn. Yan knew that she would not be at BHCC if it were not for her father.

Liva’s high school had a program that introduced college to students but she did not really know much about the program. She did know that “They [program] ask you what subject you want and then focus on colleges that are good in that subject.” She did not use this program; instead, she spoke mostly with her teachers about her going to college.
Liva thought her high school teachers were very nice and helpful. She thought the teachers reached out to her because she was a good student. She started at this high school in the 10th grade and earned cumulative Grade Point Average of slightly above 3.600 on a 4.000 scale at time of high school completion. She was in ESL and Advanced Placement math and accounting. There was one teacher in particular who spoke with Liva regularly about her college prospects. This teacher asked Liva if she wanted to go to college. Liva answered in the affirmative and added she wanted to go to a four-year college because she knew she wanted a bachelor’s degree in accounting. This teacher called a four-year college for her to ask how well the college thought Liva would do given her low English proficiency. Liva scored a total of 1200 points on the Scholastics Aptitude Test (SAT), 700 (on a scale of 200 and 800) was on the Mathematics portion. This meant she scored 500 between the Critical Reading and Writing portions of the test. The college replied that a student would do fine in their college in accounting with a foundation of the English language. It was difficult to discern what “foundation of the English language” meant. Liva did not understand it.

This teacher then talked about the rigors and stress of college and asked Liva if she would like to go to a four-year college or to improve her English first. Liva felt that her English skills were weak. She responded, “improve my English to build my foundation.” The teacher suggested BHCC because it was “close to home, easier to improve her English then transfer to another school; plus it helps save money.” Liva interpreted her conversation with the teacher to suggest that to improve English meant going to BHCC. Like Xin Ho and Fong of the older adult participant group, Liva was not aware nor informed that ESL courses and remedial education were available at select four-year institutions, like the University of Massachusetts – Boston.
When Liva learned this new information during her interview with me, she exclaimed, “Really? I didn’t know that. My teachers didn’t tell me.”

Christina barely spoke with her teachers and only met her guidance counselor twice. The first time the counselor called her in to switch her to a lower level English class. The second time, Christina asked the counselor about BHCC. Her older sister was already enrolled at BHCC and Christina wanted more information from the counselor. The counselor told Christina that it was important for her to choose a college that was “cheap and convenient.” To Christina, this meant BHCC. The counselor did not offer any more information, e.g., other college suggestions, college types, application or financial aid process. Christina did not know how to move forward. She ended up not deciding that she would go to college until after she graduated from high school. Even then, Christina had no idea what the college application or financial aid processes were. It was her older sister who completed both for her. Christina was under the impression that it was a requirement that someone else completed the admission application on her behalf, as if, one needed to be recommended or referred to enroll at BHCC. Christina thought that all colleges aside from BHCC were private institutions and, therefore, very expensive. She also thought that only BHCC allowed students to apply for financial aid which contributed to her reason to go to BHCC.

Kai’s high school had a program that provided information about college going, e.g., presentations on applying for financial aid; teachers were designated to help students with the admission applications; college fairs were advertised. The program provided a mentor too. This mentor talked to Kai about the economic benefits of completing college to which Kai responded he would consider going to college because up until that point, he had not considered college in his future.
Kai did not seriously consider college again until later in the year at the behest of his friend. Kai happened to come across his friend who was working on a college essay. Kai asked what he was doing. The friend responded and asked Kai why he was not working on his essay. That was when Kai told his friend that he was not going to go to college and that he would work as a waiter at a restaurant after high school. His friend scolded him, “He said, ‘why would you do that?!’ He asked me if I know how laborious it is to work as a waiter. With a college education, I get to choose what I want to do. If you work for the government, they can’t fire you.”

When asked why he did not decide to go to college sooner after his talk with the mentor, Kai said, “I wasn’t paying attention. I heard them but I wasn’t interested. My parents didn’t go to college. They didn’t even go to middle school. They never talked to me about college nor do they know anything about it. I rely on myself. Unless someone gives me an idea, I wouldn’t know what to do. The things my teachers were saying…I trust my friends more than my teachers. I feel that their talks are useless. When my friend told me, it hit home.” Even though Kai was not able to go to his parents for help about going to college, he recognized that that they were supportive of his decision to go to college because they rather he goes to any college than not at all.

According to Kai, the fact that his parents did not talk to him about college was not an indication that they did not care about his education; rather, it was that they could not help him. Earlier in the interview, Kai said that his parents did tell him that it was important to study hard and to go to college because without a college education, he would not have a prosperous future. They could not, however, do more than repeat this “rhetoric” which did not have an impact on Kai, just like how he did not “pay attention” to his teachers’ messages.
By the time Kai acted on applying to college, it was too late. He went back to his mentor to get help with the application process and learned that he had missed the deadlines for the four-year colleges that he was considering: University of Massachusetts – Boston and Suffolk University. He wanted to go to a four-year college because he knew that community colleges were regarded as “not as good” as four-year colleges. The mentor suggested he go to Bunker Hill Community College because he still had time with the application deadline and so that Kai could try and see if college was a right fit for him.

Sky’s high school hosted and advertised college fairs and open houses. Sky’s guidance counselor and friends talked about going to college. “Counselors, some teachers…say if you really want to go college, you must work hard.” Sky did not really care to go to college. On one hand, he recognized that “College is a path for everyone must go and I think it’s traditionally for students to go on to the society.” At the same time, he did not necessarily agree because he believed that he could learn outside of the formal classroom. In addition, if he were learning on his own, he would not have to rely on the “luck” of having a good professor.

When Sky did talk to some of his teachers and guidance counselor about college, “They say according to my grade, you can pick BHCC if you can or if you like it.” Sky did not decide to go to college until after he graduated from high school.

Summary

All the participants in this study failed to receive the necessary information required to make an informed decision about college. Neither the community centers for the older adult participants nor the high schools for the young adult participants properly advised their students about the college-choice process. These findings intimate inequities in these participants’ access
to college knowledge which negatively impacted them, which could suggest that their college “choice” was not really a choice at all.

**Theme 4: Negotiations in college-choice**

With some variation, the participants’ college choice factors were fairly similar to their college search factors. The top two reasons for selecting BHCC were affordability (7 older and 4 young adult participants) and location (8 older and 1 young adult participants). Consistent with Somers et al.’s (2006) findings, the participants of this study reported it was the “sticker price” that was important to them. The sticker price was the price published for tuition and fees without discounting through aid, loans, or scholarships. The participants used the sticker price to determine affordability. This was in part because students did not know if they would qualify for financial aid or how much they would receive, if awarded. They would pay out-of-pocket before they received aid, if they became eligible. Mei did this because she said no matter what, she had to go to college. Participants who felt the same way as Mei just took a smaller course load when they had to pay on their own. Si Man was enrolled part-time when we met for our first interview because that was all she could afford when she paid out-of-pocket. By our second meeting, she was an aid recipient and was enrolled full-time.

*Table 7: Participants’ factors for choosing BHCC*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Older adult</th>
<th>Young adult</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordability</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to get into</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of Chinese/API</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigrants</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick credential</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A factor that was not identified but indeed played a role in at least three of the participants’ college-choice process was racial stereotypes. Mei, Stacey, and Christina all heard about Roxbury Community College (RCC). All three did not consider RCC because they heard that the neighborhood was unsafe because there was a high concentration of African-Americans who resided there. They were afraid the “black ghosts” would hurt them. Christina said “Roxbury [Community College] is not good. There are a lot of ‘black ghosts’.”

Given the participants’ background as immigrants from the working class, and given the lack of information they got about college, their choices were very limited. They did not have a list of colleges from which to choose to attend. The participants mulled over the information they had (their financial situation; their desire/need to go to college; the factors they identified were important about a college; limited information they had about BHCC) to decide essentially whether or not they would go to BHCC.

All of the participants only knew basic information about BHCC. They knew that it was conveniently located. It was affordable. It had a large population of Chinese and other API immigrants. It offered ESL courses. Students’ financial aid award could pay for the courses. Some participants knew that they could transfer to a four-year college from BHCC, but did not know that students could transfer to and from any college as long as they qualified for admission in the receiving institution. Participants did not know the breadth of majors that BHCC offered. Those who had identified the major they wanted knew BHCC offered it, except for Kai. Kai wanted to study criminal justice but did not know if it was an option at BHCC. Sky, who did not

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College “test-drive”</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denied by other colleges</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
have a declared major, just thought the College offered a lot of programs and was bound to have one that would fit his interests.

It would appear that none of the participants had a choice of which college to attend. By definition, choice implies options. When 15 of the 16 participants only applied to one college, BHCC, there was no option. Having applied to only one college was not the participants’ choosing; rather they were victims of their circumstances. They were recent immigrants from low socioeconomic backgrounds with limited English language skills in an English dominant country that did not offer a lot of resources in Chinese. They had limited resources and restricted access to resources. They relied on others for information but were given little and poor information.

When the 16th participant whose applications to the four-year colleges were incomplete because of misinformation from her high school counselor, she did not have a choice either. For all the participants, the only choice they made was whether or not to go to college. Then again, some even thought that was not a choice. Mei and Stephen said that going to college for them was not a choice: their immigrant status and need for money required that they go to college to improve their English to get a degree so that they could make a decent living.

It was interesting to learn from the participants, however, that they felt going to BHCC was their choice. What was of greater interest and somewhat perplexing was when Pui Yin said going to BHCC was her choice but only because she did not know she had other college options. She stated that given her circumstances, a recent immigrant with little financial means and lack of information, going to BHCC was actually a good choice. She was happy with it. Thirteen other participants also expressed they were satisfied with BHCC. Kwan Lai said that she was
very happy at BHCC because she met new friends and had time away from her life as a mother and wife. Yan, Mei and Stephen all said they were “content” with BHCC.

**Summary of chapter**

The documented Chinese immigrants in this study shared their college-choice experiences. Due to an age and educational background difference among the participant group, there were two sets of experiences that overlapped. The years of prior schooling a participant had outside of the U.S. impacted her/his college-choice experience. All participants pointed out factors that were important to them when they considered going to college and which college to attend. As working class individuals, all participants’ desire/need to go to college was largely for upward mobility. Their low socioeconomic background accounted for their desire/need to have a college that was both affordable and conveniently located. Some participants also expressed their desire for the college they attend to have a large population of Chinese or API immigrants.

Through their experiences and stories, the participants also revealed some serious issues that had not been discussed in current college-choice models and research. There were factors that had not been explored: immigrant status and experience, previous education completed overseas, English language acquisition, desire/need to have students who share similar cultural and background characteristics, and racial stereotypes. The participants brought to light questions about equity to access to college knowledge. The older adult participants demonstrated the powerful influence that local community centers could have on prospective college students. Similarly, the young adult participants reminded us of the important role that high schools play in a student’s college-choice process.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I start with a discussion of the findings of this study and their implications. I then make suggestions for future research and recommendations to improve the college-choice process. I conclude with some final thoughts about this study.

Discussion: What do these findings challenge?

The findings of this study challenge the portrayal and understanding of the college-choice process in the current research. Current college-choice models were constructed through studies of traditional age and racial majority students seeking enrollment at 4-year colleges/universities and did not focus on the experiences of immigrants or nontraditional students or those enrolled in 2-year colleges. Hossler and Gallagher (1987), Litten (1982), and Jackson (1982) all proposed college choice models made up of a sequence of 3 steps/stages for the traditional students. The experiences of the participants of this study demonstrated that their process was not made up of sequential steps/stages; rather, the experiences included a constellation of behaviors determined by constant negotiations of factors and circumstances related to their working class immigrant status and experiences.

Working class immigrant status and experiences

Experiences prior to immigration

Starting with how students develop their college aspirations and expectations, current research provided a set of factors, like whether families, friends, and teachers encouraged or discouraged the student from wanting to go to college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Jackson, 1982; Somers et al., 2006). The different experiences that the older participants of this study compared to the younger participants’ suggested that the forming of college aspirations and expectations was more complicated and complex.
While in China, these participants were influenced by their working class backgrounds and the Chinese education system. The educational system in China requires individuals to decide their college aspirations early. Students could decide that they would try to get into college for social and economic mobility at an early stage. Alternatively, students might choose not to attempt to go to college because they did not think they would be competitive enough to get into college or because they needed to earn a living right after high school to help support their families.

For the participants who decided they wanted to go to college, they did not need to take part in a college search process in China because college admission was determined by test scores. The college entrance exam scores that the students in the academic track high schools earned determined what subjects and which colleges they qualified to attend. The only choice students had was to select an institution and major based on the test results. Participants who did not score high enough to get into college did not have a choice to enroll in college.

This “college choice” experience these participants had in China arguably influenced their expectations of the process in the U.S. After the older participants immigrated to the U.S., they enrolled in English language classes at community centers in order to “survive” in an English speaking country. Since these participants completed high school in China and were exposed to repeated messages of the practical reasons for going to college, upward mobility, and had the opportunity to go to college in the U.S., they decided that they would try to go to college. It should be noted that all the participants knew that BHCC was “easy to get into” but not one person knew that BHCC has an open access admission policy that other community colleges and some four-year colleges also have.
When these participants were at the community centers and received limited and poor information about going to college, they did not question their teachers or the community centers. Mei told me that she suspected that there would be more college options than just Bunker Hill Community College but she and her classmates did not get the information and they did not ask. Some participants thought going to BHCC was the natural next step in their education. I surmised that these participants accepted the limited information they got because they did not know it was limited. Some participants were shocked to learn in our interviews that there were other types of colleges and specific colleges that they could have applied to and possibly attended. These participants probably accepted the limited information they got from their teachers because that was what they experienced in China: they relied on their teachers to provide information relevant to them to get into college. More importantly, the school that students would attend at the next level in China was determined for them based on test scores. When I learned that all participants of this study thought BHCC’s intake course placement exam was a college entrance exam, I asked them why they thought it was an entrance exam. The overwhelming response was: “you have to take a test to get into college.” I surmised that the context with which these participants used to understand the college-choice process in the U.S. was from their own experiences in China.

**Academic experience**

When authors (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987; Jackson, 1982; Litten, 1982) discussed the influence of the students’ academic experience as a college-choice factor, they were speaking to the students’ high school experience in the U.S. Hossler and Gallagher’s model, which is one of the most popularly referenced in research, proposed that each of the 3 stages in their model corresponded with a particular grade level in high school. The first stage of predisposition
presumably takes place in the 9th grade. This model does not adequately explain the college aspirations of immigrant students, especially those who did not go to the 9th grade in the U.S. Three of the five younger participants of this study did not immigrate to the U.S. until their 10th grade. The other two who started their U.S. education in elementary and middle school did not develop their college aspirations until after the 10th grade. There was a myriad of factors that contributed to their forming their college aspirations and expectations at the time that they did which have not been identified in current research; the most important of which was a compounded factor of lack of college knowledge for working class immigrants.

Parental education

Similarly, researchers (Chapman, 1981; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al., 1999; Jackson, 1982; Litten, 1982) who have identified parental education as a college choice factor did not consider parental education gained outside of the U.S. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) found that parental education was correlated with the effectiveness of the college search process. Accordingly, a student whose parent had earned a college degree should be able to assist their child in finding information about college. Yan’s father, who earned a bachelor’s degree in economics in China, was not able to help her with her college search process. He neither understood the higher education system in the U.S. nor did he have the English language proficiently skills. He did provide her with moral support and parental support by being persistent in getting her to apply to and enroll at BHCC instead of taking a year off after high school but could not help with the college search.

Parental influence

The influence of parents as a college choice factor (Chapman, 1981; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al., 1999; Jackson, 1982; Litten, 1982) also needs to be reexamined
when trying to understand the process for adult learners. Logically, parents in general do not have as much influence over their adult children as they would on their younger children.

**Race, gender, and class**

Like Litten (1981), I did not find race to be a factor in these participants’ college choice experiences. Unlike Bers and Smith (1987), I did not find gender to be a college choice factor. I approached this study with the suspicion that race could be a factor because I was studying Chinese immigrants assuming, as per CRT, that there is racism and oppression in the U.S. resulting from institutional racism. I was surprised to learn that all these participants said that their race did not impact their college choice because they each told stories about experiences with racism in the U.S. I was similarly surprised to learn that gender was not a factor because I know that some Chinese think that college is not suitable for females and because some of the participants talked about being treated differently as women.

When I examined these participants’ responses through the lens of Chinese working class immigrants, I realized that the way current research conceptualizes and the way I talked about race and gender was based on U.S. experiences. These immigrant participants did not view race and gender in the same light. There were no women’s rights or civil rights movements in China. Racism was not a topic that any of the participants said they talked about growing up in China. Some of these participants saw a non-Chinese person for the first time when they immigrated to the U.S. All participants did see portrayals of non-Chinese, primarily Whites, in the media in China. Every one of these participants used racially derogatory terms to refer to African-Americans and Whites, e.g., “black ghosts” and “white ghosts,” respectively. Stephen called Asian Indians “ah cha” and thought it was acceptable to do so because he said that they use ethnic slurs to talk about him. He added that he meant no harm and has Asian Indian friends.
Classism, on the other hand, was much more real in these participants’ daily lives in Hong Kong and China. Stephen talked about experiences in mainland China and Hong Kong where he was treated poorly because he was working class. I speculate that as far as these participants were concerned, race and gender did not matter in their college choice in the U.S. because they were primarily concerned with improving their English proficiency (immigrant status) and financial stability (working class status) to have a “good” life in the U.S. They were in survival mode. Several of these participants also said even though there is racism in the U.S. and that things were not perfect in the U.S., “things are still better than in China” because they at least have opportunities to change their situations. Fong immigrated to the U.S. after some vacillation because she wanted to go to college and study education, an opportunity she did not have in China. One participant cited China’s one child per family policy to explain that life in the U.S. is better than China.

Model minority myth

Since the participants indicated that racism was not a college-choice factor, I was not surprised to learn that they did not think that the model minority myth was a factor either. I had initially wondered if they could be impacted by this stereotype in how they would be treated in the college-choice process as “model minorities” or if they internalized the myth to affect their decision-making. I suspected the myth might have an impact because this stereotype is still prominent in many research pieces about the API population, e.g., Teranishi (2004, 2008); Teranishi et al. (2004).

None of the participants knew the term “model minority myth” but have heard of some of attributes of the myth. The most common one is “all APIs are good at math.” Some participants said that they are good at math and did not think anything of the statement. When Kai was
singled out by his fourth grade teacher in the U.S. because he was poor at math, he was embarrassed but did not associate the mockery with the myth because he did not know it existed. Kai knew that his poor math skills were direct results of him not having received proper schooling growing up in China. These responses reminded me once again the importance of examining responses through the experiences of Chinese immigrants. The model minority myth is relevant in the U.S., although the level of its relevance could be argued, it does not exist in China.

**College reputation, location, and affordability**

Other factors that current research have identified as having an impact on college choice which need to be examined through the experiences of working class immigrants include college reputation, location of the institution, and affordability. Chapman (1981), Jackson (1982), Hossler and Gallagher (1987), and Teranishi et al. (2004) all suggested that students were interested in the college’s reputation when they were selecting which colleges to apply to and enroll in. “Reputation” for these authors referred to the college’s prestige and selectivity. For some of the immigrant participants of this study, “reputation” had to do with how well they thought the college worked with immigrants and if the college had a sizeable population of Chinese/API immigrants in the student body. Stephen left Quincy College even though he lived very close to it because he thought Quincy College did not know how to work with immigrants; did not understand immigrant needs; and did not have a sizeable Chinese/API immigrant study population.

Consistent with existing research, the college location was very important to the participants in this study (Bers & Smith, 1987; Jackson, 198; Litten, 1982; Somers et al, 2006). Bers and Smith (1987) reported their participants wanted to work, live, and study in the same
area, within driving distance. This study’s participants needed a convenient location accessible by public transportation because most did not have the means to purchase a vehicle. Fong worked in the city; lived north of the city; studied at BHCC. All three locations were near a subway station.

Affordability is a key factor for many students in the U.S. looking to go to college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al., 1999; Jackson, 1982; Somers et al, 2006; Teranishi, 2004). The definition of affordability, however, varies. Jackson (1981) and Hossler and Gallagher (1987) found that it was the net cost that their participants were concerned with in determining affordability when Somers et al. (2006) found that their nontraditional participants were concerned with the sticker price, same as this study’s participants. McDonough and Calderone (2006) found through interviews with high school guidance counselors the “notion of affordability” has changed for students. The counselor reported that students believed college was getting too expensive for them. In this same study, McDonough and Calderone found that low-income students and their families did not understand college costs and financial aid. Parents of African-American and Hispanic low-income students thought that grants were loans and they did not want to increase their debt.

I would argue that the working class participants in my study identified sticker price as their metric to determine affordability because they too did not understand college cost and the financial aid process or system. They have heard that people from low-income families could apply for aid but did not understand how the aid process worked. They did not know how much they would get, if any. In a way, I speculate that they determined affordability based on the resources they know they had, i.e., their own income/savings, and not what could potentially be available to them through financial aid. A problem with not understanding college cost and how
financial aid helps offset costs could be that students would self-select out of applying to an institution because they did not think they could afford to go to that college.

**Socioeconomic status: Questions about equity**

Chapman (1981), Hossler and Gallagher (1987) Hossler et al. (1999), Jackson (1982) and Litten (1982) identified socioeconomic status as a factor that was correlated with a student’s development of college aspirations. All but one participant were first generation college students. All participants were from working class backgrounds. As has already been described in chapter 4, all the older participants who aspired to go to college did so when they were in elementary or middle school in China. Current research findings about ineffective college searches because of low SES were consistent with the participants in this study. Similarly, Chapman’s (1981) finding that low SES students were more likely to enroll at two-year colleges was also consistent with the participant group who were all BHCC students. None of the authors explained the disparities that existed between the outcomes of the low versus high SES students.

These disparities along with the racial disparities found in college aspirations and enrollment (Hurtado et al., 1997; Perna, 2000) and the SES disparities in the use of private college advisors (McDonough, 1994; McDonough et al., 1997) raised questions about the equity in access to college knowledge and, thus, access to a “good” college. Through their work, McDonough et al. (1997) have suggested that college knowledge used to get into a “good” college has become a “commodity.” College knowledge can be acquired through purchasing one-on-one time with independent education consultants (IECs) whose primary role is to help clients maximize their competitive edge as college applicants (McDonough, 1994; McDonough et al., 1997). College knowledge could also be bought through a variety of published guides about colleges and college admissions, making college visits, and purchasing coaching services
to prepare for the SAT. McDonough (1994) and McDonough, et al. (1997) found that students from middle to high socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to use IECs than those from low SES backgrounds.

*Independent education consultants, high schools, and community centers*

According to McDonough et al. (1997), IECs were becoming more popular because the high school guidance counselors were not doing enough college advising. The authors reported that the average counselor-to-student ratio in large urban public high schools was 1:740. There was also a shift in the role of the counselors to psychological counseling, leaving less time for college advisement. The finding that counselors do limited college advisement is consistent with the high school experiences of the younger participants in this study. This shortage in college advisement in high schools created a market for privatization of college counseling, the IECs.

While individuals with the financial means, e.g., mostly upper-middle class, purchased college knowledge gained the advantage in the college admission process, those from working class backgrounds, like the participants in this study, relied on their limited resources for college information. Working class high school students rely largely on their high schools. Many working class adult immigrants use their local community centers. The API Community Center played a vital role in the lives of the older participants in this study: teaching them English for free; providing a support network; offering opportunities to socialize; introducing and encouraging them to go college in the U.S.; offering assistance in the college application process. Community centers, in general, have an important impact in the lives of immigrants serving as a valuable resource. Community centers offer multitude of services that include family services, adult English programs, job training programs, child care services, after school programs, youth
As a demonstration of the impact that one community center has in the Boston Chinatown community, the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC) offers almost all of the aforementioned services. They do not offer a college transitions program because they offer the lower levels of ESL that would not adequately prepare students for college. Other community centers offer higher level ESL and ABE courses that would be more suitable. BCNC serves over 4000 individuals each year and their Adult education program has a steady enrollment of over 400 and maintains a waiting list, which is currently at 250 (C. Leung, personal communication, March 26, 2010). A few of the participants of this study mentioned they were referred to another community center for English classes because they were wait-listed at BCNC. Two were told that they would have to wait at least a year before they would have a spot.

The Chinatown Community Educational Partnership (CCEP), whose memberships includes a network of nine Chinatown community agencies, created the “Chinatown adult education pathway” (Appendix D) that showcased this network's offerings of education and training opportunities for adults in the area. The different “pathways” could lead to employment, citizenship, earning the General Education Development (GED); enrolling in postsecondary education. The Jewish Vocational Services of Boston, which is not part of CCEP network, has a college transitions program that helps students interested in the healthcare industry enroll at BHCC (http://www.jvs-boston.org/). There is opportunity here for colleges to work with community centers to strengthen these “pathways.”
Just as the IECs need to be recognized as playing an increasingly important role in the college choice process for “privileged” students, community centers should also be recognized as possibly having a major influence in the college choice experience of immigrants. The centers offer many services to their constituencies but they do not have the resources to do everything well. As demonstrated by the API Community Center, they encouraged their students to go to college and attempted to provide college information but fell short because they themselves did not have the relevant information to help students understand the different types of colleges; how to search for information about college; what qualities to look for in a college; how to determine affordability; how to decide which college to apply to and enroll in. The limited resources that community centers have to serve their constituencies have serious implications and consequences.

**Implications**

This study on the college-choice experiences of a group of documented Chinese immigrant community college students demonstrated that current research and models on the college-choice process were insufficient and ineffective in understanding the experiences of these Chinese immigrants.

From the perspective of U.S. colleges and universities, inaction could result in low enrollments. If colleges and universities continued to not understand how immigrant students developed their college aspirations, search for or select which colleges to attend, they would not be able to improve and tailor their recruiting strategies accordingly. Especially for institutions seeking to enroll adult students, they must recognize the impact of their prospective students’ prior educational experiences. For the traditional age students, colleges and universities should be mindful that parental income and parental education could mean something different for some
immigrant students than non-immigrant students. They need to involve parents to help their children get into college.

Assuming the argument that Clark (1960a, 1960b, 1980) and other researchers had made that community colleges perpetuated students’ low socioeconomic statuses and immigrant students continued to be channeled into the two-year college system was valid, the U.S. would see a greater gap between the rich and the poor. The immigrants would not be able to increase their earning power and presumably spending power, which impacts the U.S. economy. The U.S. workforce would be negatively impacted too because there would be a smaller pool of qualified persons to work in specialized fields and fields that require an education beyond an associate degree.

As the experiences of the older participants in this study have demonstrated, community centers played a crucial role in immigrants’ transitions to life in the U.S., their educational pursuits, and their college-choice process. Community centers themselves and colleges and policy makers must recognize that community centers could strongly impact immigrant behaviors and decision making about going to college. Community centers, colleges, and college transitions programs need to form partnerships to help students get into college. One example could be collaboration among community centers, high schools, programs like Upward Bound, colleges, and organizations like TERI and the Pathways to College Network to develop a comprehensive network of support to nurture college aspirations in the youth and help aspiring college students get into college. The purpose of the network should not be to help all students get into a four-year college; rather it should work with students and their families to help them identify and get into the college that is right for them, two-year or four-year.
Community centers need more funding to serve their constituencies. As discussed earlier, the BCNC’s Adult education program enrolls over 400 students and has a waiting list of 250. Many immigrants want to learn English. Low-income immigrants cannot afford private tutoring or to go to private or for-profit English language schools. Policy makers and others who are concerned with the labor force and economic growth in the U.S. need to recognize the importance of properly funding centers that serve the underserved.

McDonough et al. (1997) have found that high school guidance counselors were not doing enough college advisement to help students get into college. Yan’s experience with her U.S. high school guidance counselor was an example of the need for improved training of guidance counselors to work with low-income immigrants whose native language is not English. These findings should concern parents, high schools, colleges, and policy makers that students might not be getting the information they need to navigate the college admission process. The “privileged” students have IECs to help develop their college knowledge. There needs to be a similar service available and accessible to low-income students. College access and equity could be adversely affected otherwise.

If research continued to neglect the important factors relevant to immigrants and people of color from low socioeconomic backgrounds, the field of education and policy makers would not be able to understand nor adequately serve a continuously growing population in the U.S.

**Suggestions for future research**

This study only began to explore the impact that immigrant experiences had on these participants’ college-choice decision making. We saw from some of the participants’ experiences that the length of time they were exposed to non-U.S. education impacted their
views of the purpose of a college education. We need more research to help us understand the growing diverse population of immigrants.

As a follow-up to this study, if the opportunity and resources presented themselves, I would like to conduct a mixed methods study reaching a much larger population to compare the college-choice experiences across API ethnic groups. The quantitative piece would survey all the API students at Bunker Hill Community College (as many as would reply) to ask them general questions about their background and college-choice experience, e.g., ethnic identity; immigration status; what were the major influences in their college aspirations; how did they conduct their search of colleges; how did they find out about BHCC; what other colleges did they consider; how did they end up choosing BHCC; what role, if any, did their immigrant status and cultures have on their college-choice process. I would then, with a team of researchers, conduct semi-structured interviews with a random selection of the immigrant students making sure to have representation from the various API ethnic groups and age groups. I want to learn more of their stories to better understand from their own words what their experiences were. The stories would also inform the literature about the similarities and differences in the students’ experiences across the API ethnic groups, across gender, age, parental education, and family income. The findings from this much bigger study would then better inform college-choice models and research.

Similar research projects could be conducted to study other immigrant groups, e.g., Latinos, Chicanos, Somalians, to compare cross-ethnic/racial groups to determine the saliency of factors like immigrant experience, race, culture, age, and gender on college-choice.

I would also like to see research on the role of community centers in the college choice process. The findings from this study suggested that community centers played a vital role for
this selected group of participants. Future research in this area could help assess the level of
influence these centers have in the college pathway for immigrants. Moreover, the information
could inform community centers, colleges, and policy makers on how to maximize their utility to
improve the college choice experience for immigrants.

The role and effectiveness of high schools in the college-choice process should also be
reexamined. The high schools in this study were ineffective. Further studies about their roles
could inform best practices to help high schools be effective.

Recommendations to improve the college-choice process

The community centers that these participants of this study discussed were already doing
a good job encouraging their students to continue their studies. The centers need to do more with
helping students search for college information. In their English language and Adult Basic
Education classes, instructors could incorporate into their lesson plans writing about going to
college and college essays typically required in admission applications. Instructors could add
lessons on using the internet to search for relevant information about colleges. Many adult
learners at community centers have very busy schedules. Incorporating these lessons into their
scheduled classes would not impose additional time commitments on their students.

I would also propose creating an easy-to-use guide to colleges in the U.S. The guide
should start with providing sample reasons to pursue a college education and then itemizing the
steps necessary for an appropriate search for colleges and then suggestions on how to select a
college that would match a student’s desires and needs. This guide could be adapted from
information provided through KnowHow2Go (2010) to fit immigrant needs. KnowHow2Go is a
nonprofit campaign sponsored by the American Council on Education, Lumina Foundation for
Education, and the Ad Council to encourage 8th, 9th, and 10th graders from low SES background
to pursue college. This guide could be made available in multiple languages through the community centers and high schools. The guide could also be shared with parents of immigrant children to educate them about the benefits of college and the process so that they would be in a better position to support their children.

U.S. high schools need to improve their training of teachers and guidance counselors to work better with immigrant students and their families to understand their needs. Emphasis should be placed on the curriculum and extracurricular activities to educate students about the importance of diversity so that students’ college searches and choices would not be negatively impacted by stereotypes. I would also urge the high schools to actively involve the students’ families offering students and parents/guardians seminars and workshops about college and college going; making materials available specifically for parents/guardians; organizing and chaperoning college visits. Materials and information should be in multiple languages. High schools should also have trained professionals who are well-versed with the application process for all students. High schools could collaborate with colleges who could send recruiters. They could partner with community centers that could provide interpreter services for their seminars/workshops.

Specifically for Bunker Hill Community College, I would recommend that they train or retrain their staff to be culturally and linguistically sensitive. The College should reach out to the community centers because this study showed that the API Community Center was sending students directly to the College without prompting. The College does have a partnership with the JVS in Boston but not the API Community Center. In their outreach, BHCC would be wise to understand the role of the community centers, the types and levels of education opportunities they offer, and to educate the centers about their College, especially with the application process.
When I asked the participants of this study for their input on how to improve the application process, one said it would be nice to have bilingual (Chinese-English) forms. Another said to have less forms to complete. Many of the participants reported a preference for more multilingual staff and having more staff available in general. Several of the participants complained about the long lines at the registration, student payment, and financial aid offices.

**Final thoughts**

I truly enjoyed listening to the participants’ stories. Sky thanked me at the end of our meeting for allowing him the opportunity to share his stories. It was I who am thankful to each and every one of the participants for having shared their experiences openly with me. Through their lived experiences, this study contributed to the literature in introducing additional factors worth considering in the college-choice process. Moreover, their stories demonstrated that existing research does not adequately explain their constellation of behaviors that led them to BHCC. These participants helped me realize that I too need to be mindful to examine their responses and experiences through the lens of working class Chinese immigrants. Lastly, these participants’ experiences affirmed for me that there could be concerns with equity in access to college knowledge, which could affect college access. I look forward to future research to investigate these potential inequities with the goal of establishing equity in the college-choice process.
Dear student,

Congratulations on being accepted to Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC). Please let me introduce myself and the purpose of this letter.

My name is Siu Ming Luie, a doctoral student at Boston College. I am writing to invite you to participate in a study I will be conducting at BHCC about community college choice. The purpose of the study is to learn about the experience of how documented Chinese immigrant students choose to attend a community college. I feel that this is an important research because no such research has been done even though many Chinese students enroll in community colleges. With your help by sharing with me your experiences, I hope to inform BHCC, other community colleges, and college-preparation organizations on how to better assist Chinese immigrants in selecting a college.

As a newly accepted student who has self-identified as an Asian/Pacific Islander, you may be eligible to participate in this study. Participation criteria are as follows: documented immigrant residing in the United States; Chinese; accepted and begin enrollment at Bunker Hill Community College in the summer or fall 2007 semester.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to meet with me for two individual interviews. Each interview will take about one hour and will be held at BHCC. You may choose to be interviewed in Chinese and/or English. After I complete the first set of interviews, I will share a summary of the data and ask you to share your feedback at the second interview. Both interviews will be completed by the end of the fall semester.

While there is no guarantee, I hope by participating, you will enjoy the opportunity to reflect on your own college-choice experience and to discuss your thoughts on being a documented Chinese immigrant in the United States. I also hope that you will take delight in knowing that your participation could contribute positively to someone else’s experience in choosing to attend college.

In presenting results of the study, your identity will be masked. A pseudonym will be used. You may select your own pseudonym if you like. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no cost to you to participate in this research study. There is no financial compensation for your participation. You may withdraw from the study at any point by contacting me. There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for stopping your participation. You will not jeopardize grades nor risk loss of present or future relationship with Boston College or Bunker Hill Community College as a result of your decision to participate or not to participate or if you withdraw from the study.
Should you have questions or concerns about my research, you can contact me or my advisor, Dr. Ana Martínez Alemán. If you agree to participate, please complete and return the enclosed Participation Information form to me. I thank you in advance for your participation and look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

Siu Ming Luie
s.luie@bc.edu
617-593-3829
親愛的學生

恭喜您成為Bunker Hill社區學院的學生。我想藉此機會自我介紹並解釋此封信的目的。

我的名字是雷小銘，目前正在波士頓學院就讀博士學位，此信的目的是想邀請您參與一項我正進行的調查，以瞭解社區學院的選擇，此研究的目的是想瞭解合法的中國移民如何選擇就讀社區學院，由於以前沒有類似的研究調查，而且許多中國學生選擇就讀社區學院，我認為此研究有其意義與重要性。希望您可在此調查中，告知我您的經驗，藉此，我可將此研究結果提供給Bunker Hill社區學院，大學預備機構，以及其它社區學院，更可進一步幫助中國學生選擇社區學院。

如果您是新進學生，而且是亞裔或太平洋島民，您可能符合資格參加此調查，參加標準如下：必須是合法的永久居民，居住於美國，中國人，已被接受為二零零七年秋季班的新生。

如您同意參加此調查，我會與您一對一面談兩次，每次面談是在Bunker Hill學院，約兩小時，您可選擇在面談時採用中間或英文，我完成第一次的面談後，會整理摘要，並在第二次面談時與您分享，並詢問您的意見，兩次面談會在秋季班結束前完成。

我希望藉由參加此調查，您有機會反省身為合法中國移民居住於美國的經驗，我更希望您瞭解您的經驗將可有助於其它人選讀社區學院的過程。

在公佈調查結果時，您的名字不會被公開，我們會使用假名，您亦可選擇自己的假名，參與此調查完全是自願而且免費，我們也將無法付費給參加者，參加與否亦不會影響您與波士頓學院或Bunker Hill社區學院的關係，您也可在調查過程中任何時間退出，將不會有任何懲罰，中途退出或沒有參加此研究者，都對您的成績，或與現今或未來就讀學校的關係有任何的影響。
如您對此研究有任何問題，您可與我或我的指導老師Dr. Ana Martínez Alemán 聯絡，
如您同意參與，請填妥以下參與資料表然後交還給我，我十分感謝您的參與，並期望與您
見面。

雷小銘敬上
s.luie@bc.edu
617-593-3829
APPENDIX B: CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR PRIOR FIELDWORK

Demographics:

- Age
- Gender
- Birth place
- Native dialect
- Resident status in US
- Why immigrate to US?
- # years in US

Other background info:

- High school name
- High school GPA at graduation
- Work info
- Family/other obligations
- Status in college:
  - College name
  - Years in program
  - FT/PT,
  - Major

College Choice

- What were your plans after high school?
- When did you decide you were going to attend college?
  - Why?
• How did you find out about colleges?

• Why did you choose to attend this (community) college?

• What were key factors you were looking for in a college?

• Who helped you?

• What were your other choices for college?

• What factors contribute positively and negatively to your college decision-making process?

• Tell me about the application process. Was it difficult to navigate? Suggestions to make easier.

• How satisfied are you with your college choice?

Family

• How does your family feel about you being in college?

• What are their expectations of you?

• What are your expectations out of college?

• What are your goals for college?

• What are your plans after college here?

Community agency specific questions

• How did you find out about the (Agency) ABE Program?

• How long were you in the program?

• What did you enjoy about the program?

Preparedness

• Do you feel you were prepared for college?

• In what ways did (Agency) ABE program prepare you for college?
• In what ways can they improve?
• Do you feel college is hard? In what ways? How so?
• What are some of the difficulties you experienced at college?
• What services have you used at the college?
• What was your experience with them?
• How do you feel you are treated in class and at the college?
• Do you feel you are treated differently because you are Chinese?
• First generation?
• Do you speak up in class?
• Do you feel your comments/opinions are respected by instructor? Peers?

Support

- With whom do you have the closest relationship on campus? Why?
- Do you keep in touch with your (Agency) classmates?
- Would you be interested in being part of a support group?
- Would you be willing to help others who recently graduated from the ABE program?
- How comfortable are you in approaching other students, faculty, staff, and administrators with questions or comments/suggestions?

When you have a question, where do you go for help?
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FIRST INTERVIEW

Introduction:

- Greet participant; introduce myself;
- Briefly describe the study;
- Explain consent form; have participant sign and return to me;
- Request permission to voice record the interview;
- State date, time, and participant’s name;
- Note gender of participant in interview notes

Background information:

1. How old are you?
2. Where were you born?
3. What is your native dialect?
4. What is your residency status in U.S.?
5. How many years have you lived in the U.S.?
6. Why did you immigrate to the U.S.?
7. Where did you go to high school?
8. What was your grade point average at graduation?
9. Did your parents attend or complete college?
10. How many courses will you be taking this fall?
11. What is your intended major of study (if already selected one)?
12. What is the highest level of education you hope to achieve?
13. Are you currently working? Full-time or part-time? What is your job?
14. Aside from school (and work), what other obligations do you have that requires your time?
   E.g., family, children, parents

15. In a typical week, how much time do you spend on each (e.g., classes and homework; work;
   taking care of family)?

**College choice:**

1. When you were in high school, how did you think about colleges?
   a. What contributed to how you thought about colleges?
   b. What role did your high school play in your plans and subsequent choice of going to
      college and this particular college?

2. When did you decide you were going to attend college?
   a. How did you come to that decision?
   b. Did anyone encourage or discourage you from going to college? Who? Do you
      know why? Please explain.
   c. Who was the first person you talked to about going to college?
      i. Why did you choose this person?
      ii. Please describe that conversation.

3. How did you find out about colleges?

4. When you were deciding on a college, what were the key factors you were looking for to
   help make the decision?

5. Was community college your first choice of college? Why (not)?

6. What were your other choices for college?
   a. How did you come up with the list?
b. How did you decide on a community college instead of a different type of college, e.g., proprietary or four-year?

c. Who helped you look for colleges and then select the college?

7. What are your goals for choosing a college?

8. Why did you choose to attend BHCC?

9. What factors contributed positively and negatively to your college decision-making process?

10. What are your expectations out of college?

11. What are your plans after BHCC?

12. Please tell me about the application process at BHCC.
   a. What were the steps?
   b. How did you navigate the process?
   c. What suggestions do you have to make it easier?
   d. Did someone help you? Who? How did they help you?
      i. Did anyone at BHCC help you? Who? How did you know to get help from this person? If no, would you ask for their help if you needed it? Who? Why?
   e. Do you feel you are treated differently in the admission process because you are Chinese? First generation college student (if applicable)? Immigrant? Non-native speaker? How so?
   f. What has your overall experience been at this college with the admission process?

13. How satisfied are you with experience with choosing a college? Why?

14. How satisfied are you with your choice of college? Why?

15. Knowing what you know now about applying for college, would you do anything differently? How so? Why?
16. If you were in your home country, what type of college would you have chosen? Why?
17. What role, if any, does being a documented Chinese immigrant play in coming up with the list of colleges and then choosing to go to this one? How about gender? Socioeconomic status? English-speaking proficiency?

**Family influence:**
1. What role, if any, did your family play in you deciding to go to college? Do you think it matters if you are male or female? Why?
2. Did your family expect you to go to college? What contributed to their expectations?
3. Is going to college your choice or someone else’s? Who? Why?
4. How about going to BHCC? Did you choose to apply to BHCC? If you could go to another college, would you? Which one and why?
5. When you had questions about choosing a college, was your family able to help you? How?
6. In what ways, does your family support or not support you going to college?

**Model minority myth:**
1. How do you think Chinese immigrants are perceived in America?
   a. Does it matter that the immigrant is documented or not?
   b. Do you think this perception changes coming from a white, black, Latino, or Native American? How so?
   c. What impact, if any, do these perceptions have on why you chose to go to college at all and then a community college in particular? How do you feel about that impact?
   d. Do you feel their perception is an accurate depiction of you or other Chinese or API immigrants? How?
2. How do you think Chinese immigrants are perceived in education in the U.S.?
a. Did that impact your college choice? How so?
b. How do you feel about that?
c. Do you feel their perception is an accurate depiction of you? How?

3. In general, how do you feel you are treated as a documented Chinese immigrant in school in the U.S.?
   a. Do you feel you have the same opportunities for services and support as everyone else? How so?
   b. Or, do you feel treatment varies because of a person’s race? Gender? Class?

4. Have you heard of the model minority myth? Please explain.
   a. Do you feel that this myth had any impact at all on your deciding to go to college? On deciding to go to a community college?

5. If you were to rank the factors that contributed to your choosing BHCC for college by importance, how would you rank the following: Chinese; documented immigrant; English language proficiency; gender; economic status? If there are other factors, please include and rank them.
**APPENDIX D: CHINATOWN ADULT EDUCATION PATHWAY**

### Asian American Civic Association
- Basic ESL: Tues-Fri 8:30am-10:30am / 617.428.5892 ext.6
- American Chinese Christian Educational & Social Services (ACCESS)
  - Mon-Thurs 8:30am-10:30am & 7-9pm / 617.426.1070
- Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence
  - Tues-Thurs 8:00am-12:30pm / 617.358.2356 ext.227
- Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center
  - Mon-Thurs / 617.358.5129 ext.1065
  - Tues / 6:45-8:45pm
- Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association
  - Mon-Sat / 617.251.3196
- Greater Boston Chinese Golden Age Center, Senior
  - Community Service Employment Program
  - Thurs 10-11:30am / 617.357.0226
- Harvard Phillips Brooks House Association
  - SatSun 1-3:30pm at Harvard / 617.495.3384

### Distance Learning
- Asian American Civic Association
  - Internet 515, 781.352.6540
- Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center
  - 617.631.5129 ext.1030

### Adult Diploma or GED Program
- Adult Diploma or GED Program
  - High School Diploma
  - Hotel Training Center
    - For Local 26 members receiving health & welfare benefits
    - Mon-Wed 5:30-6:30pm / Thurs 5:30-6:30pm / 617.512.1177
  - Boston Asian Youth Essential Service (Boston Youth 10-21)
    - Tues-Thurs 10:00am-2:00pm / 617.992.8243

### Job Readiness/Community Classes
- Microsoft applications, resume development, job search, interviewing skills, financial literacy
  - Days and times vary / 617.426.4892 ext.218 or 200

### Citizenship Classes
- Hotel Training Center
  - For Local 26 members receiving health & welfare benefits
  - Wed. 10:30am-12:30pm / 617.542.1177
  - Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center
  - Fri. 4:45-6:15pm / 617.358.5129 ext.1040

### AS OF JANUARY 22, 2019
APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM (ENGLISH)

Boston College Consent Form
Boston College School of Education

Informed Consent for Participation as a Participant in College choice and first year documented Chinese immigrant community college students in Massachusetts: A critical race analysis

Investigator: Siu Ming Luie
Type of consent: Adult Consent Form
Date Created: August 2, 2007

Introduction
You are being asked to be in a research study of college choice for documented Chinese immigrants. You were selected as a possible participant because you self-identified as a person of Asian/Pacific Islander descent. Participation criteria are as follows: documented immigrant; Chinese; accepted and begin enrollment at Bunker Hill Community College in the summer or fall 2007 semester. Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study:
• The purpose of the study is to learn about how documented Chinese immigrant students choose to attend a community college. I feel that this is an important research because no such research has been done even though many Chinese students enroll in community colleges.
• The total number of participants is expected to be between 15 and 25.

Description of the Study Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to meet with me for two interviews, each of which will take about one hour. Both will be done at BHCC. All interviews will be audio-taped with a digital voice recorder. You may choose to be interviewed in Chinese, English or a combination of both. After I complete the first set of interviews, I will write and share a summary of the data with you at the second interview. I will also ask for your feedback of the summary at this interview. Both interviews will be completed by the end of the fall semester.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in the Study:
• There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks. There may be unknown risks. You may experience uncomfortable feelings in the course of the interview.

Benefits of Being in the Study:
The purpose of the study is to learn about how documented Chinese immigrants choose to attend a community college. While there is no guarantee, I hope by participating, you will enjoy the opportunity to reflect on your own college-choice experience and to discuss your thoughts on being a documented Chinese immigrant in the United States. I also hope that you will take delight in knowing that your participation could contribute positively to someone else’s experience in choosing to attend college.

Payments:
- You will not receive any payment for your participation.

Costs:
- There is no cost to you to participate in this research study.

Confidentiality:
- The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I may publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be kept in a locked file.
- All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. Only I will have access to the digital recordings of the interviews. When the study is complete, all recordings of the interviews will be destroyed. The compact discs on which the interviews will be saved will be shredded and disposed three years after the completion of the study.
- Access to the records will be limited to the researcher; however, please note that regulatory agencies, the Institutional Review Board and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:
- Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with Boston College or Bunker Hill Community College
- You are free to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason.
- There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for stopping your participation. You will not jeopardize grades nor risk loss of present or future faculty/school/University relationships as a result of your non-participation or withdrawal.

Contacts and Questions:
- The researcher conducting this study is Siu Ming Luie. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact me at 617-593-3829 or s.luie@bc.edu.
- If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact: Director, Office for Human Research Participant Protection, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu.
Copy of Consent Form:
- You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:
I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Signature/Date:
Study Participant (Print Name):__________________________
Participant Signature:__________________________ Date:______________
波士頓學院參與研究同意書

此研究參與同意書是表示參與者同意參與“合法中國移民新生如何選讀在麻州之社區學院：一個重要的族群分析研究”

研究者：雷小銘
同意書類別：成人同意書
製表日期：二零零七年八月二日

前言
您被詢問願意與否參加一項有關合法中國移民新生如何選讀社區學院的研究，您可能獲選的原因是因為您表示您是亞裔或太平洋島民，合格參加者的必須資格如下：合法的永久居民，中國人，已被接受為二零零七年Bunker Hill社區學院秋季班的新生。在同意參加前，請仔細研讀此同意書並提出任何問題。

研究目的
• 此研究是想瞭解中國移民如何決定選讀社區學院，由於以前沒有類似的研究調查，而且許多中國學生選擇就讀社區學院，我認為此研究有其意義與重要性。
• 預期的參加人數為十五至二十人。

研究過程
如您同意參加此項調查，我會與您一對一面談兩次，每次面談是在Bunker Hill社區學院，約兩小時。您可選擇面談時採用中文或英文，每次面談將以數位錄音機錄音。您可選擇以中文，英文，或中英文兩種語言進行面談。我完成第一次的面談後，會整理摘要，並在第二次面談時與您分享，並詢問您的意見，兩次面談會在秋季班結束前完成。

研究過程您可能面對的風險/狀況
此研究並無可預見的風險,但可能有不可預知的風險。在面談過程中，您可能對某些問題有不舒服的感覺。

參與研究的好處
- 此研究是想瞭解您如何選讀社區學院
- 我希望藉由參加此調查，您有機會反省身為合法中國移民居住於美國的經驗，我更希望您理解您的經驗將可有助於其他人選讀社區學院的過程。

研究補助費
參與此研究者不會有補助費用

參與費用
參加此項研究是免費的

研究保密
- 研究結果將完全保密，結果公開時，我將不會公佈任一參加者的身份。研究結果將儲存在上鎖之檔案內。
- 所有數位錄音紀錄將須以密碼保護，只有我可以打開密碼。研究結束後，所有錄音紀錄會完全銷毀。
- 雖然只有研究者可聆聽錄音紀錄，但管理機構，大學評鑑委員會，以及波士頓學院審核員亦可能抽檢。

自願參加/退出
- 參加與否不會影響您與波士頓學院或Bunker Hill社區學院的關係
- 您可在調查過程中因任何原因，於任何時間選擇退出
- 退出將不會有任何懲罰，沒有參加此研究也不會影響您的成績，或影響與現今或未來就讀學校的關係。

聯絡資料
- 研究者為雷小銘，如您對此研究有任何問題，請致電617-593-3829或寄電郵到s.luie@bc.edu。
如您對您在研究過程中的權利有所疑問，請向波士頓學院人類研究參與保護室主任查詢，聯繫電話617-552-4778或電郵到irb@bc.edu。

同意書存儲
您將會有此份同意書的拷貝，以作為檔案及參考。

同意宣言
我已仔細閱讀此同意書，並已被鼓勵詢問問題。我的問題也被回答。我同意參加此項研究，我已獲得(或將獲得)一份此同意書的拷貝。

簽名/日期
研究參加者(請用正體字)____________________________________
研究參加者簽名__________________________日期____________
REFERENCES


C. Leung (personal communication, March 26, 2010).


People v. Hall 4 Cal. 399 (California Supreme Court 1854).


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delphia_school/