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Enhancing Asian American Post-Secondary Student Experience
through an Asset-Based Approach

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

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2025

The dissertation of Andrew Hua is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

California State University, San Marcos

2025

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated with deepest love and gratitude **to my parents**, Hứa Quốc Lương (Tường) | 許國樑 and Trịnh Tú Trân | 鄭 秀 珍, whose unwavering dedication to the values of education, hard work, family, and perseverance has shaped the very core of who I am. You have always shown me the way with your boundless love, encouragement, and sacrifices. I am eternally grateful for the foundation you've laid, which has given me the strength to pursue my dreams.

To my grandparents, Trần Tố Mi, Hứa Đức Trí, Tăng Xuân, and Trịnh Tú Đạt—whose wisdom, resilience, and sacrifices laid the groundwork for the life I have today. Your courage to venture into the unknown, to seek a brighter future for your family, will never be forgotten. You've instilled in me the importance of embracing my heritage, and your legacy continues to inspire me every day to be brave, bold, and determined in the face of challenges.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Enhancing Asian American Post-Secondary Student Experience
through an Asset-Based Approach

by

Andrew Hua

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California San Diego, 2025
California State University, San Marcos, 2025

Throughout American history and particularly in recent years, the impacts of police brutality, COVID-19, and inequity on communities of color have been topics of discussion. Asian Americans have long been labeled the "model minority," a stereotype that places undue expectations and stress on the community. This Model Minority Myth (MMM) continues to thrive, but educational institutions are working to combat its impact. However, few studies address the MMM from an asset-based approach, focusing on recognizing students' strengths rather than their needs. Shifting this focus can better reflect the contributions students make to

learning environments and challenge conventional deficit-based pedagogies that ignore the knowledge, and skills students bring.

This study examined the racial and cultural experiences of Asian Americans in U.S. society and education, especially in the context of the MMM. By advocating for an asset-based approach, it critiques the shortcomings of deficit perspectives and highlights the value of focusing on students' positive attributes. The study also explored the utilization of an asset-based tool, the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, which may help mitigate the effects of the MMM. Conducted through a hermeneutical phenomenological approach, the research provided insights into how Higher Education can better engage with the lived experiences of Asian American students, fostering an environment that values their contributions both inside and outside the classroom. The study's key findings highlight that the MMM continues to negatively impact Asian Americans, that Asian Americans' motivations to pursue higher education are influenced by factors beyond family expectations, and that asset-based approaches can elevate Asian American experiences while challenging the assumptions of the MMM.

Keywords: Model Minority Myth, Asian American, Asian, strengths, asset-based approach

Chapter One: Introduction

Culturally proficient leadership and equitable learning opportunities for students are needed more than ever as K-12 and higher education institutions respond to diverse students' backgrounds. Asian American students encounter distinct challenges that warrant focused attention, as their experiences and barriers are shaped in part by the Model Minority Myth (MMM), which can influence both perceptions and opportunities in unique ways. To effectively disrupt the MMM narrative, researchers recommend that the specific needs and struggles of Asian students are acknowledged and addressed individually, rather than being generalized alongside other groups.

Most current research has been conducted through the lens of Asian Americans as a monolith. In fact, the Asian diaspora is highly diverse with many subethnic groups, including East Asian, Southeast Asian, South Asian, Southwest Asian, Central Asian, and Pacific Islander (Grim, et al., 2019; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Poon et al., 2016). According to the Pew Research Center (2021a; 2021b; 2023), the Asian American population is growing at a fast pace; nearly doubling between 2000 and 2019; and is predicted to go beyond 46 million by 2060. Not surprisingly, the number of Asian students in college continues to rise (Hanson, 2023; National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). For instance, 54% of Asians, ages 25 and older, in the United States (U.S.) have a bachelor's degree or higher, which surpasses the national average (33%) in the same age range (Pew Research Center, 2021a). Moreover, the number of U.S.-born and foreign-born Asians earning a post-secondary degree is substantially higher than all U.S.-born people and all U.S. immigrants with college degrees (Pew Research Center, 2021a). Although Asians, as a diaspora, lead in the rates of earning at least a bachelor's degree, there is a significant difference within the Asian community (New American Economy, 2021;

Pew Research Center 2021a). For instance, less than 1 in 4 U.S.-born Laotian and Pacific Islander Americans have a bachelor's degree compared to U.S.-born Taiwanese Americans, which is almost 9 out of 10 (New American Economy, 2021).

The term *Asian American* in U.S. history has been quite complex. Before the 2000 U.S. Census, the federal government considered those who identified as Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Guamanian or Chamorro, Fijian, Tongan, or Marshallese peoples as Asian American because the term was used for coalition building as an intentional community-based strategy (Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence [APIGBV], 2022; Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2020; United States Census Bureau [USCB], 2022; U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 1997). Today, *Asian American* is defined as individuals who are born in the United States of America and have origins from the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent (APIGBV, 2022; USCB, 2022). The various definitions used to describe Asian Americans are highly political and a continuous process of self-identification and self-determination for the Asian community (APIGBV, 2022).

Furthermore, the overgeneralization of Asian Americans is fueled by a socially constructed, racially driven, and oppressive myth and term called the Model Minority Myth (MMM). The definition of the term *MMM* is expansive, contagious, and ever so prevalent (Chun, 1980). The MMM portrays Asian Americans as passive individuals who have assimilated into the White Western society and places the Asian American identity on a pedestal as the exemplary racially minoritized group (Chun, 1980; Grim et al., 2019; Kiang et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2017; Museus, 2008; Museus & Park, 2015). Another definition of the MMM is that Asian Americans excel in educational environments because Asian Americans come from cultures that value and work hard toward their education (Lee, 1994; Suyemoto, 2009).

By the same token, the MMM assumes every Asian American accomplishes universal and unparalleled academic and career achievement (Museus & Chang, 2009). Beyond some of the positive misconceptions, the MMM has also been defined as a generalization of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders as soft, quiet, and reserved (Poon et al., 2016). Though the literature has provided a variety of definitions of the MMM, including sweeping statements of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders as being silent, demure, hardworking, and exotic, some of the research fails to acknowledge the broader racist implications (e.g. limited access to societal resources, inadequate educational support, heightened stress from pressure to meet unrealistic expectations, experience aggressive, targeted behavior and discrimination, etc.) of the model minority myth (Poon et al., 2016). These definitions have been part of America's history for decades and continue to cause negative impacts on Asian American lives, especially Asian American students (Museus, 2008; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Walton & Truong, 2022).

As educational researchers continue to examine Asian American student experiences in Higher Education, scholars face one challenge every time there is a desire to examine the experience of Asian American college students – the chronic burden of demystifying the MMM (Museus & Chang, 2009). Researchers are exhaustively correcting the notion that Asian Americans are all the same, are not a racial or ethnic minority, do not encounter significant challenges due to their race, and do not require resources or support (Museus, 2009; Tan, 2019; Walton & Truong, 2022). Studies show this stereotype has caused undue expectations, pressure, and harm to Asian American students' academic success (Assalone & Fann, 2017; Empleo, 2006; Lee, 1994; Museus & Chang, 2009, Museus & Kiang, 2009; Museus & Pdark, 2015; Okura, 2022, Poon et al., 2016; Suyemoto et al., 2009; Tan, 2019; Walton & Truong, 2022). This phenomenon is known as stereotype threat - a psychological phenomenon where individuals

from stigmatized groups experience anxiety and performance decrements when they are in situations where negative stereotypes about their group are relevant (Spencer et al., 2016; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat negatively impacts performance and aspirations for members of stigmatized groups and addressing it can improve society and individuals' abilities (Spencer et al., 2016; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

The enduring MMM continues to unfairly shape the experiences and perceptions of Asian Americans, influencing the racial framing of educational research, policy, and practices in higher education (Poon et al., 2016). The origins of this myth date back to the early 20th century, particularly in the context of Japanese Americans, as both U.S. and Japanese elites worked to reshape their image in response to discrimination and legal restrictions such as the Alien Land Laws (Kaibara, 2014). The myth gained momentum in the 1980s, fueled by media narratives that celebrated Asian American success, often attributing it to cultural values (Chang & Au, 2009). This narrative serves to uphold racial hierarchies by positioning Asian Americans as the "model" minority, thus reinforcing anti-Black racism and perpetuating white supremacy (Poon et al., 2016). Research related to the MMM concluded the MMM needs to continue to be debunked because renewed efforts in challenging the MMM can expedite the change in misguided opinions of Asian Americans (Choi & Lahey, 2006; Museus & Chang, 2009; Poon et al. 2016). Furthermore, culturally proficient scholars need to challenge the MMM because research indicates the MMM can negatively shape the experiences of Asian Americans (Choi & Lahey, 2006; Grim et al., 2019; Museus, 2008, Museus & Chang, 2009; Museus & Park, 2015; Poon et al., 2016; Walton & Truong, 2022). In brief, research regarding the MMM progresses the work toward creating environments that are antideficit, anti-essentialist, and antiracist (Yi et al., 2020).

With the MMM alive and well after decades of scholarship, one may wonder if there are any asset-based approach tools, programs, or assessments universities are using to challenge this perspective and focus on an Asian American's talents, knowledge, and skills they bring when they start their undergraduate career (Museus & Chang, 2009). After an extensive review of the literature, there is a lack of university asset-based programs uplifting or promoting Asian Americans' individual talents, knowledge, and skills that can challenge the one-size-fits-all perspective of the population driven by the MMM. When university scholars implement an asset-based framework, such as Gallup CliftonStrengths®, students can identify, explore, and develop their innate abilities into strengths and achieve positive outcomes in their educational pathway (Zienkewicz, 2009). Researchers recommended further exploration of implications on Asian American students' experiences participating in programs focused on strengths and skills and how those assets can be applied to their undergraduate careers (Lerer, 2021). Therefore, this study has reviewed current literature highlighting the pressures and expectations of Asian Americans and how influences of the MMM may continue to misguide Asian Americans to academic failure (Assalone & Fann, 2017; Museus & Park, 2015). In conclusion, this study has also examined how higher education institutions can use an asset-based approach to enhance the experience of Asian American college students.

Purpose of Study

This study focused on the understanding of Asian Americans' perception and application of asset-based approaches in their college experience to explore the possibility of combatting stereotypes of the MMM. From a theoretical perspective, it focused on exploring the benefits of applying an asset-based instrument in the college experience of Asian Americans to expand existing research regarding the college experience of Asian Americans and asset-based

approaches in the educational environment. Furthermore, this study expands upon existing research by going beyond the broad body of literature that primarily explores the Asian American college experience, the role of asset-based approaches in enhancing student support services, and the impact of the MMM on the experiences of Asian American students. It also aims to delve deeper into how Asian American college students perceive their own strengths and assets, and how they may or may not leverage these assets throughout their undergraduate journey.

From the practical perspective, the study provided rich data on how to enhance the experience of a marginalized, sometimes forgotten, community in the educational environment. Additionally, the research provided anecdotal data that highlights the current experiences of Asian American college students. In the same fashion, the study provided recommendations beneficial for educational program planning and meeting current student needs. To navigate the ever-changing environment of education and the advancement of technologies and resources, educational leaders need to adapt and assess current educational practices to support Asian American students (Empleo, 2006). To self-assess current practices related to culture, intentionally attending to the dynamics of difference, expanding cultural knowledge and resources, and adapting service models to better meet the needs of historically marginalized populations are all characteristics of a culturally competent agency (Cross, 1989; Welborn et al., 2022). Historically marginalized populations, such as Asian Americans, confront racism daily and are frequently exasperated by Caucasian people, whose reactions to their frustrations range from aggression to apathy based on overwhelming obliviousness (Lindsey et al., 2018). Educational institutions need to become supportive spaces that welcome, educate, and address the needs of the diverse student population education serves (Kumashiro, 2000).

Research Questions

The principal guiding research questions and sub-questions for this study were:

1. In what ways and to what extent does the use of asset-based approaches lead Asian American college students to succeed in their selected career path?

    a. How do Asian American college students perceive participation through an asset-based lens/approach? Does this help them accomplish goals or succeed in college?

    b. How might Asian Americans utilize the results of an asset-based approach during/throughout their college experience?

2. How and to what extent does the use of asset-based approaches lead Asian American college students to contradict the Model Minority Myth?

    a. How do Asian American college students use their results from an asset-based instrument?

    b. What factors influence Asian American students' view on success?

The study approached answering these questions by conducting the study through a phenomenological approach. The study was administered to students attending a large public university on the western side of the U.S. of America. Furthermore, the data collection comprised of acquiring institutional data, participants' artifacts, semi-structured interviews, and research observations.

Methodology

This phenomenological study employed a qualitative research design, which involved participants completing an asset-based assessment and participating in semi-structured interviews. The data collected from both the assessment and the interviews were analyzed to

identify recurring themes, which helped answer the research questions and reveal unique trends and insights. By elevating these narratives and recognizing their inherent strengths, this work will actively challenge the deficit-based models that have long shaped higher education, dismantling oppressive structures and fostering a more inclusive, equitable academic environment. Further information of the methodology for this study are presented in Chapter Three.

Significance of Study

Currently, many studies focus on the lived experiences and cultural upbringing of Asians, the MMM, and asset-based and deficit-based approaches. However, few studies bring all three aspects of literature together. Even fewer studies focus on exploring whether applying asset-based approaches demystify the MMM and enhance Asian American college student experiences. For instance, much of the research on the success of a widely known asset-based instrument in Higher Education Administration, the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, have been conducted at Pre-Dominantly White Institutions (PWI) with many of their student participants identifying as Caucasian. To accurately determine the effectiveness of asset-based approaches, such as the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, future studies need to focus on historically marginalized communities (Banks & Doyh, 2019; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015). In addition, the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, proven by scholars, resonates with many different cultural contexts as it has been utilized across 25 different countries and 17 different languages (Lopez et al., 2005).

Although asset-based instruments, such as the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, may be applied to diverse research participants, many existing asset-based research do not explicitly extend asset-based understanding to individual college-aged adults as contributors to their

communities (Kellogg, 2021). Research has shown that communities of color often uplift their community while they climb up the euro-centric ladder and shatter the bamboo and glass ceilings (Kellogg, 2021). Only focusing on the individual's strengths and not the collective, researchers and practitioners will miss the larger picture of understanding students from diverse backgrounds and their role as contributors to the learning community and their own community (Kellogg, 2021). Therefore, this study explored the benefits of focusing on the individual and collective assets Asian Americans contribute to their learning environment. Centering the research on Asian Americans, the assets they contribute, and the support to their community will highlight the commitment to their community and role in maintaining membership both on and beyond the college campus, especially when combatting the model minority image (Kellogg, 2021).

Furthermore, recent scholars have outlined additional exploration of asset-based approaches around communities of color is necessary. For example, Lerer (2021) conducted a study exploring the phenomenon of a strengths-based experience for first-generation college students and indicated opportunities for future research to be conducted through the examination of cultural and ethnic norms on CliftonStrengths®. Lerer (2021) emphasizes that Lerer did not have enough data to examine the intersections of identity, such as race and ethnicity; and Lerer encouraged further examinations for diverse populations as the additional information can assist institutions in building effective asset-based programs and approaches to college campuses for all students. Another study, conducted by Seto (2020), focused on a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry into Asian American college students' perception of the philosophy around strengths development. Seto (2020) emphasized the Asian diaspora is extremely diverse and further exploration of Asian American subgroups or underrepresented populations could advance the applications of asset-based approaches in Higher Education institutions.

This research is grounded in a commitment to critically analyzing the MMM and its role in reinforcing racism, exclusionary educational practices, and racial stratification (Walton & Truong, 2022). Drawing on race-based critical theories, particularly Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit), which remains underdeveloped and underutilized in educational contexts compared to frameworks like Black Crit, LatCrit, and Tribal Crit (Capper, 2018), this study prioritizes the voices, histories, and lived experiences of Asian Americans—whose perspectives have often been overlooked or misrepresented. The theoretical framework not only shaped the development of the research and interview questions, but guided the data analysis, establishing connections between the findings and the broader theoretical insights. By amplifying the narratives in the findings and recognizing the inherent resilience, strengths, and value within them, this study seeks to confront and deconstruct the deficit-driving frameworks that have long governed higher education, paving the way for the dismantling of oppressive systems and the creation of a more inclusive and just academic landscape.

This research focuses on stereotypes to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how Asian Americans navigate and succeed within educational settings, offering critical insights into how educators, administrators, and policymakers can better support and empower Asian American students. As Hather & Rath (2010) note, when leaders recognize that their best work is achieved by leveraging their unique talents, they create pathways to greater success, balance, and fulfillment. This study can drive a significant transformation in Higher Education by reshaping the support systems for Asian American students, ensuring that their diverse talents are recognized and nurtured, and contributing to a more inclusive and empowering academic experience for all.

Chapter Summary

From the start of the doctoral journey, the foundation and drive to pursue this study has been to disrupt the inequalities and oppressive systems in education. The current literature available to practitioners and scholars continues to encourage researchers to dissect and investigate educational practices and processes that remain obscure through the education system. There is a continued cry out to educational professors to explore and implement practices that uplift students and identify the assets they can enhance and contribute to society. Lastly, scholars studying Asian American populations persist in combatting the MMM, therefore, this study contributes literature focused on addressing the gaps and inadequacies of the Higher Education system and provides recommendations to institutional stakeholders to create more inclusive, innovative, and strength-based learning environments.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter presents an overview of the scholarly literature concerning the experiences of Asian American students, the Model Minority Myth (MMM), and asset-based approaches. Several themes arose: Influences of Cultural Upbringing, Educational Expectations, Cultural Hierarchy, and Outgroup Expectations. Research conducted on the impacts of the MMM showcased patterns are categorized as: In-Group Conflict, Image of Academic Success, Conflicting Expectations, Silencing of Asian Americans, and Asian Representations. Lastly, when reviewing the literature on asset-based approaches, I outlined similar ideas in the following topics: Benefits of an Asset-Based Approach, Impact of a Deficit-Based Approach, CliftonStrengths®, and Educational Benefits of CliftonStrengths®. In conclusion, these categories were established by carefully analyzing recurring patterns and insights across literature.

The existing literature is extensive across the three main areas of research, but the challenge in the literature review was identifying sources that address the interconnectedness of these areas. To bridge this gap, the conceptual framework of Asian Critical Race Theory was used to link the main research areas, guiding the development and execution of the study as well as the interpretation of its findings.

Asian American Student Experiences

Influences of Cultural Upbringing

When facilitating the exploration of an Asian American student's strengths, it is essential to understand the experiences and the cultural upbringing of Asian American students while also considering the impact of the MMM (Tan, 2019). Culture provides parameters for everyday living, helps group members understand guidelines for acceptable behavior, and provides consistency and predictability in daily actions (Lindsey et al., 2018; Welborn et al., 2022). These

guidelines reflect covert values which make up cultural expectations or codes (Lindsey et al., 2018). Cultural expectations help recognize those outside the group and control those inside the group; hence, providing the foundation for a group to sustain itself (Lindsey et al., 2018).

The Asian American diaspora is vast and diverse; unsurprisingly, Asian ethnic groups have different experiences, cultural values, and characteristics (Empleo, 2016; Hune, 2002; Poon et al., 2016). To better understand the Asian American experience, the literature review consists of studies focusing on the migration of Asians to the U.S., family and cultural influences on their livelihood in the U.S., racism and racist behaviors Asians experience, and narratives of Asians in education. Selected studies in the literature review consist of empirical research, quantitative questionnaires, qualitative focus groups, ethnographic interviews, and quantitative literature analysis.

To best understand the Asian American population, it is critical to know that each Asian ethnic group's experience and reasons for coming to America are vastly different. Also, it is critical to understand experiences in the waves in which Asian immigrants came to America. For example, there are three distinct waves of Southeast Asian Americans: (a) attributes of the Southeast Asians arriving between 1975-1982 were educated elite, professionals, and individuals who worked closely with the U.S. military; (b) between 1979-1982, the makeup of the wave was Southeast Asians with education and above-average economic and social resources, and they had familial ties to the first-wave immigrants; (c) the third wave of Southeast Asians who arrived from 1982 to the present, were categorized as having lower English proficiency, fewer opportunities with formal education, and less transferrable skills (Ngo & Lee, 2007). When research does not disaggregate the experiences of different ethnic groups in the Asian diaspora, there is a failed account for the diversity in the Asian community and the economic and political

influences of the migration of the Asian population (Grim et al., 2019; Hune, 2002; Lee et al., 2017; Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2020; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Poon et al., 2016).

Educational Expectations

Another troubling pattern is the persistent stereotype within the community that Asian Americans are overly focused on the pursuit of education. Additionally, Asian Americans often perceive education—and the pressure to attain higher education—through a distinct lens. For instance, many Southeast Asian American families' attention and focus of discussions are on the child's education and grades (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Subsequently, in addition to societal expectations from the MMM, students feel added expectations to excel for their families for reasons such as taking care of elders, and because, their families as well, believe in society's unjust expectations of Asian students (Walton & Truong, 2022). The truth is many Asian Americans live in poverty, are first-generation college students, and have parents who lack formal education to support Asian Americans' academic success (Hurh & Kim, 1989; Wing, 2007). Consequently, the MMM paints a picture of Asian Americans being successful without the need for social or educational resources, which renders their experience invisible (Empleo, 2006; Hurh & Kim, 1989; Tan, 2019; Walton & Truong, 2022; Wing, 2007). History disguised the model minority as a positive identity, which has been costly to Asian Americans. That is, Asian Americans are placed on a pedestal as a successful and problem-free dominant racial group that does not need social programs to support disadvantaged minorities (Hurh & Kim, 1989; Tan, 2019; Wing, 2007). As a result, education expectations have remained unchanged for every Asian American in every ethnic group.

Cultural Hierarchy

Many Asian American students are culturally raised to please their parents and obey their parents' desires, especially in conversations related to following a particular career path. Asian parents often pressure their children to pursue career pathways related to science, technology, engineering, or mathematics, which may not be their desired path (Wing, 2007). The opportunity to explore career aspirations related to communications media, creative arts, and social sciences is not an option because of family influences and the elders' expectations for more fields of studies leading to more lucrative careers (Cornejo et al., 2020; Suyemoto, 2009; Wing, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 1998).

Furthermore, students from certain Asian ethnic groups, such as Vietnamese, are constantly reminded by family and, sometimes, peers in similar ethnic groups of the sacrifices their parents or elders had to endure to allow them to have an opportunity to pursue higher education (Centrie, 2000; Conchas, 2006; Ngo & Lee, 2007). This filial piety Asian American students have for their parents, and elders cause children to quickly learn self-restraint and emotional suppression (Bankston & Hidalgo, 2006; Cornejo et al., 2020; Huang, 2012). The demanded respect often leads to students subordinating their personal desires for the sake of the family's collective philosophies and expectations (Bankston & Hidalgo, 2006; Cornejo et al., 2020; Huang, 2012). Because families' pressures and expectations are significant burdens on Asian American students, most will do as much as possible to save face. The term *saving face* is described as one's choice to maintain their social status, dignity, and respect in the view of others (Huang, 2012). The notion of saving face engenders feelings of shame if Asian Americans deviate from Asian cultural expectations. Therefore, Asian Americans feel they must conform and comply with face-enhancing behavior or behaviors that do not identify them as risk-takers (Chew, 2012; Huang, 2012; Yamagata-Noji & Gee, 2012). Moreover, the cultural philosophies

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of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders do not condone risk-taking behaviors (Cornejo et al., 2020; Yamagata-Noji & Gee, 2012). So, educators must remember that many Asian American students, especially those in certain ethnic groups, come to college with a career trajectory and educational expectations already formed by their parents.

Outgroup Expectations

Considering cultural expectations Asian Americans must uphold, living in the U.S. – a country founded on colonialism, capitalism, and racism – can add stress to an Asian American's life. The process of socializing and interacting with a culture completely different from their own can be a culture shock because of feelings of isolation, hopelessness, racism, and anxiety affiliated with falling short of meeting the demands of one's cultural upbringing (Chew, 2012). Furthermore, living a dual life with different cultural expectations and perceived racial discrimination can cause internal conflict and increase depressive symptoms in Asian Americans (Cornejo et al., 2020). Also, intergenerational differences, high levels of interdependence, and navigating expectations of family, community, and peers increase depression and anxiety in Asian American college students (Cornejo et al., 2020).

With such pressures, Asian American students do not feel they can explore their passions or possible career paths outside of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics-related studies (Chung & Sedlacek, 1999). Frequently, Asian American students are asked to hone skills that may not be innate or may be stereotypically forced upon them. For example, stereotypes noting Asian Americans are good with math and will excel in the subject or Asian Americans should become doctors or lawyers proliferate. This stereotypical rhetoric sets Asian American students on a path of possible failure to succeed socially, academically, and in their careers. Therefore, when an Asian American does choose to go beyond the stereotype, Asian American

students may need *career GPS* – a phrase to describe the need for assistance in finding their way in the career development maze (Yamagata-Noji & Gee, 2012). In addition, without understanding the Asian American population, educators may not know how complex and influential Asian culture is in an Asian American student's decision-making ability regarding education. Higher education institutions may benefit from exploring the need for coaching as a solution to empower Asian Americans to step out of their family career expectations and societal stereotypes.

Impacts of the Model Minority Myth

Again, another theme in exploring Asian American college student experiences is the impact of the MMM. The MMM creates a set of high expectations for Asian Americans to uphold, and if Asian Americans do not meet them, they are seen as less than and a deficit to their community. When educators view scholars as having a deficit and not having anything to contribute, the educator silences them and prevents them from further growing as contributors to the learning environment (Missingham, 2017). Instead of upholding Asian Americans to these unnecessary standards and watching Asian Americans fail to meet them, educators should understand the MMM and focus on how educators can view Asian American students as unique individuals who bring assets to the classroom and campus life.

In-Group Conflict

Beyond the pressures discussed above from non-Asian individuals, there are also disagreements in the Asian community regarding who is considered Asian. In a recent study, the default assumption of who is considered Asian was individuals who identified as East Asian (Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2020). Even in the Asian community, there are exclusions toward other ethnic subgroups. For instance, Indians are three times more likely to be excluded from the Asian

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category than individuals who identify as Chinese by Asians (Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2020). Similarly, individuals identifying as Pakistani are five times more likely to be excluded from the Asian category (Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2020). This dissonance regarding who *counts* as Asian causes confusion about how Asian students navigate societal and educational expectations and support spaces on campuses.

Furthermore, the incongruence in who is considered Asian further supports the need to continue researching the Asian American diaspora and disaggregate the experiences of Asian Americans. When East Asians' narratives are the only stories that are reported in history, literature, or research, a portrait of Asian American experiences is incomplete and misconstrued (Grim et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2017; Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2020; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Poon et al., 2016). The inconsistent descriptions of Asian Americans reinforce the MMM and will continue to cause additional harm to the Asian American college experience (Poon et al., 2016; Yi et al., 2020).

The Asian American community is diverse and extensive; however, society, history, discrimination, racism, and systems of oppression pin all Asian subgroups under one assumption: the MMM (Grim, et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2017; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Poon, et al., 2016). In some studies, conducted in secondary schools, non-Asian high school students would assume all Asians shared the same lived experiences regardless of ethnicity (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Lee, 1994). However, many Asian students in a study stressed their specific ethnic group affiliation in interracial situations and within Asian circles (Lee, 1994). Furthermore, there are discriminatory discrepancies that occur within the Asian community. For example, although Asian Americans continued to be labeled as model minorities, Southeast Asian Americans have indicated being stereotyped as inferior, having cultural deficiencies, and being financially poor

(Museus & Park, 2015). The lumping of all Asians under the image of the MMM suppresses the different and unique experiences of each Asian American, and it reinforces the fact that Asians do not face discrimination, even in the Asian community.

Together with the challenges within the Asian American community, the MMM continues to place barriers on Asian Americans regarding their relationship with other communities of color. The MMM places Asians on a fabricated pedestal of society for other communities of color to strive for, hence creating a tense environment that encourages competition between meeting expectations from their Asian cultural upbringing and expectations that have been fueled by white supremacy (Empleo, 2006; Hurh & Kim, 1989; Kiang et al, 2016; Kim, 1999; Lee et al., 2017). The model minority image creates an environment that pits other ethnic groups against Asian Americans because they are displayed as the exemplary minority group, which in turn reinforces and perpetuates racial and social stratification (Kiang et al, 2016). This can be easily exhibited by the continuous battle regarding whether to consider Affirmative Action - in college acceptances (Chang, 2008; Hurh & Kim, 1989; Lee et al., 2017; Kumashiro, 2000). The friction between Asian Americans, non-Asians, and communities of color, caused by the MMM, further reinforces the inaccurate image of Asian Americans' academic achievement.

Academic Success Image

Even though the MMM assumes all Asian Americans excel academically, that is entirely false (Choi & Lahey, 2006; Grim et al., 2019; Hurh & Kim, 1989; Walton & Truong, 2022). Despite the high percentage of Asian students who make up the top of academic rankings, a thorough examination of data shows that not all Asian ethnic groups excel at the same success rate (Lee, 1994). For instance, there are ethnic disparities in acquiring a bachelor's degree

(Museus & Chang, 2009). When reviewing college degree attainment data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2004), some Southeast Asian American groups, such as Laos, Cambodian, and Hmong, acquire college degrees at a very low rate compared to the national average and any other racial or ethnic population. Accordingly, there are disparities among racial groups attaining doctoral degrees (Museus & Chang, 2009). According to the Council of Graduate Schools (2008), half of Asian Americans who begin doctoral programs attain their degrees at a lower rate than their Caucasian and Latinx peers. Additionally, research shows that in specific fields of study, such as the social sciences, more Caucasians attain their terminal degree than Asian Americans (Museus & Chang, 2009).

There are also misinterpretations of how well Asian Americans navigate careers after acquiring higher education because the MMM creates a false image of Asian Americans' prowess. For example, it is believed that Asian American parents encourage their students to attend higher education institutions because it will lead to more lucrative employment opportunities (Wing, 2007). But, this is not always true. To illuminate this, Chung & Sedlacek (1999) conducted a study and discovered Asian American students reported having lower career, academic, and social self-appraisals than their peers who identify as African American. Altogether, the image of Asian Americans' academic success is poorly and inaccurately illustrated because of the stereotypes supported by the MMM.

Conflicting Expectations

To combat the MMM, educators also need to understand the internal conflict Asian Americans experience with navigating contradictory expectations of how they should behave. Asian Americans feel pressure from members of their families, and some Asian American students have also expressed feeling the burden of meeting societal expectations to assimilate

into westernized White culture perpetuated on college campuses (Museus & Park, 2015). Asian Americans feel they need to change the way they dress, adjust their vernacular, and align their behaviors with the White majority of universities (Museus & Park, 2015). Overall, the MMM has forced Asian Americans to face internal conflict and pressures to meet familial and societal expectations (Assalone & Fann, 2017; Cornejo et al., 2020; Museus & Park, 2015). Asian Americans may be harmed when subjected to the MMM standards. Some Asian American high school students feel a sense of guilt and responsibility to their families to live up to the expectations of the MMM (Assalone & Fann, 2017; Lee, 1994). This level of pressure leads high and low-achieving Asian-American students to experience anxiety, depression, and embarrassment (Lee, 1994; Nguyen, 2018). These negative emotions and mental burdens prevent Asian Americans from reaching out and requesting assistance, especially when the required help is affiliated with their academic achievement (Lee, 1994; Walton & Truong, 2022).

The MMM has set such high expectations for Asian American students to achieve to the point they are seen as not needing assistance (Lee, 1994; Walton & Truong, 2022). Their experiences and struggles are often ignored and absent in educational policy development. For instance, the media has stereotypically displayed Asian Americans as a race that is academically successful and socioeconomically prosperous (Assalone & Fann, 2017; Lee, 2010). Due to aggregated data showcasing some Asian Americans having high assimilation rates, income, and education, Asian Americans are often excluded from minority-serving services (Hune, 2002; Hurh & Kim, 1989; Lee, 2010). Because Asian Americans seem to have it all together, they are not only excluded from services and support, but they are silenced and not expected to protest against the racist status quo.

Silencing of Asian Americans

Recent events have highlighted the racial challenges Asian Americans continue to face. For example, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, racialized fear surfaced in public discourse through racist comments and jokes directed at Asian Americans, both online and in person (Dillard, 2020). The pandemic exposed the deep-rooted racism and xenophobia in U.S. history, particularly against Asian Americans. Despite being well-documented by scholars, the history of anti-Asian racism is often omitted from K-12 and higher education curricula. This gap in education perpetuates harmful stereotypes, including those portraying Asian Americans as disease carriers, especially with the coronavirus being referred to as the "Chinese Virus" or "Kung Flu" (Teranishi et al., 2022). In addition to these damaging stereotypes, Asian Americans were subjected to social isolation by individuals who feared contracting the virus or who believed in the false narratives circulating. The existence of this type of exclusionary behavior in society enables the continued reinforcement of the stereotypes of the MMM, further marginalizing Asian Americans.

For many years, the MMM has created a pristine image of Asian Americans as a racial group that does not experience any racism (Chun, 1980; Hurh & Kim, 1989; Lee, 2010; Poon et al., 2016). When Asian Americans strive to protest the negative impacts of the MMM, their efforts or resistance are seen as nonconfrontational because there is fear of the potential impacts if Asian Americans overtly confront perpetrators of the MMM (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Lee, 2010). Examples of nonconfrontational measures range from internally denying some of the prevailing racial framings, creating changes in social and political environments for one's self and others, and creating positive self-definitions and self-valuations (Chou & Feagin, 2015). Because of the fear of potential impacts, Asian American parents raise their children to ignore stereotypical actions and comments and be nonconfrontational in those situations (Chou &

Feagin, 2015). These familial expectations discourage Asian Americans from displaying overt actions that draw attention to them (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Lee, 2010). Thus, any Asian American who chooses to speak out against anti-Asian racism faces social retaliation from the Asian community for causing disruptions in the discriminatory status quo (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Lee, 2010).

Asian Representation

Another reason Asian Americans may not speak out, especially in educational environments, is the lack of representation of Asian Americans in university administration and faculty positions, especially in senior leadership positions (Museus & Chang, 2009; Wang & Teranishi, 2012). Some Asian American students feel they have been racially silenced because they feel their voice has been denied from various spheres of campus life (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Museus & Park, 2015). Further study on Asian Americans related to the MMM is needed, including methods and tools with an asset-based perspective to mitigate the MMM. Future research can address the conflict that seems to reside between upholding cultural values at the expense of silencing an Asian American's voice or setting the expectation that they do not have a voice.

Asset-Based Approaches

In light of the details shared regarding the impacts of the MMM, educators should explore asset-based approaches as a tool to combat the MMM. When educators begin to research programs and educational pedagogies to enhance the student experience of Asian American students and demystify the MMM, educators should consider implementing methods focused on highlighting student assets and what those assets can contribute to the learning environment. This literature review also considers research regarding organizational practices centering on asset-

based approaches related to highlighting individual strengths and skills attributed to academic and career success. Higher education needs to be student-ready compared to the conventional expectations of ensuring the student is college-ready (McNair et al., 2022). One way universities can be student-ready is to view students through an asset-based lens. Asset-based approaches occur when students are seen as contributors to the learning environment, institutions are not just focused on the student needs but also the strengths the student brings with them, and university employees start with the positive attributes and capabilities of the learning community versus seeking the areas a group lacks when addressing a situation (Kellogg, 2021; Krutkowski, 2017; Missingham, 2017). When leaders use their personal talents, skills, and strengths in their day-to-day activities and empower others to do the same, positive psychology and leadership become the founding connection and framework for working and learning environments (Barnes & Larcus, 2015).

Foundational structures of education did not include educating students from minoritized communities. Educators have spent years identifying solutions to dismantle euro-centric, racist, and deficit-minded approaches and replace them with inclusive, equity-minded, asset-focused practices. When educators shift their education paradigm from focusing on problems to the possibilities a student can bring to an institution, an initiative, or a situation, the transition of students into higher education will become smoother and more sustainable (Clifton & Harter, 2003; Krutkowski, 2017; Lopez & Louis, 2009; Pashkova-Balkenhol et al., 2019; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015c). When faculty, staff, and student beliefs and practices shift to what students can do rather than what they cannot, the educational institution is shifting toward an asset-based perspective (Lin, 2020). Recognition and appreciation of talents and strengths can drastically transform the learning environment, student resources, and teaching pedagogies to meet students

with different learning styles and diverse needs (Krutkowski, 2017). At the same time, it is important to note that asset-based approaches require sustainable and consistent reflection and reapplication. By prioritizing proactivity, routine focus, and independent learning, students can capitalize on their strengths, manage their transitions more effectively, and achieve their academic goals (Krutkowski, 2017). In Krutkowski's (2017) study, they researched how an asset-based approach, such as Gallup CliftonStrengths®, can be a tool to encourage learners to embrace ownership of what they learn, commit to more self-reflection, and convey their ideas more effectively. Taking an asset-based approach honors the individual's lived experiences and prior knowledge of the learning environment, in turn empowering the student to engage in learning with meaningful and thoughtful intentions (Krutkowski, 2017; Missingham, 2017). To best understand the importance of asset-based approaches, the literature review will describe the benefits of asset-based approach learning and the deficiencies of the current educational pedagogy.

Benefits of an Asset-Based Approach

Asset-based approaches are defined as moments when educators and leaders are set on identifying positive attributes and possibilities of an organization instead of seeking out the issues or deficits of the group or community (Krutkowski, 2017; Missingham, 2017). Asset-based approaches create spaces for creativity and innovation when groups face problems or complex situations to resolve (Krutkowski, 2017; Missingham, 2017). Leaders who guide their teams with an asset-based mindset often focus on the teams' internal strengths and empower groups to utilize those strengths daily (Soria & Stubblefield, 2015a; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015b). With this in mind, asset-based approaches aim to identify and encourage people and groups within the local organization to catalyze social change (Missingham, 2017).

When applying asset-based practices to the educational system, the system attempts to begin by focusing on and valuing student contributions to the classroom and co-curricular activities (Ashby & Minter, 2017; Missingham, 2017; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015b). Lived experiences, prior knowledge, learned skills, and cultural upbringing are all considered assets students add to the learning environment. Through an asset-based lens, students are seen as a community full of potential, a group with social capital and social networks, and a scholarly collective (Kellogg, 2021; Lopez, 2009; Missingham, 2017). Asset-based approaches shift the learning environment from a conventional, lecture-based, and expert-centric education to a learning environment that uplifts student engagement and participation whilst holding assets students possess as the foundation of the participatory learning in the course (Hooks, 2014; Missingham, 2017). In addition to the shift in teaching pedagogy, asset-based approach practice shifts the relationship between the educator and the learner. Asset-based approaches have the capability to challenge institutionalized inequalities in universities (Missingham, 2017). This dismantling of inequities can be done by centering and contextualizing students' identity, lived experience, knowledge, and connections to their communities, localities, and environments as important avenues to understand the nature of communities, community issues, and challenges and the possible solutions and sources of social change and creating a sense of belonging (Missingham, 2017; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015b). The outcomes from asset-based inspired learning lead students to conduct an inventory of their individual experiences, skills, talents, social capital, and institutional connections to apply toward mobilizing in-depth, diverse, sustainable, and developmental change (Barnes & Larcus, 2015; Missingham, 2017; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015b). With such benefits of asset-based approaches to learning about students,

institutions should promptly depart from conventional practices that diminish students'

wholeness through the use of deficit-based approaches.

Impacts of a Deficit-Based Approaches

Deficit-based approaches have been part of Westernized teaching practices for centuries.

With this conventional practice, the professor or lecturer is seen as the one and only beholder of

all the knowledge and serves as the expert in the learning environment (Freire, 1972;

Missingham, 2017). The educator is deemed the academic authority figure, and each student is

seen as simply an individual in the masses versus a collective community (Missingham, 2017).

Furthermore, the deficit mindset paints the image of students as lacking the necessary skills,

capabilities, interpersonal skills, connections, and knowledge to succeed in the academic realm

(Missingham, 2017). The learning occurring in the classroom in deficit-based approaches, such

as the banking model, becomes very transactional, where the lecturer presents information, and

the student is expected to retain and understand that information (Freire, 1972; Missingham,

2017).

One's identity and the sense of equity in learning are lost or often ignored when

educators lead with a deficit perspective (Missingham, 2017). A scholar's cultural upbringing,

lived experiences, connections to family and friends, and personal stories are rarely attributed in

the classroom because the lecturer's traditional deficit approaches control the level of

engagement and discourse in the learning space (Kellogg, 2021; Missingham, 2017). Deficit-

based approaches sustain the relationship and hierarchical power dynamic between the lecturer

and scholar. When a student struggles at an institution, the student of concern becomes perceived

and labeled in target groups with deficits, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of education,

as a rationale for their insufficiency in universities (Missingham, 2017). Deficit-based

approaches continuously silence target communities and stunt their ability to develop their skills and knowledge further because it does not invite the communication members to engage and share their stories or contribute their human, cultural, and social capital (Missingham, 2017). In addition, without including students' assets, deficit-based approaches prevent historically disadvantaged people from developing their agency and reinforce the inequitable power dynamic between the educator and learner (Missingham, 2017).

Integrating asset-based tools is critical in creating a more inclusive and welcoming learning environment. Moreover, educators should explore integrating asset-based tools, such as Gallup CliftonStrengths®, into learning environments to enhance educational settings and learning outcomes for students and teachers. Because Gallup CliftonStrengths® was founded on focusing on measuring an individual's talents, providing a common language that outlines their strength, ensuring the results of the tools were digestible for teams, families, and friends, and ensuring the instrument applies to any profession, Gallup CliftonStrengths® can assist in highlighting Asian Americans as individuals and the exceptional talents they possess; hence disproving the MMM (Rath, 2018). For that reason and the fact that the Gallup CliftonStrengths® does not ask about knowledge (i.e. formal education, degrees, resume, etc.) or about the ability to perform a specific task and focuses on amplifying innate natural talents of an individual, this paper provides an in-depth review of Gallup CliftonStrengths® (Rath, 2018).

Gallup CliftonStrengths®

Gallup CliftonStrengths® is an asset-based assessment tool measuring an individual's talents – the innate recurring pattern of perspectives, emotions, and manners – and how talents can be applied productively to everyday decisions and tasks (The Gallup Organization, 2014). Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment is an online assessment tool to assist individuals in

identifying and applying their personal strengths to their daily responsibilities (The Gallup

Organization, 2014). This assessment measures a person's talents and skills with 34 talent

themes and produces their top five most used and innately occurring behaviors expressed as

strengths (Barnes & Larcus, 2015).

Furthermore, to help individuals understand areas in which they excel when working

within and leading groups, the 34 strengths are categorized into four domains*: Executing,

Influencing, Relationship Building, and Strategic Thinking* (Barnes & Larcus, 2018; Gallup,

n.d.d., Rath & Conchie, 2008). As outlined by Gallup (n.d.d), the four domains of

CliftonStrengths provide a natural way to categorize strengths based on how they contribute to

accomplishing goals within teams. These domains capture the essential capabilities that every

leader and team need to achieve success. Individuals with themes in the Executing domain are

action-oriented, possessing strengths that drive results and turn ideas into tangible outcomes

(Gallup, n.d.d.). They work relentlessly to bring goals to fruition. Those in the Influencing

domain are natural leaders who have the ability to inspire and persuade others, take charge of

situations, and ensure that all voices are heard and considered (Gallup, n.d.d.). Individuals with

strengths in the Relationship Building domain excel at fostering strong, supportive connections

(Gallup, n.d.d.). They are the glue that holds a team together, uniting members and motivating

them to work toward shared success. Lastly, individuals with strengths in the Strategic Thinking

domain help teams think critically and plan for the future, using their strengths to guide decision-

making and create improved outcomes for the group (Gallup, n.d.d.). There is no perfect balance

of the four domains required for success, as each team and individual bring their own unique

strengths to the table. However, the CliftonStrengths domains provide valuable insight when

working with teams and partnerships. Understanding these domains fosters a deeper awareness

of how different strengths contribute to achieving common goals, ultimately enabling more effective and harmonious collaborations.

Once an individual understands their strengths and domain(s), they are able to start applying the concept to their everyday tasks. In addition to focusing on how achievement can be reached by using the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, individuals who engage in discovering, developing, and applying their strengths also gain a sense of personal satisfaction because the feelings lead individuals to see the potential they have to be where they see themselves in the present and the future (Anderson, 2005; Ashby & Mintner, 2017; Lopez, 2009). Beyond reaching or accomplishing one's potential, using Gallup CliftonStrengths® has enhanced the quality of life for many individuals (Anderson, 2005). Many Gallup CliftonStrengths® participants have reported an increased level of self-assurance and hopefulness after discovering, affirming, and celebrating their strengths (Anderson, 2005; Hodges & Harter, 2005; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015a). In addition, Gallup CliftonStrengths® participants report a sense of optimism and pleasant psychological reward when developing and applying Gallup CliftonStrengths® (Anderson, 2005).

Educational Benefits of CliftonStrengths®

Given Anderson's findings above, applying the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment can empower students to focus on the positive traits they possess and how they use their talents to navigate new and challenging situations (Ashby & Mintner, 2017; Barnes & Larcus, 2015). Educators should utilize Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment to create opportunities for students to discover their capabilities to accomplish many tasks individually and as team members (Ashby & Mintner, 2017; Barnes & Larcus, 2015). When Anderson (2005) conducted over 2 million interviews, they found the top achievers of their profession are individuals who

build their lives around their talents, skills, and strengths. Therefore, when educators consider using Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment with their students, it is important to note students, who develop their talents into strengths, gain abilities to perform specific activities with consistency and near perfection (Anderson, 2005).

In learning environments, such as universities and colleges, educators, who use Gallup CliftonStrengths®, aim to equip their scholars with the knowledge and skills necessary to use their unique strengths and talents to pursue their career path of choice and achieve their life goals (The Gallup Organization, 2014; Soria & Taylor, 2016). Educators nationwide have utilized strengths-based approaches to engage and retain their students to persist and graduate (Soria & Stubblefield, 2014; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015b). When higher education institutions assess, teach, and create learning opportunities through a strengths-based approach, students are afforded additional learning opportunities to discover their strengths and utilize them to achieve academic and personal excellence (Anderson, 2004). When Soria and Stubblefield (2015a) studied first-year college students' experience with Gallup CliftonStrengths®, they discovered once first-year students have a deep understanding of, enthusiasm in, and a desire to further invest time in developing their Top 5 Gallup CliftonStrengths®, then the students are likely to have a hopeful perspective in terms of achieving their goals. This hopeful perspective contributes to the first-year student's ability to overcome challenges and obstacles when transitioning into higher education (Soria & Stubblefield, 2015a).

Beyond student achievement and excellence, applying the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment in higher education environments can increase students' sense of belonging. The Gallup CliftonStrengths® provides students with the ability to have a shared language. Students can use Gallup CliftonStrengths® as a conversation starter (Soria & Stubblefield, 2015b).

Moreover, students have used the Gallup CliftonStrengths® results in those conversations to find commonalities, even in new group environments (Soria & Stubblefield, 2015b). In addition, when students in a group share their Gallup CliftonStrengths® and differences in strengths are discussed, the compare and contrast discourse happen without any negative perceptions, only positive effects (Soria & Stubblefield, 2015b). Through identifying different strengths and discussing how strengths contribute to their academic and personal lives, students expressed they had a higher level of respect for each other (Soria & Stubblefield, 2015b).

Studies have shown that the investment into Gallup CliftonStrengths® cannot only come from the students; university and college faculty and staff also need to invest in uplifting Gallup CliftonStrengths®. The first step is for students to complete the assessment and discover and understand their Gallup CliftonStrengths®. Next, professionals in higher education will need to move beyond the simple task of strength identification; programmatic efforts need to be dedicated to allowing students to apply their Gallup CliftonStrengths® (Soria & Stubblefield, 2014). To accomplish the task of moving beyond strengths identification, higher education faculty and practitioners also need to be mindful of their strengths and have the ability to assess and enhance their instructional pedagogies and their area of expertise (Anderson, 2004). Like students, if university instructors and staff engage in Gallup CliftonStrengths®, then growth in the field of experiences is garnered from becoming aware of their own talents, which can propel them to reach their highest potential (Anderson, 2004; Lopez, 2009). For instance, if campus staff were to invest in Gallup CliftonStrengths®, they can modify their advising efforts to assist students in making critical choices regarding their academic major or minor studies decisions based on areas where their Gallup CliftonStrengths® can be applied to increase their success (Banks & Dohy, 2019). If institutions were to require students to have early conversations with

advising staff focused on the student's Gallup CliftonStrengths®, then hindrances, such as changing majors, to degree completion could be mitigated (Banks & Dohy, 2019).

Leaders in higher education should focus on the assets students contribute to the development of a diverse campus environment. Students apply to colleges and universities by sharing their lived experiences and how they plan to persist and contribute to the institutions they hope to be admitted. Another reason for higher education institutions to focus on strengths-based programs is the opportunities to build on the assets the students possess when entering college, and the knowledge and ability to identify specific behaviors that are not areas of strengths (Clifton & Harter, 2003; Barnes & Larcus, 2015). Asset-based approaches, such as Gallup CliftonStrengths®, advocate that individuals should build on their strengths rather than try to be the best in all aspects of their role and focus on remediation of their weaknesses (Clifton & Harter, 2003; Barnes & Larcus, 2015).

In addition to the personal benefits of utilizing Gallup CliftonStrengths®, there are benefits to the larger community, especially in collaborative team environments. When individuals have a comprehensive knowledge of their Gallup CliftonStrengths®, they develop a sense of respect for others' strengths, leading to increased collaboration levels (Lopez, 2014). In collaborative spaces, leaders have the ability to be intentional in partnering with people who possess Gallup CliftonStrengths® in areas they are not talented to overcome any potential obstacles or challenges (Barnes & Larcus, 2015; Gordon, 2012). Research conducted by the Gallup organization has identified leaders of companies and organizations worldwide are successful because they will use Gallup CliftonStrengths® in areas aligning with their talents and delegate or collaborate with others in areas they are not talented in (Rath & Conchie, 2008).

Overall, the exploration of asset-based university programs will enhance the Asian American student experience. Beyond all the benefits listed above, Gallup CliftonStrengths® is an assessment in which results are influenced by the student's responses to the prompts on the survey. Furthermore, those decisions are influenced by the student's life experiences, culture, ethnic upbringing, and societal expectations, which makes Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment a unique tool. Because the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment is not developed to cater to one demographic population or field of study, the tool may be ideal for scholars as they prepare to future research with a culturally proficient approach. In addition, when researchers focus on understanding the Asian American cultural upbringing and how they enrich a scholar's life, then practitioners can integrate Asian American culture and values in the learning environment to enhance an Asian American's academic experience, career prospects, and identity development. Based on previous research, there is a lack of research exploring Asian Americans' level of personal awareness of their strengths, how Asian Americans can apply their strengths effectively, and how their strengths develop realistic expectations for themselves and clarify Asian Americans' personal values in the context of the academic or professional career path of their choice (Soria & Stubblefield, 2014).

In summary, Asian Americans have been promoted as not struggling with academics and excelling better than other racial groups. Hence, for these reasons, little attention has been paid to understanding their academic challenges. Yet, if educators were to spend time on ethnic groups with Asian Americans, they would learn about the diverse needs of the Asian American population. Still, without an early understanding of the needs and strengths of Asian American students, which could be culled from Gallup CliftonStrengths®, educators will be unaware of how to support them. As a result, Gallup CliftonStrengths® is useful for dismantling expectations

of Asian Americans and giving voice to Asian Americans to identify career choices and services to support academic and career trajectories.

Conceptual Frameworks

This study is informed by many bodies of theory as well as extensive research reviews on Asian Americans' educational experiences. However, the guiding theory for this proposed study is the Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit). The Asian Critical Race Theory is derived from the foundational framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Capper, 2018; Kim et. al., 2021; Museus & Iftikar, 2013). Although CRT can be applied to diverse communities of scholars in Higher Education, researchers and educators need to have frameworks focused on the specific lived experiences, racial realities, and concerns each community faces (Capper, 2018; Kim et al., 2021; Museus & Iftikar, 2013). Therefore, in relation to this study's focus on Asian American college students, it is vital that the study applies the AsianCrit as its conceptual framework. The AsianCrit allows for the study to explore the situational and contextual influences of race and ethnicity on a student's identity and engagement with their peers. The AsianCrit provides scholars, serving Asian American students, a framework to examine and understand ways that racism impact Asian Americans (Kim et al., 2021; Museus & Iftikar, 2013). The framework's foundation, as described by Museus and Iftikar (2023) is based on the following seven unique tenets (p. 23):

1. *Asianization* refers to the reality that racism and nativist racism are pervasive aspects of American society, and society racializes Asian Americans in distinct ways.

2. *Transnational Contexts* emphasize the importance of historical and contemporary national and international contexts for Asian Americans.

3. *(Re)constructive History* underscores the importance of reconstructing authentic

    historical Asian American narratives where they have previously been absent or

    mischaracterized.

4. *Strategic (Anti)Essentialism* is based on the assumption that race is a socially constructed

    phenomenon that can be shaped and reshaped by economic, political, and social forces.

5. *Intersectionality* is based on the notion that racism and other systems of oppression (e.g.,

    sexism, heterosexism, ableism, etc.) intersect to mutually shape the conditions within

    which Asian Americans exist.

6. *Story, Theory, and Praxis* underscores the notion that counterstories theoretical work, and

    practice are important inextricably intertwined elements in the analysis of Asian

    American experiences and advocacy for Asian American people and communities.

7. *Commitment to Social Justice* highlights the notion that critical theory is dedicated to

    advocating for the end of all forms of oppression.

Exploration of Asset-Based Approach Through Asian Crit

When considering asset-based approaches to uplift and enhance the Asian American

college student experience, it is vital for AsianCrit to guide the study in capturing the Asian

American student experience and perceptions of asset-based thinking. In the reflection and

research of U.S. educational pedagogy, deficit thinking is one of the most predominant forms of

existing racism (Yosso, 2005). The assumptions and misconceptions around minority students

entering school unprepared with normative cultural expectations, values, context, knowledge,

and skills and the lack of value and support for students' education are key contributors to

deficit-based approaches (Yosso, 2005). As mentioned in the literature, these assumptions and

misconceptions are construed and fueled by racialized concepts and societal creations, such as the MMM.

Chapter Summary

The AsianCrit framework guides the study's research questions and methodology to ensure Asian American college students' experiences can be accurately depicted through an asset-based perspective. With the U.S. Asian population projected to surpass 46 million by 2060, Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racial or ethnic demographic group in this country more than half the Asian population have at least a bachelor's degree, which is much higher U.S. average, this growth requires educators to be intentional in their teaching pedagogy, curriculum development, and campus culture development (New American Economy, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2021a; Pew Research Center, 2021b). In conclusion, the empirical studies reviewed show there is substantial research regarding Asian American cultural upbringing, the MMM, and asset-based approaches; however, there is very little research that intertwines all three topics.

Furthermore, the literature highlights there are distinctive subgroups within the Asian American identity; therefore, future scholarship needs to continue to account for the diversity within racial groups' experiences and cultures because diversity within cultures is as important as diversity between cultures (Lindsey et al., 2018). The literature review also unveiled the effects of the MMM on the experiences of Asian Americans are multifaceted and wide-ranging. Still, the common theme amongst the research is the MMM is continuously causing harm to the Asian American community and presents a false perception that Asian Americans do not face discrimination, racism, or barriers, or need support (Tan, 2019; Walton & Truong, 2022). All in all, future research regarding Asian Americans needs to explore new methods or adjust current practices to better enhance the Asian American experience and combat the MMM.

The practice of continuing to self-assess current practices related to culture, intentionally attending to the dynamics of difference, expanding cultural knowledge and resources, and adapting service models to better meet the needs of historically marginalized populations are all characteristics of a culturally competent agency (Cross, 1989). Lastly, the literature review highlighted the benefits of educational institutions shifting the teaching pedagogy from a deficit perspective to an asset-based approach. Utilizing strengths-based tools, such as the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, can lead institutions to become culturally competent because it is a self-assessment tool that accepts, highlights, and respects differences.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology used to describe the experience and perceptions of Asian American college students applying asset-based approaches during their undergraduate careers. Additionally, the chapter will also provide an overview of phenomenological research, the rationale for the utilization of a phenomenological study to comprehend the lived experiences of study participants, and outline the methods addressing the validity concerns. Included in this chapter will be an outline of the research design, which will consist of participant recruitment, instrumentation, and data analysis methodology.

Purpose of Research

While there is a plethora of studies conducted on the lived experiences and cultural upbringing of Asians, as well as the Model Minority Myth (MMM), and asset-based versus deficit-based approaches, few have examined how these elements intersect or explored the impact of asset-based approaches on Asian American post-secondary students. This research highlights the strengths, resilience, and community contributions of Asian Americans, with the goal of reshaping support systems in Higher Education. By doing so, it aims to ensure that their diverse talents are recognized, fostering a more inclusive and empowering academic experience. As outlined in Chapter One, the principal guiding research questions and sub-questions include:

1. In what ways and to what extent does the use of asset-based approaches lead Asian American college students to succeed in their selected career path?

    a. How do Asian American college students perceive participation through an asset-based lens/approach? Does this help them accomplish goals or succeed in college?

b. How might Asian Americans utilize the results of an asset-based approach during/throughout their college experience?

2. How and to what extent does the use of asset-based approaches lead Asian American college students to contradict the Model Minority Myth?

a. How do Asian American college students use their results from an asset-based instrument?

b. What factors influence Asian American students' view on success?

These questions provide the framework for the research and inform the design of the study, guiding the exploration of its significance.

Research Design

The purpose of the study is focused on understanding how asset-based approaches can enhance the college experience of Asian American students. To best understand the impacts of asset-based approaches on Asian American college student experiences, the study conducted the research through the qualitative research approach. The qualitative method best aligned to answer the research questions is the hermeneutical phenomenological qualitative approach. Hermeneutical phenomenology describes research focused on participants' lived experience and their experience with the determined phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This research design prioritized understanding several participants' shared experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Understanding the common experiences allowed for developing practices and policies to grasp the understanding of the features and benefits of asset-based approaches for Asian American college students (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The study's approach to collecting data also aligned with practices of hermeneutical phenomenology as I conducted in-depth interviews with participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Research Site

With more than one-third of all U.S.-Born Asian American and Pacific Islanders living in the western region of this country, it was important to select a research site that represented the lived experiences of Asian Americans (New American Economy, 2021). For this study, I selected a large research university on the West Coast of the U.S. In order to protect the privacy of the participants, I used a pseudonym, Asset University, for the research site. Asset University is an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institute (AANAPISI) with a total enrollment of approximately 42,000 students during the 2022 academic year.[1]

As of Fall 2022, approximately 14,700 students identified as either Asian or Pacific Islander.[2] In collaboration with the institution's division for equity, diversity, and inclusion, the study will conduct most outreach efforts through the campus department that serves Asian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, or Desi Americans, which will be referred to as Asian American Programs and Services (AAPS). Asian American Programs and Services unit is physically located in the center of the institutions, where students frequently visit when traveling through class, enjoying a meal, or connecting with student support services. In addition, to collaborating with the AAPS unit, I reached out to several registered student organizations and student-facing campus departments, such as student government, academic departments, student retention offices, etc.

Interview Participants

The participants for this study were purposefully selected in an effort to acquire rich data from the sample size (Maxwell, 2013). Purposeful participation selection is also a triangulation

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[1] To ensure the confidentiality of the research, the in-text citation and reference for this information were omitted.

[2] To ensure the confidentiality of the research, the in-text citation and reference for this information were omitted.

method - "collecting information from a diverse range of individuals" - because each participant provides variant data through sharing their lived experience and perspectives (Maxwell, 2013, p. 128). Furthermore, to increase the recruitment of participants, I approached the study with the practice of "snowball" sampling – having participants suggest their peers they know may be interested in engaging in this study (Maxwell, 2013). The outreach efforts of the study garnered the interest of twelve (12) participants. The criteria for selecting study participants included: 1) Enrolled as an undergraduate student at Asset University; 2) Identify as Asian American; 3) Have completed the specified asset-based instrument (e.g. CliftonStrengths®)[3]. With their varying backgrounds, scopes of work, and educational schemas, this sample provided heterogeneity and allowed for the comparison of data that illuminated unique and interesting experiences in the data collection (Maxwell, 2013).

Data Collection

Data collection for this study was conducted in multiple stages. The first stage was introduced when I directly outreached via email and social media to individuals and applicable student groups. Included in the e-mail outreach was a Google Form which collected their demographic information and acquired consent to utilize the data collected. The demographic information was collected to ensure I accounted for any possible comparisons and contrasts that may be reported because of the diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The last stage of data collection was scheduled in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews allowed for a semi-structured approach to explore the participants' understanding and perception of the selected asset-based approach (e.g., Gallup CliftonStrengths®) through

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[3] If participants are selected and have not completed the CliftonStrengths® Assessment, the researcher provided the resources to access the assessment.

intentional and well-thought-out questions. The interviews lasted approximately 60 to 75 minutes in duration and were conducted over Zoom with recording, transcription, and closed-captioning features enabled. The flexibility of Zoom allowed the participants to identify a quiet and private location to have the interview completed.

When developing the research and interview questions, I aimed to maintain objectivity. However, given my own lived experiences, shared identity with the participants, and familiarity with the topic, some bias may have influenced both the questions and responses. To address this, it was essential to align the interview questions with the research questions and conceptual framework. Interview Questions 1–4, 6–8, and 16 were framed using AsianCrit Tenets 1, 2, 5, and 6, focusing on the lived experiences of Asian American students and the factors shaping their pathways to success. Questions 5, 11, and 12 incorporated all seven tenets of the AsianCrit framework and explored how participants' assets and experiences either align with or challenge the Model Minority Myth. Lastly, Interview Questions 9, 10, 14–16, and 17–21 were grounded in Tenets 4 and 5, aiming to gather insights into how participants perceive their strengths and plan to apply them in their undergraduate careers and beyond. Appendix B provides a visual representation of the connections between the research questions, conceptual framework, and interview questions. In addition to aligning the interview questions to the conceptual framework and research questions, I took field notes during the interviews to capture physical cues and observations, which were later used to supplement the analysis.

Upon completion of their interview, participants were offered a $25 Amazon e-gift card as a token of appreciation. They were also eligible to receive a Gallup CliftonStrengths® Certified Coaching session, which could be redeemed 90 days after the interview. This coaching session would no longer be available one year following the interview's completion.

Data Analysis

Participant Observations

During the interviews, I closely observed my participants for any visual or physical cues that might provide deeper insights into the research topics. For example, if I noticed a strong emotional reaction, either visually or audibly, I would make a note of it. Additionally, I employed both open and focused coding of the participant observations, completing analytical memos within 24 hours of each interview. These memos proved to be a vital tool for capturing accurate depictions of the data for drafting material to be incorporated into the study later (Lareau, 2021; Maxwell, 2013). As I reflected on these memos, I critically examined any assumptions I may have held regarding the Asian American college student experience, the effects of the MMM, and the potential benefits of asset-based approaches.

Participant Interviews

The participants in the interview process were instrumental in deepening my understanding of student success, the MMM, asset-based thinking, and the questions I posed. The student participants, as experts of their own experiences, served as invaluable teachers to me by offering enriching perspectives and insights (Lareau, 2021). The students shared stories that challenged my assumptions and illuminated nuances I had not previously considered, pushing me to think critically about how these concepts intersect in the context of Asian American students' post-secondary experiences.

Throughout the interview process, I observed recurring patterns in responses that offered valuable context for understanding how asset-based approaches could enhance the college experience for Asian Americans. For instance, several participants spoke about the importance of community and familial support in their academic success, highlighting strengths such as strong

work ethic, adaptability, and empathy. These responses helped me recognize the significance of shifting away from deficit-based perspectives, which tend to focus on perceived limitations, and instead embracing asset-based frameworks that emphasize the strengths and resources students contribute to Higher Education.

After conducting open and focused coding, and completing analytical memos, I identified at least three substantive categories that encapsulate participants' concepts and beliefs (Maxwell, 2013). Each theme provided distinct lens for understanding how participants navigate their college experience and how asset-based thinking may assist institutions in better supporting the growth and development of Asian American students. Further exploration of these categories will be provided in the *Findings* section of this paper, where I will discuss how these themes are intricately connected to the broader discourse of Asian American student success, the conceptual framework, and the guiding research questions.

The iterative process of data analysis—through memos, coding, thematic analysis, and narrative analysis—enabled a deeper comprehension of how participants perceive asset-based thinking in relation to their college experience (Maxwell, 2013). By categorizing codes and reflecting through memos, I gained a richer understanding of participants' experiences, helping me refocus on the broader objectives of this study (Lareau, 2021). The process brought clarity to the complexities of the participants' experiences and highlighted the values of their voices in challenging traditional narratives surrounding Asian American students. The results will succinctly reflect these insights, presenting a more nuanced and empowering vision of student success for Asian Americans in Higher Education.

Instruments & Artifacts

As discussed throughout the study, the asset-based instrument I utilized is the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, specifically the CliftonStrengths® Top 5, to identify the assets of the research participants. First, I provided literature and resources for the participants to learn about the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment and their CliftonStrengths® Top 5. During the interview, I had dived deeper into the results that were produced. The Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment is a talent assessment that focuses on helping individuals discover what they naturally do best, learn how to develop their greatest talents into strengths, and utilize their personalized results and reports to their maximum potential (Gallup, n.d.a). Furthermore, the assessment measures the participant's natural patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving (Gallup, n.d.b). The Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment includes 117 questions set up as paired statements for the participants to select between which statement best describes them (Gallup, n.d.a; Job Test Prep, 2023).

The typical duration of time a participant would take to complete the assessment is approximately 30 minutes. For the purposes of this study, each participant is provided with an access code to complete the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment. Once a participant had completed the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, the participant received their CliftonStrengths® Top 5 report. Although the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment measures the existence of talents in 34 areas, or "themes," the purpose of the CliftonStrengths® Top 5 is to introduce participants to strengths by helping participants discover their most dominant talents (Gallup, n.d.b).

CliftonStrengths® Top 5 reveals only the top five CliftonStrengths® themes so one can focus on their dominant talents (Gallup, n.d.b). Talents are the "raw materials" for strength development, and the more dominant the talent, the greater the opportunity for strength (Gallup,

n.d.b). CliftonStrengths® Top 5 report reveals the first five talent themes in one's

CliftonStrengths® profile and includes rudimentary strategies to assist participants in employing

their most powerful CliftonStrengths® to thrive in their learning and working environment

(Gallup, n.d.b). The report helps participants comprehend what they innately do best and how

they can cultivate and apply their talents to live their greatest life possible (Gallup, n.d.b). The

CliftonStrengths® Top 5 report is invaluable to participants as they communicate and collaborate

with others to achieve their tasks and goals – and overcome challenges (Gallup, n.d.b).

CliftonStrengths® Top 5 is ideal for individuals desiring a fundamental understanding of what

they naturally excel in (Gallup, n.d.b).

       The application of the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment in this study may raise

concerns, therefore, an overview of the scientific foundation behind the Gallup CliftonStrengths®

and its established credibility in research is important to note. Gallup CliftonStrengths® are based

on foundational concepts written in a formula format: Talent x Investment = Strength (Gallup,

n.d.c). The founder of the Gallup CliftonStrengths®, Don Clifton, defined talents as one's

"naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling or behavior" (Gallup, n.d.c). Talents are "innate,

natural abilities you can productively apply" (Gallup, n.d.c). To ensure reliability in the results,

Gallup has conducted multiple inquiries on their assessment, which have produced *test-retest*

results – results and differences between an individual's initial test, and then retest (Gallup,

n.d.c). This method of inquiry reveals the long-term stability of the results (Gallup, n.d.c).

       Although the interviews were the primary source for data collection, I incorporated

artifacts, such as the Gallup CliftonStrengths®'s *Strengths Insight Guide* and *Your Signature*

Theme Report. The Strength Insight Guide is an "in-depth analysis of [the participant's] top five

CliftonStrengths® themes" (Gallup, n.d.b). The Strength Insight Guide is "unique to [the

participant's] specific CliftonStrengths® profile [and] describes who [the participant] is in astonishing detail and explains what makes [the participant] stand out" (Gallup, n.d.b). The Your Signature Theme Report provides "full descriptions of [the participant's] top five CliftonStrengths® themes (your Signature Themes) so [the participant] can quickly reference [the participant's] most dominant talents and build them into strengths for personal and career success (Gallup, n.d.b).

These artifacts provided diverse perspectives and identified important common patterns beyond responses collected from interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Maxwell, 2013). The utilization of multiple data collection methods, also known as *triangulation*, decreased the risk of the study's results being reflective of biases of one method, provided a clearer illustration of the study, and broadened the range of aspects of the phenomenon being studied (Maxwell, 2013). Additional steps to address biases, the accuracy, and validity of the study will be outlined further in the next section of this chapter.

Positionality & Validity

Potential Validity Threats

As the researcher, I acknowledge the selected research site may raise concerns about the validity of the study, given my role and my close involvement with both the students and professionals at the site. Therefore, this section will examine potential threats to the study's validity. Additionally, I have outlined the steps taken to address these concerns through various validity tests.

The two broad types of threats to validity in this qualitative study were: researcher bias and reactivity - "the influence of the research on the setting or individuals studied" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124). Because of my proximity to the participants and the collaborative relationship I

have with the campus partners, I need to acknowledge the subjectivity that permeates the study. In addition, I was committed to actively seeking out biases and examining subjectivity as a virtuous tool through the lens of Peshkin's process of Tamed Subjectivity - "monitoring the [self], [I created] an illuminating, empowering personal statement that attunes me to where self and subject are intertwined; [thereby intentionally prevented myself from exercising my subjectivity; I did,] rather, enable myself to manage it - to preclude it from being unwittingly burdensome – [I progressed] through collecting, analyzing, and writing up my data." (Peshkin, 1988, p. 20). In addition, I employed Peshkin's (1998) practice of subjectivity audit, specifically his acknowledgment of Pedagogical-Meliorist I - "being careful to be nonjudgmental and uninvolved with [the study being observed]" to mitigate validity threats (p. 20). Throughout the study, this factor was consistently considered by acknowledging assumptions as asides but not allowing them to influence the data collected.

To address potential reactivity, I made a conscious decision early in the research process to transform this potential threat to validity into a productive tool to enrich the data. Given my existing relationship with the stakeholders at the research site and prior knowledge of the student population, I took extra care in the development of the interview questions to avoid leading language that could influence the participants' responses. Furthermore, being mindful of reactivity, I started every interview by introducing myself, highlighting my role as a doctoral scholar and researcher, and clearly explaining the purpose and scope of my study. I emphasized their responses would have no bearing on my relationship to the campus, ensuring they felt comfortable and unimpeded in sharing their insights.

Although I am considered an "insider" – an individual who may share similar lived experiences, racial or ethnic membership, or upbringing leading to the increase in quality,

legitimacy, and value of the study – I strived to approach the study as an "outsider" (Lareau, 2021). The "outsider" perspective is expected to approach the study with curiosity, openness, and deep respect for the stories the participants share (Lareau, 2021). Furthermore, through an "outsider" perspective, I had the opportunity to recognize themes or patterns that often may be ignored or missed when a study is approached from an "insider" perspective (Lareau, 2021).

Validity Tests

As mentioned previously in my *Interview Participant* section, I applied the method of triangulation – purposeful selection – when selecting interview participants (Maxwell, 2013). Beyond the cultural and demographic backgrounds and diverse lived experiences they possess, the participants offered differing perspectives and perceptions for the application of asset-based approaches. In addition, to ensure the data collected was rich and factual, the recording of interviews, verbatim field notes, and transcriptions of the participant observations and interviews were employed in the research design.

Acknowledging that my substantive categories and findings may be influenced by my bias or assumption, I further strengthen the validity of the study by engaging in "peer debriefing" – a method of inviting researchers, unfamiliar with the study to review parts of the study's data, and requesting their analysis of the data prior to providing my analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). Seeking informed input from colleagues and committee members will affirm my substantive themes and also my assertions regarding the data collected, reflection and analysis of interview transcripts, Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 Strengths Report, and field notes. (Maxwell, 2013).

Another validity test I integrated into the research design is conducting member checks of the interview transcripts. Member checking is the practice of requesting feedback and

confirmation of the data and conclusions from the participants I am studying (Maxwell, 2013).

Member checking is described as one of the most important methods to eliminate the risk of

misinterpreting the narratives of the research participants (Maxwell, 2013). Member checking

can also serve as an opportunity to identify my own biases and misunderstandings of the

information I have collected. As a researcher, I diligently sought discrepant evidence by using

informed interviewing techniques, emphasizing discrepant evidence in member checks.

Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the study participants, along with a detailed presentation of the data collection and analysis processes employed in this research. In addition, the chapter introduces the three key themes and their respective sub-themes that emerged from the data:

1) Influences of Cultural Upbringing

   a. From Self

   b. From Community

2) Impact of Asset-Based Approaches

   a. Understanding of Assets

   b. Perceptions of Results Asset-Based Approaches

   c. Application of Asset-Based Approaches

3) Perceptions of the Model Minority Myth (MMM)

   a. Experiences Affirming MMM

   b. Experiences Contradicting MMM

   c. Strengths Alignment/Contradiction of MMM

Additionally, the findings from the assessment tool and individual interviews further illuminate the participants' experiences, particularly in how they utilized and applied an asset-based approach throughout their undergraduate careers.

Participants' Profile

Twelve (12) undergraduate students in total participated in this study. All participants self-identified as Asian American, however, they had varying ethnicities. The ethnicity of the study group included five Filipinos (four females, one male), five Chinese females, three

Vietnamese (two females, one male), two Taiwanese (one female, one male), and one Indian female. It is important to know that multiple participants were multi-ethnic. Furthermore, several participants held additional salient identities, including, first-generation, eldest sibling, and varying socio-economic statuses. The intersection of these shared and distinct identities emerged as participants reflected on their cultural upbringing and early educational experiences.

In addition to their racial and salient identities, all students self-reported ages ranging from 19 to 24 at the time of the interview. Nine participants identified as female, two as male, and one as non-binary. The number of years of education completed at the university ranged from 1 to 3 years; with the majority having completed three years. The participants majored in: Biological Sciences; Arts & Humanities; Computing, Information and Data Sciences; Engineering; and Social Sciences. Only two female participants confirmed they had completed the asset-based instrument, the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, before engaging in this study (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Years of Study Completed	Major/Minor(s)	Completed Asset-Based Tool Before Study	Gender	Ethnicity	Other Salient Identities
Arden	24	1	Declared Major: Microbiology Minor: Chemistry	No	Male	Filipino	SEC
Evelyn	20	3	Declared Major: Global Health	No	Female	Filipino	1st Gen, Military Affiliation
Vera	24	3	Declared Major: Dance Minor: AAPI Studies	No	Non-binary/third gender	Filipino	1st Gen, SEC
Lennox	19	2	Declared Major: Structural Engineering	No	Female	Indian	1st Gen, SEC
Sierra	20	3	Declared Major: Economics	No	Female	Chinese	N/A
Jasper	21	3	Declared Major: Psychology, BS Minors: Business, Human Development Sciences	No	Female	Chinese, Taiwanese	SEC
Selena	20	2	Declared Major: Data Science, Anticipated Double Major: Business Economics Minor: Finance	No	Female	Chinese	N/A
Thalia	20	2	Declared Major: Computer Science Minor: Interdisciplinary Computing and the Arts	No	Female	Chinese, Vietnamese	SEC
Nova	21	3	Declared Major: Global Health Minor: Psychology	Yes, once.	Female	Vietnamese	SEC
Taylor	19	2	Declared Major: Pharmacological Chemistry	No	Female	Chinese, Filipino	N/A
Ryder	21	3	Declared Major: Psychology Minor: Education	No	Female	Filipino	1st Gen, Eldest Sibling, SEC
Cassian	20	2	Declared Major: Human Biology	No	Male	Taiwanese, Vietnamese	N/A

Note: SEC: Socio-economic Status; 1ˢᵗ Gen: First Generation College Student

Arden

Arden self-identifies as a male, Filipino American. He was born and raised in Southern California. Arden has a great deal of pride in where he was born and raised, which led him to factor in the location of the institution in his college admission decision. Arden is also a transfer student; he attended another public research institution and community college before

transferring to Asset University. Arden is studying Microbiology and Chemistry in hopes of

becoming a medical doctor, conducting research, and hopefully acquiring a Ph.D. When Arden

completed the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, they received their results: 1. *Achiever*, 2.

Developer, 3. *Learner*, 4. *Relator*, and 5. *Analytical*.

Evelyn

Evelyn self-identifies as a female, Filipina American. Evelyn was born in the Philippines

and, before her military family arrived in Southern California, she spent part of her childhood in

Japan. Evelyn is a first-generation student who values her family significantly. Evelyn stated:

"My family means a lot to me. And so, when deciding which college I wanted to go to, I knew

for a fact that I wanted to go somewhere that was near…. home." Evelyn is studying Global

Health in hopes of attending nursing school and making her family proud. When Evelyn

completed the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, they received their results: 1.

Individualization, 2. *Restorative*, 3. *Learner*, 4. *Input*, and 5. *Strategic*. The majority of Evelyn's

Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 are associated with the *Strategic Thinking* domain.

Vera

Vera self-identifies as a non-binary, Filipino American. Vera is a first-generation college

student and originates from Southern California. Prior to attending Asset University, Vera had

participated in the university's Upward Bound program, a federally funded college preparatory

program designed to assist low-income and first-generation high school students in preparation

for college. Originally, Vera did not have plans to attend Asset University, because Vera and

their partner at the time, had determined to go out of state and Vera's negative family experience.

Vera stated, "My family, it wasn't an environment that I wanted to stay in to support my healing,

or just have the space that I need[ed]." However, despite the aforementioned reasons, Vera

stated, "The acceptance [to] Asset University was also the only one I was excited about…[my partner and I] both ended up going to Asset University…it felt like the option for me to be able to continue through to higher education." Vera started their undergraduate career with an undeclared major. However, after engaging with the support staff and faculty within the Dance Department, Vera found Dance to be a form of healing and platform to process a variety of experiences. Although Vera is unsure how they plan to apply their major after graduation, Vera has found the classes have boosted her confidence. When Vera completed the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, they received their results: 1. *Empathy*, 2. *Connectedness*, 3. *Developer*, 4. *Learner*, and 5. *Input*. The majority of Vera's Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 are associated with the *Relationship Building* domain.

Lennox

Lennox identifies as a female, Indian American. Lennox is a first-generation college student and expressed that her culture and family was important in her decision to attend Asset University. Lennox stated, "I chose [Asset University] because I had family in [the area]. So just having that, I think in my culture, family is a really big thing. And having the support of my family plays into my culture. Even if I'm not close to my family here, just knowing that my family is here, it's more of a cultural thing, for sure." Lennox is studying Structural Engineering because she is simply interested in the topic. Although Lennox is unsure how she will apply her academic studies, she expressed that Structural Engineering would provide a financially stable future. When Lennox completed the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, they received their results: 1. *Developer*, 2. *Includer*, 3. *Positivity*, 4. *Connectedness*, and 5. *Empathy*. The majority of Lennox's Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 are associated with the *Relationship Building* domain.

Sierra

Sierra identifies as a female, Chinese American. Sierra was born and raised in Northern California. When deciding on which institution Sierra wanted to study Economics, she considered her racial identity, socioeconomic status, and the location of the institution. Sierra stated, "My socioeconomic identity really played a part in [my decision]…[the location of Asset University] is [in a] much bigger [city]…I do come from a city that is very predominantly Asian and I guess, like upper middle class. And…I'd like to experience something different…I grew up a lot around Chinese people, but at [Asset University], like, I actually don't have any Chinese friends. I find myself in a multi-ethnic friend group instead." Sierra's interests in problem-solving, resource allocation, and supply and demand led to study of Economics. In addition, Sierra expressed she does want to go to graduate school to acquire a Master's degree, but she hopes to explore institutions outside of California. Lastly, when Sierra has free time, she enjoys serving in the college's student government. When Sierra completed the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, they received their results: 1. *Harmony*, 2. *Developer*, 3. *Arranger*, 4. *Individualization*, and 5. *Input*. The majority of Sierra's Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 are associated with the *Relationship Building* domain.

Jasper

Jasper identifies as a female, Chinese-Taiwanese American. Jasper is from Southern California. Jasper selected Asset University because of the proximity to home, the institution's reputation regarding the Psychology program, the student population's demographics, and their socioeconomic status. Jasper shared, "My decision to come to Asset University was very much centered around my major and also finances and location…it has a decent Psychology program. It was close to home during the time of COVID. But also, not too close to home. So, it offered a

nice buffer between home and [me.] And I liked the…landscape…I think I had certain thoughts of not wanting to go to certain areas that were predominantly white or predominantly of one ethnicity because I [wanted] to interact with multiple ethnicities, or I wanted to be in a space where multiple viewpoints are able to be shared and held in a very welcoming manner." Jasper is studying Psychology because she finds that this career path will bring her fulfillment, give her value to his life, and energize her. As a co-curricular activity, Jasper enjoys serving as a lead peer mentor for a team focused on helping students navigate Asset University. When Jasper completed the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, they received their results, which were: 1. *Connectedness*, 2. *Empathy*, 3. *Developer*, 4. *Adaptability*, and 5. *Individualization*. The majority of Jasper's Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 are associated with the *Relationship Building* domain.

Selena

Selina identifies as a female, Chinese American. Selina is originally from Southern California. Selina had considered whether she wanted to attend Asset University or an institution in the Midwest. Selina ultimately decided on Asset University for its location, the prestige of each program she was admitted to, her family, and her socioeconomic status. Selina stated, "The things that I consider the most…the major and also like how close it is, and the weather and the tuition. So, I think…Asset University is just a better choice for both me and my family, so that's why we decided to come here." Selina is studying Data Science because she finds data exploration and analysis fascinating. Selina also believes achieving this degree will provide her with a variety of career opportunities, for instance, she shares, "I can go into finance, I can go into Econ Business. I can go into [the] game industry if they want me." When Selina completed the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, they received their results, which were: 1.

Individualization, 2. *Empathy*, 3. *Developer*, 4. *Communication*, and 5. *Positivity*. The majority of Selina's Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 are associated with the *Relationship Building* domain.

Thalia

Thalia identifies as a female, Chinese-Vietnamese American. Thalia is from Southern California. Thalia considered her future career opportunities, their socioeconomic status, the student population they wanted to be a part of, and their family as factors in deciding where they would pursue their higher education. Thalia stated, "I did get into…two private [institutions], and then there was Asset University, so just weighing the options, like for my career, and also financially, it was better to come to Asset University… [When selecting Asset University,] I think it was a lot of, like, more family-centric and socioeconomic-centric for me. And then as I'm going through undergrad, it's family too. So just keeping on with, like, the Computer Science major too, so that I could be financially stable and then help other people in my family." Thalia is studying Computer Science. She explained her pursuit to acquire this degree is heavily influenced by her family's recommendation, which is a field of study she believes has many opportunities to be applicable in the future. When Thalia completed the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, they received their results, which were: 1. *Deliberative*, 2. *Relator*, 3. *Learner*, 4. *Input*, and 5. *Achiever*. Thalia's Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 are is associated with multiple domains.

Nova

Nova identifies as a female, Vietnamese American. Nova was born and raised in Northern California. Nova factored in location, academic opportunities, and socioeconomic status when selecting where they would like to pursue their Global Health major. Nova shared,

"[Asset University] was like one of the schools I was interested in, mainly because it was in, like a new area, and they had a lot of majors that I was interested in, because I wanted to go to, like a S.T.E.M. focused school…I definitely applied to schools where I knew I could get, like, financial aid. So, I guess I did consider, like, my socioeconomic status." Nova is studying Global Health in hopes of applying her skills and knowledge in service communities that need assistance, such as Third World Countries. When Nova completed the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, they received their results, which were: 1. *Discipline*, 2. *Responsibility*, 3. *Woo*, 4. *Achiever*, and 5. *Futuristic*. The majority of Nova's Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 are associated with the *Executing* domain.

Taylor

Taylor identifies as a female, Chinese-Filipina American. Taylor was born and raised in Southern California. Taylor discussed the importance of family, the location, and the academic opportunities available when deciding to attend Asset University. Taylor stated, "Well, I've lived in San Diego. I was, like, born here, raised here, so [Asset University], you know, always been in my mind, just because it's, like, right here, and it's like, a pretty good public school. Also, I have a really good relationship with my family, so I don't mind living with them. A lot of people I know wanted to move out and go somewhere else, but I like [the area], so I wanted to stay, so I could stay with my family and everything. And I knew I wanted to be in the medical field, or somewhere around there. Asset University is pretty good at that, so I just decided to stay, that was my goal. And then I got in." Taylor is studying Pharmacological Chemistry, and she hopes to continue her education by acquiring admission to a pharmacy graduate school. When Taylor completed the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, they received their results, which were: 1.

Developer, 2. *Empathy*, 3. *Achiever*, 4. *Consistency*, and 5. *Relator*. The majority of Taylo's Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 are associated with the *Relationship Building* domain.

Ryder

Ryder identifies as a female, Filipina American. Ryder has lived in Southern California for the majority of their life. As a First-Generation college student, Ryder considered Asset University's location and student population demographics when applying for college. In addition, Ryder experienced health conditions that did not allow them to consider applying to other institutions. Ryder shared, "I think the bulk of [my decision] was that [Asset University] was near home…and part of it was wanting to be there for my family. Also, I think I knew that Asset University was a solid school…I knew that there would be a diverse population, and I wouldn't significantly have to worry about racism and fitting in;… [and I did] not [have] a lot of options of where else to go. I purposely didn't apply to so many more [schools], maybe just due to my health at the time." Ryder currently studies Psychology. After completing their bachelor's degree, Ryder plans to apply for a master's program at Asset University, where she can continue to study how mental health and intersectionality impact human behavior. When Ryder completed the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, they received their results, which were: 1. *Ideation*, 2. *Connectedness*, 3. *Harmony*, 4. *Developer*, and 5. *Individualization*. The majority of Lennox's Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 are associated with the *Relationship Building* domain.

Cassian

Cassian identifies as a male, Taiwanese-Vietnamese American. Cassian was born and raised in Southern California. When considering which institutions Cassian wanted to begin his undergraduate studies, he factored in location, the academic offerings, and the diversity of the institution's student demographic. Cassian explained, "Well, since I'm in California, I picked all

the [state universities] that I liked. And then, I got into [Asset University and it was] the best fit for me because I was like looking at what's best for like, pre-med. I also wanted to go away from home, but not too far. So, this was also, a good distance away…I think I wanted to go to a school that was not predominantly white. I wanted a big college. And then with like, I guess, just sort of like a diverse school. I wanted a decent Asian population but also not a fully Asian school; at least somewhere I could always see, maybe, a couple of other people that look like me in the room." Attaining a bachelor's degree in Human Biology is only one step in Cassian's plan toward attending medical school. After receiving his doctorate, Cassian hopes to apply his knowledge and skills to address the intersectional issues of healthcare and politics. When Cassian completed the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, they received their results, which were: 1. *Harmony*, 2. *Empathy*, 3. *Harmony*, 4. *Adaptability*, and 5. *Developer*. The majority of Lennox's Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 are associated with the *Relationship Building* domain.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interview Analysis

Over the course of several months, 12 Asian American university students shared their experiences both prior to and during their undergraduate education, providing valuable insights into their perceptions of the top 5 Gallup CliftonStrengths® and offering reflections on the Model Minority Myth (MMM). Each participant took part in a one-on-one, 60-minute semi-structured interview, which included 21 questions. During these interviews, participants were asked to explore their personal identities as Asian Americans and to discuss how, if at all, their cultural upbringing and surrounding community influenced their educational choices.

To address the research questions, two types of coding were employed: unitizing and categorizing (Rudestam & Newton, 2014). The first method, unitizing, was conducted using MAXQDA. This involved analyzing participants' responses to identify significant quotes that captured the essence of their experiences. The goal of unitizing was to break down the data into manageable pieces of information that could be analyzed individually while retaining the richness of the participants' narratives. Each highlighted unit of text provided rich context and insight into individual perspectives, allowing me to understand the nuances of each student's experience.

To ensure thorough analysis, transcripts were reviewed multiple times, with particular attention paid to words and phrases that were not only meaningful to the participants but also those that appeared frequently across interviews. This repetitive occurrence indicated that certain topics or experiences were central to the participants' narratives and helped guide the identification of key themes. The process of unitizing laid the foundation for a deeper analysis of the data, ensuring that important insights were not overlooked.

The second coding method, categorizing, facilitated the grouping of shared experiences among Asian American students based on similarities in meaning (Rudestam & Newton, 2014). Using the MAXQDA tool, key quotes, statements, and observations were categorized, allowing for the identification of overarching themes that emerged from the interviews. By grouping similar experiences and narratives, I was able to gain a greater understanding of how Asian American students navigate their university experience, especially in relation to the benefits of the asset-based approaches and the pressures of the Model Minority Myth.

The method of categorization revealed connections between different aspects of participants' lived experiences and identities. This group of shared experiences was critical in

identifying key themes that formed the basis of the study's findings. The categorization process enabled me to synthesize complex data into coherent themes, providing a structure for further examination and assisting to inform the conclusions drawn in the study.

Asset-Based Tool Data Analysis

Prior to conducting the interviews, all participants completed the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment through Gallup.com. As described in Chapter Three, the assessment utilizes 117 questions in the format of paired statements to help produce personalized reports consisting of the participants' top 5 Gallup CliftonStrengths® based on the participants' innate talent, skills, and abilities (Gallup, n.d.a; Gallup, n.d.b). Table 2 presents the result of Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment for each participant of the study. Table 2 offers an aggregate of all the participants' results by the specific Gallup CliftonStrengths® Strengths. In addition, Table 2 provides the sum of participants' results by Gallup CliftonStrengths® Domains. In totality, Relationship Building Gallup CliftonStrengths® Strengths made up 62% of the results. Through a review of the survey data, most of the interviewees possessed Gallup CliftonStrengths® Strengths associated with the *Relationship Building* domain; only four individuals' results spanned out through the other three domains. Diving deeper into the survey results, 75% of the participants possessed *Developer*, 50% of the participants possessed *Empathy*, 42% of the participants possessed *Includer*, and 33% of the participants possessed either *Achiever, Connectedness, Relator, Input, or Learner* as one of their top 5 Gallup CliftonStrengths® Strengths.

When examining the ethnicity of the participants, distinct patterns emerge in relation to the Gallup CliftonStrengths® results, both in terms of commonalities and differences. Notably, individuals who identified as Filipino tended to possess four or more strengths in the *Relationship Building* domain. Furthermore, three out of the five Filipino-identified students exhibited a majority of their strengths within this domain. A similar trend was observed among the Chinese-identified participants, with four of the five women showing strengths predominantly in the *Relationship Building* domain. In contrast, the Vietnamese-identified students displayed strengths across a variety of domains, with no distinct concentration in any one area. Taiwanese-identified students, however, exclusively demonstrated strengths within the *Relationship Building* domain. An interesting observation emerged with the multi-ethnic, female participants, as they were the only individuals to exhibit strengths in the Influencing domain. This highlights a unique characteristic within this subgroup.

In terms of educational background, a comparison of participants' years of education completed and Gallup CliftonStrengths® results revealed a pattern related to the length of undergraduate education. Those who had completed two years of undergraduate studies exhibited strengths in the *Relationship Building* domain. In contrast, participants who had completed three years of undergraduate education tended to display strengths across a broader range of domains.

The findings from the Gallup CliftonStrengths® assessment were integral to the participant interviews, providing a strengths-based framework for understanding their lived experiences. The interview questions encouraged participants to reflect on and critically analyze the assets they possess, and how these strengths have contributed to their personal growth, development, and educational journey.

Table 2.

Participants' Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5

	EXECUTING									INFLUENCING								RELATIONSHIP BUILDING									STRATEGIC THINKING							
	Achiever	Arranger	Belief	Consistency	Deliberative	Discipline	Focus	Responsibility	Restorative	Activator	Command	Communication	Competition	Maximizer	Self-Assurance	Significance	Woo	Adaptability	Connectedness	Developer	Empathy	Harmony	Includer	Individualization	Positivity	Relator	Analytical	Context	Futuristic	Ideation	Input	Intellection	Learner	Strategic
Arden	1																			2						4	5						3	
Evelyn									2															1							4		3	5
Vera																				2	3	1									5		4	
Lennox																			4	1	5		2		3									
Sierra		3																		2		1		4							5			
Jasper																		4	1	3	2			5										
Selina												4								3	2				1	5								
Thalia	5			1																						2					4		3	
Nova	4					1		2									3												5					
Taylor	3			4																1	2					5								
Ryder																			2	4		3		5							1			
Cassian																		4		5	2	1				3								
	10									2								37									12							

Development of Themes

At the start of theme development, the research questions, sub-research questions conceptual framework, and interview questions set the stage for the code development and data analysis. In conclusion, three main themes were identified: Influences of Cultural Upbringing, Perceptions of Model Minority Myth, and the Impact of Asset-Based Approaches. As a result of the defined themes, the data presented, in Table 3, 226 references were associated with the Influences of Cultural Upbringing, 76 segments of code were associated with the Perceptions of Model Minority Myth theme, and 272 references were related to the Impact of Asset-Based Approaches theme. The statements highlighted by the study participants' interviews offer a robust insight into the lived experiences of the students and provide a roadmap for understanding the categorization of data.

Table 3.

Themes, Counts, and Sub-Themes from Participant Interviews

Themes	Counts	Sub-Themes
Influences of Cultural Upbringing	226	From self (intrinsic/extrinsic) & Salient Identities
		From Community (i.e. family, friends, organizations, internships, etc.)
Perceptions of the Model Minority Myth (MMM)	76	Experiences affirming MMM
		Experiences contradicting MMM
		Assets aligning with MMM
		Assets contradicting MMM
Impact of Asset-Based Approaches	272	Understanding of Assets
		Perceptions of Results of Assets-Based Tools Application of Asset-Based Approaches

Addressing The Guiding Research Questions

The key insights into how Asian American college students can leverage asset-based strategies to thrive in their undergraduate education and challenge the stereotypes associated with the Model Minority Myth (MMM) were articulated by interview participants in various ways. First, the interviewees consistently conveyed they had opportunities during their undergraduate years to demonstrate their Gallup CliftonStrengths®, and they shared their intentions to continue leveraging these strengths in the future. Additionally, most participants highlighted how their unique strengths and lived experiences directly challenged and contradicted the pervasive stereotypes of the MMM.

Second, the foundation of these experiences was shaped by the influences of their cultural upbringing and community, including immediate and extended family, former leaders, and peer groups. While the MMM was rarely or only minimally cited as a direct barrier to pursuing their degrees, it did lead many participants to reflect on negative experiences tied to their cultural background. Although the stereotypes associated with the MMM may have had a subtle impact on their perceptions of their skills, talents, and strengths, many participants found, through the application of the asset-based instrument, that the myth was both inaccurate and contradictory to their actual strengths. As such, the key themes that emerged in relation to the overarching research questions were: Influences of Cultural Upbringing, Perceptions of the Model Minority Myth, and the Impact of Asset-Based Approaches.

Emerging Theme One: Influences of Cultural Upbringing

Sub-theme: From Self

The students described their cultural upbringing and its influences on the participants' perspectives of success and their academic journey in a multitude of ways. At the start of the

interview, the participants were asked to reflect on their personal reasons for pursuing their undergraduate career at Asset University. As seen in Table 4, a majority of the students had selected to attend Asset University because the institution had a diverse population, they were hoping to be a part of. Many participants did not want to attend a "predominately white" institution, instead, they were seeking a campus with "a diverse population," where they could engage with students who possess "multiple viewpoints" and a student body with "multiple ethnicities." Lennox expressed their desire for the opportunity to learn and "understand all perspectives." Furthermore, Evelyn and Jasper shared they sought a "welcoming" campus "community."

In addition to the diversity of the campus climate, half the participants indicated the following were contributing factors for attending Asset University: familial reasons, the institution's location, and academic and career opportunities. For instance, Taylor had shared:

> Well, I've lived in [the area]…I was born [and] raised here, so it's always been in my mind, because it's right here, and it's a pretty good public school. I also have a really good relationship with my family, so I don't mind living with them. A lot of people wanted to move out and go somewhere else, but I like [the area]. So, I wanted to stay, so I could stay with my family and everything. And I knew I wanted to be in the medical field, or somewhere around there. So, [Asset University] is pretty good at that, so I just decided to stay, that was my goal. And then I got in.

Attending a large and public research institution can be quite costly, however, only three participants indicated finances impacting their decision to enroll at Asset University. For instance, Arden stated their "main thing for [them] was what financial aid looked like…[Asset University] came up with a very, very generous financial aid offer for me that nobody else matched. So, I ended up coming [to Asset University]."

Furthermore, the interviews engaged the students to reflect on any salient identities they considered in their decision. The participants expressed the following identities had some

consideration in their choice to attend Asset University: First Generation (33.3%), Gender

(16.7%), Military Affiliation (8.3%), Race (16.7%), Sibling Status (8.3%), Socio-Economic

Status (58.3%). In particular, Ryder shared how their identity as the oldest sibling:

> I'm the eldest child of my family, and so, I got to do something so I could
> eventually earn money to support everyone else. Although I'd say it's sad, the kind
> of pathway I'm going on now. I don't think it's going well, but I did take into
> consideration [of my] family and there was [a] culture of just going straight into
> [a] university.

From the study's sample, only three participants chose not to disclose any identities they

considered when deciding to attend Asset University. Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the

identities each participant possessed and considered.

Table 4.

Reasons For Attending Asset University

	Advancement	Diversity of Student Population	Family	Financial	Location	Salient Identity
Arden					●	●
Evelyn		●				●
Vera					●	●
Lennox		●				●
Sierra		●	●		●	●
Jasper	●	●	●	●	●	
Selena	●		●			
Thalia	●	●	●	●		●
Nova		●		●		●
Taylor	●		●		●	
Ryder		●	●		●	●
Cassian	●	●				●
Total	6	8	6	3	6	9

Note: Advancement: Considerate of reasons related to academic and career interests

Sub-theme: From Community

Beyond highlighting the intrinsic variables factored into the student's decision to attend Asset University, participants were asked to share any external considerations influencing their educational decision. All participants have shared Social and Cultural Influences as external influencers in their academic choices. Within the Social and Cultural Influences theme, 92%

percent of the participants explicitly named family members and a multitude of familial

experiences as an external factor when making educational decisions. For example, Arden

described a memory with their father,

> My dad was always like, 'my son's going to cure cancer one day.' You know, those types of parents…and so I've always wanted to go and get a higher degree…I [wanted] to become a medical doctor, and I was actively taking steps towards that…I knew that I wanted to go and get a PhD, and that's where I've stuck from now on.

The family influence on Nova's educational influence was apparent as well. As Nova

stated,

> Well, I think my family definitely played a big role in it. They always encouraged me to pursue higher education and get an undergraduate degree. So, I never really thought twice about it. I just always knew after high school, this is what I'm going to go do. So, I think they played a really big role in that. And then also, I think my friends too, like in high school. We all were very motivated. And people I was around were very high achieving, so we always knew that we wanted to go to college. And, in terms of cultural upbringing, I think that ties in, like my family. They always valued education. That was something that they always made me prioritize growing up, so they never wanted me to never consider going to college.

In addition to Ryder's family influencing their pursuit of an undergraduate degree, Ryder

also considered the financial implications of attending Asset University. As Ryder stated,

> It's influenced by my family being immigrants. Technically, I'm a first-generation university student here [in] the US. My parents went to school in the Philippines, and the structure at the time of their high school, they didn't have 11th and 12th grade, so definitely the structure was different. And there's also this narrative of my grandfather traveling to Guam for work from the Philippines and providing for the rest of the family. And I guess it's kind of inspired by that. It is important for me to take this initiative, similar [to] the way that my grandfather had to provide. Not only that, [the] majority of my family is poor. Visiting the Philippines this month, this past month has been increasingly evident, and I got to witness it. Because the last time I visited was about 10 years ago, or when I was 11 or nine…When I was very young…there's this want to have upward social mobility or just a level in which my family doesn't have to struggle or worry so much about finances, and there's this element of freedom that I had hoped to attain by pursuing higher education.

Similarly, Thalia shares her educational decisions were influenced by her family, the financial implications, friends, and pure interest. As Thalia stated,

> I think it was a lot more family-centric and socioeconomic-centric for me. And then as I'm going through undergrad, it's family too. So just keeping on with the computer science major too, so that I could be financially stable and then help other people in my family. And also, I chose a minor, the two things that I enjoy, so that was kind of with friends and a little like, just to balance what I grew up with [and] the stuff that I like to do as a career. Like, if I wanted to do art as a career, it wouldn't be as good financially. So, I'm like weighing the options there to get a little bit of both of what is necessary and like what I like to do.

Each participant shared a variety of experiences that impacted their educational decisions; however, the trends of external financial influences seem to be in alignment with how the student's self-perception of financial implications on their education decision, which is that finances have very little impact on their academic decisions. Table 5 will provide a more in-depth understanding of external influences as it will share the number of times each influence was presented in the interviews.

Table 5.

Influences on Educational Decisions

	Academic Motivation and Interests	Economic Factors	Social and Cultural Influences
Arden	1	2	4
Evelyn			5
Vera	1		6
Lennox			10
Sierra	1		
Jasper	4		6
Selena	10		4
Thalia	3	1	4
Nova	2		4
Taylor	2		6
Ryder	3	1	4
Cassian	1		2
Total Count	33	4	55

Note: Personal Motivation and Interests: Responses that speak to applicability, pure interest, and exposure to their field of study.
Social and Cultural Influences: Responses that speak to Community, Family, and Values
Economic Factors: Responses that speak to financial implications or desire for financial stability.

Emerging Theme Two: Impact of Asset-Based Approaches

Sub-theme: Understanding of Assets

This sub-theme explores the pre-assessment experiences that shaped the study participants' understanding of their assets—strengths, skills, and innate abilities. During the interview, each student shared words that described their assets before taking the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment. While all participants paused and reflected before answering this question, four female participants identified communication as a key strength. For example, Thalia said, "I'm a pretty good listener." Similarly, Ryder shared, "I definitely thrived in team settings. I was very interactive, and when meeting new people in classrooms, I was proactive in hearing what people had to say and encouraging everyone to introduce themselves."

In addition to "communication," one male participant and two female participants identified "hardworking" as one of their strengths. Arden stated, "I would say my biggest

strength, generally, is that I'm very hardworking." Likewise, Taylor remarked, "Whenever people would ask me about my strengths, I'd always mention being hardworking because I don't think I'm innately very smart." While participants shared some similar experiences, their identities as Asian Americans in academia were expressed in unique ways. Figure 1 visually illustrates these differences and similarities, using larger font sizes for frequently mentioned words and smaller fonts for those mentioned by fewer participants.

Figure 1.

Self-Identified Strengths

Sub-theme: Perceptions of Results Asset-Based Tools

This sub-theme focused on the students' perceptions of the results produced by the

Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment. As a group, the study participants resonated with their

results and found the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 Report affirming and inquisitive. Five

female and two male participants expressed the results affirmed their behaviors, actions, and

character. Many participants reflected on their cultural upbringing, their engagement with

classmates, and their involvement on campus to express how their strengths align with

experiences. Lennox shared,

> To be honest, I wasn't surprised, at all, that [my strengths] fell into relationship
> building, because ever since I was little, like everyone saw the empathetic side in
> me a lot. And I think I've always struggled with feeling overly empathetic for
> people. I don't know if that's a bad thing, but like, kind of forgetting about myself
> because of how much I care about others. And so, I don't know, when I saw that
> they were all in relationship building, I was like, Oh My God, it makes so much
> sense.

Lennox highlights that her strengths lie primarily within the *Relationship Building*

domain, acknowledging that these qualities have been part of her since a young age. Her family

and community recognized her natural ability to build strong relationships with others. Lennox

also shared several experiences that align with her relationship-building strengths. She recalled

instances where she used her strengths in *Developer, Includer,* and *Empathy* to support team

members, helping them achieve their highest potential through mutual understanding.

Similarly, Taylor expressed a sense of affirmation, joy, and fascination upon reviewing

her strengths. She shared her reaction,

> I was pretty satisfied with the results because I read them and the brief
> descriptions. And I thought that was pretty accurate in describing me. So, I
> thought that was pretty neat that those are ways of describing me that I've never
> thought about. But [they] seemed very accurate. So, I was like, wow, that's kind
> of cool. And then I guess that bleeds into fascinating because I have never thought
> about that stuff. So, it was kind of like new, but it just made sense. So, it's kind of
> cool that just answering all those questions and they already got such a good read.
> And then happy, kind of like satisfied, where I was just really happy with the

results, and I like the things that [the report] said. I think I value relationship-building and executing a lot. So yeah, I was pretty good with that.

Taylor's fascination, happiness, and alignment with her strengths were further explored when she described how her *Achiever* and *Consistency* strengths contributed to her success in academic coursework and the pursuit of research opportunities.

Another unique finding from the interviews was the fact that several participants expressed they were surprised and curious to learn more about domains their Gallup CliftonStrengths® were associated with. For instance, Jasper stated, "The very first thing I noticed was that everything was blue. Then, I looked into what blue was." Jasper was curious to understand how their Gallup CliftonStrengths® were categorized in the *Relationship Building* domain, which is not far from Ryder's initial reactions, where she expressed she "noticed four out of five of [Gallup CliftonStrengths®] were blue," and made the connection to the *Relationship Building* domain as well. Similarly, but yet different, Nova expressed her results were a little surprising because her Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 Report resulted in three Gallup CliftonStrengths® in the *Executing* domain. Nova shared that they believed they would possess a Gallup CliftonStrengths® in each of the domains.

Although participants expressed some common perceptions, their individual views on their unique strengths were articulated in different ways. Each person brought their own perspective to how they understood and valued their abilities, highlighting the diversity of experiences within the group. In a similar manner to the first figure, Figure 2 visually captures these variations by adjusting the font size based on frequency. Words that were mentioned by a larger number of participants appear in larger font sizes, while those mentioned less frequently are displayed in smaller fonts, allowing for a clear representation of the shared and unique aspects of their perceptions.

Surprised
Affirmation
Confused
Unsurprised   Curious
Happy

Figure 2.

Perceptions of Asset-Based Results

Sub-theme: Application of Asset-Based Approaches

This sub-theme moves beyond a simple understanding of asset-based approaches to delve into how each student has or intends to strategically apply their strengths throughout their academic journey. The past experiences that students associated their strengths reveal clear and consistent themes, which were organized into four distinct categories: *Building Connections, Co-Curricular Activities, Contributing Structure to Life,* and *Team Settings*.

In the *Building Connections* category, a significant majority of participants – nine students, or 75% – reported they have leveraged their strengths to initiate or cultivate meaningful connections with others. Notably, of these nine students, eight possessed at least two or more strengths within the *Relationship Building* domain, underscoring the central role of relational capabilities in their academic strategies. Jasper shared,

For *Empathy*, I think just a lot of the conversations I have with friends, I have found a lot of fulfillment in and I would actively seek out those conversations or prioritize those conversations. Any opportunity to understand someone better that I care about, I think I would highly prioritize those [opportunities]. And I think I tend to associate myself as someone who can listen to other people.

Similarly, Taylor shared experiences from her interpersonal interactions with friends.

Taylor stated,

[As for] *Relator*, I definitely just get a lot of close friendships with people who are pretty similar to me. I got a lot of friends in high school who are very education-focused, and then we went to [Asset University] together, and now we just kind of complain about [Asset University] and, like, school stuff together. It's just a lot easier to get along with people who you relate to.

In the *Co-Curricular Activities* category, 41.7% of participants (five individuals) indicated that they are able to recognize how their strengths have been demonstrated through their involvement in co-curricular activities. All of these students demonstrated strengths within the *Executing* domain, with four ranking *Achiever* among their top five strengths, highlighting their focus on achievement and task-oriented success. Nova stated,

For *Futuristic*, like that also is related to *Achiever*. Like, I like the things that I'm constantly applying for, like things that I like [to] get involved in, or dedicate my time towards, are all things that I think would help me in the future, or just, like, prepare me or give me certain skills that I think would set me up for success in the future. I always have an end goal in mind, and I'm always striving to achieve something. So that's why I always have plans of what I want to do in the future.

Comparably, Arden, who embodies the strengths of *Learner* and *Developer*, reflects on an experience that he believes aligns closely with his strengths:

I was a tutor…I remember when I was in high school and I was tutoring some of my friends, there's always that one moment [when somebody's] really frustrated with something. They just aren't getting it, and it's making them upset. And then after some practice or some more explanations, it clicks for them, and they start to find joy in what they're doing. And that's always what I try to strive for. I mean, it's important that they understand the topic, but I also think it's more important for them to enjoy what they're doing, to enjoy the learning experience. Because some people just don't like learning, but I think [joy in learning] is more

important, because if you can enjoy the experience, then you can get better at doing it on your own.

Half of the participants noted that their strengths are instrumental in bringing structure to their lives, giving rise to the category: *Contributing Structure to Life*. Among those who identified structure as a key component, five participants demonstrated strengths within the *Relationship Building* domain, indicating a dual capacity to both organize and connect in meaningful ways. Sierra recalls an experience in which she believes her *Arranger* strength was demonstrated:

> I see [*Arranger* demonstrated] because I use Google Calendar…I love Google Calendar and I like [to] plan every single, like almost, not every minute, but like, every one-hour chunk. I like to have it planned out, and I like event planning and organizing things.

In a similar fashion, Nova, who also possesses a strength within the *Executing* domain, shares an experience that highlights how this strength has influenced her actions and decision-making in various situations. Nova states,

> [For] *Discipline*, it says I enjoy routine structure, which is true. I always follow the same routine, every day. I have a morning routine, and then I get ready to go to school. And then when I'm in class I have a certain way that I like [to] take notes. Quotes and like, keep track of all the material that's being presented to me, so I know what works well for me, and I try to just do the same thing every day, and all of my close friends know this. But I hate surprises. I try to make everything as predictable as possible for myself. So yeah, I think that's where the discipline comes in.

Lastly, for the *Team Setting* category, a substantial 83.3% of participants – ten students – reported that they have utilized their strengths in team settings, highlighting the importance of collaboration and collective success in their academic trajectories. Jasper described how she leverages her *Developer* strength to engage with team members. Jasper shared,

> For *Developer*, after becoming more grounded in myself, I found myself increasingly wanting to take on positions or roles where I could be of support to others in a way where I can hopefully draw out their potential or…being part of

something that can help people shine. And so, these can be like little mentorship roles here and there... And I find that I find a lot of satisfaction in just showing people how amazing they are. And hopefully, they can find more power in themselves. So, I think this developer theme probably came out the most in terms of different opportunities or extracurriculars I chose to go for.

As another student with strengths in *Relationship Building*, Cassian reflects on instances where he observes *Harmony* and *Empathy* emerging in team settings. Cassian stated,

For *Harmony*. I think [being on] a team or leading a project and trying to have things go smoothly. That's like a big thing. Like just getting the team to just focus on what we're trying to do. For *Empathy*…[in my on-campus job], I guess, just trying to help out my fellow students.

Table 6 offers a deeper insight into how participants perceive the manifestation of their strengths in both past and current experiences throughout their undergraduate journey.

Table 6.

Association of College Experience with Asset-Based Results

Participant	Building A Connection	Co-Curricular Activity	Contributing Structure to Life	Team Settings	Unsure
Arden	●	●		●	●
Evelyn	●	●	●	●	
Vera	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Lennox	●			●	
Sierra	●		●	●	
Jasper	●		●	●	
Selena	●			●	
Thalia		●	●		
Nova		●	●	●	
Taylor	●	●	●		
Ryder	●			●	●
Cassian	●			●	
Total Count	26	13	8	15	2

Note: N/A – Participant Vera did not complete the interview process, therefore there was no data for Vera.

The opportunities that students highlighted for future applications of their strengths reveal clear and consistent themes, which were organized into four distinct categories: Implement in Professional Environments, In Academia, Optimize Team Interactions, Personal Authorship and Fulfillment, and Strengthen Relational Dynamics. Many participants, specifically 10 students, expressed their intention to use their strengths in various professional settings. Many of them highlighted how they plan to incorporate their strengths into the processes of securing internships, advancing their careers, or pursuing research opportunities. For instance, Evelyn mentioned,

I think I will utilize [the Gallup CliftonStrengths®], specifically, [when] I'm looking for more experiences in clinical experience or experiences that [would] help me get to nursing school. Specifically, I think [the Gallup CliftonStrengths®] would help me a lot during job interviews to help share my story. As you can see here, just having this conversation alone is helping me realize what examples I could use. I literally just had an interview this morning, and I think this would have helped me. Also show what I'm good at most.

Likewise, Selena explained that the internship she is applying for requires participants to complete the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, and she is eager to see how her results might evolve if she is selected. During our conversation Selena states,

The internship [I applied to] actually asks their interns to take the Gallup CliftonStrengths®, they actually require us to take it. So, I feel like, if I can get into the internship, they're probably going to ask me to take it again, which is going to be pretty cool. I really want to see if the results change.

Sierra also discussed how understanding her strengths would impact her future interactions, especially in interviews:

I think being able to recognize my strengths might affect how I speak, or maybe how I introduce myself, or sort of like, get others to perceive me…When doing interviews or introductions…I'm explaining myself, I think that's where it could affect my college learning experience, whether it's group work at like in classes, or doing an interview for anything.

In addition to explaining how they plan to apply their strengths, students also reflected on how knowing about their strengths earlier would have benefited them, allowing them to apply this knowledge to past opportunities and experiences.

As enrolled students, it is not surprising that more than half the participants shared how they plan to apply their Gallup CliftonStrengths® in the academic and learning environments. Notably, all three Vietnamese-identified participants mentioned the application of strengths in academia, however, even so, two of the Vietnamese-identified participants had their strengths spread throughout the domains compared to the other Vietnamese-identified participants, who

had all their strengths in the *Relationship Building* domain. Nova, who only has one *Relationship Building* strength – *Relator*, shared,

> I use pretty much all of them to do well in my major because it's very interdisciplinary. So, obviously, you have to be disciplined and responsible to get all of your assignments done. There's a lot of readings that you need to do to understand concepts and global health and public health, and some things might not be as intuitive. So, you kind of have to study more, or just ask for help. And then the connectivity aspect where *Woo* comes in, helps me with connecting with professors and talking to people in the Global Health community, especially during, our quarterly conversation.

In alignment with Nova, Thalia, also Vietnamese-identified, has strengths across various domains and their only *Relationship Building* strength is *Relator*. She discussed how her Learner strength influences her academic approach:

> When I don't really do well on quizzes or my tests, I do feel like I want to improve on the next assignment or the next midterm, so I do try hard in that aspect. Sometimes the process of learning excites me. Like, when I do classes I enjoy, like one of the music classes, I did like learning how to synthesize sound that was pretty enjoyable. Not just the process of creating the sound and knowing that it's a lot of math, and it is more technical than I thought it was. That was pretty exciting.

Beyond the Vietnamese-identified participants, there were other instances of how strengths were applied in academic settings. Ryder, for example, shared her perspective on applying her strengths in her Psychology major:

> I think all of them are pretty relevant to succeed in my major, especially in Psychology, which involves…a lot of interpersonal communication. And I think experiencing experiences with interpersonal communication and interacting with others requires these traits, seeking the best in people, how we can improve and move on to implement, whether it be programs or whatever events, for the future.

While most participants shared how they apply their strengths in academic settings, each individual demonstrated unique ways of utilizing their strengths, highlighting the versatile applications of asset-based approaches in their educational journeys. Another key theme that emerged was the use of strengths to optimize team interactions in future group projects, student

organizations, and competitive e-sports. However, only 33.3% of participants expressed plans to

specifically apply their Gallup CliftonStrengths® to improve team dynamics. Selina, for example,

emphasized the importance of leveraging individual strengths within group projects, stating:

> I definitely need to use those traits in group projects; finding my team, finding labs and things…in a group project, you have to do whatever you're best doing so that each person can contribute their best to the project. And then we come together with a really great project. So, college experience-wise, yeah, building connections, and also group tasks as well.

> Cassian, whose strengths are concentrated in the *Relationship Building* domain, shared

their intention to seek out opportunities that allow them to apply their strengths in a team setting.

Cassian explained:

> I guess I try to do more things where I have more experiences, where I'm on a team or where I work with other people on a project, but also maybe try and find, like, something that could use all five of these strengths.

> Through the introspective reflections prompted by the interviews, all participants, except

one, expressed how their Gallup CliftonStrengths® contributed to their sense of self and intrinsic

fulfillment. This insight led to the emergence of the *Self-Authorship and Fulfillment* category.

For instance, Lennox shared, "I think this test is going to help me just become myself more and

learn about myself more and become a stronger individual and just navigate relationships and

social interactions." Similarly, Jasper, who has all of their strengths in the *Relationship Building*

domain, discussed how her strengths have contributed to her success:

> I think a lot of my successes, I guess, I think have been in the people role. I think I feel a lot of fulfillment in being on the Club board and being able to be part of the greater efforts to create a community. And that's been really fulfilling for me. And that took some people skills. And adaptability has also been one that has helped me a lot feeling secure.

In the following excerpts, participants reflect deeply on how their Gallup

CliftonStrengths® help them understand themselves better. Ryder, for example, shared how the

assessment has influenced her decision-making regarding his academic future:

> Honestly, I'm at this point in time where I'm still contemplating switching to
> another major or field of study after I graduate with a Psychology major. And so,
> I found coming across this [assessment] pretty interesting and kind of eye-
> opening to see what Gallup CliftonStrengths® has to say about different
> characteristics. And there's so much depth into them. I was just looking at the
> website, and I was like, 'Oh, wow, like this can be useful,' and so I definitely
> hope to refer to the program and maybe look into the extended questionnaire to
> see how I could have a better understanding of myself to help others and honestly
> realign my path on what to pursue.

Uniquely, Nova, the only participant who had previously engaged with this asset-based

tool, shared how the Gallup CliftonStrengths® assessment has provided her with fresh personal

insights into her approach toward achieving her goals:

> Yeah, I think [Gallup CliftonStrengths®] does help me understand how I
> accomplish goals. Before taking the assessment both this year and last year, I
> could never really articulate what it was that I did well. I could generally
> describe...these are things that I'm good at, but this gives you a much clearer idea
> of what your strengths are and what tasks or roles are better suited for you. So, I
> think that definitely helps me achieve things more efficiently, or just be more in
> tune with my qualities and that helps me present myself to other people.

The *Strengthen Relational Dynamics* category focuses on how participants plan to use

their Gallup CliftonStrengths® to enhance personal relationships outside of academic, co-

curricular, and professional contexts. Five participants identified ways they intend to use their

strengths to foster connections within their communities. For example, Thalia shared that she

sees her strengths supporting her goal of "meeting new people in class and building long-term

friendships." She also connected her *Input* strength to her hobby of sticker collecting, explaining:

> I did mention this earlier, but I got into sticker collecting. So, it's part of me it's
> just because I like art too. So just collecting really good art, and also just the
> process it took to get that sticker…I guess a more concrete example would be
> [when] I did the last senior send-off…I volunteered for the first time to get some

stickers and some merch. And I thought it would be a really miserable experience. But now I have good memories associated with a sticker and the cross bag that I got because I met really cool people [and] for a brief moment in time, and the weather was pretty good.

Similarly, Taylor shared how her *Developer, Empathy,* and *Relator* strengths "not only help [her make] some friends, [but also] help them." Overall, each participant shared numerous ways in which they plan to apply their Gallup CliftonStrengths® to their educational and personal lives. Table 7 provides a more detailed breakdown of how each participant plans to use their Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 results.

Table 7.

Participants' Application of Asset-Based Results

Participant	Implement in Professional Environments	In Academia	Optimize Team Interactions	Self-Authorship and Fulfillment	Strengthen Relational Dynamics
Arden	●				
Evelyn	●		●	●	●
Vera	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Lennox	●	●		●	
Sierra	●	●		●	
Jasper		●		●	
Selena	●		●	●	
Thalia	●	●		●	●
Nova	●	●		●	●
Taylor	●			●	●
Ryder	●	●	●	●	●
Cassian	●	●	●	●	
Total Count	19	10	13	18	13

Note: Implement in Professional Environments: The application of their strengths in interviews, jobs, internships, as a leader in a co-curricular organization. In Academia: The application of their strengths in the classroom or academic environment. Optimize Team Interactions: The application of their strengths, specifically, in team environments.

Self-Authorship and Fulfillment: The application of their strengths to further understand themselves, learn more about their Gallup CliftonStrengths®, and reach self-actualization. Strengthen Relational Dynamics: The application of their strengths in building stronger relationships, whether it be personally or socially. N/A – Participant Vera did not complete the interview process, therefore there was not data for Vera.

Toward the end of the interview, each participant was asked whether they believed they would benefit from engaging in the asset-based approach prior to beginning their journey. With the exception of one participant – Lennox – all indicated that completing the asset-based assessment before attending Asset University would have been advantageous. Lennox, however, explained that they did not feel that engaging in the assessment, prior to starting their undergraduate education, would have been beneficial at that time, stating, "I don't think that this

would have been helpful two years ago because I didn't know myself two years ago, and I don't think I would have been able to answer these questions accurately, because I wouldn't have even known what type of person I [was]." These insights demonstrate how an asset-based tool can serve as a valuable resource, fostering positive outcomes and supporting continued development and growth for both current students and future alumni of Asset University.

Emerging Theme Three: Perceptions of Model Minority Myth (MMM)

A key motivation for this study was to explore how the current generation of students perceive the Model Minority Myth (MMM) and to examine whether shifting from a deficit-based perspective to an asset-based approach could challenge and deconstruct the stereotypes associated with the MMM. As participants reflected on their cultural backgrounds and their experiences with the asset-based tool, their stories revealed both affirmations and contradictions of the MMM. These reflections led to the emergence of the third theme: Perceptions of the Model Minority Myth.

Sub-theme: Experiences Affirming MMM

In the interviews, participants were asked to share their understanding of the MMM and whether their personal experiences either aligned with or contradicted the stereotypes it presents. Only one student, Selena, shared an experience from her community that seemed to affirm the stereotype of Asian Americans as reserved. She reflected on how her friend's family expressed affection differently from her own, illustrating the contrast in cultural practices:

> I have a friend [and] their family don't really say I love you out loud. They also don't really hug around and stuff, which is totally different than my family. We totally hug all day. Well, not all day. We hug so much, and we always like verbally express how much we love each other, which is pretty against the stereotype. But I do know that some families, even with a friend who's born here, her family, is way more conservative in the way that they express love.

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Although most participants did not have direct experiences aligning with the MMM, they noted its presence within their peer communities.

Sub-theme: Experiences Contradicting MMM

All participants expressed how the MMM negatively impacted them in various aspects of their lives—academically, socially, and within their families. As discussed in Chapter Two, the stereotypes embedded in the MMM place undue pressures and unrealistic expectations on Asian Americans. Nova, for example, shared how the MMM affected her behavior and approach to academics:

> When I was young, I definitely was told to…keep to myself and just…stay [in] my lane. As long as I did all the right things, then I would be in a good place later on in life. So, I think I…internalized some of that, and I was very…shy, quiet, good, and I always push myself to do well in school, because I didn't want to be a failure and obviously disappoint anybody that I knew. I guess in that way, it was a little bit negative, because there was a lot of internal pressure that I was putting on myself.

Similarly, Vera reflected on how the MMM manifested in her academic environment and its detrimental effects on her learning habits:

> There were a lot of ways that all of the Asians strived to get A's and [were] expected to…in our class. I'm recognizing as I'm [speaking]…the kind of culture that may have [been] created subconsciously, and what other patterns different folks in my class had, or what that may have meant for me, because I used to think my perfectionism as having stemmed from my parents' divorce, because it was similar timing…but I don't know so, I used to internalize [those feelings]. I really wanted to get good grades, and I thought if I didn't get good grades, I was a bad person. I didn't really have any bad repercussions if I didn't get an A, but I was praised for getting awards or good grades on one side of my family…I know that I didn't develop necessarily good habits, I think in middle school or high school. I think I overworked myself in terms of all my extracurriculars, and that was something that I wanted to do. But in terms of like classwork, I didn't have really good habits in terms of learning and being okay with failing; that was a really hard lesson for me.

Furthermore, Selena gives us insight into how the MMM provides an avenue for others to

make assumptions about her academic abilities and for her doubt her choice with the use of her

time. Selena explains,

> I feel like a lot of people kind of just assume that I get good grades, which like, I
> mean, I don't get bad grades. But how dare to assume?...It's not because [I'm]
> naturally smart and I don't need to study to get good grades. [They] don't see the
> hard work I put behind all that and the suffer[ing] I went through to…get those
> good grades…I know a lot of people who don't really work hard, and they're
> Asians, and I feel…it's just personal…I can choose to work hard, I can also
> choose to not work hard. I think it's fully just personal preference. But I also know
> that family and peer pressure environment[s] can be a factor. So, some people, if
> they live in a really strict household, and…they're kind of forced to be hard
> working. For me…my entire family works really hard…I definitely know that
> people kind of just assume that I have good grades by looking at me. [They would
> make comments, such as,] 'You're Chinese and you must be good at studying and
> stuff.'…I don't just study all day. My roommate actually studies all day. That's
> kind of crazy, but she's not Asian, but she studies all day, every day, and she
> studies like her life depends on it, and that kind of stresses me. Am I supposed to
> be like that? But I kind of want to have a life. I want to take the time to cook for
> myself. I want to hang out with family and friends as well as cook dinner and
> things…It really depends on each household and their environment. Peer pressure
> is real.

Participants also discussed how the MMM perpetuates "othering" within the Asian

community, especially across different ethnic backgrounds. Arden described how Filipinos are

often excluded from the "model minority" image. Arden shared,

> The Philippines are in Asia, but people are like, you know, Filipinos are the fake
> Asians. They don't have the same academic success [or] academic reaching
> qualities that other Asians do. And that was definitely something I strove, in
> particular, to try and wipe out in groups that had friends who were like full
> Asians, like full Chinese or full Koreans.

Evelyn shared a similar experience, feeling disconnected from the broader Asian

community due to the MMM. Evelyn stated,

> When I came to [Asset University], I felt like I was defeated, because there were
> so many other people who were better than me. And I, for a while, or in the
> beginning, felt like I didn't belong. And I couldn't get to where they [were], as an
> Asian specifically…I'm a Filipino and I kind of I try my best to use my Filipino

identity to motivate me like, 'Oh, My God, I got to get an A for the Philippines.'… A for the Philippines, A for females or women empowerment, [and] A for myself. But whenever I didn't succeed,…it just made me think…I'm not like the other Asians or 'what happened to me'…And I didn't have that much support, because COVID happened when I was mainly going through this.

In addition, when examining the responses regarding the participants' experience with the MMM, students expressed how their cultural upbringing diverged from the MMM, as their upbringing lacked the academic pressure that is often associated with the MMM. For instance, Ryder shares,

I think I greatly differ [from] this definition. I think I understand where it comes from because of parents or at least from many Asian cultures; pushing their children to excel and focus so much [on education]. But also in other countries, they actually prioritize academics more than, for example, the US. [The US] encourages sports mostly in the culture or often encourages sports in addition to academics. But honestly, I've grown up without much pressure to actually do well in school; and I always struggled in math…It's so bad, and I literally remember getting a C and a test, and I didn't worry about it in elementary. So, it really differs [from] how my parents raised me compared to maybe what other students.

Although the MMM predominantly had negative effects on the participants, a few expressed how they benefitted from the stereotype. Only four females had identified experiences where they have benefitted from the MMM. Jasper shares briefly how the MMM positively impacted her academics. Jasper stated,

I think a more positive part of the of [the Model Minority Myth] is that it did encourage me to work harder and get better grades because I identify as Asian.

The data overwhelmingly demonstrates the negative impact of the MMM on Asian American undergraduate students, particularly in terms of fostering feelings of "othering" and self-doubt. Participants' experiences also highlight the diversity within the Asian diaspora, showing how cultural backgrounds and family values influence how individuals navigate these stereotypes. These stories emphasize the need to challenge the assumptions embedded in the MMM and underscore the importance of embracing an asset-based perspective. The next section

will explore how the asset-based instrument contrasts with and challenges the assumptions of the

MMM.

Sub-theme: Strengths Alignment/Contradiction of MMM

The interview responses revealed distinct examples of how participants' strengths align

with or contradict the MMM. Before diving into direct quotes, it is important to note a few

common patterns among the group. Eighty-three percent of the participants expressed how one

or more of their Gallup CliftonStrengths® did not align with the MMM. However, of 83%, 30%

(n=3) of the study's sample identified at least one of their Gallup CliftonStrengths® aligned with

the MMM. In addition, of the 83%, ten percent (n=1) was unsure if their Gallup

CliftonStrengths® aligned with the MMM. Uniquely, several participants indicated that Gallup

Gallup CliftonStrengths® in the *Executing* domain seemed more aligned with the assumptions of

the MMM. For example, Thalia, who possesses two strengths in the *Executing* domain, shared:

> I think definitely anything that has to do with learning and achieving your goals
> and working hard to get there would align with the MMM. I've definitely
> exemplified hard-working…because I care about my academics, which is a part of
> the Model Minority Myth.

In a similar fashion, Nova, who possesses three Gallup CliftonStrengths® in the

Executing Domain, stated,

> I think [my strengths] align pretty well, like the *Discipline, Achiever*, and
> *Responsibility* [Gallup CliftonStrengths®]. I think those are all things that people
> expect of Asian American people to just always be hard-working and know what
> [they] are working towards. And [they] can't give up until [they've] achieved it.
> So, I think that aligns pretty well, but *Woo* and *Futuristic* may not align as
> much…I don't think those are typical themes that people would associate with the
> Model Minority Myth.

From a different perspective, Lennox, who only possesses Gallup CliftonStrengths® in

the *Relationship Building* domain shared a similar sentiment as Thalia and Nova. Lennox stated,

I feel like [a strength that this more] logical, like from the *Strategic Thinking* or *Executing* [domain]…it would kind of fit [the Model Minority Myth] because I think [the Model Minority Myth is] also driven by those [types of strengths].

While all participants could identify at least one Gallup CliftonStrengths® that aligns with the MMM, Lennox, the only Indian participant in the study, expressed that she felt all of her strengths aligned with the MMM, "I feel like they align. I feel they all actually [align from] the way I see it."

In contrast, participants like Arden, Ryder, and Selena expressed that their Gallup CliftonStrengths® contradict the MMM. For example, Ryder directly stated that her strengths "don't really align with the Model Minority Myth." Similarly, Selena shared:

> Asians are a little reserved and a little conservative…in [their] communication and expressing their feelings…I'm the total opposite…I love talking to people, and I have a great amount of empathy. I can really feel what other people are feeling. And, I also really like to observe different people and see their strengths and also the positivity.

The remaining six participants identified at least one strength that aligned with the MMM but named several strengths that contradicted it. Evelyn, for example, explained how her *Learner* strength may align with the MMM's expectations of hardworking, but the rest of her strengths contradicted the stereotype that Asians are passive and reserved:

> *Learner* contributes… to why we're good at certain subjects because we have an interest in learning them…Before college when I was actually good at math. I spent a lot of time on that subject because I enjoyed getting the answer right. And I enjoyed the challenge. And I think [*Learner*] contributed to me doing well and appearing knowledgeable in comparison to others. Hard-working…I think that [is] also the *Learner* [strength]…because I have an interest in learning that subject more [and] I spend a lot of time on that subject and try to get better at it. And in a way, you could translate that to being hard working. When actuality it's just your interests. And you just were passionate. [As for] passive and reserve…I can't really say anything for that one [stereotype.] I think my [strengths] tell the opposite.

Additionally, some participants initially claimed their strengths aligned with the MMM but later retracted their statements after further reflection. Taylor, for instance, initially mentioned the *Achiever* strength as aligning with the MMM but then re-clarified. When Taylor was asked about any alignments between her Gallup CliftonStrengths® and the MMM, she started with,

> I guess kind of the *Achiever* [strength], because it's like hardworking…None of my strengths are really passive or reserved. It's just kind of like building relationships. I don't think they really match super well [with the MMM].

However, when asked if her Gallup CliftonStrengths contradicted the MMM, she stated,

> First of all, the *Achiever* [Gallup CliftonStrengths®], the hard worker thing kind of contradicts the naturally excelling academics. Because, like I said before, I don't really think I'm innately smart [or] super talented. I just worked hard to keep up my grades. So, the working hard kind of is less contradicting, but the innate talent, just naturally talent academics is definitely not accurate. [As for] the passive or reserved, I don't think [is true]. I am a good listener and I'm good at building relationships, but I don't think that necessarily means it's passive…Passive just seems pretty contradicting to the skills, because I like [to] build people up.

In conclusion, the interview responses demonstrate that Asian American college students are far more complex than the stereotypes depicted by the MMM. These students bring diverse assets, experiences, and cultural perspectives that challenge the validity of the MMM. Furthermore, the varied yet interconnected experiences of the Asian diaspora highlight the importance of disaggregating their experiences rather than aggregating them under a singular, limiting stereotype.

Chapter Five: Discussion

As the Asian American population continues to grow and more individuals pursue higher education, understanding the evolving trends and distinct needs of Asian American college students becomes increasingly crucial (Pew Research Center, 2021a; Pew Research Center, 2021b; Pew Research Center, 2021c). Recent research consistently highlights the undue pressure, high expectations, and significant harm that Asian American students experience as a result of the stereotypes perpetuated by the Model Minority Myth (Assalone & Fann, 2017; Empleo, 2006; Lee, 1994; Museus & Chang, 2009; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Museus & Park, 2015; Okura, 2022; Poon et al., 2016; Suyemoto et al., 2009; Tan, 2019; Walton & Truong, 2022). Despite these challenges, there is a notable gap in research regarding how educational institutions can enhance the college experience for Asian American students by better understanding and leveraging their strengths. Previous studies on the Model Minority Myth (MMM) and Asian American college experiences have called for future research to explore more innovative and human-centered approaches to address the stereotypes associated with the MMM (Poon et al., 2016).

This study addressed that gap by investigating how Asian American college students perceive and apply an asset-based approach in their academic journeys, specifically in relation to challenging the MMM. The research explored the impact of asset-based strategies on Asian American students' success, self-perception, and overall college experience. It also examined how students identify and utilize their personal strengths throughout their college years and whether these assets play a role in countering the stereotypes tied to the MMM.

Conceptual Frameworks

This study is grounded in Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit), a framework developed from Critical Race Theory (CRT) that specifically addresses the unique racial experiences of Asian Americans in higher education (Capper, 2018; Kim et al., 2021; Museus & Iftikar, 2013). AsianCrit facilitates an exploration of how race and ethnicity influence students' identities and interactions, with a particular focus on the effects of racism (Capper, 2018; Kim et al., 2021; Museus & Iftikar, 2013). This framework serves as a foundation for understanding how Asian American students can challenge stereotypes and harness their strengths throughout their college journey. The study's findings align with participants' lived experiences, shedding light on their sense of identity and how they can use their personal strengths to confront and overcome the MMM.

Research Questions

As previously discussed, the study addressed the following research questions, which wer designed to explore the key factors influencing the participants' experience, perceptions, and application of the asset-based approach in their academic journeys, as we as gain a deeper understanding of the broader cultural, social, and theoretical contexts shaping their perspectives:

1. In what ways and to what extent does the use of asset-based approaches lead Asian American college students to succeed in their selected career path?

    a. How do Asian American college students perceive participation through an asset-based lens/approach? Does this help them accomplish goals or succeed in college?

    b. How might Asian Americans utilize the results of an asset-based approach during/throughout their college experience?

2. How and to what extent does the use of asset-based approaches lead Asian American college students to contradict the Model Minority Myth?

   a. How do Asian American college students use their results from an asset-based instrument?

   b. What factors influence Asian American students' view on success?

Methodology

The study employed a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of participants as they navigated their academic journeys. This methodology was chosen for its ability to provide a meaningful platform for understanding the perspectives of the population. Participants were first asked to complete an asset-based survey tool, the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Top 5 Assessment. Following the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted to facilitate in-depth exploration of their experiences, yielding rich, qualitative data. This data was then interpreted through the lens of the conceptual framework guiding the study.

Study participants were self-identified Asian Americans. Participants were selected through a purposeful, homogeneous sampling strategy, followed by snowball sampling to ensure the desired sample size. A total of twelve Asian American students currently enrolled at a public university in Southern California took part in the study. Each participant engaged in an individual, semi-structured interview and completed the asset-based assessment. The interviews were transcribed, and the resulting data was analyzed by the researcher. In addition to taking electronic notes during the interviews, reflective memos were written afterward to enhance the interpretive process. To identify emerging themes and patterns, MAXQDA software was utilized to facilitate a more robust analysis of the data.

Summary of Research Findings

The findings of this study revealed three core themes, each further unpacked by several sub-themes that provided a nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences. The first theme, Influences of Cultural Upbringing, explored the diverse factors each participant considered when reflecting on their academic journey and defining their own sense of success. This theme is intricately linked to four tenets of Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit): Asianization, Transnational Context, Intersectionality, and Story, Theory, and Praxis. The second theme, Perceptions of the Model Minority Myth, examined how participants' experiences and perspectives were shaped by the pervasive stereotypes associated with the MMM. This theme is closely interwoven with all seven tenets of AsianCrit.

Additionally, the second theme serves as a foundation for the third theme, Impacts of Asset-Based Approaches, which focuses on how asset-based strategies contributed to the participants' perceptions of success in their academic and career paths. This theme also explored how participants viewed the outcomes of the asset-based assessment they completed, as well as how they planned to apply the tool's results throughout their undergraduate studies. Three specific tenets of AsianCrit—Strategic (Anti) Essentialism, Intersectionality, and Story Theory, and Praxis—were key to understanding this theme. Appendix B provides a visual presentation of the connections between the themes, the guiding research questions, the conceptual framework, and the interview questions.

Research Question 1

In what ways and to what extent does the use of asset-based approaches lead Asian American college students to succeed in selecting their career paths? The findings of this study underscore the significant potential benefits for Asian American college students when they integrate an asset-based approach into their academic journey and broader life experiences.

Existing research has consistently highlighted the positive impact of asset-based approaches for communities of color, demonstrating that programs designed around this framework can significantly enhance the retention, engagement, and success of Asian American and other minority students (Ghani & Read, 2024; Soria & Stubblefield, 2014; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015b). These programs focus on leveraging the diverse experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds students bring, creating a more inclusive and supportive academic environment (Ghani & Read, 2024). An asset-based approach shifts the conversation from a deficit-oriented perspective to one that emphasizes students' inherent strengths and potential. This paradigm empowers students by recognizing their value and fostering a sense of belonging and self-efficacy within the academic community (Ghani & Read, 2024).

The findings from this study align closely with the existing body of literature. For example, after completing the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment and reflecting on their results, all participants reported that engaging with these asset-based tools provided valuable resources, methodologies, and language to better apply their strengths in various areas of their lives, including academics, career pursuits, and interpersonal relationships. This process of self-reflection gave them the tools to understand how their strengths could be used strategically and intentionally moving forward. Furthermore, all but one participant expressed that being part of a diverse community was crucial when selecting an undergraduate institution, highlighting the importance of cultural and identity considerations in their educational choices.

Previous studies have also emphasized that asset-based approaches play a critical role in helping students acquire the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to achieve both academic success and long-term excellence (Anderson, 2004; The Gallup Organization, 2014; Soria & Taylor, 2016). While the majority of participants could draw direct connections between

their top five Gallup CliftonStrengths® and past experiences, two participants noted that they struggled to identify how one particular strength had manifested in their previous academic or personal experiences. This observation speaks to the complexity of personal growth, as it sometimes takes time for students to recognize the subtle yet impactful ways in which their strengths shape their actions. This aligns with previous research, which has acknowledged that aligning strengths with lived experiences can be a nuanced process. Additionally, prior literature highlights the importance of community engagement, noting that students who are actively involved in supporting peers and family members not only enhance their own educational experiences but also contribute meaningfully to their broader communities (Kellogg, 2021). The participants in this study affirmed this notion, sharing how they were able to identify their strengths in team settings, community involvement, and professional environments both before and after completing the assessment.

An important finding of the study is that all participants reported a sense of positive affirmation, self-authorship, and increased fulfillment as they deepened their understanding of their strengths. Previous research has shown that when students identify and celebrate their strengths, they experience increased levels of self-assurance, hope, and optimism about their future prospects (Anderson, 2005; Hodges & Harter, 2005; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015a). Participants in this study echoed these findings, describing how the process of self-reflection fostered not only a greater sense of confidence but also a renewed sense of purpose. This aligns with research on Gallup CliftonStrengths®, which reports that participants often experience a significant psychological reward and greater optimism as they engage with the strengths-based framework (Anderson, 2005).

In addition to fostering academic success, asset-based approaches, such as the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment, also play a pivotal role in increasing students' sense of belonging within higher education environments. The study found that, with the exception of two participants, Selena and Cassian, the majority of participants experienced a marked improvement in their ability to articulate their strengths and skills. This enhanced self-awareness gave them the language and confidence to discuss their unique contributions in academic, professional, and social contexts. Prior research suggests that Gallup CliftonStrengths® can be used as an effective conversation starter, allowing students to engage more meaningfully with others and build connections based on shared strengths (Soria & Stubblefield, 2015b). The participants in this study confirmed that they had already begun using their strengths in academic, professional, and social settings and intended to continue doing so, further solidifying the connection between the asset-based approach and social integration.

Furthermore, the research findings bring attention to the differences in cultural upbringing for this generation of Asian Americans. Early research on Asian Americans was conducted when Asian Americans parents may have lacked formal education, and their children were entering college as a first-generation student. Some of the study participants indicated their parents' former educational background and how their parents' formal education provided them with guidance in deciding their career trajectory. In addition, prior literature illustrated Asian parents often pressure their children to pursue and avoid particular career pathways (Cornejo et al., 2020; Suyemoto, 2009; Wing, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). However, the results of this study portray parents and family members as supporters of the academic major or career pathway that their children enjoy and desire to explore. For one student, they expressed that they may choose to go undeclared for one enrollment period because they weren't sure what they wanted

to pursue and there was no pressure from family. Although most participants hold an academic major in STEM, the participants expressed they selected the career path because of their interest, passion, and potential opportunities the selected career path brings.

While there are some variations, research participants did confirm certain findings from previous studies on Asians. For instance, it is widely believed that Asian American parents motivate their children to pursue higher education, as it is seen as a pathway to better and more financially rewarding job prospects (Wing, 2007). At least two students stated their reasons for entering the selected major because they were interested in the topic, and they were informed by their parents that the occupation would be lucrative. The MMM continues to exist in various formats, however, this generation of students and the anecdotes regarding parental involvement has altered the perception of Asian American cultural upbringing. Another reason to not group all Asian Americans as a monolith that shares similar experiences.

Beyond academic achievement, this study also highlights the intertwined nature of cultural identity, academic identity, and intrinsic motivations. Participants shared how their cultural backgrounds, personal passions, and strengths guided their academic endeavors and influenced their aspirations. For many, their cultural heritage was deeply connected to their academic ambitions, with the pursuit of higher education seen not only as a personal goal but also as a way to address broader societal challenges. These challenges, many of which participants encountered firsthand, shaped their commitment to creating a positive impact and enacting meaningful change in the future. This reflects the broader notion that students' academic journeys are often shaped by both personal and collective motivations.

From the perspective of AsianCrit, the findings related to Research Question One suggest that asset-based approaches in undergraduate education offer significant advantages for Asian

American college students. These approaches go beyond simply enhancing academic performance; they also foster deeper student engagement, personal growth, and a sense of belonging. They promote equity and inclusion by addressing systemic disparities in educational outcomes and cultivating a more active, engaged student body. By focusing on students' strengths and community assets, asset-based approaches create an educational environment that is both supportive and enriching, ultimately contributing to the overall success and well-being of students.

Research Question 2

How and to what extent does the use of asset-based approaches lead Asian American college students to contradict the Model Minority Myth? The findings of this study reinforced the important reminder that Asian Americans are not a monolithic group. While there were shared experiences among the twelve participants, who represented five different ethnic backgrounds, each participant interpreted and responded to the asset-based assessment results, the MMM, and their pursuit of higher education in unique ways. This diversity in responses highlights the individuality of each participant's experience. Previous research has illuminated the nuanced and often harmful effects of the MMM on Asian Americans, particularly the undue pressures and unrealistic expectations they face. The study participants confirmed much of the literature, noting that they have endured negative consequences from these stereotypes in their families, academics, and social environments. However, four participants also shared that the MMM had some positive effects on their lives. Three of these students noted that the stereotypes motivated them to "work harder" academically, while one expressed that it helped them maintain a "good reputation." Additionally, one participant mentioned that the stereotypes allowed them to find a sense of unity within the broader Asian diaspora.

Previous research has depicted the MMM as portraying Asian Americans as passive, quiet, and reserved individuals (Chun, 1980; Grim et al., 2019; Kiang et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2017; Museus, 2008; Museus & Park, 2015; Poon et al., 2016). However, this study's findings challenge that stereotype. Several students directly rejected the idea that all Asian Americans are passive or reserved, particularly those who possessed many Gallup CliftonStrengths® in the *Relationship Building* or *Communication* domains. These students highlighted strengths like *Empathy* and *Woo*, pointing out how their lived experiences contradict the stereotype of passivity.

Previous literature also discussed anti-imperialist and anti-deficit approaches to dismantling the MMM (Yi et al., 2020). While these approaches have helped challenge essentialist stereotypes, they have not focused predominantly on asset-based frameworks (Yi et al., 2020). This study addresses that gap, providing rich insights into how asset-based approaches can challenge the MMM. The MMM often suggests that Asian Americans achieve exceptional academic and career success, leading some participants to believe that, if the MMM were true, they would excel in the *Executing* domain of the Gallup CliftonStrengths® assessment (Museus & Chang, 2009). However, the study revealed that the group as a whole had 37 Gallup CliftonStrengths® in the *Relationship Building* domain and only 10 in the *Executing* domain. At the individual level, only half of the participants had one to three strengths in the *Executing* domain.

Interestingly, the few participants who did possess strengths in the *Executing* domain expressed how these strengths contradicted the MMM. One student, for example, noted that the *Achiever* strength reflected their personal drive to work hard and achieve academic success, rather than attributing success to a racial stereotype of innate intelligence. Additionally, all but

one participant indicated that their Gallup CliftonStrengths® did not align with the stereotypes associated with the MMM. Some students initially claimed that certain strengths did reflect the MMM but later retracted those statements after reflecting on their assets. This shift may signify a deeper understanding of their individual strengths, as opposed to conforming to collective, stereotype-driven expectations. The study also revealed that, except for one participant, all planned to further engage in activities that would deepen their understanding of their strengths and identities. This indicates that the asset-based tool not only helped participants reflect on their personal strengths but also inspired them to continue exploring and developing those strengths.

In conclusion, the interview responses illustrate that Asian American college students are far more complex than the stereotypes perpetuated by the MMM. These students bring a wide range of strengths, experiences, and cultural perspectives that challenge the validity of the MMM. The diverse yet interconnected experiences of the Asian diaspora emphasize the importance of disaggregating these experiences, rather than reducing them to a single, limiting stereotype.

Implications for Social Justice

The changing racial demographics of students, coupled with the evolving generational cohort and the growing body of research focused on Asian Americans and asset-based approaches, are promising signs of progress in Higher Education. However, the ongoing negative effects of the MMM and the stereotypes that accompany it indicate that educational institutions still face significant challenges and areas for growth. Additionally, the lack of widespread implementation and critical examination of asset-based approaches for Asian American students reveals substantial opportunities for higher education institutions to better support and enhance the educational experiences of this group. By embracing an asset-based framework, educators

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and institutional leaders can gain a deeper understanding of the unique needs of Asian American students, creating culturally relevant academic experiences that foster both personal and academic success.

Asset-based approaches focus on recognizing students' strengths, skills, and potential, rather than viewing them through a deficit lens. These approaches aim to disrupt and transform systems of oppression that have long affected marginalized communities, addressing historical and intersectional disadvantages. In doing so, they contribute to a more equitable and inclusive educational environment that benefits all students (Ghani & Read, 2024). For Asian American students, implementing asset-based frameworks challenges the harmful effects of the MMM, emphasizing their strengths, talents, and unique perspectives. This not only positions them for success on campus but also prepares them for success beyond graduation. The continued reinforcement of the MMM can be mitigated when educators begin to view Asian Americans as valuable contributors to the academic community—individuals who bring unique skills and insights—rather than as a monolithic group defined by stereotypes (Walton & Truong, 2022).

To effectively support the diverse needs of students, educators must actively recognize, rather than overlook the differences in students' identities. Affirming these differences enables educators to adapt their teaching practices and services to better meet the needs of a diverse student body. This approach goes beyond mere inclusivity; it fosters an environment where students feel seen and empowered for who they are (Assalone & Fann, 2017; Kumashiro, 2000). Educators and researchers have a responsibility to honor and learn from the individual stories and experiences of their students, both in the classroom and through academic work. Ultimately, asset-based approaches create an opportunity to integrate these lived experiences into university

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spaces, cultivating an environment where all students feel valued, supported, and capable of reaching their full potential.

Implications and Recommendations for Institutional Leaders

Educational leaders must confront and address the long-standing inequities embedded in educational institutions. To do this, they must reevaluate the values upheld by these institutions and ensure alignment with the mission, vision, and strategic plans. Given the profound impact of COVID-19, this reassessment should be guided by a lens prioritizing student well-being and human dignity (Commodore & Johnson, 2023). As the educational landscape evolves, influenced by technological advancements and shifting resources, leaders must adapt current practices to better support Asian American students (Empleo, 2006). Transforming deficit-based practices into asset-based approaches will not only improve the educational experiences of Asian American students but also help mitigate the harmful effects of the MMM.

Evaluating institutional practices, culture, and policies can lead to a process of "reculturing" — the development and implementation of new values, beliefs, and norms within an institution (Stoll, 1998). What drives this shift from potential to action is the involvement of all stakeholders—faculty, staff, students, community members, and alumni (Stoll, 1998). This shared responsibility encourages collective leadership, where all members contribute to meaningful change (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). Shared leadership also adds a layer of accountability, ensuring that educators remain responsible for their role in fostering transformation (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017).

Towards the end of the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on how Asset University had contributed to their success. One participant expressed surprise at the abundance of student organizations dedicated to specific ethnic groups or nationalities. Two others

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mentioned that they had benefited from support provided by the AAPS unit. Another student emphasized the wide array of opportunities offered at Asset University for students to develop skills and foster a sense of belonging.

In addition to highlighting successes, students also provided recommendations for how Asset University could further enhance their experience and invest in their strengths. All but one participant indicated that they would have found value in engaging with Gallup CliftonStrengths® before their undergraduate journey, reinforcing previous research on the benefits of asset-based tools. As a result, institutions should consider establishing asset-based programs, like *ExperienceVT*, that allow students to focus on their strengths, provide access to free Gallup CliftonStrengths® assessments, and intentionally direct students towards opportunities aligned with their assets (Virginia Tech, n.d.). Participants expressed that having regular opportunities to revisit their strengths would help them make the most of the Gallup CliftonStrengths® results.

Beyond asset-based programming, three participants suggested that Asian American students could benefit from additional mental health resources. The participant stated therapy would help students address generational trauma and better understand their own identities. Another participant proposed that group therapy could offer a space for students to discuss the stigmas and stereotypes of the MMM. Additionally, one participant suggested creating spaces where students from diverse backgrounds could engage in civil discourse to learn from each other's cultures. While a few students highlighted successes at Asset University, the majority—eight participants—expressed a desire for more engagement opportunities on campus. One student noted that while resources like the AAPS unit exist, their busy academic schedule prevented them from attending workshops and events. These students also identified a need for

intersectional workshops, such as those addressing the experiences of Asian American first-generation college students.

Assumptions, Limitation, and Delimitations

In this study, there are a few limitations I foresee this study facing: 1) the lack of generalizability, 2) the inability to draw causal conclusions, 3) researcher bias, 4) possible limitations in participation willingness to describe their experiences, and 5) little to no confirmation of factual living experiences. Although many of the limitations and delimitations are often minor hindrances to qualitative research, it is important to acknowledge and make efforts to address the concerns that may impact the results of the study. Further explanations and details on how the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were addressed in Chapter Three.

Limitations and De-Limitations of the Study

With this proposed study, I foresee several limitations that should be acknowledged. Some of these limitations are inherent to conducting qualitative research, specifically hermeneutic phenomenology research. Other limitations are access to certain data sets and a diverse population of Asian Americans. Below you will find the limitations, in greater detail, that may have the potential to influence the study's findings.

Confirmation of Lived Experiences

When conducting phenomenological studies, the focus is on capturing lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Van Manen, 2023). Lived experiences are described as experiences that can be articulated with as much detail as possible; in hopes of avoiding generalizations or abstract interpretations (Van Manen, 2023). Feelings, emotions, and moods are important aspects of understanding the state of mind during live experiences as well (Van Manen, 2023). In addition, when conducting phenomenological research, the hope is to capture accurate accounts,

in detail, of the lived experience without beautifying the moment with intricate terminology (Van Manen, 2023). In addition, when conducting phenomenological studies, the experiential should not lack detail, concreteness, and vividness, if so the data and data analysis will lack substance (Van Manen, 2023). Therefore, lived experiences are subjective and the truth of the lived experience must be taken as is. I do not plan to request participants to provide evidence of their experience, nor do I plan to challenge their experience. Regardless, it is important to remember phenomenology is "less concerned with the factual accuracy than with the plausibility of [their lived experience – regardless of if their story] is true to our living sense of it" (Van Manen, 2023, p. 314).

Access to Diverse Asian American Populations

In this proposed study, I do not plan for this study to be generalizable to the Asian American diaspora, however, I hope to capture rich data from a diverse sample of participants. "This study is not intended to be generalizable, although some themes may resonate in similar contexts" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 157). The results of the study are intended to provide valuable understanding, insights, and recommendations for educational leaders and practitioners in higher education institutions rather than to identify a generalizable phenomenon. Through the data analysis, I will be focused on identifying any patterns and outliers to present in the results of my study. Although Asset University has a large population of Asian American students, the heterogeneity of ethnicity amongst Asian Americans is skewed. Due to the lack of disaggregated data on Asian American ethnicity, the nearly 50 distinct ethnicities can become homogenized.[4] At Asset University the ethnic statistics drastically vary; for instance, one Asian American ethnic

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[4] To ensure the confidentiality of the research, the in-text citation and reference for this information were omitted.

group may have as few as less than a dozen while another group may have over 3,000.[5] Overall, even though I made efforts to reach out to Asset University's diverse student population and purposefully sample, I was not able to acquire a robust and diverse sample of participants.

Geographic Location

A delimitation of the study was the decision to focus on an institution on the West Coast. This choice was intentional, as it allowed for access to the targeted demographic and considerations that educational resources and philosophy are regionally different. To maintain the study's accuracy and avoid generalizations, it was important to concentrate on a focused sample of participants, taking into account the geographic location of a West Coast research site.

Incomplete Data Collection

One limitation to note with the findings of this study is incomplete data collection for one study participant. After completing the Gallup CliftonStrengths® Assessment and one-third of the interview questions, Vera was no longer available to complete the remainder of the interview questions. Therefore, Vera's experience with the study is partially captured. The decision to include the data collected from Vera was intentional, as the sample size was small, and Vera possesses identities other participants did not disclose. It was vital to highlight Vera's experiences and highlight the heterogeneity of the Asian American population. Furthermore, the removal of Vera's experience would not have altered the outcomes of the study. The analysis of the data without Vera's experience would ultimately result in no change to the findings of the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

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[5] To ensure the confidentiality of the research, the in-text citation and reference for this information were omitted.

Research on Asian Americans that challenges the MMM through asset-based approaches is an emerging field. While much scholarly work has focused on debunking the MMM, research on asset-based approaches remains underexplored. Future studies on Asian American students and their experiences with asset-based frameworks are essential to understanding how different support structures and teaching environments can be modified to enhance the college experience. This will help continue dismantling the stereotypes and preconceived notions surrounding the Asian diaspora perpetuated by the MMM. Longitudinal studies could explore the long-term impacts of engaging with strengths-based frameworks, providing insights into how consistent use of these strengths influences students' academic journeys. Additionally, future research might examine the evolving understanding or perception of the MMM due to generational shifts in the Asian population and the increased pursuit of higher education.

One participant shared that they did not fully grasp the MMM, which could suggest that its impact has lessened in certain cultural contexts. As the Asian American population grows, particularly in K-12 and early educational environments, the influence of the MMM may not be as pronounced as past studies suggest. For example, one participant mentioned that they did not experience the MMM's impact because they grew up in a predominantly Asian community. This may indicate that the MMM's effects are not as pervasive among younger generations or in specific communities.

Many students in this study shared experiences where peers assumed that, because of their racial background, they did not struggle academically. Most participants found this assumption unrealistic and inaccurate. The MMM perpetuates the idea that Asian Americans achieve success without requiring social or educational resources, which leads to the invisibility of their challenges (Empleo, 2006; Hurh & Kim, 1989; Tan, 2019; Walton & Truong, 2022;

Wing, 2007). However, previous research has debunked the notion that all Asian Americans are the same, that they do not encounter significant challenges, or that they do not need support (Museus, 2009; Tan, 2019; Walton & Truong, 2022). This study further emphasizes that Asian Americans are not a monolithic group, and they indeed face unique challenges that require support. There is still a need to address this stereotype and challenge its lasting impact.

Distinct patterns related to ethnicity and Gallup CliftonStrengths® results emerged, highlighting both shared traits and individual differences. Most participants demonstrated strengths in the *Relationship Building* domain, suggesting a potential link to prior research that identifies collective philosophies and expectations within Asian communities (Bankston & Hidalgo, 2006; Cornejo et al., 2020; Huang, 2012). In addition, Filipino participants showed a strong concentration of strengths in the *Relationship Building* domain, a finding that aligns with prior research on collectivist values in Asian communities (Bankston & Hidalgo, 2006; Cornejo et al., 2020; Huang, 2012). This concentration of strengths in the *Relationship Building* domain may suggest that these students may be particularly well-positioned for success in environments that value interpersonal connections, empathy, and collaboration—skills that are essential in both academic and professional settings.

Furthermore, the relationship between participants' academic progress and their Gallup CliftonStrengths® results further enriches our understanding. Those who had completed two years of undergraduate education showed a more concentrated focus on *Relationship Building* strengths, possibly reflecting the emphasis on interpersonal connections in the early stages of academic life. These findings add a layer of complexity to the understanding of how various cultural and social influences may shape the development of particular strengths, offering a new avenue for further exploration.

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Given the small sample size, there are opportunities to explore the intersection of gender identity, educational decision-making, and the integration of asset-based approaches. Only two participants – Vera and Sierra – explicitly described how they considered their gender identity in making their decision to attend Asset University. The study also uncovered that Chinese-identified participants, especially women, displayed similar patterns of strengths, with a strong emphasis on the *Relationship Building* domain. Taiwanese-identified participants showed an even more pronounced concentration in this area, suggesting that cultural factors may influence the development of these strengths. In contrast, Vietnamese-identified participants demonstrated a wider variety of strengths across multiple domains, highlighting a broader range of personal skills and attributes. One particularly interesting finding was the identification of strengths within the *Influencing* domain, which was predominantly observed among multi-ethnic, female participants. Future research could further explore the cultural influences that shape the development of strengths within different ethnic groups, especially in relation to gender.

Given the limited participant pool, additional research focusing on specific Asian ethnic subgroups and intersecting identities is necessary. For example, only two participants – Sierra and Cassian – explicitly considered their race and ethnicity when selecting the institution they planned to attend. In addition, several participants shared experiences with numerous salient identities, such as socio-economic status, sibling status, and first-generation status as they discussed their educational journey and experience with asset-based approaches. This highlights the importance of further exploring the intersections of identities and their influence on education and the application of asset-based approaches.

The findings of this study reinforce the notion that the Asian diaspora is not monolithic, emphasizing the importance of disaggregating experiences to challenge the concept of a unified

"Asian identity." To prevent the continuation of stereotypes, racism, and racial stratification, future studies should explore how the unique strengths of specific Asian ethnic groups can be recognized and leveraged (Walton & Truong, 2022). The Asian population is vast and intricately diverse, and educators must not overlook the nuances in students' identities. Instead, they should actively affirm these differences, adapting their practices to meet the needs of a varied student body (Assalone & Fann, 2017; Kumashiro, 2000).

Additionally, examining how these strengths manifest in other contexts, such as in professional settings or across different stages of the educational journey, could provide valuable insights. Comparative studies could also investigate whether similar patterns emerge in other ethnic communities, expanding the understanding of how cultural background impacts the development of various strengths. By honoring and learning from individual stories, educators and researchers can help create an inclusive environment where students' lived experiences are valued, fostering a more supportive and equitable academic space for all. In conclusion, asset-based approaches can provide a framework that recognizes and welcomes these diverse experiences into university spaces.

Conclusion

The findings of this study emphasize the critical role of asset-based approaches, particularly tools like the Gallup CliftonStrengths® assessment, in boosting the retention, success, and employability of Asian American college students. By recognizing and harnessing students' inherent strengths, these approaches not only help address systemic inequities but also promote individual growth. More significantly, they contribute to the transformation of educational systems, steering them toward greater inclusivity and equity. This shift toward asset-

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based practices not only empowers Asian American students to achieve personal success but also catalyzes a broader, systemic change toward more equitable educational environments.

When analyzing the Gallup CliftonStrengths® results, distinct patterns emerged across different ethnic groups, revealing both shared traits and unique variations. These patterns provide a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the strengths students possess, underscoring the diversity within the Asian American student population. By combining Gallup CliftonStrengths® data with in-depth interviews, this study offers valuable insights into how asset-based approaches can enrich the educational experiences of Asian American students. The interview process allowed participants to reflect on their strengths and how these traits have shaped their academic journeys, offering a holistic view of their personal growth and development.

This research highlights the critical need to continue exploring how asset-based approaches can better support the diverse needs of Asian American students. While extensive research exists on Asian American cultural experiences, the Model Minority Myth (MMM), and asset-based frameworks, few studies have integrated all three areas. This study adds to the existing body of knowledge by stressing the importance of recognizing the diversity within Asian American subgroups. Understanding that cultural diversity within racial groups is as significant as diversity between groups (Lindsey et al., 2018) is essential for an accurate understanding of the experiences of Asian American students. The MMM continues to perpetuate the false notion that Asian Americans do not face discrimination or require support. This study reinforces the pressing need for future research to dismantle these stereotypes and explore innovative methods to better serve Asian American students.

In conclusion, the findings of this study present a compelling argument for integrating asset-based approaches into Higher Education, particularly for Asian American students. By

acknowledging and celebrating their unique strengths, educators can help challenge harmful stereotypes, fostering a more inclusive, supportive, and academically enriching environment. This approach has the potential to transform educational systems, shifting from deficit models to a focus on growth, potential, and success for all students.

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Soria, K. M., & Stubblefield, R. (2014). First-year college students' strengths awareness: Building a foundation for student engagement and academic excellence. *Journal of the Fi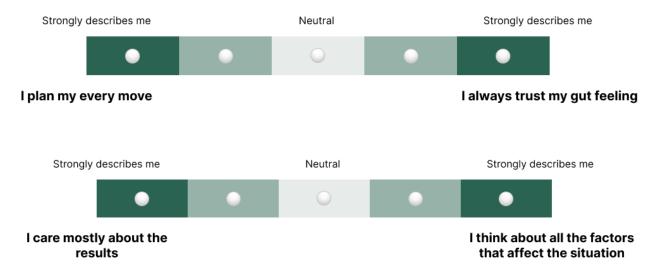rst-Year Experience & Students in Transition, 26*(2), 69-88. https://ezproxy.csusm.edu/login?auth=shibboleth&url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/first-year-college-students-strengths-awareness/docview/1651861576/se-2?accountid=10363

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Appendix A – CliftonStrengths® Image of Questions

Below you will find image samples of the questions on the CliftonStrengths® Assessment:

Strongly describes me   Neutral   Strongly describes me

I plan my every move   **I always trust my gut feeling**

Strongly describes me   Neutral   Strongly describes me

I care mostly about the results   **I think about all the factors that affect the situation**

Appendix B – Data Analysis Connections

Data Analysis: Connections between Research Questions, Themes, Conceptual Framework, & Interview Questions				
Research Questions	Theme	Description	Asian Crit	Interview Questions
RQ1: In what ways and to what extent does the use of asset-based approaches lead Asian American college students to succeed in selected career path?	Impact of Asset-Based Approaches	Interview participants express how assess-based approaches can lead them to succeed in their selected career/major.	Strategic (Anti)Essentialism	Q14 - Q16; Q17 - Q18; Q19 - Q21
RQ1a: How do Asian American college students perceive participation through an asset-based lens/approach? Does this help them accomplish goals or succeed in college?	Impact of Asset-Based Approaches	Interview participants express their thoughts about the Gallup CliftonStrengths results.	Strategic (Anti)Essentialism; Intersectionality	Q9 - Q10; Q13; Q17 - Q18; Q19 - Q21
RQ1b: How might Asian Americans utilize the results of an asset-based approach during/throughout their college experience?	Impact of Asset-Based Approaches	Interview participants express how they have planned or plan to utilize the results from the Gallup CliftonStrengths in their undergraduate education.	Strategic (Anti)Essentialism; Intersectionality	Q14 - Q16; Q19 - Q21
RQ2: How and to what extent does the use of asset-based approaches lead Asian American college students to contradict the Model Minority Myth?	Perceptions of Model Minority Myth	Interview participants express how their Gallup CliftonStrengths results may align with or contradict the Model Minority Myth and Asian American stereotypes.	Asianization; Transnational Contexts; (Re)constructive History; Strategic (Anti)Essentialism; Intersectionality; Story, Theory, and Praxis; Commitment to Social Justice	Q5; Q11 - Q12;
RQ2a: How do Asian American college students use their results from an asset-based instrument?	Impact of Asset-Based Approaches	Interview participants express how they have planned or plan to utilize the results from the Gallup CliftonStrengths in their undergraduate education.	Strategic (Anti)Essentialism; Intersectionality	Q14 - Q16; Q19 - Q21
RQ2b: What factors influence Asian American students' view on success?	Influences of Cultural Upbringing	Factors interviewees shared that influences their view of success, such as, but not limited to: family, friends, socio-economic status, etc.	Asianization; Transnational Contexts; Theory, and Praxis; Commitment to Social Justice	Q1 - Q4; Q6 - Q8; Q16