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Why Class Matters: Understanding the Relationship Between Class, Family Involvement, and Asian American College Students' Success

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Why Class Matters: Understanding the Relationship Between Class, Family Involvement,
and Asian American College Students' Success

A Thesis Presented

by

BLAIR HARRINGTON

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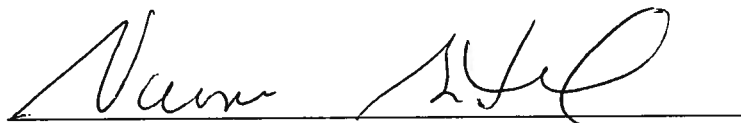
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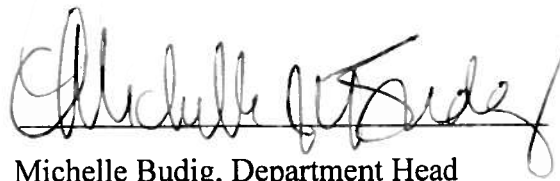
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ABSTRACT

WHY CLASS MATTERS: UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLASS, FAMILY INVOLVEMENT, AND ASIAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS' SUCCESS

SEPTEMBER 2017

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Drawing on intensive interviews with 61 Asian American undergraduates from diverse class and ethnic backgrounds, this paper investigates the relationship between class, family involvement, and student success. I assess three hypotheses derived from the literature. First, social reproduction theorists suggest that parents from advantaged class backgrounds provide more support—economic and cultural capital—to their children than parents from disadvantaged class backgrounds, which leads to greater success for these advantaged offspring. Second, some research challenges this view, arguing instead that class does not impact students' receipt of support or their resulting success. Third, some now suggest that larger amounts of support may undermine success. Employing a trichotomous class design and model of family that includes parents and non-parents, analysis of the interviews reveal that students from advantaged class backgrounds do receive far more economic as well as cultural capital than students from disadvantaged class backgrounds. Yet, how the receipt of that capital impacts student success yields mixed results. Quantitative analysis reveals that the receipt of large amounts of various forms of capital had little or no impact or a slightly negative impact on students' GPAs. Analysis of the intensive interviews, however, suggests the provision of capital created substantially less stress and struggle for students as they navigated the college

environment. These findings challenge popular stereotypes concerning Asian Americans, highlight the complexity of class, and call for broader definitions of family and a reconceptualization of “success”.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We hear a lot in the media about the large number of Asian Americans in higher education, but rarely do we hear that these students come from diverse class backgrounds. A 2005 national survey of college freshman attending four-year universities indicated that 30% of Asian American undergraduates were from households that earned more than \$100,000 a year, 39% were from households that earned between \$40,000 and \$100,000, and 31% were from households that earned less than \$40,000 (Chang et al. 2007). This paper investigates the relationship between class, family involvement, and Asian American college students' success.

Very little research explores this relationship. In fact, there is minimal scholarship on the Asian American family in general. Fang et al. (2008) reviewed over 5,000 articles in eight prominent family-based journals and found that only 39 articles pertained to Asian Americans. Moreover, much of this research focuses on how culture—not class—affects Asian Americans' parenting style (Chao 2002; Museus 2013) and looks at parenting prior to college (Louie 2001, Teranishi 2010). This study contributes to the literature, shedding much needed light on how class affects Asian American undergraduates' receipt of familial support and the ways this support shapes their experiences in higher education. Further, in exploring this relationship, it also provides valuable insight into the meanings students make of their family's contributions.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Three competing hypotheses frame this study. First, social reproduction theory proposes that middle and upper class students receive more capital from their parents—in the form of material and non-material resources—than their working class peers, which make it easier for them to navigate the educational system and achieve professional and financial success. Second some research, challenges this view, arguing instead that class does not impact students’ receipt of support or their resulting success. Third, some now suggest that larger amounts of support may undermine success. I review each of these hypotheses in turn.

The Power of Class

Social reproduction theorists argue that two forms of capital middle class parents provide that are essential to students’ success are economic capital and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). Economic capital refers to the transmission of monetary and other material resources. Cultural capital refers to the transmission of “attitudes, habits, and knowledge” (Waithaka 2014). This paper analyzes both forms of capital, but due to the complexity of the latter, it focuses on the transmission of knowledge; this aspect of cultural capital appeared more prominent and explicit in the student’s narratives of their experiences in college. While all parents provide their children with knowledge, some of it is more relevant to their passage through college than others. When using the term cultural capital, this study refers specifically to such relevant knowledge.

Exposing the inequalities that exist among undergraduates is critical, because most research—both that which is specific to Asian Americans and that which is not—

ignores this time period. It instead examines the inequalities that take place prior to college (Lareau 2011; Louie 2001; MacLeod 2009), in the college admission process (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999; Teranishi 2001), and between college going and non-college going students (Laureau 2015, Swartz 2008). But as some literature on college and university life suggests, social reproduction, of course, also persists within the “black box” of higher education.

The scholarship that investigates social reproduction during college typically focuses on White college undergraduates (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Bathmaker, Ingram, and Waller 2013) and pays little attention the ways race may shape these processes (Kaufman 2005; Nichols and Islas 2015). It advances that students with middle class parents receive substantial amounts of economic and cultural capital from their parents while working class students tend to get far less. With regard to economic capital, studies indicate that many middle class students have their tuition and other expenses paid for (Aries 2008) and receive additional spending money on top of these funds (Kaufman 2005); working class students often receive little monetary support after they finish high school (Swartz 2008) and must rely more heavily on federal and private loans in order to pay for college (Lee and Mueller 2014). Research cites two primary ways middle class students receive cultural capital in the form of knowledge: 1) direct assistance—parents doing things such as helping their children with their assignments (Banks-Santilli 2014) and engaging with school officials on their behalf (Lareau 2015) and 2) advice with respect to their academics (e.g., course selection and test-taking strategies). Studies suggest that working class students receive far less cultural capital;

their parents—unlike middle class parents—are often not college-educated and, therefore, lack a detailed awareness of the higher education system (Austin 2011).

This research demonstrates, or sometimes just assumes, that the capital students do or do not receive from their parents affects their success during college; it, however, employs a narrow definition of the term. Some studies focus on quantitative indicators of success. They analyze the relationship between students' receipt of capital and their GPA data and suggest that there is a positive correlation between parental support and GPA (Nichols and Islas 2015). Other scholarship posits that middle class and working class college students have qualitatively different experiences due to their unequal receipt of capital. It typically focuses on the experiences of working class college students, showing they work long hours in minimum wage positions and frequently worry about money (Austin 2011) and find it difficult to understand assignments and make academic decisions (Banks-Santilli 2014; Lareau 2015). Comparing disadvantaged and advantaged college students, this paper examines their families' provision of economic and cultural capital (or lack thereof) and then analyzes—using quantitative and qualitative indicators of success—their effects on students': 1) GPA and 2) stress and struggle during college.

Minimal scholarship explores how these findings on social reproduction apply to Asian American undergraduates. A number of studies suggest that Southeast Asian American college students (Chhuon et al. 2010; Maramba 2008; Museus 2013; Palmer and Maramba 2015; Tang, Kim, and Haviland 2013) and Asian American college students who are the children of immigrants (Qin and Han 2014; Yeung 2011) have experiences similar to those of working class students more generally. That is, they receive limited capital from their parents and face challenges in college as a result. This

research, however, includes both middle class and working class students and makes few intergroup class comparisons, so it is impossible to disentangle how class—distinct from ethnicity and immigration—affects these students. One study, conducted by Louie (2008), compares middle class and working class undergraduates—and shows that these students do experience social reproduction—but it looks only at Chinese American and Vietnamese American students. The latest census (2010 U.S. Census Bureau) reported that there were 24 different Asian American ethnic groups (excluding Pacific Islanders); so while it is essential that more class-based research be done, it is also essential that this research investigate more ethnically diverse populations of Asian American college students.

Challenges to Social Reproduction Theory

Contrasting social reproduction theory, racial stereotypes and some researchers favor a second, alternative view. They advance that class differences do not create inequities in Asian American students' receipt of capital from their families nor their success. Looking at prevailing stereotypes, they imply that class does not affect Asian Americans in the same way as it does other racial groups. The model minority stereotype, which has its origins in the 1960s, depicts all Asian Americans as educationally and financially successful, regardless of their class background (Li 2008). The more recent tiger mother stereotype similarly disregards class background and portrays all Asian American parents, particularly immigrant mothers from East Asian descent as implementing strict childrearing tactics that garner such achievement (Chua 2011a). In a far less publicized piece, Chua (2011b) modifies this argument to suggest that parents' involvement becomes virtually nonexistent during college, but this claim only furthers

the idea that inequities in familial support do not affect Asian American undergraduates. Although limited research supports these stereotypes, a recent study by Lee and Zhou (2015)—which has garnered much publicity—includes an extensive analysis of class and affirms that class disadvantage does not inhibit immigrant parents' ability to provide Asian American college students with capital. The researchers conclude that working class parents must employ different strategies than middle class parents in order to supply this support, but they, nonetheless, manage to provide equivalent amounts of capital.

Also supporting this view that class does not affect students' receipt of assistance—though in a different way—some literature acknowledges that working class parents do not have the ability to provide as much support as middle class parents; it, however, advances that students from disadvantaged backgrounds can receive these supports from other family members (i.e., siblings and extended kin). While there is non-race specific scholarship (Jaeger 2012; Lareau 2015) as well as scholarship focused on Asian American undergraduates (Chhuon et al. 2010; Louie 2008; Palmer and Maramba 2015) that makes this claim, I argue that exploring the support this latter group receives from family members who are not their parents is particularly important given Asian Americans' cultural emphasis on collectivism (Chao 2002). Maramba (2008) argues this in her research, concluding about Asian American families that, "It is important to understand that the dynamics of the family does not involve only parent relationships but also those of siblings and in some cases extended family such as grandparents' (p.346)". Thus, a number of studies indicate that these family members provide working class college students with invaluable capital, but very few address if this help is enough to override class disadvantage entirely. This paper uses a broader model of family—which

includes parents and non-parents—as it analyzes the amount of capital students receive and how this capital shapes their college experiences.

A third hypothesis concerning the relationship between class, family involvement, and Asian American college students' success counters both a theory proposing social reproduction and one that proposes no effect of capital. Focusing specifically on economic capital, this third group proposes that undergraduates from higher income backgrounds receive more support than their working class peers but that the receipt of large amounts of funding *undermines* academic performance. In their book, *Top of the Class: How Asian Parents Raise High Achievers and How You Can Too*, sisters Abboud and Abboud (2006) assert that—compared to financially advantaged parents—financially disadvantaged parents may find it easier to motivate their children to work hard in college and get good grades. They suggest that financially advantaged parents should not provide their children with excessive funding for this reason. The sisters, however, base their claims on their own personal observations of their parents and their Asian American friends' parents rather than research. A study done by Hamilton (2016) builds upon this argument. Her research on White undergraduates finds that in order for monetary contributions to benefit students' grades, they must be academically or professionally focused; undergraduates who receive large sums of unrestricted funding satisfice (i.e., spend their time socializing and partying), which, in turn, negatively impacts their academics. Similar claims about a potential negative effect associated with an abundance of cultural capital have not been made.

These three competing hypotheses and the limits of existing literature inform this study's research questions. It asks: 1) How do class differences affect the amount and

type of capital Asian American college students receive from their parents?, 2) How do family members other than parents (i.e., siblings and extended kin) affect Asian American college students' receipt of capital?, and 3) How does the receipt of capital (or lack thereof) affect Asian American college students' success in college—both their GPA and their subjective college experience? With each question, this paper examines how students understand and evaluate such family involvement.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Employing a qualitative approach, this study draws on interview data with Asian American college students—from diverse class and ethnic backgrounds—attending a large, predominantly White, public research university in the Northeast. At the time of the study, Asian Americans—international students from Asia excluded—comprised 8% of the school’s population. I conducted intensive, semi-structured in-person interviews with 61 self-identified Asian American college students between August 2013 and December 2013.

I identify as Asian American. As Baca Zinn (1979) proposes, this may have afforded me an “insider” advantage where—due to our racial similarity—participants may have felt more inclined to be candid with the information they provided. I believe it may have made it easier to recruit students as well, because I intentionally made my race evident as I sought participants.

The 61 interviews are part of a larger project, which aims to understand how race, class, and gender shape family involvement in the college experience across Black, White, Asian American, and Latino undergraduates. Fitting with the larger project’s objectives, there were five selection criteria. I sought females and males who were: 1) were non-international students, 2) under the age of 31, 3) did not live with their parents during the school year, 4) full-time students, and 5) in their sophomore year or above.

Most respondents (n=50, 82%) were recruited through email. The university provided a list of all of its full-time students in their sophomore year or above. This list included students’ self-reported race, financial aid data (i.e., whether they received a Pell

Grant, received financial aid but not Pell, applied for but received no financial aid, or had not applied for financial aid), sex¹, year in college, resident status, current GPA, and school email address. Since email recruitment typically garners low response rates (Desilver and Keeter 2015)—especially among college students (Straumsheim 2016)—I emailed most of the non-international Asian American respondents on the list (459 females and 591 males). Far more females—who fit the study’s criteria—responded and volunteered to be interviewed (i.e., 55 females compared to 22 males)², even though I sent some of these males multiple recruitment emails. Other research has similarly found that females are more willing than males to volunteer for interview-based studies (Louie 2004; Nichols and Islas 2015). I intended to interview 25 females and 25 males, but—due to the high female response—I decided to interview 29 of these females and 21 of these males. I recruited the other 6 female and 5 male respondents through respondent-driven sampling and various undergraduate courses; these methods allowed me to find and include more males in my sample. Compared to email recruitment, these latter methods are less preferred because of their potential bias (e.g., selecting students who know each other or are in the same major), but I found no major differences between respondents—with regard to class status, their receipt of capital, or GPA—based on their method of recruitment.

Given this study’s aims, it was important that my sample include respondents from diverse class backgrounds. I used three common indicators of class to assess students’ class status: parental income, education level, and employment. Although this paper considers a broader model of family, I only looked at parents to determine

students' class status because respondents said that their parents were their primary guardians. Students reported these indicators of class for each parent (and stepparent when applicable) during their interviews³. Since this information was not known until the interview, however, I relied on the university-provided information on Pell to assist in the recruitment process. Pell grants are intended to be for low-income students. With this in mind, I intentionally recruited a relatively proportionate number of Pell grant and non-Pell grant recipients⁴.

For the analysis, I assessed each student's class status by first designating them as either advantaged or disadvantaged with regard to each indicator class. While respondents could typically provide information on their parents' education level and occupation, most students indicated that they were not confident of the parental income figure they reported and more than a quarter (n=17, 28%) stated that they did not know how much their parents earned. I, therefore, used both students' reported income figures and the financial aid data to assess parents' income. Students were designated as advantaged in terms of parents' income if they were a non-Pell grant recipient and/or they indicated that their parents had combined incomes of at least \$50,000. They were designated as disadvantaged in terms of income if they were a Pell grant recipient and they indicated that their parents had combined incomes below \$50,000. The U.S. Census Bureau listed \$52,250 as the median household income in 2013, making \$50,000 a useful cut-off for middle class (U.S. Census Bureau 2013). Students were designated as advantaged in terms of parents' education if at least one parent held at least a Bachelor's degree—degrees earned outside of the United States were included. They were

designated as disadvantaged in terms of parents' education if they did not have at least parent who held at least a Bachelor's degree. Students were designated as advantaged in terms of parents' occupation if at least one parent had a professional or managerial occupation (e.g. doctor, lawyer, business owner). They were designated as disadvantaged in terms of parents' occupation if they did not have at least one parent who had a professional or managerial occupation.

Based on previous research, I expected it would be easy to look at these indicators and divide the students into two class categories: middle class and working class. It, however, was not. A portion of the students (n=20, 33%) were advantaged with respect to all three indicators. A portion were disadvantaged with respect to all three indicators (n=26, 43%). That, however, left a sizable portion of students (n=15, 24%) who were advantaged with respect to at least one indicator and disadvantaged with respect to at least one indicator. For example, one Filipina American female—who was not a Pell grant recipient—explained that her parents had a combined income of \$130,000 but neither parent had graduated high school and each worked 60 hours a week on a factory line. Most students in this final grouping (n=10, 67%) described similar situations. That is, they had parents who surpassed the \$50,000 income threshold, but no parent(s) held a Bachelor's degree or a professional or managerial occupation. These three distinct groupings led me to create three class categories: the solidly middle class, working class, and ambiguously middle class. The “ambiguously middle class” is a term developed by Bathmaker et al. (2013), describing parents who have characteristics reminiscent of both the middle and working class.

Comparing these three class categories, they were similar in terms of their gender composition, respondents' age, and year in school. Most respondents were in-state students, but the solidly middle class had greatest percentage of out-of-state students (n=6, 30%), which is not surprising given the higher cost of out-of-state tuition. Though it was unintentional, all students—except one solidly middle class respondent—had at least one parent who was an immigrant to the United States. The majority of students were born and/or raised in the United States, but a portion—from each class grouping—had immigrated to the country in either childhood or adolescence.

With regard to ethnic make-up, respondents represented a total of 15 different Asian ethnicities (i.e. Chinese, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Sri Lankan, Filipino, Asian Indian, Indo-Trinidadian, Thai, Indonesian, Pakistani, Hmong, Singaporean, Taiwanese, Korean, and Tibetan). Some students were multi-ethnic. Addressing the tendency of existing research to focus on a limited number of Asian ethnic groups, I purposefully tried recruiting students who were diverse in terms of ethnicity. I divided the students by ethnic group: East Asian, Southeast Asian, South Asian, and other (i.e., multiethnic or multiracial) to see if there was a relationship between class category and ethnic group and found no relationship. In each class category, most students were either East Asian or Southeast Asian. The working class was unique from the other class categories in that it had a substantially higher percentage of East Asian as compared to Southeast Asian students, 58% and 27% respectively. This does not accord with national data, which suggest that East Asians are more likely than Southeast Asians to be part of the middle class (2010 U.S. Census Bureau).

Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and three hours, with the average lasting one-hour. Students were asked about their receipt of economic and cultural capital: if and/or how much their parents and other family members (i.e., siblings and extended kin) were contributing toward their schooling and other expenses and if these family members helped them with their academics—either through direct assistance on assignments or providing advice with regard to course selection and major. They were asked to explain how they felt about this receipt of support or lack thereof, and how they believed it shaped their college experience—positively or negatively. Also, they were asked to explain their involvement in extracurricular activities and work during the school year; many of the students held jobs indicated the exact number of hours they worked a week.

Each interview was audio recorded, transcribed, and then coded using NVivo 10. The research team for the larger project jointly created both the interview protocol and coding scheme. The coding process entailed inductive and deductive methods. First, broad codes were developed based on the initial open-coding of the interviews and existing theory and research. After interviewing more students and discussing emergent themes, the scheme was then narrowed for more precise codes. Queries and analyses were performed using the codes most germane to this study. I examined economic capital and cultural capital separately throughout my analysis.

To address the study's first two research questions, I analyzed each class of students' receipt of capital (e.g., how did solidly middle class students' receipt of capital from their siblings and extended kin compare to that of ambiguously middle class students). With regard to the third research question, I first designated each student as either receiving or not receiving a large amount of capital based on the following

operationalization: Students were categorized as receiving large amounts of economic capital if they received spending money in addition to having their education-related expenses paid for. Students were categorized as receiving large amounts of cultural capital if they received either direct assistance or advice. I then use the qualitative data on students' sense of stress and struggle and compared the students who received large amounts of capital with those who did not. Although this study is primarily qualitative in nature, in order to observe how the receipt of capital affected students' GPA—the study's other measure of success—I also conducted a quantitative analysis of the university-provided GPA data, comparing the GPAs of “receivers of capital” and “non-receivers of capital”.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Corresponding to the paper's three research questions, the results section is divided into three parts. Part one analyzes how differences in class background affected the amount and kind of capital Asian American college students received from their parents. Part two assesses how siblings and extended kin affected students' receipt of capital. Part three focuses on how students' receipt of support, or lack thereof, from their family members (i.e., parents and non-parents) affected students' success in college.

How Class Differences Affected Students' Receipt of Capital from their Parents

As social reproduction theory suggests, class created inequities in the amount of economic and cultural capital students received from their parents. However, challenging the binary model of class most literature employs—which juxtaposes middle class students as recipients of capital and working class students as non-recipients—I found substantial variation among the three class categories I analyzed: the solidly middle class, working class, and ambiguously middle class. In general, solidly middle class students received the most support from their parents. Working class students received the least. Ambiguously middle class students' receipt of capital typically fell in between these two groupings. I compare the two extremes—solidly middle class students' receipt of support with working class students' lack thereof—looking first at first economic and then cultural capital, before turning to ambiguously middle class students.

Nearly all of the solidly middle class students (90%) reported that their parents helped pay for their schooling. Some simply paid the full expense of their college. When asked how she was paying for college, a Chinese American female said, “My

parents...we don't do loans, because you have to pay those back, right?" A Vietnamese American male similarly explained, "[my mom] just pays the [bill] herself, because she doesn't want me to go to college with loans." While more than half of solidly middle class students (55%) indicated that they had at least some money in loans, the majority said that their parents were helping to pay them off or would be once they graduated. Their parents' assistance did not stop at schooling as they also paid for students' other expenses—school-related and otherwise. One Indonesian American female—an out-of-state student—estimated that her father paid \$40,000 per year out-of-pocket for her tuition, housing, and meal plan costs and paid a similar amount for her older sister who was also attending the university. In addition to this, he gave each daughter \$1,500 in spending money every semester. Like this student, some indicated that their parents sent them a set amount of money in routine intervals (e.g., every month, semester, etc.). Others stated that they were given money whenever they asked for it or had a credit card, which their parents paid for. Illustrating this was a Filipino American male who—when asked how he paid for his cellphone, insurance, and other expenses—responded, "my parents take care of all those things. My credit cards, they take care of that too." Sometimes parents expected that their children maintain a certain GPA in order to receive these funds, but often it was provided without any stipulations.

Conversely, no working class student reported receiving this level of funding from his or her parents. They explained that scholarships, grants, and loans covered the majority of their tuition costs. When asked how she was paying for college, a Korean American female, answered "The majority is financial aid, and then whatever financial aid doesn't cover, I take out a private loan." Adding to this, a Chinese American female

indicated, “My loans are a lot more than what [my parents] are paying.” Many working class students expected that their student loan debt—which they alone would be responsible for paying—would likely reach into the thousands or tens of thousands by the time they graduated college. A small portion of working class students (15%) were loan free, but that was because of scholarships or other family members’ monetary contributions and not their parents’ funding. Parents tried financially contributing as much possible—especially those from Chinese descent⁵—but did not have the economic means to provide as much solidly middle class parents. Some parents assisted their children with their tuition and college fees, but it was more common that they help with smaller expenses (e.g., occasionally buying the student’s groceries or giving them money toward school supplies).

While the middle class students seemed to take for granted, even expected the level of funding they received without commenting on the way this provision might affect their parents, working class undergraduates were far less sanguine. In fact, regardless of the amount of monetary support their parents provided, working class students usually indicated that it was a struggle for their parents to supply these funds, so many resisted accepting their help and employed strategies to avoid financially burdening them. They said things like, “I never ask them for money”, “I basically pay for everything I need unless I’m really tight with money”, and “they paid for the first year [of college], but after that—during that first year—I worked so I would have the money. So I kept saving...so when the bill comes, I pay it.”

In addition to receiving substantial amounts of economic capital, all solidly middle class students had at least one college-educated parent who provided them with

cultural capital. With regard to direct assistance, no student suggested that a parent talked to school officials on their behalf. A few reported that a parent monitored their grades. Several, however, indicated that their parents provided hands-on help with their assignments. An Indonesian American female described how her father provided her assistance with her chemistry course:

I'm taking chemistry this year and I don't understand a lot, and my dad knows a lot about it. So if there's a problem that I don't understand, I'll be like, 'how do you do this?' And then he'll like send me resources and be like go on this YouTube channel and watch it and it'll show you how to do it. Or if I really don't know how to do it, we set up a Skype session, and he kind of goes through it with me.

This student explained that her father was able to provide this help because his work field was similar to her major. Since many parents were not experts in students' specific major or field of study though, students explained that advice-giving was the most frequent form of cultural capital their parents provided. Demonstrating this, a half-Vietnamese, half-Singaporean American stated, "[My mom] didn't take organic chemistry, so she couldn't talk about organic chemistry specifically, but she could talk about test-taking strategies". A Cambodian American female conveyed that her stepfather advised her on "big decisions" in college; she was looking for a job on campus and had asked for his input earlier that day. Many students indicated that they received such advice on a regular basis.

A sizeable portion of solidly middle class students (40%) reported that their parents earned their bachelor's degree outside of the country and, therefore, were not entirely familiar with the American higher education system:

Their experiences are limited to Filipino colleges, and it's very, very different. Even the grading system there is different. So they don't understand sometimes how much pressure there is here. I mean I guess there is more pressure back in the Philippines, but they just don't understand the culture [here]. My parents are first generation immigrants, so there is a large difference because they went to college in Korea. I wouldn't say that there are significant clashes between the two different cultures. It's just that it is different.

Yet these same students reported that their parents had at least a basic understanding of how college operated and provided cultural capital. Thus—based on students' assessments—degree location reduces but does not nullify solidly middle class parents' ability to provide cultural capital.

Working class parents, on the other hand, did not provide cultural capital through either direct assistance or advice-giving. All of these students' parents were first-generation immigrants to the United States. None had graduated college, and more than half had not finished high school in their home country. One Cambodian American male described his parents as "illiterate." These parents were usually highly invested in students' academic and professional success but did not understand how the American higher education system operated, and, therefore, could not discuss these topics in much detail. Illustrating this, a Sri Lankan American female said, "[My mom] just needs to know that I'm doing good. That's all she asks. 'How are your grades? What are you doing?' But that's all she asks. I don't want to say that's all she cares about, but that's all she understands." Another working class student, an Indo-Trinidadian American female, when asked if her father helped with her academic work, responded, "Nope. I get my dad's support and love and kisses and hugs, but that's about it."

A few working class students said that their parent(s) attempted to involve themselves in their academic affairs. A Vietnamese American female conveyed that her mother tried to monitor her academic progress:

My mom constantly tells me, “Do you have enough credits?” And she’ll think like anything can be a credit, like volunteer work or anything. She thinks if I don’t have enough credits I won’t graduate, which is true, but she doesn’t understand exactly what credits are.

A Korean American female similarly described her mother’s failed attempt at providing advice:

My parents don’t really know anything about the college process since they never went to college. And I mean my mom has a very wide social circle, so she’ll talk to her friends whose children have gone to college and she’ll be like, “they said this.” My sister [who went to college] will be like, “it doesn’t apply. Don’t listen to her.”

As these examples show, these parents tried providing cultural capital but were thwarted by their lack of experiential knowledge demonstrating the importance of class and that Asian American parents’ “parenting strategies” were far from monolithic.

Ambiguously middle class students’ experiences were different from both the solidly middle class and working class Asian Americans. Their parents were advantaged with regard to one indicator of class and disadvantaged with regard to another, and this led to their having either of two experiences. A little more than half of the ambiguously middle class students (60%) could be described as lower middle class. That is, their parents made more than \$50,000 a year but not much, and only one of these students had a parent who was college-educated⁶. As a result, these students described receiving little cultural capital from their parents, but their receipt of economic capital fell somewhere in-between that of the solidly middle class and working class students. Their parents did

not provide the recreational funding most solidly middle class parents did. Their financial contributions, however, were larger and more frequent than most working class parents.

A Vietnamese American female described her parents' occasional monetary support:

My parents pay for some of my stuff sometimes. Like when I need money—when I'm really desperate—they help me. My mom like knows my bank account, so she knows how much is my bank account, and sometimes she'll put money in there.

These students—like their working class counterparts—tried to avoid asking their parents for financial help but were more likely to request and/or receive their occasional assistance.

The other ambiguously middle class students (40%) differed in another way from their solidly middle class and working class peers in the support they received from their parents. That is, their receipt of parental support paralleled aspects of both of the other class groupings. Most (83%) described themselves as receiving large amounts of economic but not cultural capital. Their parents were financially secure despite not having earned college degrees. For instance, an ambiguously middle class half-Cambodian, half-Chinese American male described his affluent father as a “financial figure” who paid for his tuition costs out-of-pocket and provided additional funding whenever he asked for it:

Anything I need money for, he gives it to me. If I need books, he'll do that...If I'm going out and I need some money, I will ask him for a little bit. He gives me *plenty* to make sure I'm on the safe side if anything happens.

These responses resembled those given by the solidly middle class participants. This same student, however, went on to say that his father, who was not college-educated, never provided academic advice or help with his assignments. He stated, “My dad

doesn't know the process, so he just lets me do it." This response reflected those given by the working class participants.

These findings show that class played a major role in the support students received from their parents but not in the ways that a typically dichotomous (or even continuous) view of class would suggest. While this study rejects a dichotomous view of class, class remains an important construct for analyzing and understanding the inequality in Asian American college students' experiences. Moreover, the absence of capital did not lead to a devaluation of their parents. Quite the reverse: When working class and ambiguously middle class students described their parents' lack of assistance, they often made it a point to explain that they were not upset with their parents for being unable to supply capital. Speaking to her parents' inability to provide large amounts of economic support, a Vietnamese American female said, "I have a lot of respect for my parents, so I mean I don't ever feel like they holding out on me. They help me when they can." Speaking similarly—but about her parents' inability to provide cultural capital—a Tibetan American female said, "my parents weren't educated...It's not that they didn't want to help me. It's just that they couldn't." Class—not desire—limited their parents' provision of assistance, and that was something she did not want to criticize.

Such inequities in the receipt of parental support among the three class groupings challenge the view that differences in class background do not affect Asian Americans. Yet they also challenge the notion that students—at least Asian American students—can be classified as fitting nicely into the middle class or working class or as either recipients or non-recipients of support. This is a critique both of the ways scholars operationalize

class and a critique of merging the varying forms of capital. Adding to this critique is that parents were not the only providers of capital.

Moving Beyond Parents: Other Family Members and the Receipt of Capital

For many Asian American college students, familial involvement extended beyond parents. Disconfirming what other scholarship suggests, however, class did not seem to affect whether or not a student received this non-parental support. Approximately half of the students within each class grouping reported receiving capital from siblings and/or extended kin. For the solidly middle class students who received this aid, it added to their surplus of capital. For the working class and ambiguously middle class students, it somewhat compensated for their parents' lack of assistance; yet, even with this support, these students rarely received the same amount of capital as their middle class peers.

Most of the solidly middle class students who received capital from siblings and/or extended kin indicated that these family members provided cultural rather than economic capital. While it was common across all class groupings for the exchange of money to remain within the nuclear family, solidly middle class students were the only class category where no student received additional monetary support from a sibling(s). These students' parents were often already contributing more than enough in the way of funding, which may explain why siblings did not supply such assistance. With cultural capital though, students explained that their siblings and extended kin supplemented the support their parents provided. An Indian American female described her parents, both of whom went to college, as providing general academic and career advice. Yet she turned to her cousin for more specific advice. She explained, "Sometimes I email my cousin, who's a lawyer, because I take political science classes and she did that in college, too."

So she might have a bit more advice or insight [than my parents]. So I just email her occasionally if I need help.” A Chinese American female said that she routinely spoke with her cousins before selecting classes:

Since my cousins are in school now they kind of have a feel of what kind of classes there are to take. So they’ll just ask like, “Oh, if you’re taking this class, can you take it with this class too?” Like they kind of know the system.

This latter student suggested that her cousins’ advice was more relevant than her parents’ due to their age, but they were also majoring in related fields. Siblings and extended kin who provided solidly middle class students with supplemental cultural capital were college-educated and often had more specified knowledge about the students’ major and/or coursework as compared to students’ parents. As these comments suggest, focusing only on parents—as so much research does—is a biased view that ignores the importance of broader kin networks in the transmission of class.

Sometimes these kin ties serve not as supplements but instead as substitutes for parental assistance. A portion of the working class and ambiguously middle class students also received capital from their siblings and/or extended kin. It was common for siblings who were working full time—either they had already completed college or had never attended—to put at least some money toward students’ tuition costs or other education-related expenses. An ambiguously middle class Indian American male stated that his older sister was currently contributing between \$100 and \$200 every month for his tuition. In a few instances, students indicated that a sibling paid for most, if not all, of their tuition. A working class Vietnamese American female, in her 5th year of college, stated that her twin brother, who had graduated the year before and secured high-paying employment, was helping her with her student loans:

He has a fulltime job. He's making [a lot of money], so he doesn't mind paying for some of my student loans. [My parents] are both on welfare and receiving Medicaid, so they can't really afford to pay for my education. They're both retired, and they asked my brother if he could pay for my college education because I don't really know where I will be when I graduate.

Most students explained that their siblings' funding went exclusively toward their education. Their receipt of capital, therefore, still did not measure up to that of most solidly middle class students who were often afforded substantial spending money as well. And they paid in another way: A number of these students suggested that they felt guilty for receiving financial assistance from their siblings. The Vietnamese American female whose brother was paying for her college expressed such guilt:

I wish he wasn't helping me so he could save up that money to do whatever he wanted with it. I mean he's still, you know, he's 22. He has lots of dreams and ambitions. So I wish he would treat himself to a nice vacation or something, instead of paying for my student loans.

Despite students not wanting to be financially reliant on their siblings, it was a common and somewhat expected practice that siblings in financially disadvantaged families pool their monetary resources.

Even more working class and ambiguously middle class students received cultural capital—both direct assistance and advice—from their college-educated siblings and (to a lesser extent) extended kin. With regard to direct assistance, a working class Chinese American male explained, “Since I'm in an accounting class and my sister is an accountant, I can ask her questions to prep for exams...[And for help with papers] that would be my other sister who majored in journalism.” With regard to advice, A Korean American female described myriad ways her sister had advised her throughout college:

I think she's probably played the biggest influence on my college experience. Cuz I came in as an undeclared student. So I wasn't sure what I wanted to major in. I had no idea. And as I was taking various classes to see what I might potentially want to major in—like I think my choices at the times were like communication, hospitality and tourism and management [HTM], and women and gender and sexuality studies—and she's just like, “just go for the business school, because [the university] has like a very good business program. It's probably like the best school at [the university]”. So I applied. Like I took the class, and I liked it. So I applied, and I got in as a HTM major so. And then she would always be like, “get involved in clubs. You need to do this. You need to do that”. Um the two jobs that I have on campus were mostly her influence. And last year, her senior year and my sophomore year, we roomed together. So she was like a constant presence.

While working class and ambiguously middle class students often requested their siblings' assistance—as this latter example demonstrates—students' siblings frequently initiated this provision of cultural capital as well. It seemed that many of these older siblings—since they were first generation college students themselves and understood the struggles associated with college—believed that it was their responsibility to supply their younger siblings with the cultural capital they had gained. Demonstrating this, the Chinese American male in the example above discussed how his eldest sister actively monitored his email, “My sister has access to my school email, because that's one of the clauses, one of the requirements that she kind of wants...It was emphasized and kind of forced.” When describing why her older sister provided her with advice, the Korean American female said, “My sister basically didn't want me to make the same mistakes that she did when she came to college.” Rather than simply providing occasional support to students, these students' siblings were highly invested in their college experience.

As these findings show, family members other than parents played an integral role in many Asian American college students' receipt of capital, suggesting that analyses of Asian American families need to utilize a broader model of family that includes parents

and non-parents. Yet while these non-parental contributions proved critical for the working class and ambiguously middle class students who did not receive such support from their parents, they did not eliminate the effects of class. First, some solidly middle class students also received this aid, which further increased their surplus of capital over the other two class categories. Second—even employing this broader model of family—working class and ambiguously middle class students rarely received large amounts of both economic and cultural capital. Lastly, not all working class and ambiguously middle class students were recipients of such support; approximately half did not receive capital from either siblings or extended kin.

How the Receipt of Capital (or Lack Thereof) Affected Students’ Success

The study’s final research question asks how the receipt of capital (or lack thereof) from family members affects Asian American students’ success in college. I explored two indicators of success: 1) students’ GPA and 2) the stress and struggle they incurred while navigating the college environment. For each indicator, I discuss the effects of receiving economic capital and cultural capital separately, since it was possible for a student to receive one form of support and not the other.

Table 1 compares the mean GPA and standard deviation of students who received large amounts of capital to those who did not by capital type.

Table 1. GPA and Receipt of Capital

	Economic Capital		Cultural Capital	
	Received (N=25)	Did Not Receive (N=36)	Received (N=35)	Did Not Receive (N=26)
Mean GPA(SD)	3.11(.51)*	3.36(.38)	3.17(.43)	3.37(.46)

*Significantly different from “Did Not Receive” (p<.05)

After confirming that the data were relatively normally distributed, I then conducted independent samples t-tests for each form of capital. The test for economic capital showed that students who received large amounts of economic capital ($\bar{x}= 3.11$, $SD= .51$) had significantly lower GPAs than students who did not receive large amounts of capital ($\bar{x}=3.36$, $SD=.38$); $t(42) = .256$, $p=.038$. This finding runs counter to social reproduction theory, instead lending some support to hypothesis three—the argument Hamilton (2016) makes about satisficing (i.e., funding in college can detract from students' academic performance).⁷ With cultural capital, students who received large amounts of support had a lower mean GPA ($\bar{x}= 3.17$, $SD= .43$) than those who did not ($\bar{x}= 3.37$, $SD= .51$). The difference between groups, however, was not significant, $t(52) = .192$, $p= .1$. Fulgini, Riveria, and Leininger (2002) suggest that parental class disadvantage can motivate students to work harder in order to be successful, and this may further explain why a lack of capital did not negatively impact students' academic performance. Taken in combination, these findings on economic and cultural capital do not demonstrate that their receipt enhanced students' grades.

The qualitative data suggest something much different. Comparing the responses of students who received large amounts of capital to those who did not—for both economic and cultural capital—it was evident that students who received large amounts of capital endured far less stress and struggle in college. For each form of capital, I first describe the experiences of students who received support and then contrast these experiences with those of students who did not receive such support.

Students who received large amounts of economic capital from their families spent their time on campus much differently than the students who did not. Substantiating

what other scholarship has found, students who received monetary support from their families were less likely to work during the school year than those who did not. A Filipino American male explained that he did not work during the school year because, “I prefer to use that time for school and friends.” A half-Cambodian, half-Chinese American said similarly, “I’ve never really had a job, like a long term job. The most I’ve done was uh...a sales position during winter break.” For these students, having a job aside from being a student was optional, and several said that their parents actually dissuaded them from working during the school year. An Indonesian American female described what her parents had told her when she asked them if she should find a job, “No, you don’t have to work. You’re doing okay. Just hold your money. Just take our money.” To be sure, some students who received large amounts of economic capital did work, but most explained that they opted to do so for professional development purposes—to enhance their résumés—rather than for the money they received (i.e., they expected that this work would benefit their future success). It was common for students receiving family funding to be involved in multiple résumé-boosting extracurricular and volunteer activities, all of which were unpaid.

In contrast, the majority of students who did not receive large amounts of economic capital from their families worked during the school year in order to support themselves. Not working was not an option for these students. Many held two jobs simultaneously and worked 20 or more hours a week—a significant amount especially considering that they were full-time students—in positions they did not view as résumé-boosters. Describing her typical work schedule, a Vietnamese American female said, “Usually for the tea shop in town I work 14 hours a week and the security job, they’re

like 4-hour shifts and I work them Monday, Wednesday, and Friday or Saturday.” An Indo-Trinidadian American female who worked 30 hours a week in two different work study positions disclosed, “I’m like 10 [hours] over the [work study] limit.” Showcasing the stress caused by working, a Cambodian American female explained that she had transferred to the university—which cost less for her to attend than her former school—so that she could reduce her work hours:

It was a five night a week job. So I would barely have time to do anything I wanted. It was literally school, dinner for five minutes...pretty much shovel everything into my face...work, homework, sleep, repeat. It was such a stressful lifestyle I realized maybe there is something else I can do to better my experience in college.

A Korean American female who was currently working 21-26 hours a week voiced this same sentiment: “Between working and schoolwork and wanting to sleep, there’s not much time.” As these females demonstrate, many students who worked long hours indicated that they did not have time to participate in unpaid extracurricular or volunteer activities. In fact, when asked if she was involved in any activities, the Indo-Trinidadian female responded: “I work and I think that is an activity and an organization. I work for the campus hotel. I also work for the residential campus programs...so I guess that’s an extra-curricular activity.” These students did not believe that working negatively affected their grades—which was reflected by the GPA data—but it did create much strain for them.

The amount of economic capital a student received also affected the extent to which they monitored and worried about their finances while in college. Students who received substantial funding from their families spent little time thinking about money and in their interviews seldom mentioned monetary struggles. In fact, many of these

students said that they were largely oblivious as to how much their education and other expenses were actually costing, because their parents—or whatever family member was providing economic capital—took care of all their financial matters. As one Chinese American male stated, “I don’t really know finances at all...I’m literally blind.” A Thai American female said that she once questioned her parents about money and was told, “You don’t ever need to worry about money.” Another student, a Chinese American male, indicated that the large financial investments his parents gave him were specifically meant to make his time at the university as stress-free as possible. He explained, “They want to shove money down my throat...They’re like he must be really stressed and not able to pay for all this stuff”. Thus, the receipt of economic capital allowed students the ability to focus on their college experience without being burdened by financial concerns.

Conversely, students who did not receive large amounts of economic capital from their families frequently spoke of money-related struggles they faced in college, as they found it difficult to pay for their daily expenses and education costs. An Indo-Trinidadian American female described, “I live paycheck to paycheck”, and this was something that was common for these students. They had to budget their money closely and restrict their spending as much as possible. A Vietnamese American male said his financial strategy was simply, “Don’t spend money.” A Chinese American male said that he had still not bought the \$200 textbook one of his courses required because of its cost. A Vietnamese American male similarly stated, “I haven’t been buying books ever [laughing].” When I asked, “Is that because of the money or...?” He answered, “Yes. I work with friends. I make friends who have books, and we work together.” These students had no choice but to think about their finances and explained that they were often a source of substantial

anxiety. Take for instance, a Vietnamese American female who feared she might have to forgo a semester of college for monetary reasons:

At the beginning of this semester I wasn't planning to like drop out but to take this semester off because we didn't have the financial package come in until like a week before like the school started. It was very stressful, and I didn't want to go to school. I didn't want to tell my mom like, 'oh, we can't afford school right now, because you have to pay 13,000 like right off the bat.' And where was I going to get that money? So I was really stressed out, and a lot of time in my mind I kept thinking oh, maybe I should not [go], like I should just drop out and get a job now.

Another Vietnamese American female explicitly compared her experience to students who received such support: "It's hard looking at other families who are like so, you know...looking at other students like whose parents like pay for everything. They don't have to think about these things at all." These students were very aware of their financial disadvantage and understood that receiving more funding would make navigating college far less challenging. Further, it is important to reiterate that this study focuses only on current college students, it is likely that some students who experience financial strain drop out of college.

Turning to cultural capital, although its receipt (both direct assistance and advice) did not significantly impact students' grades, family members' provision of it—like economic capital—resulted in less stress and struggle for students. Speaking to students who had a family member(s) helping them with assignments, they did not suggest that this assistance made it easier for them to complete their assignments. It seems that these students may not be recognizing their advantage, because many students who did not receive help with their coursework—when asked how they felt about their family's involvement with their academics—were explicit in saying that they desired such involvement and that it would make doing their assignments far less challenging. A

Vietnamese American male said, “Sometimes I wish like there was someone to like help me out, because sometimes I do get confused. I don’t know everything. So I can’t just be like oh I should do this and this and this.” A half-Cambodian, half-Chinese American male provided a similar response:

I’ve had plenty of times where I wished there was actually someone there because like my role has always been the foothold helping [my younger siblings]. But sometimes I need a foothold, and there’s not one there for me.

And yet another student, a part Vietnamese, part Chinese American female expressed, “I mean I definitely would have loved if they could have helped me... But because they couldn’t do that, I felt like it was very stressful doing everything myself.” These students did not suggest that having a family member’s help would necessarily improve their grades, but they believed it would make the process of completing their coursework less arduous.

According to students’ responses, family members’ provision of cultural capital had an even greater impact, however, and that was on students’ ability to make academic decisions. Both students who received cultural capital and those who did not reported experiencing instances of academic uncertainty during college (e.g., being unsure of how to talk to professors, what courses to select, what their major choice should be, etc.), but the former explained that the support they received from their family members helped them resolve these uncertainties. A Chinese American female explained that she was extremely confused and anxious about class selection until her older, college-educated sisters helped her figure out what to do:

When I switched majors and was freaking out about what to take, my sister who went here was like, “This is what I [took]... You can look online and do this.” They kind of did all the research for me, because I was like, “Oh, I kind of want

to do business school”. And they looked and were like, “Ok. These are the classes you need for the business school.”

Yet the most significant academic decision many students explained that their family members assisted them with was their major choice. Contrary to the tiger mother stereotype that suggests parents demand that their child select certain majors (e.g., the hard sciences, engineering, or computer science), these students stated that their parent—or other college-educated family who provided cultural capital—helped them select something they were happy with. For instance, a Taiwanese American female, in her junior year of college, said that she recently went to her father when she realized that she was unhappy in her science-related major. His advice to “research about these different majors that were available and to see which one actually interested [her]” lead her to change her major to linguistics, a choice she said she was far more content with. A Vietnamese American female advanced that she would not know what to major in had her sister not assisted her with the decision:

She was the only person who made me like become a nursing major. And if she didn't do that, honestly I don't know what I'd be doing, like in terms of like successfulness. Because it's like maybe I would have done business...but I don't think that would have been more fulfilling than nursing.

In fact, no student receiving this support indicated that they were entirely discontent with or unsure of their major choice, regardless of what year they were in college. Thus, these examples demonstrate that students whose family members provided cultural capital did experience some stress and struggle with their academic decision-making, but the assistance these students received made that this stress and struggle short-lived.

Unlike these students, those who did not receive cultural capital often spoke about how they found it challenging to make academic decisions and were left not knowing

what do. A Vietnamese American male in his junior year of college had already switched his major six times, but was still unhappy with his choice. When asked how his parents felt about his current major, he said, “They think I know what I’m doing. They think like I have it under control, and that’s the last thing I am: under control about this. I’ve been like nonstop paranoid about what I want to do since I’ve walked into this college.” This student did not directly attribute his uncertainty with his major choice to his family members’ lack of advice, but many did. A Hmong American male said, “There was never any guidance.” Even more, many students described that their family members’ inability to provide cultural capital led to them having difficulty choosing a major and making academic decisions in general. A Vietnamese American female voiced this sentiment:

I don’t know what to do if I have a conflict. Like whether I want to take this class or this class or like what I want to do with my life. It’s kind of hard, because they don’t, I feel like they don’t have any preference. They’re just like, “go do what you want to do.” But if I can’t decide, how is that going to help, you know?

A Cambodian American male expressed a similar view:

Coming to college is a big decision and choosing a major. Almost every step along the way can have a great impact on how further decisions will be made. So I think [my family] was not there when I made those decisions, so I had to make them alone. I think it creates a burden on me. Something that I see other peers getting assistance with [from their families] that I don’t. It almost creates a sort of mentality of why do they have these types of supports and why do I not have these types of supports? Or why are we different from other families type of deal? ...So it’s almost like you don’t know where to go when you have to find someone to lean on.

These students desired their family members’ advice, and not receiving it—although it did not negatively impact their grades—did create a sense of hardship on their path to earning a college degree.

This study looked at multiple indicators of success—both students’ GPAs and their stress and struggle—to investigate how the receipt of capital affected Asian

American college students' success. An analysis of the former did not suggest that the receipt of capital was tied to greater student success. It actually suggests the opposite may hold.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

To better understand the relationship between class, family involvement, and Asian American college students' success this study drew on interviews with 61 Asian American undergraduates from diverse class and ethnic backgrounds. It investigated 1) how class affected the amount of capital students received from their parents, 2) how family members other than parents (i.e., siblings and extended kin) affected students' receipt of capital, and 3) how the receipt of capital (or lack thereof) affected students' success. This study's findings challenge and expand upon existing hypotheses regarding this relationship. That is, it found none of the existing hypotheses to be entirely correct and, instead, advances its own.

With regard to the first research question, this study found that students from advantaged class backgrounds received far more economic and cultural capital from their parents than students from disadvantaged class backgrounds. This finding challenges the notion that parents from different class backgrounds provide their children with equivalent support (Chua 2011a, Lee and Zhou 2015). While other scholarship (Louie 2008; Nichols and Islas 2015) describes the significance of class, it largely describes class in dichotomous terms: advantaged parents—those in the middle or upper class—provide capital while disadvantaged parents—those in the working class—do not. This study found a trichotomous designation of class—solidly middle class, working class, and ambiguously middle class—far more useful. That is, looking at parents' income, education level, and occupation, there were a sizable proportion of students who could not be categorized as wholly advantaged or wholly disadvantaged with regard to class.

Bathmaker et al. (2013), who developed the categorization ambiguously middle class, advanced that these students mimicked those in the solidly middle class in terms of the capital they received from their parents. I found this not to be the case. Rather, there were clear distinctions between the three class categories. As a trend, solidly middle class students received large amounts of economic and cultural capital while working class students received large amounts of neither. Ambiguously middle class students' receipt of support fell in-between these two classes. They either 1) received a moderate amount of economic capital—in-between that of the other two class groupings—and little cultural capital or 2) received a large amount of one form of capital and little to none of the other.

In addition to challenging a binary model of class, I found additional ways the support Asian American college students received from their parents differed from existing literature. I found that while most solidly middle class students received large amounts of cultural capital from their parents, they were much more likely to receive advice as compared to direct assistance. I also observed that parents attaining their Bachelor's degree outside of the United States lessened but did not eliminate their ability to provide cultural capital. Since most of the scholarship that describes class differences in parents' provision of capital pays little attention to how race may affect this process (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013, Nichols and Islas 2015)—and that which looks at Asian Americans often contains little ethnic diversity (Louie 2008)—this may somewhat explain the findings of this study.

With regard to the second research question, this study confirmed what a small amount of research has suggested; that is, siblings and extended kin provided capital for some students (Chhuon et al. 2010; Palmer and Maramba 2015). Yet—as a trend—these

family members' investments did not nullify the importance of class: 1) Some solidly middle class students received this support, adding even more to the capital they possessed, 2) Even adding in the support of siblings and extended kin, students in the working class and ambiguously middle class seldom received large amounts of both economic and cultural capital, and 3) Many working class and ambiguously class students did not receive such assistance. Thus, this support helped some working class and ambiguously middle class students receive more in the way of capital, so it is important to include both parents and non-parents in analyses of familial support. Employing a broader definition of family does not eliminate the significance of class.

With regard to the final research question, this study found evidence both against and in favor of the receipt of large amounts of capital having a positive impact on student success. It operationalized success in two ways: students' GPA and their stress and struggle in college. Analysis of the GPA data implied that the receipt of capital was not important to student success—when looking at cultural capital—or possibly even a detraction from it—when looking at economic capital. Yet taking into account students' understandings (i.e., the stress and struggle they endured while in college) reveals a more intricate or complex understanding of the relationship between class and family assistance. The receipt of capital made it easier for students to achieve success, while the lack of capital made it more challenging. This study, therefore, calls for a conceptualization of success that indicates outcomes but also entails an assessment of the experiences and processes underpinning those outcomes.

Although this study's findings on success were mixed, it does not suggest that students' lack of capital can or should be ignored. Students who did not receive support

clearly demonstrated that—while their grades may not be impacted—they desired greater assistance and experienced substantial difficulty in college due to their lack of it. With this third question, it is also important to remember the relationship between class and students' receipt of capital. Compared to the other class categories, solidly middle class students were the ones most likely to receive large amounts of both economic and cultural capital. They, therefore, also experienced the least amount of stress and struggle in college. Social reproduction did operate among these students but was somewhat masked because of the GPA data as well as the fact that it was possible for a student to receive one form of capital—experience “success” with regard to one form of capital—but not the other.

It is important that more research is done to corroborate the findings reported here. As described, this study was not longitudinal, so I could only consider indicators of success within the college experience. What will happen to these students with regard to their professional success once they leave college is unknown. Also, the interview data relied entirely on students' accounts. Parents and other family members may discuss their involvement in undergraduates' experiences differently, though doing such an investigation would be difficult considering that so many different family members were involved in providing support. Further, many of these family members lived outside of the United States or had immigrated to the country but spoke limited English. Similar research should be conducted at universities in other regions of the country and explore schools that are privately funded to observe how the Asian American college students in these settings compare to those described by this research. Since all but one of the

respondents had at least one immigrant parent, immigration may well affect this study's findings.

Though this investigation attempted to recruit an ethnically diverse sample, the number of students of South Asian descent was relatively small. The university-provided list also excluded students who identified as Pacific Islander. It is possible that a sample of different ethnic composition would influence the results. Based on the interview data, however, this study argues that class differences trump ethnic differences and other locations with regard to students' receipt of capital. For instance, although my sample included more females than males, both groups were similar in their receipt of capital. That is, 43% of females and 38% of males received economic capital, and 60% of females 54% of males received cultural capital. Future analyses should be attuned to both ethnic and gender differences to further gauge their impact.

Especially for quantitative analysis of GPA, future research should utilize larger sample sizes. The study's respondents had significantly higher GPAs ($\bar{x}=3.26$, $SD=.45$) than that of the 1,174 Asian American students on the registrar-provided list ($\bar{x}= 3.13$, $SD=.54$); $t(69) = .13$, $p=.033$. So it is possible that self-selection, in two senses, influenced the study's findings on success. First, Students with low GPAs who received little capital from their families may not have volunteered to participate in the study. Second, some students who experience financial strain drop out of college, and it is unclear how the inclusion of these students' GPA data may have impacted the study's results.

Despite these limitations, this paper has significant policy implications. Currently, few efforts are directed toward helping Asian American undergraduates succeed in college and after. Due largely to racial stereotypes—and possibly due to the somewhat

masked nature of students' difficulties discussed above—most universities do not perceive Asian Americans as needing assistance. This study shows that most working class and ambiguously middle class students do face difficulties achieving success. Their pathways are typically more blocked, contain greater stress and struggle, than their more affluent peers. Universities should aim to reduce the amount of stress and struggle these students experience. These resources include money, but also the implementation of programs aimed at helping first-generation students. Several working class students explained their high schools had special programs that helped them with the college application process. No student described a similar program at the college level. Some working class and ambiguously middle class students explained that, while they were in college, they relied on ethnic organizations (see Tang et al. 2013 for similar argument) or fraternities and/or sororities for some of these supports. Universities can do more to promote greater and more inclusive participation in such organizations.

APPENDIX

ENDNOTES

¹ The registrar data provided students' self-reported sex rather than their gender identity, but none of the Asian American respondents indicated that their sex and gender did not align. Sex and gender, therefore, are used interchangeably throughout the paper.

² The response rate for this study cannot be calculated, since it unknown how many individuals who did not respond to the email fit the study's criteria.

³ Students were not asked to provide this information for parents whom they indicated provided them with no support—financial or otherwise.

⁴ I recruited Pell grant recipients somewhat more heavily for this study, because I realized—during the interview process—that Pell is an imprecise indicator of parental income for low-income students. That is, not all Pell grant recipients were low income according to my study's definition of financially disadvantaged.

⁵ Although this study found few ethnic differences among its participants, the parents of Chinese American students were apt to provide more in the way of economic capital compared to other low-income parents. Students suggested there was a cultural rationale, saying things like “Chinese parents would love to the pay the tuition for their children.” These parents still, however, did not provide the level of funding of most solidly middle class parents.

⁶ This student was ambiguously middle class because neither parent held a professional or managerial occupation (i.e., his parents were advantaged in terms of income and education level but disadvantaged in terms of employment).

⁷ I did not differentiate between what students received predominantly professionally focused funding and those who did not.

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