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### Asians Applying for Postsecondary Success: Students, Schools, and Socioeconomic Status

Avery M.D. Davis

*The Graduate Center, City University of New York*

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ASIANS APPLYING FOR POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS:  
STUDENTS, SCHOOLS, AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

by

AVERY M. D. DAVIS

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2020

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Asians Applying for Postsecondary Success: Students, Schools, and  
Socioeconomic Status

by

Avery M. D. Davis

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal  
Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

Asians Applying for Postsecondary Success: Students, Schools, and  
Socioeconomic Status

by

Avery M. D. Davis

Advisor: Juan Battle

Higher education recruitment rates are rapidly declining as schools are stymied by dynamic demographic shifts and a competitive ecosystem. Despite the constant realities of this challenge for tertiary institutions, the complexities of the interplay for demographics, student motivation, parental influences, and school environments during the postsecondary education application process is often overlooked. This thesis analyses how these four domains impact Asian American students within the Education Longitudinal Study (ELS) in terms of the number of postsecondary schools to which they apply? This study examines a sample ( $N = 662$ ) of the ELS by employing multivariate regression analysis on the number of postsecondary schools to which these students apply to during the first round of applications. The analysis suggests that parental implications are not significant influencers for these students as previous literature suggests. The paramount predictors in this process are socioeconomic status and students' belief in their own potential. Although every system involved in this progression impacts this critical process, special effort should be made by scholars, educators, administrators, and policymakers to continue to develop policies and practices that support these primary postsecondary education application influencers of socioeconomic status and self-aspirations.

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## **Introduction**

Educational systems are changing at every level, from kindergarten to postsecondary schooling. Higher education institutions are affecting some of these changes by collaborating with states to develop creative solutions for sustainability, looking to educational models and student decision-making patterns from across the globe as a knowledge base from which to inform best practices. To expand the available understanding on student decision-making patterns, this thesis aims to explore the factors that impact Asian American students' choices during the postsecondary education application process. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed the ecological systems theory in which he noted that humans develop in concert with their interactions through various aspects of their environments. Considering the current study within this theoretical framework, this thesis analyzes the unique components of the micro-, macro-, and meso-systems within which Asian American students determine their paths to a postsecondary education, in part, by continually examining the underlying decision points during the critical tertiary education application process. In this work, postsecondary education is defined as any formal education pursued after high school, including studies at colleges, universities, vocational-technical institutions, and trade schools. This intensive study into the higher education application process and factors that impact it was motivated by my quantitative and sociological interests and by my career in higher education.

The lack of a college education in today's world gives rise to extreme challenges in social mobility. However, while education and schooling, as part of the social division of labor, are central to modern society, the pursuit of education can be hindered by intervention from the government and the public. In the United States, individual states are legally responsible for the education of resident students, but ultimately, parents are the lawmakers who determine the

guidance, education, and protection that their children receive. Although parents generally convey that they are acting in the best interests of their children, unique factors inherently affect students' decisions whether to let their parents influence their choices. However, research on this topic is scant. Moreover, higher education research does not generally focus on the process of applying to and selecting a postsecondary school (Weiler, 1994). This is intriguing in the sense that without the application process, there is not an opportunity for successful enrollment.

Many scholars have studied the experiences of students enrolled in college, but students' experiences prior to enrollment, e.g., during the postsecondary education application process, and the background of those involved in the process, have received little scholarly attention. Therefore, this thesis analyzes particular concepts that impact the postsecondary education application process for students, including demographics in general, student motivation, parental influences, and school environments. Theoretically, investigating these influencing factors—in particular, the impact socioeconomic status has on the application process—will enable institutions to adjust their offerings and their recruitment approaches to reduce stress-inducing aspects and make other improvements based on the findings. This research may also advance parental understanding of the influence, both positive and negative, they exert on their children during the process. Moreover, postsecondary institutions could further benefit from the reciprocal effect of questioning applicants on how to retain students at their institutions. However, this exchange, without input from parents, will not provide sustainable insight on how schools can better recruit and retain students.

This thesis also explores the theoretical framework expressed by Émile Durkheim (1933) and John Dewey (1905), who asserted that institutions are meant to provide moral education for students to support their efforts to contribute positively to society. This topic presents interest

and criticality to scholarship because of the importance of how Asian American students are viewed around the world, considering they are the ones ultimately enrolled in the academic institution or program. The view of Asian students, in particular, is commonly based on their performance in schools, which is perceived as a critical factor in their ultimate career success (Liu & Xie, 2016).

The dataset employed for this study is Asian American students recruited for the 2002-2012 Education Longitudinal Study (ELS) who were followed from their sophomore year in high school through eight years after their expected date of high school graduation; data used in the current research comes from the initial ELS cohort study. The sample population broadly consists of high-performing students with two-parent/guardian families who were able to pay for their children's education. Parents of high socioeconomic status enroll their children where experienced teachers worked and where testing results demonstrated that students excel (Qiu & Wu, 2011).

This thesis uses the ELS study as guidance in developing ordinary least square regression models centered on the dependent variable to derive insights into the core issue of this research (student predictors influencing their postsecondary school application process). The dependent variable in this study is the number of postsecondary schools to which Asian American students applied during their first round of applications. The key independent variables that are analyzed include the following: race, gender, socioeconomic status, having two parents/guardians, school urbanicity, school controls (public vs. non-public), students' desired educational outcome, the value of education, motivations to study, the enjoyment of reading, the enjoyment of mathematics, parents' desired educational outcomes of their students, parents desire more education post-high school, parental expectations of success, college discussions with students,

school quality, student enjoyment of school, peer effects, and school safety. These factors all potentially impact students' decisions on their postsecondary education.

This study will attempt to answer three primary research questions related to these potentially influential factors:

1. How can higher education institutions understand the various components associated with the shifting demographic landscape of undergraduate students?
2. What are the relative impacts of demographics, student motivation, parental influences, and school environments on the postsecondary education application process of Asian American students?
3. For Asian American students, does gender affect students' motivation to apply for postsecondary education?

The analysis of the research variables and previous scholarship are both used to answer the research questions. To arrive at these answers, this study uses multiple regression analysis to examine the relative impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable, which is the number of postsecondary institutions to which Asian students apply. The independent variables are classified into four domains: demographics, student motivation, parental influences, and school environments. To determine any differences within the predictors of the postsecondary education application process, this study will analyze how these domains operate for males and females, both as one group and separately.

In addition to assessing the core issue of socioeconomic status over children's postsecondary school application process, this study will further examine whether parents and school environments significantly impact students' choices during the postsecondary education application process. If so, the strongest predictor will be evenly distributed amongst student

motivation, parental influences and school settings. This paper will conclude with a discussion of public policy responses for postsecondary institutions and high schools to implement in an effort to enhance student motivated qualities in ultimately being meaningful contributors to society with high levels of postsecondary educational attainments.

### **Background and Literature Review**

The primary focus of this study is to examine the relative impact of four domains on the postsecondary education application process for Asian American students: I) demographics, II) student motivation, III) parental influences, and IV) school environments. The dependent variable (the number of postsecondary schools to which these Asian American students apply) and the independent variables as noted previously are categorized into these four domains. Previous research on these domains and on outcomes explored in this study are discussed in the following sections. Although much of the research reviewed here relates to the postsecondary education application process, some of the literature examines other educational attainment and career outcomes related to the variables considered in the study.

To provide context for exploring the impact of the number of postsecondary schools to which Asian American students apply, prior research on demographics (Domain I) has been included. Much of this research seeks to explain the socioeconomic status and family composition of Asian Americans, including gender, school controls (public vs. non-public), and urbanicity. Additionally, the research on student-related variables evaluates their desire to continue their education, their motivation to study, and their enjoyment of particular subjects. Similarly, a large body of research on parental influences is included in this section to convey their impact on the postsecondary education application process. Finally, school environments,

including teacher quality, student behavior, and school safety are integrated as factors that potentially impact the postsecondary education application process.

### **The Postsecondary Education Application Process**

Across the globe, education has mostly been considered a necessary staple in children's lives. Some scholars have employed the foundations perspective when examining education, which advocates the adoption of various approaches, encompassing historical, philosophical, sociological, and political components to understand the way the world thinks about schools and the societies in which they exist. This perspective must be analyzed not only from the experience of a single teacher, student, or household, but also from a collective experience, because all involved individuals contribute to the holistic educational experience of a student (Sadovnik, Cookson Jr., Semel, & Coughlan, 2018). The consideration of these approaches is important to ensure that schools are effectively developing students holistically to meaningfully contribute to society. It can be argued that outside of finding a life partner, no greater choice is made than the selection of a postsecondary institution. Therefore, one of the primary ways of preparing to be a contributing member of society begins with the postsecondary education application process.

This process is a crucial step in the pursuit of a college education (Robinson & Roksa, 2016). However, although extensive research on various aspects of higher education exists, little of it directly analyzes the application process and the critical relation of predictability and interactivity among pertinent factors, including student motivation, parental influences, and school environment, during the process of choosing a postsecondary school. One study found consensus on the reason for applying for postsecondary education, but the number of colleges to which Asian American students applied varied; half of the students applied to seven or more schools with some to as many as eleven (Kim & Gasman, 2011). Ralitsa Todorova (2018)

expressed the importance of the college application essay as a factor in this process, noting that sub-values include intellectual confidence and personal growth. This is directly connected to students' motivation to apply to postsecondary institutions in an effort to meaningfully contribute to society. The conditions that influence students' postsecondary education application process, which are examined in this study, are described in the following sections, beginning with demographics, followed by student-related issues, then parental influences, and finally, the school environments.

### **Demographics**

With any project in educational studies, it is critical to understand the identity of the group. The demographics set forth in this study include the following: race, gender, socioeconomic status, having two parents/guardians, school urbanicity, and school control (public vs. non-public). Race and ethnicity relations to school performance and educational attainment have thoroughly been examined in literature. Race has been defined as “a social construct that has both self-prescribed and externally ascribed meaning”; thus, race in the United States has had “more social and political meaning than biological reality” (Howard, 2010, p. 96). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), Asian is defined as a person who is native to the following countries: China, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam. Asians have been known to academically outperform white, black, and Hispanic students (Sadovnik et al., 2018). This effort is connected to their comparative postsecondary success. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2016), 86% of Asian students graduated from high school, and 51.4% obtained a bachelor's degree. In comparison, 88.7% of whites graduated high school, but only 31% earned a bachelor's degree, while Asian students outperformed black and Hispanic students in attainment



of both high school and bachelor's degrees: 83.8% of blacks graduated high school, while 19.5% received a bachelor's degree; 64.9% of Hispanics earned their high school diploma, and 14.3% earned a bachelor's degree (as cited in Sadovnik et al., 2018). These numbers support previous findings, which note that Asian Americans are more likely to complete college and obtain postsecondary degrees (Hirschman & Wong, 1986; Lee & Zhou, 2015).

An additional student demographic component of particular concern in this research is gender. Historically, females were less likely to attain the same education level as males, but now females are less likely to drop out of school and more likely to perform higher, particularly in reading proficiency levels, than males (Legewie & DiPrete, 2012; Sadovnik et al., 2018). This study will examine whether Asian American students' motivation to apply for postsecondary education is not affected by gender, which will provide the data to answer the third research question. Scholars have noted that Asian parents have held higher educational and professional aspirations for boys, but no difference in the ultimate academic performance (Park, 1997).

In addition to gender and race, another independent variable considered in this investigation is socioeconomic status. Understanding the demographics and dynamics of socioeconomic status within educational outcomes is a critical and thoroughly researched topic in relation to postsecondary success. Indeed, Sirin's (2005) meta-analysis on student achievement revealed that socioeconomic status was the best predictor for educational achievement. Education, income, and occupation are foundational to socioeconomic status; however, these markers measure the fitness that a student has with a particular institution with regard to location, affordability, and quality (Weiler, 1994). It has been reported that a socioeconomic factor that contributes to status is the sense of ownership with cultural capital (Anyon, 1981). Previous literature has illuminated the interactive work of culture and

socioeconomic status in explaining the academic achievement of Asian Americans (Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Liu & Xie, 2016). Robin Das (2018) noted in her work on immigrants' educational attainment in the United States that the visibility of Asians has been based on their socioeconomic lifestyles. Higher socioeconomic lifestyles allow for additional resources that improve student learning (Sirin, 2005). Drawing on data from the base-year survey of the 1988 National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), Peng and Wright (1994) found that Asian American students are more likely to be raised in intact two-parent family units, compared to students of other racial and ethnic groups (as cited in Kim & Gasman, 2011).

As the desired outcome for students is furthered, their admissions essay and educational values have been investigated. For example, students with access to financial resources are able to unfairly pay for college preparatory agencies to assist in the college application process (Todorova, 2018), while various programs attempt to bridge the gap for low-income families with dedicated resources to assist students in the admissions process (Early, DeCosta-Smith, & Valdespino, 2010). Karen Jeong Robinson and Josipa Roksa (2016) found that students from less socioeconomically advantaged backgrounds remain less likely to enter higher education. These students are also less likely to attend the elite institutions (Espenshade, Radford, & Cheng, 2009). Generally, first-generation college students do not have access to the necessary resources needed to flourish, as they are by definition the first in their family to face the challenges associated with entering college (Kreniske, 2017). Additionally, some scholars have found that Asian American students have greater chances of attending prestigious institutions by having additional resources available to them (Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, & McDonough, 2004). This unfortunately has been considered the ultimate success of Asian American students (Yeh et al. 2005)

For Asian Americans, there are numerous immigrant groups and an equal number of socioeconomic characteristics. For example, specifically related to income, Japanese immigrants suffer little or no discrimination, while Chinese, Koreans, Filipinos, and Asian Indians have smaller income advantages compared to their high levels of education; Nakanishi and Nishida (1995) proposed that this wealth to education gap is related to the larger proportion of immigrants and those who have had disadvantaged experiences similar to those experienced by women with equivalent occupations. In the Asian American Collective's (2018) qualitative study, scholars found disparities in the socioeconomic status of Asian students, which led to a strong work ethic that empowers and prompts the values of character (Yano, Akatsuka, Adolph, Odo, & Park, 2018).

Family composition can also influence Asian American students' postsecondary choices. For example, scholars have found that women from intact families academically performed higher, as they grew up in more closely supervised environments where parents influenced their daughters to have high academic aspirations (Abada & Tenkorang, 2009). For Asian immigrants, specifically, historical factors of China's one child policy and other government efforts to control birthrates lead to students having high expectations for their educational outcomes to support their parents (Tsui & Rich, 2002). Some studies discuss these historical aspects and related policies but do not focus enough on the process from the perspective of parental interactions. Parents who only have one child need that child to be successful in society to elevate their own socioeconomic status. One study found that women who attained postsecondary education desired fewer children than those without a postsecondary education (Zheng et al., 2016). The working hypothesis revolves around socioeconomic status and language. These factors are rooted in Chinese Americans as they raise their families, understanding the past as well as the impact of

rigor for future success. With the parental influence on the various factors for this group of students, many may see that money is not the sole challenge for families in school selection. Parents work hard to send their children to the best schools, but this group may strive even more.

Asian family values are widely understood as focusing on a sense of respect and living up to the namesake. In Asian countries, not completing one's assignment is considered a sign of failure, which brings shame to the student and his or her family, resulting in punishment (Kim & Zhou, 2006). White (2015) noted that regardless of age, socioeconomic status, gender, or culture, students and adults consider respect, honesty, understanding/empathy, and love as behavioral norms. The Chinese system of thought, Confucianism, maintains the values of education, family honor, discipline, and respect (Kim & Zhou, 2006). During the Yedo period in Japan, Confucian moral doctrines formed fragments of orthodox education (Durkheim, 1964). Asian families impact and shape the core of the student but also hinder components of their future (Yano et al., 2018). These components, identified previously, are the reasons schools must create and maintain a learning environment that prepares students for the world.

In most communities, there is local appeal that encourages some students to stay at home and attend the town's college; postsecondary institutions with a local attraction narrow down their application requirements. In an effort to put students on "the right track," parents create the experience they want for their children at the high school age when there is still no control on the student's part. They seek to find postsecondary institutions that blend these characteristics but focus most importantly on quality or the reputation of an elite institution. Elite postsecondary schools generally include Ivy League schools and those with an equivalent reputation that provide access to the top level of a stratified professional hierarchy (Mullen, 2009). Conversely, urban schools reflect the demographic characteristics of their environments and therefore

exemplify the segregation and social stratification of their communities (Sadovnik et al., 2018). Students' specific learning locations – such as internal school settings and the external urbanicity of the environments – act as frames of reference, informing their perceptions and the world around them (Jović, 2019). Most studies classify a school setting as urban, suburban, or rural, according to the population density. Finally, the consideration that students who attend public schools (and the families that elect to enroll them in such institutions) often differ in significant ways from their peers attending private schools. It is understood that students enrolled in public schools are based on their neighborhoods, although in some urban areas high school enrollment is open to various application processes; private institutions are tuition-driven with the aid of donor funding to support their programs. William Tate (2008) describes the complexity of *geography of opportunity*, specifically at how urban areas with significant industrial development may enhance some areas but contribute to stagnant or worsening conditions for under-resourced locations; Tate maintains that the education needs to understand the strengths and challenges of unique communities as a responsibility and recognize the importance of geography as a critical factor in youth development and learning outcomes. It has been noted that a successful urban ecosystem is a learning ecology that supports its youth, and the caretakers, maximize the use of the community's resources toward full human flourishing of each student's potential (Pinkard, 2019). This development has the strongest impact with the peer relations in urban schools. Though teachers in these high schools are typically Caucasian American and represent the elite groups within the school, the students and their peers are typically minorities and their experiences may be more complex than definitions of racial discrimination suggest (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004).

## **Student Motivation**

The educational experiences of Asian students, which are related to desired educational outcomes and educational value, have been thoroughly researched. The student motivation domain in this study includes the following: students' desired educational outcome, the value of education, motivations to study, the enjoyment of reading, and the enjoyment of mathematics. In Japan, educational access is not a challenge, as nearly the entire population attends school in general and exhibits proficient literacy (Holloway, 1989), while Vietnam maintains that cultural education is fortified through literacy (Hossain, 2016). Asian students have historically been known to place a high value on education, holding high standards and aspirations when pursuing academic achievement (Chen & Stevenson, 1995). The aspiration's stage for postsecondary success encompasses the development of students' plans to attend college based on family values, social networks, and school cultures (Klasik, 2012). Students have been known to think about the college process as early as elementary and as late as the first semester of their high school senior year (Kim & Gasman, 2011). This study explores the cross-sectional analysis of high school sophomores who have begun the process by this stage in some capacity. Asian American students aspire to occupations with high education requirements and eventually high earnings (Xie & Goyette, 2003).

In China, education has historically been a particularly important focus, from its early traditions, when everyone studied vigorously for the civil service examination, to the modern world, where the competition to get into universities is fierce. The Chinese modernized world is credited with the strategic educational influences that have made for a nation with access to education. Understanding the historical context of education in China sheds light on the importance of educating children in that society. Scholars have analyzed this holistic experience

and the associated class conflict, as small classrooms had to be replaced with bigger classrooms to better align values and opportunities for the individual and the nation (Hansen, 1999). This is one of the underlying reasons that the civil service examination was abolished in 1905.

Furthermore, to improve access and success in education, China's leadership implemented policies where the Han people (the dominant ethnic group in China) assisted ethnic minorities with education; the ethnic minorities greatly help the Han people in supporting society with their land and agricultural expertise (Chai, 2000).

In an effort to improve their reputation, Asian Americans have been known to surpass all immigrant groups with regard to attainment of education and employment (Das, 2018). Asian Americans are perceived as the higher academic achievers who are hardworking, very diligent, and very motivated at school as well (Gao, 2017). These long-held viewpoints have been linked to Asian American students' preparation and work ethic, as this population has been described as being best poised for success due to their academic achievements and engagement in enrichment programs (Espenshade et al., 2009). Additional connections have been made with the influence of parents, who are strict and desire the best outcomes for their children to elevate their socioeconomic status and namesake. Knowing this historic framework provides background to help answer key questions on the practical implementations and parental expectations of success in schools. Further, Asians have consistently been viewed by scholars as needing to achieve greater outcomes than students from other ethnic groups (Chai & Weseley, 2017; Espenshade et al., 2009; Gao, 2017; Nakanishi & Nishida, 1995). This "model minority" understanding has consistently been debated with regard to stereotypes of Asian American students' enjoyment of subjects and academic performance (Gao, 2017; Kim, Yeh, & ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, 2002). As for mathematics, Sung Tae Jang (2018) noted that school characteristics in

their study did not mediate or resolve the inequalities in educational outcomes. Asian American students have been known to achieve higher scores in mathematics than their Caucasian American counterparts (Chen & Stevenson, 1995).

This typecast is broadly defined as the Asian American student who may or may not be particularly “smart” but is hardworking, calm, modest, docile, diligent, and obedient (Yano et al., 2018). This preconceived notion of the Asian American student has manifested itself in the high school grades and ultimate educational attainment of this student population (Chan, 1991; Liu & Xie, 2016). Furthermore, many associate these stereotypical traits with the additional cliché that such students are also nerdy and unsociable (Chai & Weseley, 2017). These biases in schools create a limited perspective of Asian Americans that does not adhere to group heterogeneity (Kim et al., 2002). Chai and Weseley (2017) noted that students applying to higher education institutions are justified in feeling marginalized; they added that schools discriminated against students who pursued the stereotypical interests.

When noting educational attainment, there are numerous factors that affect achievement, including the importance of a subject with relation to the future job (Codruta, Emil, and Span, 2013). Asian Americans generally pursue occupations where they can effectively manage various drawbacks by achieving marketable credentials (Xie & Goyette, 2003). For math specifically, Asian female students have been known to perform slightly lower than their male counterparts (Jang, 2018). In contrast, some scholars have found Asians as a whole to be three times more likely to have careers in the STEM fields (Beede, Julian, Khan, Lehrman, McKittrick, Langdon, & Doms, 2011).



## **Parental Influences**

In addition to the demographics and student motivation domains, this study analyzes various components of the parental influences including the following: parents desire for more education after high school, parental expectations of success, and college discussions with students. Parents' expectations for their children's formal college application and selection processes are developed prior to their child's entry into the tenth grade of high school. Scholars suggest that, even from the time their children are in elementary school, parents seek advice from elite schools on what path will successfully get their students into a reputable institution (Espenshade et al., 2009). In other cases, affluent parents have been known to pressure their children from an early age to pursue activities such as squash and the study of Chinese or other languages (Espenshade, 2004), which they encourage their children to continue through high school for the purpose of qualifying for admission to a college or university.

Parents in middle and upper-middle classes have their children engaged in activities to benefit their opportunities for advancement (Lee, 2011). Some scholars have identified, in Caucasian students, that parental involvement is a form of social capital for the sake of achievement; this can be inferred, regardless of race, by educational expectations of parents (Yan & Lin, 2005). Researchers and policymakers typically found that Asian American students had better experiences and higher performances than other ethnic minority students (Jang, 2018). Asians have been found to value academic performance more than Caucasians (Kao, 1995). These influences are exercised by adult generations on students who are not yet ready for social life and, thus, need an institution to assist in this development (Dill, 2007). In a school, where Asian American students were academically more successful than others, the inequalities within

one school can seem as significant as those between wealthy suburban schools and poor urban schools (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004).

Parents of various socioeconomic statuses vary in the amount of pressure they place on their children, which is generally a reflection of their own educational levels (Hansell, 1982). The parent's education contributes as a factor, as it influences the lifestyle and *habitus* of the student's childhood (Lee, 2011). When analyzing the psychosocial factors within the *habitus*, analyses indicated a direct measure of parental influence in students' selection of a college (Nora, 2004). Parents serve as powerful motivators, especially within the Asian American community, and they create a clear expectation for success that is further reinforced by the schools (Gao, 2017; Kitano & Dijiosia, 2001; Lee & Zhou, 2015). Students realize this priority in their life and aim to please, particularly if they are the only namesake, e.g., previously China's one-child policy. If this is accurate, the data will show that parents desire that these children achieve an advanced degree, enabling the child to care for them when they age.

Recent studies have found that pursuing a postsecondary education can increase psychological stress and reduce self-esteem and confidence (Song, 2017). Enrolling in certain schools creates stress for students whose parents want to ensure they control their own cultural capital by sending their students to their alma maters. This situation also is intertwined with the parents' expectations of their children. Furthermore, stress levels and influence do not come just from parents, but also from the higher education institutions themselves. With the early decision targeted to various students, schools aim to improve their reputations at the expense of intensifying stress levels within the students (Chapman & Dickert-Conlin, 2012). Having an early decision influences parents to suggest to their students that a postsecondary educational choice needs to be made during the early decision period to ensure a spot is available. The

counterargument of this process suggests that this allows for schools to better connect sooner with prospective families. This is, of course, intertwined with the discriminatory levels of less privileged students who may benefit more from elite schools (Chapman & Dickert-Conlin, 2012).

The parental influences of Asian American high school students is a significant factor in their academic achievement (Mau, 1997). It is believed that parents are instrumental in the college choice process, and they nudge students in the direction where parental experiences are reassured for the sake of their own satisfaction (Nora, 2004). When it comes to college choice, parents tend to lead the decision-making process without objectively listening to their child. As this background has alluded, this is intertwined with the expectations parents have of their children. This will be further explored in future sections to determine if this influence remains significant in predicting this study's sample of Asian American students pursuing postsecondary education.

### **School Environments**

Finally, school contexts have been understood to shape students' college-going behaviors (Engberg & Wolniak, 2010; Robinson & Roksa, 2016). This thesis examines school environments including the quality of teachers and classes, students' enjoyment of their school, peer effects, and school safety. As the purpose of educational institutions, including postsecondary schools, has been identified as developing students for society, the origin of education must be defined. When referring to the roots of education, it can be defined as "to lead out of." When thinking specifically *out of* what, Pano Kanelos (2018, p. 4) asserted, "ignorance has become the general sense." Kanelos further noted that there "are two agents involved in education. There is the one who leads and the one who is led. The first we call a *teacher*, the

second, a *student*.” Sylvia Wynter (2003), in an effort to describe what it means to be human, succinctly wrote that “learning, whether at the micro level of the individual or at the macro level of the society, must...function within the terms of what [Michel] Foucault previously identified as the ‘politics of truth’” (p. 268). The theory of social change and human development is knowing that as learning environments move toward more complex technologies in an increasingly modernized world (where people are more educated and wealthier), psychological development must become more individualistic; social change is the understanding that socio-demographic shifts drive the alterations in cultural values (Uhls & Greenfield, 2011). Some students expect academic learning to be facilitated (Lee, 2011). To address these changes and enhance the efficiency of minority education, schools should engage in more multicultural, multiple-channel, and multiple-format vocational education in a global-minded environment (Qian, 2010). These various deliveries and goals are often attributed to the role of schools.

High school classrooms are one place where college preparation occurs. Schools with limited resources are generally unable to afford extracurricular courses that are preparatory for this facet of social mobility (Early, DeCosta-Smith, & Valdespino, 2010). However, teachers and school counselors are found to be insignificant impact of Asian Americans in attending elite institutions after high school (Teranishi et. al, 2004). With the understanding of family values, learning purposes, and the potential for educational delivery, the focus can now be analyzed for specific academic institutional implications. The student’s socioeconomic status background matters in the classroom as a safe space to discuss challenging topics that could lead to frustrations and stress (Lee, 2011). School, though stressful, provides an outlet for students to discuss their emotions, including their feelings about their parents’ influence on their postsecondary education application process. It is critical for society to have such conversations

that, at times, will be difficult, but students should be prepared to approach them effectively outside of school. Additional disruptions, moreover, occur within the school setting that have implications for educational performance. For example, Southeast Asian (Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, and Hmong) students—whose backgrounds include educational disruptions—have different psychological and academic needs from East Asian (Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Japanese) students and their families (Kim et al., 2002). When gender is analyzed in this disruption context, boys have been known to deliberately interrupt co-curricular experiences of their female counterparts (Legewie & DiPrete, 2012; Thorne, 1993). When studying gender-based bullying, some scholars have found school employees responding to such violence as they sought to unsettle sexist narratives, norms and practices that support social hierarchies privileging males over females (Anagnostopoulos, Buchanan, Pereira, & Lichty, 2009).

According to Gao (2017), the American expectation of dating has been conveyed as a distraction for Indian students, as it is not the cultural norm for that population (Gao, 2017). Additionally, high levels of background noise in school classrooms affect student learning, particularly for those pupils who are learning in a second language (Chan, Li, Ma, Yiu, & McPherson, 2015). As gender is integrated in this, girls are more sensitive to sounds than boys (Restak, 1979). Similarly, it is likely the boys causing the distractions in the classroom spaces. Some scholars have noted the distraction of technology in classrooms. For example, mobile phones can be a source of great disruption, as they provide individuals with access to the internet, texting, and games (Beland & Murphy, 2015). Teachers want their students to be able to contribute meaningfully in society. This is the sense of obtaining a job and serving a community. Obtaining a postsecondary education is the passageway for this to happen.

## Theoretical Framework

This thesis was guided by the supposition that the number of postsecondary schools to which Asian American students apply is a function of four general factors: demographics, student motivation, parental influences, and school environments. Because this study investigated the impact of these factors on Asian American male and female students' postsecondary education application processes, educational sociology and community psychology theories were applied to describe the predictability and interplay between the postsecondary education application process, gender, demographics, student motivation, parental influences, and school environments. Specifically, this investigation relied on three theoretical frameworks: Émile Durkheim and John Dewey's moral education theories, Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, and Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins' theory of intersectionality.

Education is becoming increasingly more specialized. Durkheim (1933) found it necessary not to submit students to a uniform culture, but to train them differently in light of the different functions they will be called upon to fulfill in society. As part of the postsecondary education application process, students consider what role they wish to fill in society and how best to train for that role. According to Dewey (1905), "only by being true to the full growth of all the individuals who make it up, can society by any chance be true to itself" (p. 19). This thinking on personal development and lifelong learning reflects the progression from individual to society. The approach to the selection of variables and dataset analysis for this research project was framed within this theory. Durkheim proposed that people make decisions and organize themselves based on the satisfaction of their own needs and on behalf of social needs (Durkheim, 1964). It is for the sake of society that we hold a rational account of our duties. Humans are

destined to fulfill their contribution to society and, consequently, must learn how to contribute prior to the actualization of being unaccompanied as an adult. Durkheim (1933) thought that education was necessary for humans to learn their individual role in contributing to society.

John Dewey's theory places nicely in this conversation in that the highest virtue in education is the cultivation of desire toward a meaningful end. For Dewey, the central aim of education is cultivating unique, productive capacities that allow students to engage in society by reconstructing society (Reich, Garrison, & Neubert, 2016). Dewey's philosophical perspective of educational reform conveys that in human development, the intellectual mind is complemented by impeccable character. Moral training in schools was to consist of forming habits of action in conformity to rules and standards (Dewey, 1963). Furthering this point in relation to overarching theory, we find key experiences that are crucial to living in society: schools prepare individuals for these experiences by bringing students together to collaboratively answer important questions, while learning respectful behavior and subject matter during the course of their discourses (White, 2015). Both Dewey and Durkheim noted that each society uniquely approaches education for its own purposes, and thus it is always embedded in a particular cultural context (Dill, 2007). Scholars have determined that education in successive societies builds upon the notions of education in previous societies (Dill, 2007). Dewey believed that education, positioned firmly within a democratic society, resulted in human development (Sadovnik et al., 2018). In other words, schools prepare students for community life, considering the needs of society.

As the micro theories for the purpose of this thesis were realized, it was additionally important to understand the major theoretical framework of Russian-born American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner. His ecological systems theory notes that numerous processes and

conditions, including the immediate setting and the direct/indirect relations between multiple settings, impact the development of humans in the actual environments they live within (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Utilizing the microsystem of this theory, this study built the domains of demographics, student motivation, parental influences, and school environment as they engage with each other and the postsecondary education application process; similarly, the mesosystem's composition of the interrelations of two or more settings was employed in the combined variables. For example, mesosystems are extended by combining and assessing the success expectations of teachers with students' interest and level of challenge experienced in their classes. Additionally, the macrosystems refer to the cultural contexts in which people live, such as race, class, and other categorical variables. Students' specific learning locations, such as internal school settings and external urbanicity, act as frames of reference, informing their perceptions of the world around them. Macrosystems such as schools present distinctive affordances based on various demographics, including gender, that lead to different meanings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Deutsch & Jones, 2008; Jović, 2018).

Furthermore, the theory of intersectionality was used in this study. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduced the term to address the marginalization of women of color in not only antidiscrimination law but also in feminist and antiracist theory and politics. This foundational theory is applied to numerous races and research fields within the underlying process of developing social science research (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013). Some scholars account intersectionality as being broadly defined as the understanding of complex human experiences in the world that are shaped by diverse and influencing factors (Collins & Bilge, 2018). Sung Tae Jang (2018) noted that although intersectionality has been integrated into multiple marginalized social categorizations as an analytical tool, inadequate consideration has



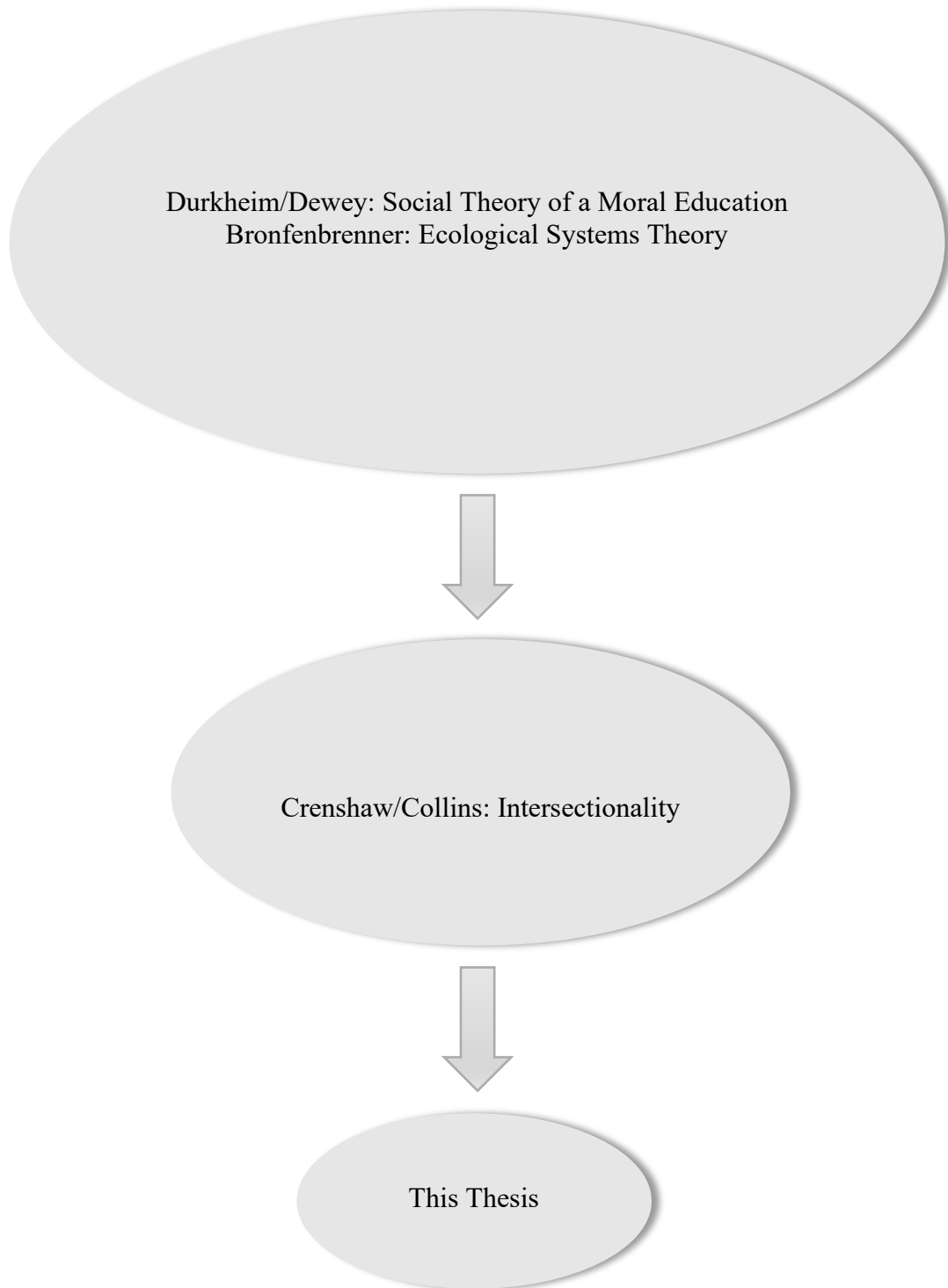
been given to Southeast Asian female students. Though Collins initially applied her theory to African Americans and social justice, the underlying rationale allows additional studies to pursue policy transformations to meet the needs of students originating from their position on the intersections of race, gender, and socioeconomic status (Jang, 2018). Intersectionality allows for a greater understanding of global inequalities and perceptions of gender; this theory also notes that people face multiple oppressions based on a combination of components, such as class and race, which develop their identity (Collins & Bilge, 2018). In gender specifically, the paradigmatic change of this theory was initially realized by expounding inequality among a group in a single nation (Collins, 2000). This study used this framework for Asian American students, who are the most populous group in the broadest sense but are not thoroughly researched in American educational contexts. These theories, intertwined with concerted cultivation, show that various components aid in preparing students for their ultimate positive contribution to the community-at-large, since the family cannot complete this task alone.

Knowing that schools are to provide a moral education as they prepare students to meaningfully contribute to society, expectations are high for their students to continue with postsecondary school and ultimately obtain advanced degrees. In the next section, this thesis presents an analysis of the data to discover whether Asian American students within the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Education Longitudinal Study (ELS) are influenced more by their demographics, motivation, parental influences, or school environments in their determination of the number of postsecondary schools to which they apply. Do the differences in gender impact educational ambitions? As the literature and logic conveys, a variety of influencers impact a student's approach to postsecondary school. This research identifies the influence differences for this specific demographic.

This ELS sample of Asian American students was examined to provide information on the influence that the four domains (demographics, student motivation, parental influences, and school environments) have on these students in pursuing postsecondary education. Émile Durkheim's functionalist theory contributes that schools are the institutions that assist in the education of the mind of a child for the sake of a functioning society (Dill, 2007). The mental anticipation of individuals within society is exhibited by Durkheim's distinctions that are necessary for humans (Durkheim, 1964). People attend various institutions to learn in preparation for contributing to the community-at-large. This ties directly to the notion of social mobility.

As this thesis questioned how Asian American students, encompassed within the ELS, are influenced in the number of postsecondary schools to which they apply, it is noteworthy that the implications of the application process are not thoroughly researched. Employing the theories referenced and the four domains, the following data allowed for an examination of other underlining factors for research not yet analyzed within this dataset. Durkheim's macro theory found that schools needed to prepare students for society and should be a place where there was an authority hierarchy with standards for conformity (Dill, 2007). The logic model (Figure 1) illustrates the broader theories of Durkheim (1933/1964), Dewey (1900/1963), and Bronfenbrenner (1979), leading into Crenshaw (1989/2013) and Collins (2000/2016) that thematize the interactions of descriptive components in society. This theoretical framework allowed for a greater understanding of the variable relations outlined in the next section.

**Figure 1. Logic Model for Theoretical Framework**



## **Data & Methods**

The data for this research is from the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS). It is designed and collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which is the primary federal entity for data collection and analysis related to educational experiences in the United States. The original sample contained over 16,000 participants, following their transition from secondary schooling to subsequent education and work roles. The NCES gathered the data for ELS optimizing a two-stage design, sampling schools and the students within them. Ensuring various groups were adequately represented in the data, the NCES over-sampled students from certain ethnic and economic minority classifications.

Commencing in 2002, the baseline survey was administered to high school sophomores, their parents, and Math/English teachers from public institutions, private and parochial schools. The study followed throughout secondary and postsecondary years with a particular focus on students' trajectories from high school into postsecondary schools and ultimately into the workforce of society. The subsequent follow-ups by the NCES commenced in 2004, when the bulk of the sample size were seniors in high school. Then in 2006, transcripts from high schools were collected along with the second follow-up, with many sample members enrolled in a postsecondary institution, employed, or having never attended college. In 2012, the final follow-up occurred for a retrospective analysis of college enrollment, employment history, and personal statuses such as marriage, family composition, and community participation.

### **Dependent Variable**

For the focus of this thesis, the data will be limited to Asian students labeled Asian, Hawaii/Pac. Islander, non-Hispanic. This thesis emphasizes the correlation for the number of postsecondary schools applied to (dependent variable) in relation to the various domains of

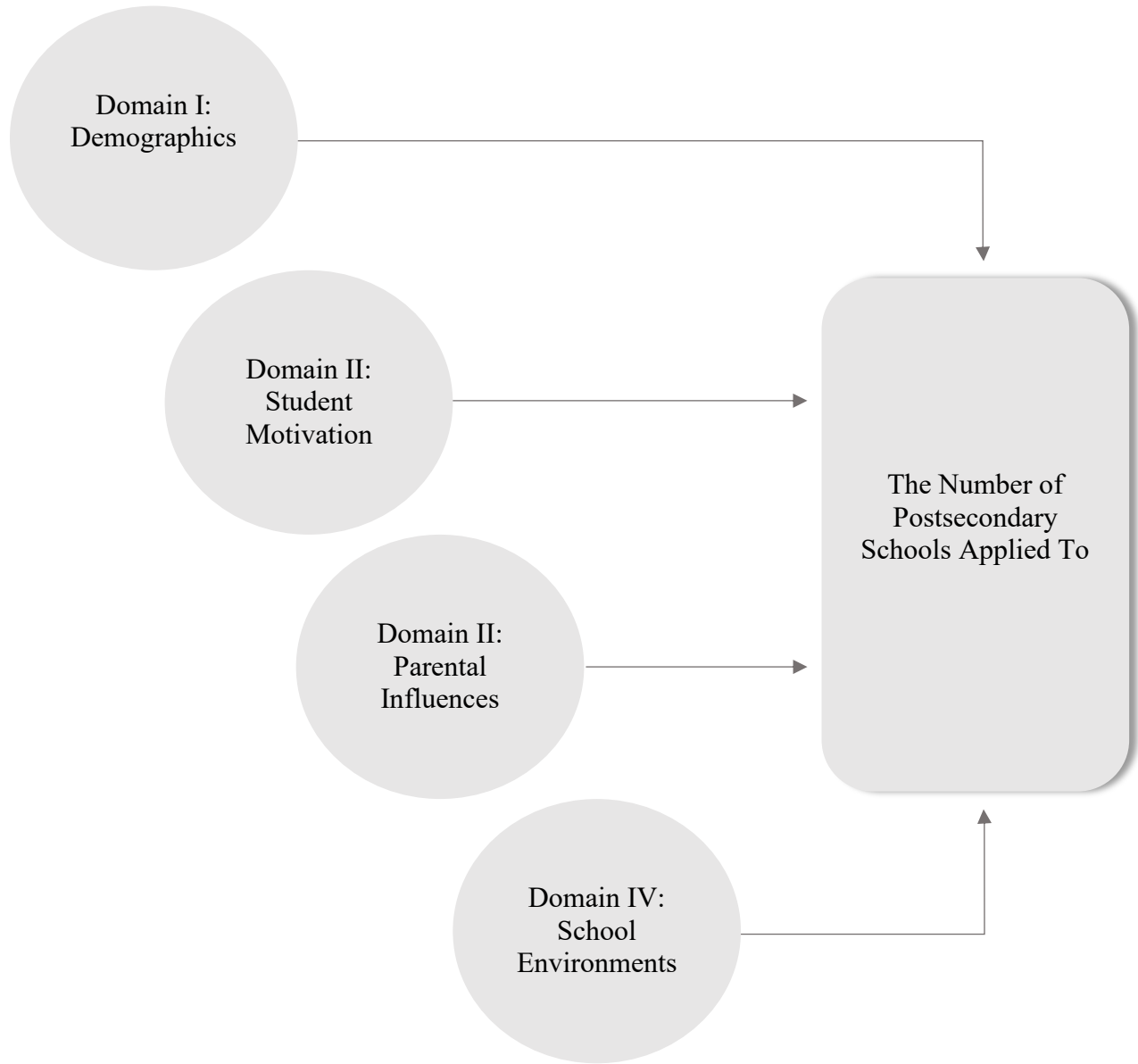
independent variables that hold demographics, student motivation, parental influences, and school environments. The dependent variable used in this study, the number of postsecondary schools applied for during the first round of applications, is ELS's F2B03\_P (Table 1). Of the students in this sample, 1108 answered the question noting how many postsecondary institutions they applied to during the first round of applications. The number of colleges to which Asian American students applied has consistently varied (Kim & Gasman, 2011). The important understanding for F2B03\_P is that it holds the intervals 1-10 for the number of schools and eleven or more schools is valued at 11, containing an undisclosed number above.

**Table 1. Number of Postsecondary Schools Applied To**

Number of postsecondary schools	<i>N</i>	Percent
1 school	262	23.6
2 schools	223	20.1
3 schools	181	16.3
4 schools	147	13.3
5 schools	98	8.8
6 schools	70	6.3
7 schools	45	4.1
8 schools	28	2.5
9 schools	15	1.4
10 schools	19	1.7
11 or more schools	20	1.8
Total	1108	100.0

This thesis includes an additional logic model (Figure 2) to facilitate development, operationalization and consolidation of a variables geared to understand the postsecondary education application process. As noted, the independent variables are classified into four domains: demographics, student motivation, parental influences, and the school environments. To determine any differences within the predictors of the postsecondary education application process, this study will analyze how these domains operate for males and females, both as one group and separately.

**Figure 2. Logic Model for Variable Relations**



**Domain I: Demographics**

For the additional procedures and regression analyses, the valid listwise number of cases ( $N = 662$ ) was analyzed. This thesis utilizes the outcome variables and the following four domains for organization: demographics, student motivation, parental influences, and school environments (See Table 2 for means, standard deviations, and ranges of all variables). These

relate back to Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory with the individual's relationships to the various aspects of their society. Ecological systems theory elucidates the natural intersectionality of all domains as the student's proximity and control shifts further out. To assess the relationship of any research question, we must first understand the measures of identity. The variables related to the Asian American respondents' family background and life included in the demographics domain are the following: race, gender, socioeconomic status, having two parents and/or guardians, being an urban school, and being a public school. In addition to analyzing the number of postsecondary institutions applied for in the first round of applications, demographics allow for an understanding of how the population of this sample is composed. To assess the impact of race, this study uses a dummy variable for Asians created from the BYRACE variable in ELS with Asian, Hawaii/Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic students coded as 1 and all others coded as 0. According to NCES (2019), Asians and Pacific Islanders are combined into one category in indicators for which the data were not collected separately for the two groups. This combined category is more representative of Asians than Pacific Islanders, as 96% of all Asian/Pacific Islanders ages five through twenty-four are Asian according to the Census Bureau Current Populations Reports (as cited in the National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Finally, a dummy variable was also created for gender, utilizing BYS14, with males coded 1 and females coded 0. This sample had an even split for gender ( $M = .50$ ,  $SD = .50$ ).

**Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, Ranges and Description of Variables for Asians (N = 662)**

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Range	ELS Variable NAME and Label
<i>Dependent Variable</i>				
Number of Postsecondary Schools Applied To	3.46	2.40	1-11	F2B03_P. 'When you were in high school, how many colleges, universities, vocational-technical or trade schools did you apply to?'
<i>Domain I: Demographics</i>				
Student is Asian/Pacific Islander	0.09	0.29	0-1	From BYRACE. 'Asian, Hawaii/Pac. Islander, non-Hispanic' coded 1; all others coded 0.
Student is Male	0.50	0.50	0-1	From BYS14. Males were coded 1; females were coded 0.
Socioeconomic Status Composite	0.01	0.86	-2.11-1.98	BYSES2. 'socioeconomic status composite, v.2'
Student has Two Parents/Guardians	0.83	0.37	0-1	From BYFCOMP. mother & father, mother & male guardian, father & female guardian, and two guardians were coded 1; all others coded 0.
School is Urban	0.44	0.49	0-1	From BYURBAN. Urban schools were coded 1; non-urban schools were coded 0.
School is Public	0.88	0.32	0-1	From BYSCTRL. Public schools were coded 1; non-public schools were coded 0.
<i>Domain II: Student Motivation</i>				
How Far in School Student Thinks will Get	5.49	1.29	1-7	BYSTEXP. 'As things stand now, how far in school do you think you will get?'
Education is Very Important to get a Job Later	0.67	0.46	0-1	BYS27D. 'Strongly agree' that an education is important to get a job later on coded 1; all others were coded 0.
Motivation to Study	5.65	1.80	1-8	Sum of two items: from BYS89D. 'studies to get a good grade' and BYS89P. 'studies to ensure financial security'
Thinks Reading is Fun	0.57	0.49	0-1	From BYS87B. 'Strongly agree' and 'agree' that reading is fun coded 1; all others coded 0.
Thinks Math is Fun	0.44	0.49	0-1	From BYS87C. 'Strongly agree' and 'agree' that mathematics is fun coded 1; all others coded 0.
<i>Domain III: Parental Influences</i>				
How Far in School Parents Wants 10 <sup>th</sup> Grader to Go	10.33	3.32	1-14	Sum of two items: BYS65A. 'how far in school mother wants 10 <sup>th</sup> grader to go' and BYS65B. 'how far in school father wants 10 <sup>th</sup> grader to go'
Parents Desire More School After High School	0.84	0.36	0-1	From BYS66A & BYS66B. combined to show that parents want respondents to have more education after high school coded 1; all others coded 0.
Parents Very Much Expect Success in School	0.62	0.48	0-1	BYS27I. 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about why you go to school? I go to school because my parents expect me to succeed'
Discussed Going to College with Parents	0.89	0.30	0-1	BYS86G. 'In the first semester or term of this school year, how often have you discussed the following with either or both of your parents or guardians? Going to college'



*Domain IV: School Environments*

Students Find Teachers and Classes Rewarding	6.46	1.65	2-12	Sum of three items: BYS27H. 'teachers expect success in school,' BYS20E. 'the teaching is good,' and BYS27A. 'classes are interesting and challenging'
Likes School a Great Deal	0.25	0.43	0-1	BYS28. 'How much do you like school?'
Other Students Often Disrupt Class	0.70	0.45	0-1	BYS20D. 'Strongly agree' and 'agree' that other students often disrupt class coded 1; all others coded 0.
Feels Safe at this School	0.87	0.33	0-1	BYS20J. 'Strongly disagree' and 'disagree' that respondent does not feel safe at this school coded 1; all others coded 0.

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Socioeconomic status is measured using ELS's BYSES2 variable. This variable was developed utilizing data on parental education, occupation and income. These markers measure the fitness that a student has with a particular institution with regard to location, affordability, and quality (Weiler, 1994). An additional dummy variable was developed from BYFCOMP to show the respondents that had two parents and/or guardians. Asian families impact and shape the core of the student, but also hinder components of their future (Yano et al., 2018). An additional dummy variable was created from BYURBAN for the urbanicity of school locale as indicated in sampling of the Common Core of Data (CCD) 1999-2000 and the Private School Survey (PSS) 1999-2000. Urban schools were coded 1; non-urban schools (suburban and rural) were coded 0. Lastly, a dummy variable for public schools was created from BYSCTRL as indicated from CCD and PSS. Public schools were coded 1, while non-public (Catholic and other private) schools were coded 0.

**Domain II: Student Motivation**

The second domain for analysis, holding the student-level variables, is for the students in their educational ambitions, study motivations, and subject enjoyment. The education aspiration variable is BYSTEXP noting how far the student thinks they will get in school. The response categories use a Likert scale that includes a range from 1-7, where:

- 1= “less than high school graduation”
- 2= “high school graduation or GED”
- 3= “attended or complete 2-year college/school”
- 4= “attend college (4-year degree incomplete)”
- 5= “graduate from college”
- 6= “obtain a master’s degree or equivalent”
- 7= “obtain PhD/MD or other advanced degree”

This group ( $M = 5.49$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ), landing in-between graduating from college and obtaining a master’s degree, suggests that the Asian American students sampled here have a strong ambition for more education subsequent to high school. As the literature noted, these students have been known to place a high value on education, holding high standards and aspirations (Chen & Stevenson, 1995). This remains consistent in the data analyzed here. A dummy variable for BYS27D was created for how students felt in going to school because education is important for getting a job later on. The respondents that strongly agreed with this were coded 1, while all others were coded 0. When students pursue additional education, there are numerous factors that affect success, including the importance of subjects related to future employment (Codruta et al., 2013; Xie & Goyette, 2003).

To assess the study motivations, BYS89D ‘studies to get a good grade’ and BYS89P ‘studies to ensure financial security’ were combined. For both of these variables, the respondents were asked how often the aforementioned statements applied to their study habits. Furthermore, the enjoyment of two academic subjects were analyzed as part of the Domain II. A dummy variable was developed for BYS87B ‘because reading is fun, I wouldn’t want to give it up.’ The response categories ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ on this statement were coded 1; all others were

coded 0. Similarly, the same responses for BYS87C ‘because doing mathematics is fun, I wouldn’t want to give it up’ were coded 1 with the others coded 0. Interestingly, the mean for enjoying reading ( $M = 0.57$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ) was higher than math ( $M = 0.44$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ) though the standard deviations were equivalent. Asian students have been known to exhibit proficient literacy (Holloway, 1989; Hossain, 2016).

### **Domain III: Parental Influences**

In addition to understanding the student/family demographics and student motivation, this study incorporates parental influences in the third domain. The sum of BYS65A ‘how far in school mothers want 10<sup>th</sup> graders to go in school’ and BYS66B ‘how far in school fathers want 10<sup>th</sup> graders to go in school’ conveys the aspirations that parents have in these combined variables. Parental aspirations in the desired postsecondary educational attainment ( $M = 10.33$ ,  $SD = 3.32$ ) is consistent with the self-aspirations of children desiring to at least obtain a bachelor’s degree. Additionally, a dummy variable was created for BYS66A ‘mother’s desire for 10<sup>th</sup> grader after high school’ and BYS66B ‘father’s desire for 10<sup>th</sup> grader after high school’ to show parents appeal for students to obtain more education after high school. Parents that responded that they desired their students ‘go to college’ or ‘enter trade or apprenticeship’ the code was 1; all other responses were coded 0.

Furthermore, BYS27I expresses that these students go to school because their parents expect them to succeed in schools was developed into a dummy variable; students that responded with ‘strongly agree’ were coded 1, while all others were coded 0. Parents for the most part very much expect success of their students in school ( $M = 0.62$ ,  $SD = 0.48$ ). Parents serve as powerful motivators, especially within the Asian American community, and they create a clear expectation for success that is further reinforced by the schools (Gao, 2017; Lee & Zhou, 2015). For the final

parent-level variable, a dummy variable for BYS86G ‘In the first semester or term of this school year, how often have you discussed the following with either or both of your parents or guardians? Going to college’ with ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’ coded 1 and ‘never’ coded 0. Most Asian students spoke with their parents about the college process ( $M = 0.89$ ,  $SD = 0.30$ ). This is connected to seeing parents as experts on the topic, since parents are the ones seeking advice from elite schools on the path that will successfully get their students into a reputable institution (Espenshade et al., 2009).

#### **Domain IV: School Environments**

The fourth and final domain for this study is the school-level. As noted by Émile Durkheim and John Dewey, schools are to provide a moral education to prepare students to have a meaningful contribution in society (Dewey, 1905; Durkheim, 1964). First, a dummy variable was developed to convey whether or not students found teachers and classes rewarding by combining three variables: BYS27H ‘teachers expect success in school,’ BYS20E ‘the teaching is good,’ and BYS27A ‘classes are interesting and challenging.’ With a range of 2-12, the sum of these three items conveyed adequate quality with regard to the schools ( $M = 6.46$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ). Additionally, a dummy variable for BYS28 ‘how much do you like school’ was created for those with the response ‘a great deal’ coded 1; all others were coded 0. School contexts have been understood to shape students’ college-going behaviors (Engberg & Wolniak, 2010; Robinson & Roksa, 2016). A dummy variable was additionally created for BYS20D with students that ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ that other students often disrupt class coded 1, with all others coded 0. Finally, the safety of schools was measured in BYS20J with a dummy variable created with ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘disagree’ that respondent does not feel safe at this school coded 1; all others were coded 0. High levels of background noise in school classrooms affect student

learning (Chan, Li, Ma, Yiu, & McPherson, 2015). Students' specific learning locations act as frames of reference, informing their perceptions and the world around them (Jović, 2019). Following the descriptive statistics, a Pearson's Correlation will be conducted to test for strengths between the variables. These descriptive notes provide a primary understanding of the components for the student's desires in relation to their demographics, parents and schools.

### **Findings**

The result of several bivariate and multivariate statistical analyses communicates that regardless of parental influences, Asian students are individually motivated to pursue more education. This is consistent with the work of Gao (2017) who noted that Asian Americans are higher academic achievers who are hardworking, diligent, and motivated at school. Of particular importance, socioeconomic status and students' particular motivation to in how far they think they will get are robustly and consistent predictors in the number of postsecondary schools to which they apply. Moreover, students thinking that reading is fun was a significant predictor in this postsecondary education application process. This can be attributed to the natural component of additional reading that takes place at the postsecondary level, as opposed to mathematics.

### **Correlations**

A series of Pearson's Correlation was performed to test the relationships between all of the study's variables (Table 3). This was included to measure the correlation strength between the variables. Table 3 shows that there is strength in nearly every measured variable, though no variables were correlated so highly as to indicate possible multicollinearity. The number of postsecondary schools applied to strongly correlated with socioeconomic status ( $r(1108) = .253$ ,  $p < .001$ ), how far student think they will get in school ( $r(1005) = .258$ ,  $p < .001$ ), motivation to

study ( $r(867) = .181, p < .001$ ), how far parents want their student to get ( $r(921) = .176, p < .001$ ), and discussed going to college with parents ( $r(928) = .110, p < .001$ ). The variable of the student's thoughts in how far they will get in school strongly correlated with numerous variables including the following: socioeconomic status ( $r(1309) = .263, p < .001$ ), education is very important to get a job later ( $r(1247) = .148, p < .01$ ), motivation to study ( $r(1002) = .321, p < .001$ ), thinks reading is fun ( $r(1032) = .160, p < .001$ ), thinks math is fun ( $r(1016) = .115, p < .001$ ), how far in school parent's want 10<sup>th</sup> grader to go ( $r(1071) = .355, p < .001$ ), parents desire after high school ( $r(1099) = .124, p < .001$ ), discussed going to college with parents ( $r(1067) = .110, p < .001$ ), and likes school a great deal ( $r(1269) = .093, p < .001$ ). This conveys that nearly every aspect of the student's environment significantly impacts their educational ambitions.

**Table 3a. Pearson's Correlation for Asians**

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Number of postsecondary schools applied to	1	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
(2) Student is Male	-.067*	1	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
(3) Socioeconomic Status Composite	.253***	-.004	1	---	---	---	---	---	---
(4) Student has Two Parents/Guardians	.046	-.039	.108***	1	---	---	---	---	---
(5) School is Urban	-.039	-.003	-.237***	-.034	1	---	---	---	---
(6) School is Public	-.089**	-.088***	-.213***	-.004	-.096***	1	---	---	---
(7) How Far in School Student Thinks will Get	.258***	-.069*	.263***	.037	-.005	-.063*	1	---	---
(8) Education is Very Important to get a Job Later	.034	-.075**	-.008	.004	-.001	.048†	.148***	1	---
(9) Motivation to Study	.181***	.010	.183***	.100***	-.041	-.013	.321***	.314***	1
(10) Thinks Reading is Fun	.104**	-.133***	.078**	-.008	-.022	.024	.160***	.124***	.134***
(11) Thinks Math is Fun	.051	.089**	-.055†	-.017	-.010	-.005	.115***	.138***	.104***
(12) How Far in School Parents Wants 10 <sup>th</sup> Grader to Go	.176***	-.002	.294***	.109***	-.073*	-.062*	.355***	.084**	.218***
(13) Parents Desire More School After High School	.056†	-.041	.082**	.053†	.067*	-.039	.124***	.075**	.095**
(14) Parents Very Much Expect Success in School	-.021	-.011	-.001	.038	-.026	.050†	.071*	.398***	.248***
(15) Discussed Going to College with Parents	.110***	-.026	.164***	.044	-.085**	-.053†	.110***	.087**	.177***
(16) Students Find Teachers and Classes Rewarding	-.029	.010	.098***	-.016	-.100***	.059*	-.088**	-.280***	-.200***
(17) Likes School a Great Deal	.015	.009	-.059*	-.039	.036	-.008	.093***	.216***	.216***
(18) Other Students Often Disrupt Class	-.079**	.047†	-.025	.013	-.014	.031	-.050†	-.027	-.016
(19) Feels Safe at this School	.060†	-.043	.090***	-.026	-.096***	-.076**	.076**	.063*	.120***

†p=.10 \*p=.05 \*\*p=.01 \*\*\*p=.001

**Table 3b. Pearson's Correlation for Asians**

Variables	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)
(10) Thinks Reading is Fun	1	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
(11) Thinks Math is Fun	.305***	1	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
(12) How Far in School Parents Wants 10 <sup>th</sup> Grader to Go	.102***	.075*	1	---	---	---	---	---	---
(13) Parents Desire More School After High School	-.012	.009	.121***	1	---	---	---	---	---
(14) Parents Expect Success in School	.040	.036	.079**	.074**	1	---	---	---	---
(15) Discussed Going to College with Parents	.013	.020	.094**	.056†	.125***	1	---	---	---
(16) Students Find Teachers and Classes Rewarding	-.228***	-.286***	-.051†	-.015	-.185***	-.078**	1	---	---
(17) Likes School a Great Deal	.202***	.272***	.054†	-.019	.066*	.016	-.431***	1	---
(18) Other Students Often Disrupt Class	-.070*	-.065*	-.049†	.030	.057*	.005	.104***	-.088***	1
(19) Feels Safe at this School	.004	-.038	.044	-.003	.061*	.051†	-.059*	.069*	-.084**

†p=.10 \*p=.05 \*\*p=.01 \*\*\*p=.001

### T-test

As an initial step toward answering the research questions, a set of t-tests was performed comparing means for the dichotomous variables (Table 4). This analysis shows that means are similar for each variable except for the effect on thinking that math is fun ( $M = 0.36$ ,  $SD = 0.48$ ;  $M = 0.47$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ), still with a significant indicator ( $p < .001$ ). This is consistent with previous research that Asian female students have been known to perform slightly lower than their male counterparts with regard to mathematics (Jang, 2018). Comparatively, the variable for students that think reading is fun ( $M = 0.52$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ;  $M = 0.53$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ) has a slightly less significance ( $p < .05$ ). Additional variables that exhibit a strong significance ( $p < .001$ ) during the t-test are the following: parents desire more school after high school and discussed going to college with parents.

**Table 4. Comparison of Means: Number of Postsecondary Schools Applied To**

Dummy Variables	Number of Postsecondary Schools Applied To ( <i>SD</i> in parentheses)
Sex	
Male	0.50 (0.50)
Female	0.52 (0.50)
Student has Two Parents/Guardians	
Yes	0.84* (0.36)
No	0.80 (0.39)
School is Urban	
Yes	0.49 (0.50)
No	0.46 (0.49)
School is Public	
Yes	0.92* (0.26)
No	0.89 (0.31)
Education is Very Important to get a Job Later	
Yes	0.67 (0.46)
No	0.66 (0.47)
Thinks Reading is Fun	
Yes	0.52* (0.50)
No	0.53 (0.50)
Thinks Math is Fun	
Yes	0.36*** (0.48)
No	0.47 (0.50)
Parents Desire More School After High School	
Yes	0.87*** (0.33)
No	0.81 (0.39)
Parents Very Much Expect Success in School	
Yes	0.60 (0.48)
No	0.63 (0.48)
Discussed Going to College with Parents	
Yes	0.84*** (0.36)
No	0.88 (0.32)
Likes School a Great Deal	
Yes	0.25 (0.43)
No	0.25 (0.43)
Other Students Often Disrupt Class	
Yes	0.74** (0.43)
No	0.69 (0.46)
Feels Safe at this School	
Yes	0.83* (0.37)
No	0.87 (0.33)

†p=.10 \*p=.05 \*\*p=.01 \*\*\*p=.001

Note: Within each predictor on the dependent variables, the superscript of the level of statistical significance is placed just on one of the two categories to indicate that the relative mean scores are statistically different from each other.



## **OLS Regressions**

Twelve ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions were conducted, and coefficients obtained, during this project to test the relationship between the Asian American family demographics, student motivations, parental influences, and school environments (Table 5). Particular findings will be explored in this section. We utilize ordinary least squares regression to examine the relationship and predictability between the dependent variable (the number of postsecondary schools applied to) and the four domains (demographics, student motivation, parental influences, and school environments). In Group 1 (Asian Students), the sample of the entire population is analyzed. This group contained Models I, II, III, and IV which added the domains in order during each model. Students were then split by gender. Group 2 (Asian Males) and Group 3 (Asian Females) followed the same procedures when adding domains during their regressions. Because variables are standardized, the regression coefficients indicate the relative importance of each variable in the model. The independent variable remained the same for all tests. Standardized coefficient betas are noted in parentheses. A pattern that emerged in this research analysis was that socioeconomic status remains robustly predictive in the number of postsecondary schools applied to, regardless of gender. This is consistent with previous literature that identified socioeconomic status as the best predictor for educational achievement (Sirin, 2005). Similarly, how far students think they will advance in their postsecondary studies is a significant predictor in the application process. Asian American students aspire to occupations with high education requirements and eventually high earnings (Xie & Goyette, 2003). The postsecondary education application process is the first step in achieving this workforce-related goal.

**Table 5. OLS Regression on Number of Postsecondary Schools Applied To for by Asians (Standardized Coefficients Betas in Parentheses)<sup>a</sup>**

Variables	Asian Students (N=662)				Asian Males (N=311)				Asian Females (N=348)			
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
<i>Domain I: Demographics</i>												
Socioeconomic Status Composite	.732*** (.249)	.512*** (.174)	.484*** (.165)	.477*** (.162)	.760*** (.255)	.590*** (.198)	.568** (.191)	.573** (.192)	.728*** (.254)	.485** (.169)	.449** (.157)	.433** (.151)
Student has two Parents/Guardians	.004 (.001)	.005 (.001)	-.025 (-.003)	-.020 (-.033)	.022 (.003)	-.017 (-.003)	-.023 (-.003)	-.009 (-.001)	-.107 (-.014)	-.085 (-.011)	-.152 (-.020)	-.227 (-.029)
School is Urban	.034 (.007)	-.011 (-.002)	.002 (.000)	.017 (.003)	.161 (.032)	.051 (.010)	.034 (.007)	.123 (.024)	-.170 (-.034)	-.150 (-.030)	-.100 (-.020)	-.077 (-.015)
School is Public	-.424 (-.055)	-.519† (-.067)	-.459 (-.059)	-.472 (-.061)	-.675† (-.099)	-.697† (-.102)	-.636 (-.093)	-.558† (-.082)	-.222 (-.025)	-.331 (-.037)	-.285 (-.032)	-.296 (-.033)
<i>Domain II: Student Motivation</i>												
How Far in School Student Thinks will Get	---	.471*** (.207)	.453*** (.199)	.450*** (.198)	---	.463*** (.206)	.449*** (.200)	.415** (.185)	---	.497*** (.217)	.468*** (.204)	.477*** (.208)
Education is Very Important to get a Job Later	---	-.221 (-.040)	-.089 (-.016)	-.078 (-.014)	---	-.482 (-.091)	-.366 (-.069)	-.384 (-.073)	---	.012 (.002)	.130 (.022)	.178 (.031)
Motivation to Study	---	.118* (.079)	.119† (.080)	.116† (.078)	---	.057 (.037)	.060 (.040)	.037 (.024)	---	.152† (.105)	.148† (.102)	.144† (.099)
Thinks Reading is Fun	---	.581** (.114)	.567** (.111)	.555** (.109)	---	.515† (.104)	.511† (.103)	.455 (.092)	---	.555* (.105)	.536† (.101)	.509† (.096)
Thinks Math is Fun	---	.093 (.019)	.083 (.017)	.073 (.015)	---	.160 (.032)	.133 (.027)	.182 (.037)	---	.080 (.016)	.079 (.016)	.000 (.000)
<i>Domain III: Parental Influences</i>												
How Far in School Parents Wants 10 <sup>th</sup> Grader to Go	---	---	.019 (.025)	.018 (.023)	---	---	.016 (.021)	.026 (.034)	---	---	.031 (.038)	.028 (.034)
Parents' Desire More School After High School	----	----	.152 (.019)	.156 (.019)	----	----	.232 (.029)	.294 (.037)	---	---	.065 (.008)	.130 (.017)
Parents Very Much Expect Success in School	---	---	-.351† (-.066)	-.295 (-.056)	---	---	-.282 (.055)	-.299 (.058)	---	---	-.337 (-.063)	-.229 (-.043)
Discussed Going to College with Parents	---	----	.305 (.033)	.348 (.038)	---	----	.135 (.015)	.170 (.019)	---	---	.370 (.041)	.450 (.049)
<i>Domain IV: School Environments</i>												
Students Find Teachers and Classes Rewarding	---	----	---	.052 (.034)	---	----	---	.021 (.015)	---	---	---	.099 (.059)
Likes School a Great Deal	---	----	---	.153 (.027)	---	----	---	.180 (.032)	---	---	---	.248 (.044)
Other Students Often Disrupt Class	---	----	---	-.405* (-.074)	---	----	---	-.226 (-.041)	---	---	---	-.573* (-.109)
Feels Safe at this School	---	----	---	-.047 (-.006)	---	----	---	.647 (.084)	---	---	---	-.325 (-.041)
Constant	3.910***	0.400	-0.007	-0.075	3.882***	1.003	0.638	0.099	4.022***	-0.076	-0.451	-0.595
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.064***	.133***	.133***	.134***	.070***	.124***	.116***	.114***	.060***	.137***	.133***	.138***

†p=.10 \*p=.05 \*\*p=.01 \*\*\*p=.001

<sup>a</sup> Information above is based on a listwise deletion of cases

For Model I, when sampling all Asian American students in the study, socioeconomic status ( $B = .732, p < .001$ ) had a greater predictive value for the number of postsecondary schools applied to than the other three demographic domain variables. Thus, socioeconomic status is an influential variable above having two parents and/or guardians, the school's urbanicity, or the school's public or private status. The quantifiable and malleable sociological components of identity are more influential than those that are solely related to family or the school's community. For Model II, in addition to socioeconomic status ( $B = .512, p < .001$ ), the school's public status ( $B = -.519, p < .10$ ) held a minor predictability when adding the student-level variables. Additionally, how far the students believe they will progress in their postsecondary studies ( $B = .471, p < .001$ ), their motivation to study ( $B = .118, p < .05$ ), and their perception of reading as fun ( $B = .581, p < .01$ ) all embraced a significant predictive value for the students in this application process; in this model and subsequent tests, the variable identifying education as very important for getting a job did not show significance. Model III continues significant predictability with the aforementioned variables but adds a minor and sole occurrence for the predictor in parental high expectations for success in school ( $B = -.351, p < .10$ ). Finally, Model IV remains consistent and noted that other students disrupting class ( $B = -.405, p < .05$ ) was a factor in predicting the number of schools to which the students applied.

Models V through VIII, comprising the second group, were limited to Asian American males with the original dependent variable. The regression analysis followed the same procedures used for Group 1 when inserting subsequent dependent variables. Unsurprisingly, Model V showed that socioeconomic status ( $B = .760, p < .001$ ) remained robust but additionally added a minor predictive value for the school's public status ( $B = -.675, p = .084$ ). In Model VI, students' belief in how far they will progress in postsecondary education was significant ( $B =$

.463,  $p < .001$ ), along with marginal significance in students' enjoyment of reading ( $B = .515$ ,  $p = .081$ ), therefore, remaining predictors, but at a lower level versus the entire group. Models VII and VIII did not show any statistically significant predictors in the number of postsecondary institutions applied to with the added domains.

For the final group (Models IX through XII), the regressions were tested for Asian American females in the postsecondary education application process. Model IX remained robustly consistent with previous indications of socioeconomic status ( $B = .728$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as a predictor in the demographics domain. Model X uniquely showed that Asian American females' motivation to study ( $B = .152$ ,  $p = 0.61$ ) and their perception of reading as fun ( $B = .555$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were key indicators in their postsecondary education application process. In this study, females showed a higher level of predictability than males for the postsecondary education application process with regard to reading. Model XI also conveyed similar findings, but with no additional factors in Domain III. Furthermore, Model XII noted frequent student class disruptions ( $B = -.573$ ,  $p < .05$ ) as a significant factor. This was unsurprisingly shown in females but not males, as it is likely the males disrupting classes (Legewie & DiPrete, 2012; Thorne, 1993). These significant parts are critical to understanding a student's schooling, despite the inevitable distractions that are part of their learning environments.

As discussed, many factors contribute to a student's choice in the number of postsecondary institutions they apply to; the elements discussed in the next section will include the rationale of the significance or insignificance for the four domains. The regression results in concert with previous literature will elucidate the findings of demographics, student motivation, parental influences, and school environments. The two robust predictors (socioeconomic status and students' belief in how far they will advance in their postsecondary education) for the

number of schools to which Asian Americans apply for will be at the forefront of the next section.

## **Discussion**

The results presented in the previous section provide a rich representation of the types of actions that impact students in the postsecondary education application process. In relation to the first research question, the findings can help higher education institutions to better understand the various components associated with the dynamic demographics of potential undergraduates, particularly Asian American students. What are the relative impacts of demographics, student motivation, parental influence, and school environment on the postsecondary education application process of Asian American students? All things considered, this current study highlights that among Asian Americans, socioeconomic status and student aspirations serve as powerful predictors of the number of postsecondary institutions to which these students apply to during their first round of applications. Previous literature noted that students with access to financial resources are able to unfairly pay college preparatory agencies to assist in the college application process (Todorova, 2018), and students from less socioeconomically advantaged backgrounds remain less likely to enter higher education (Robinson & Roksa, 2016). This study, focusing on the application process, notes that socioeconomic status is a primary predictor of how many colleges Asian American students apply to, as the other studies focused on ultimate enrollment. However, applying is the first step for this eventual success, which is consistent with Sirin's (2005) analysis, namely, that socioeconomic status was the best predictor for educational achievement. It has been noted that a successful urban ecosystem is a learning ecology that supports its youth and parents/guardians, maximizing the use of the community's resources

toward the full human flourishing of each student's potential (Pinkard, 2019). This study did not find urban schools as fulfilling this for the postsecondary education application process.

Institutions should aim to be more cognizant of student aspirations.

Outside of socioeconomic status, students' belief in how far they will progress in their postsecondary education was the sole variable that proved to be robustly significant for all models in the study. Family circumstances were previously thought to be a primary predictor in this process, but this study's data indicate that other components more strongly impact this turning point of life. Parents were thought to have served as powerful motivators, creating a clear expectation for success that was reinforced by the schools (Gao, 2017; Lee & Zhou, 2015). Parents were additionally believed to be instrumental in the college choice process, nudging students in the direction where parental experiences were reassured for the sake of their own satisfaction (Nora, 2004). In fact, Asian American students are continually self-motivated, which is a primary predictor of their desire to elevate their educational level; thus, they apply to postsecondary schools. This study did not find the parental implications to align at the same predictability as student-related factors. The initial description of the student's need to apply to more schools relates to the value they place on themselves. This holds true with relation to the various gender groups.

Additionally, reading was a significant predictor in this process. The literature noted that Japanese pupils exhibit proficient literacy and Vietnamese students fortify literacy for cultural education (Holloway, 1989; Hossain, 2016). Further exploration on the implications for the postsecondary education application process revealed that students will read more in these institutions than they do in high school. Females are less likely to drop out of school and more likely to have higher reading proficiency levels than males (Sadovnik et al., 2018). This study

showed only a marginal difference in the predictability between Asian American males and females. Thus, gender did not impact the results for Asian American students in this study. In almost every case, gender was not a significant variable for Asian American students in their educational aspirations.

We understand that Asian students have historically been known to place a high value on education with high standards and aspirations when pursuing academic achievement (Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Jang, 2018), and that these aspirations for postsecondary educational success encompasses the development of students' plan to attend college based on family values, social networks, and school cultures (Klasik, 2012). However, this study notes that it is the self-aspired motivation that progresses their desire for educational attainment. The students hold the primary motivation and the primary stress implications. Knowing that the socioeconomic statuses of families have an impact on educational opportunities and resources shows that the students are able to access various opportunities in the world (Qiu & Wu, 2011). Students are certainly implicated with the expectations of their own socioeconomic status, causing stress on their interactions at school and home, but their self-determination proves most fruitful. Students in this dataset have enhanced the theory of schools serving as the place to develop them for society. The students want to increase their educational levels in order to have access to resources. As Dewey described, the ideas for the student are not separate from the social conditions (Dewey, 1905; Sadovnik et al., 2018).

The only notion of significant gender differences was indicated when other students are found disrupting classes. This is consistent with literature that noted boys have the tendency to disrupt the co-curricular experiences of their female counterparts (Legewie & DiPrete, 2012; Thorne, 1993). This is interesting, as it relates to the behavioral norms of males; females seek an

environment where they are in a position to succeed academically and emotionally. Males are the ones likely causing the disruption; thus, the data did not find this variable significant for them. There is likely a need for males to fit in and be a part of the world by agreeing to societal norms of their gender in school settings. This point ties back to the search for truth with the efforts in learning (Wynter, 2003). We know scholars have found that socioeconomic status is a contributing factor to postsecondary education desires, as it influences the student's lifestyle and *habitus* (Lee, 2011). The focus of the student is consistent with the understanding that students bring knowledge, too, and are motivated for postsecondary success.

### **Conclusions and Policy Implications**

This cross-sectional analysis of the data collected by the NCES for the ELS employed univariate, bivariate, and multivariate techniques. First, descriptive statistics were applied to determine general characteristics of the Asian American student sample. Second, a series of correlational analyses and *t*-tests were performed to determine the relationships between the variables. Finally, multiple regression analyses were utilized to determine which independent variables had the greatest impact on predicting the number of postsecondary schools to which these students apply.

There is little consensus among scholars and policymakers as to whether, and how, Asian American students pursue the postsecondary education application process. This thesis has implications for policies, research, and practice, in particular to emphasize the needed support systems for student motivation. This study notes that socioeconomic status and self-aspirations are the primary factors in affecting students' higher education application processes. These findings for Asian American students allow for an aligned level of importance to live up to their



own expectations versus the expectations primarily of their parents. These associations were robust through the multivariate cross-sectional analyses. The surrounding factors require additional analysis on the stress students place on themselves, since there may not be the same expectation from their parents and schools to attend a postsecondary school and obtain advanced degrees. Based on the findings presented in this study, there may be several opportunities to more effectively use policies to support the postsecondary education application process.

We understand that development occurs in concert with and based on students' interactions through various aspects of their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and that complex human experiences in the world are shaped by diverse and influencing factors (Collins & Bilge, 2018). However, the most important aspects in this study involve socioeconomic status and student motivation toward their postsecondary education application behaviors. Higher education institutions can work to recruit these students by aligning program offerings that lead to further education (e.g., graduate school), since this self-motivation is a key factor. Similarly, high school administrators can continue to build programs for students from all socioeconomic levels that uses this demographic as a lever in pursuing postsecondary educational success. High school teachers should foster an environment that leverages the subject of reading and minimizes students' disruptions so they can comprehend the opportunities available through their higher education institutions and society in general. We must continue to train students in unique ways in light of the different functions they will be called upon to fulfill in society (Durkheim, 1933). The world provides reading opportunities everywhere (online and offline) and distractions are sure to arise (people in communities and personal boundaries) that need not distract from the penultimate task at hand: applying for postsecondary success.

Finally, parents and family cultures, which were previously thought to have the most significant impact on this process (Abada & Tenkorang, 2009; Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Liu & Xie, 2016; Nora, 2004; Yano et al., 2018), do not primarily predict the number of postsecondary schools to which these students apply during the first round of applications. Students' specific learning locations, such as internal school settings and the external urbanicity of their environments, act as frames of reference, informing their perceptions of the world around them (Jović, 2019). This is, in part, true, but I have found that the motivation of how far in school they (both males and females) think they will get is their strongest perception based on where they are from. Learning environments must promote a positive academic experience to support students' self-aspirations in their desired educational attainment so that they expect to achieve this postsecondary success. While this current study elucidates several findings and proposes several strategies for constituents to implement in support of applying for postsecondary success, much work remains for future research.

### **Limitations & Future Research**

Several of this study's limitations stem from the use of publicly available data provided by the NCES. Importantly, the public dataset for the ELS does not aggregate students by school but by school locale. Particular schools may have specific program offerings and resources to assist students in postsecondary preparation. For example, schools that require a college preparation course may have students applying to more postsecondary schools than others. Understanding the high school's co-curricular offerings and resources for experiential learning could be additive in the postsecondary education application process. This study employed a cross-sectional analysis on the postsecondary education application process, not encompassing ultimate outcomes in school enrollment, educational attainment, or volunteer/career

achievements. Utilizing a longitudinal frame of reference would allow for greater understanding of the impact on the application process. This study is based on a quantitative analysis; it would benefit from qualitative components assessing stress factors in the postsecondary application process, as well as students' understanding of the amount of time involved in the postsecondary education application process. Do students that spend more hours on this application process find it more stressful or more rewarding? Additionally, focus groups or interviews could expound room dynamics and help to understand the levels of empathy students have for each other in this process outside of the family context. Some scholars (Teranishi et. al, 2004) noted that students impact their fellow classmates more than teachers in attending elite institutions.

Though the sample size ( $N = 662$ ) is suitable for a quantitative analysis, a larger sample (with equal race breakdowns for Asians) would prove helpful in understanding whether the marginal predictive effects maintain the same impact on the postsecondary education application process. Previous literature has noted that Asian American students had better experiences and higher performances than students of other ethnicities (Jang, 2018; Liu & Xie, 2016).

Understanding the regression analyses for other races would prove interesting in comparison to see if the impact of performance relates to aspirations. Do Asian Americans and Caucasian Americans have the same predictability? Similarly, what are the primary factors impacting Hispanic and African American students when pursuing postsecondary education? Students' native language is an available variable within the ELS dataset, which would cover a specific demographic of families and provide context on the specific races within the Asian American student demographics. With this framework, it would be interesting to understand whether or not these students' enjoyment of reading remains a predictor for the postsecondary application, as students with English as a second language may have challenges with literacy. Eighty-three

percent of the students in this study had at least two parents and/or guardians; this study would benefit from a direct analysis of a suitable sample from the students who did not have two parents/guardians to see if the relative impact remained or differed during the regression analysis.

Additionally, a limitation of this particular regression analysis approach is that it does not consider students' grades and test scores, nor does it consider the sibling structure of the home. Another consideration for future research is the integration of additional school subjects (i.e., science, art, and social studies) as they relate to this application process. As the Pearson's correlation in Table 2 is recalled, there was a strength in the variable on how far students think they will advance in their postsecondary studies across most variables. Would this strength remain for the new variables and how do they impact the ultimate outcomes? Furthermore, this thesis did not examine the type of postsecondary schools that students apply to, but rather the number of them. In this same sense, an analysis on the elite-ness of institutions may provide interesting results in the thinking on societal expectations based off the school's public and religious reputations. Similarly, how students are recruited for athletics and academic teams would provide a unique perspective on postsecondary institutional efforts. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of the amount of schools that these students apply to could be useful. Do they have the same drive as the group within this thesis?

Moreover, this study (using data collected in 2002) would benefit from a more recent dataset gathered by the NCES, such as the 2009-2016 High School Longitudinal Study (HSLs) or the 2012-2017 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS). Finally, this study deliberately did not include variables related to grades, test scores, sibling settings, or teacher-parent relations (exosystems). This choice allowed a narrower focus for the study.

However, it is possible that the additional school and family factors influence these models in ways that are important but unaccounted for here. The implications this process has on younger siblings who will undergo this critical life point also offers an opportunity for further research. Do younger siblings apply to some of the same schools to which their older counterparts applied? Scholars may also wish to analyze the degree variations. For example, does pursuing a liberal arts or vocational degree alter the stressful influences for college applicants? This dataset does not offer those specific variables, but the school controls are noted and can provide an entryway for this analysis. As postsecondary school perspectives are analyzed, a greater understanding of admissions requirements and acceptance rates would be additive in conveying the school's role in the application process. Furthermore, the implementation of interventions to reduce stress is a critical component to be analyzed when providing recommendations to schools and families. With this particular addition, scholars may find differences in the reputations of the schools and the jobs ultimately attained.

## **Conclusion**

These limitations notwithstanding, the implications of this study offer helpful insight for higher education institutions, as they are not hindered by the parents' influence entirely for this student demographic. Furthermore, this suggests that high schools, where these students are encompassed, have opportunities to prepare students for the next phase in society, where they can contribute meaningfully. It is the building on these associations that must remain.

Facilitating relationships with students from various socioeconomic status backgrounds allows for their moral development in the classrooms, where they can express new ideas and hold difficult conversations (Lee, 2011). The students are likely succeeding in handling stress in relationship to pursuing a postsecondary education. This particular group of students can turn to

their teachers' achievements for a better understanding of their own college application process or a desire to find one and become experts on such, but they are self-motivated in how they define their postsecondary success. Similarly, the peer dynamics can inform a cohesive learning environment that affords the opportunity for students to feed off one another's motivation.

If higher education institutions are to survive and thrive, they need to enroll more students with creative recruitment efforts. If the model and behavior of applicants are changing based on student motivation and not parental pressure, more research is needed on their psychological motivation and how to support and augment such aspirations. This research can assist higher education institutions in their recruitment and retention efforts with additional background on behavior to maintain the theories that schools are to provide a moral education to prepare students to meaningfully contribute to society. Though there are numerous factors, as Bronfenbrenner noted, that provide interplay with this study, focusing on the primary factors supported the analysis needed.

To conclude, educational institutions are still regularly working to solidify their purpose in an effort to recruit, retain, and prepare students for society. A new method on how to encourage and maintain motivation in this process would be beneficial for this process, which should be rewarding and enlightening. Focusing on the classroom and school experience holistically contributes to the development of a student's moral life. Finally, the role of the guidance counselor at high schools should be reformed so that they serve as unbiased supporters in identifying students' actual needs in relation self-aspirations. The data shows that education is one factor in the socioeconomic status assessment in these Asian American students that influences their decisions to apply to postsecondary schools. For this sample, this is an offering for the continual adaptation of schools because the world is always changing. The foundations

perspective conveys that there are numerous factors impacting a student's education, but self-aspiration is one of the primary aspects in a student's critical selection process. This is natural, as their rationale is to be part of an educated society and to make informed decisions for social mobility. With school counselors taking a more objective role in this process, students can receive guidance to assist in supporting on their aspirations and potential.

### **Final Remarks**

This study began by examining higher education institutions' understanding of the various components associated with the shifting demographic landscape of undergraduate students and the relative impacts of demographics, student motivation, parental influences, and school environments during Asian American students' postsecondary education application process. Furthermore, it aimed to explore whether the domains differed according to gender. This thesis notes that the two greatest predictors for Asian American students' (both males and females) postsecondary education application processes are socioeconomic status and their belief in their own potential.

Although every system involved in this process influences child development, special effort should be made by scholars, educators, administrators, and policymakers to continue to develop practices that aid in these aspects. The self-motivation characteristic, in particular, has weighty implications across the gamut of variables. Student development can be successful only with the support of the various learning environments (i.e. home and school). All spaces and systems must foster a positive academic experience to support students' self-aspirations in their desired postsecondary educational attainment so that they expect to achieve application success. More importantly, family and school settings must work to permeate this self-motivation such that students not only have high hopes but also firmly believe that with effort and persistence,

they have the capacity to realize their robust ambitions of a postsecondary education. Instead of labeling Asian Americans as stereotypical academic achievers that do not need support, all involved should embrace the potential and drive that is held forth in these students that they may apply for success with a reinforced foundation.



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