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Emily Jang April 3, 2024

Exploring Beliefs & Identity:
The Internal & External World of Asian Americans

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Abstract

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This is an exploratory study investigating beliefs held by Asian Americans specifically about the concepts of success and well-being. Belief systems are considered in relation to different aspects of identity– seeking to better understand the complex relationship between beliefs and identity. The investigation of belief systems and identity for Asian Americans is conducted through semi-structured interviews with Korean Americans and a Chinese American. This study finds success and well-being are conceptualized in holistic and affective ways that demonstrate these concepts as interconnected to one another. Two aspects of identity, low economic status and religion, are identified and further explored as shaping these belief systems. Through the review of individuals' lived experiences and beliefs, the nuances of belief systems, attributes of identity, and how they are related for Asian Americans are better understood.

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Chapter One: Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Background and Study Overview

"Who are you? What do you believe?" are both questions of significant weight. These questions of identity and beliefs are complexly *influenced* and may complexly *influence* different aspects of an individual's lived experience. However, the present study seeks to explore how these two aspects of living as agents in a social world may influence one another. The relationship between the two is specifically explored for Asian Americans, who have often had these questions of identity and beliefs reductively answered for them through stereotypes. The use of narratives in this study addresses this reduction by adopting an anecdotal standpoint. This study explores identity and beliefs for Asian Americans by Asian Americans in order to cultivate acknowledgement of the fullness and complexity of these individuals.

In the present social landscape, social identity has become a key avenue for gaining greater insight into how one's social self shapes their reality, which is perceived and shaped by beliefs. The value of identity as this avenue comes from the meanings social identities are charged with. Through semi-structured interviews with four Korean Americans and one Chinese American, this study illuminates this path through descriptions of belief systems and how they relate to identity. This study seeks to shed light on beliefs about success and well-being held by Asian Americans with the intent of exploring how this relates to social identity. The study reveals the complexity of individual belief systems on success and well-being through narratives. These personal descriptions capture both personal and shared experiences. The shared experiences are nuanced by the commonality of the Asian American identity shared by the

Chinese American or Korean American interlocutors, which intersect with other facets of identity such as religion and income status.

The Asian American identity is a social identity gaining greater footing in different domains including mainstream pop culture, academia, and politics. However, Asian Americans continue to be a largely understudied group warranting a nuanced investigation given the high degree of heterogeneity that exists in this demographic. This diversity prompts the acknowledgment that one cannot generalize across this group, and generalizations themselves can be a disservice to the individual differences that exist within groups. Despite this understanding, the reality is that there are generalizations, often manifested as stereotypes, for Asian Americans. These generalizations, regardless of accuracy, make salient specific concepts, such as success and well-being. Success and well-being are specifically related to Asian Americans due to their relationship with popularized stereotypes like the "model minority" and the incomplete study of Asian Americans themselves in this area. The significance of these concepts specifically related to Asian American identity prompts its emphasis in this study of exploring identity and beliefs for Asian Americans.

The exploration of the relationship between beliefs and identity builds upon the assumption that these two concepts are important to one's lived experiences and how one navigates their world given the "Janus-faced nature of subjectivity" (Ozawa-de Silva, 2019, p.21-22). This framework recognizes that individuals navigate their reality by "looking out" and "looking in" from the self. "Looking out" recognizes that everyone lives in a shared world, which includes shared meanings and beliefs, while "looking in" recognizes the self as "separate from others," which points to the individuality of the self (Ozawa-de Silva, 2019, p.21-22). In this framework, I see social identity as a link between the self and the social world because social

identity shapes how one is perceived and perceives the world. This suggests even beliefs informed by the shared world may act and be acted upon differently for those of different identities. Therefore, identity and beliefs and how they relate are important to understanding one's experience.

This study provides a means of investigating the questions: What are Asian American beliefs about success and well-being? How are these beliefs related, if at all? Additionally, what aspects of social identity influence these belief systems?

Rationale and Significance

Despite the significance and growing presence of the Asian American identity, research on this group is relatively lacking. Even within the existing literature, there are mixed results and gaps due to factors such as the high degree of heterogeneity within the group and the historical lack of attention given to Asian Americans (Chu & Sue, 2011; John et al., 2012). The Asian American identity is associated with cultural values and experiences along with connections to other meanings sourced from the identity itself. Meanings from social identity can be manifested as specific tropes that become widely circulated in society. This reiterates the significance identity and beliefs have on how individuals make sense of themselves and the world they occupy. For Asian American identity, current literature recognizes the depth of the implications identity and belief can have (Iwamoto & Liu, 2011). Given the significance of both identity and beliefs independently and possibly interdependently, this study seeks to explore these two areas for Asian Americans more fully.

The growing presence of this community, or rather, the growing acknowledgment of this community from non-Asian Americans is evoked not only by their population growth but also by

the shift in attention towards them. By the year 2055, Asian Americans are estimated to comprise 36% of the United States immigration population, making them the largest immigrant group in the country (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Such a large and increasing population presence has significant implications for a range of fields including politics and medicine. Asian Americans have also attracted growing interest, increasing its prominence in the areas they occupy. Interest in Asian Americans have come internally from the Asian American community and externally from outgroup members.

As a group, Asian Americans have called for greater amplification of their own presence through different conduits of representation and power. This exists in tandem with the external interest from non-Asian Americans brought onto this group in recent years. Assisted by increased globalization and accessibility to Asian cultures, members outside of the Asian American community have come to recognize the identity and cultures of this more. However, the interests expressed by outsiders have and often are selective and idealized– straining the complex tension between the "Asian-ness," otherness, and exoticism of the Asian American identity.

The "Asian American" identity is often left reductive, creating gaps in understanding Asian American belief systems and an underdeveloped understanding of how social identity shapes individual realities. Thus, there is a chasm between popularized understandings of Asian Americans –especially as successful "model minorities"-- and the actual lived experiences of Asian Americans. In the United States, a significant aspect of Asian American characterization is success materialized by tropes such as the "Tiger Mom." The emphasis on success, indexed by these tropes, can not be easily dismissed as impotent stereotypes. Even in the inaccuracies of these beliefs, these tropes and beliefs are influential. The acknowledgment of beliefs as

influential agents in our social world in tandem with the gap of literature in this area for this community.

It is increasingly difficult to dismiss the significance of success even with the understanding of stereotypes as inherently fallacious because of the lived experiences I experience, hear, and share with other Asian Americans. As a Korean American, I have observed the dominating role success has played in many Asian Americans' narratives at the cost of one's well-being. A popular narrative I recognize, especially in first-generation Asian American immigrants, appears to be founded on the American Dream. In the race to achieve this popularized immigrant success story, I've noticed many Asian Americans, particularly small business owners, work long hours every day for about 363 days of the year. There remains little room to consider and pursue well-being, especially given the limitation of time. The double burden for small business owners and workers emerge from their self-employment as they often lack health insurance and work long hours at their own discretion (Cook et al., 2014).

The story of pursuing success at the cost of well-being isn't contained to first-generation immigrants, although it appears to manifest differently for non-first-generation immigrants. The narratives for many first-and-a-half or second-generation Asian Americans including myself commonly revolve around success as shaped by the Immigrant Bargain. The Immigrant Bargain drives children of first-generation immigrants to pursue success to justify the sacrifices their family has had to make. This drive to success pressures individuals to work at the price of their physical, emotional, and mental health– often, to achieve a success defined for them by their parents or by the very stereotypes that emphasize success.

By intentionally exploring questions of belief systems and identity through this study, a more critical and intentional insight can be provided into making sense of how success,

well-being, identity, and the ways they relate to each other come to be for Asian Americans. The use of narratives also provide a space for Asian Americans themselves to recognize and share their lived experiences. The opportunity to share one's narrative enables ownership in individual lived experiences by creating a platform for Asian Americans to be empowered by the stories in their community. By exploring identity and beliefs related to success and well-being, this study seeks to enrich the understanding of Asian Americans. This research challenges the reductive tendencies found in common Asian tropes by broadening the space of Asian American understanding to include individual narratives.

Positionality

This research stems from a personal position as an individual who identifies as Asian American. I am considered a 1.5-generation immigrant having immigrated with my family to the United States at age two from South Korea (Harvard, n.d.). The research question and study were initially motivated by multiple conversations shared with other Asian Americans. These conversations with mostly Korean Americans and Chinese Americans of various immigration generation statuses centered around our shared similar struggles of pursuing success, carrying familial burdens, discovering our joys, and learning through growing pains what we choose to believe and pursue as Asian Americans. One particular characteristic commonly found in these conversations have been the struggle to pursue success while protecting one's well-being.

My narrative as a low-income Christian Korean American immigrant echoes elements of the findings I share in this study. However, I do not intend to generalize or speak for an incredibly diverse group of people through this research. Instead, I seek to provide the platform

and light on individuals within this broad demographic to make space for these complex voices and demand attention to this field.

METHODS

The primary research method for this study was semi-structured interviews with Asian Americans of Korean and Chinese heritage. These interviews were conducted both online over Zoom and in person. The oral consent form and interview guide utilized in these interviews are available in Appendix I and II respectively. All interlocutors are de-identified to maintain confidentiality.

Although the following mentions my initial recruitment of Asian Americans with East Asian heritage, I consider the complexity of these descriptive terms. This reflects the complexity of the panethnic and ethnic terminologies often utilized for the Asian American demographic. The difficulties in utilizing the term "East Asian Americans" considering the issue of ingroup cohesion led to my specification of interlocutors through ethnicity. Ingroup cohesion is particularly difficult for "East Asian Americans" because of the historical tensions between countries of origin. To address this challenge of identification, I specify my study and results to the ethnicities of my interlocutors: Korean American and Chinese American. Thus, my study primarily pertains to Asian Americans of Korean and Chinese descent given those were the identified ethnicities of my interlocutors.

Recruitment Criteria

Given that this study is focused on Asian Americans, specifically Korean and Chinese Americans, this was the sole group interviewed. "Asian American" in this study is described as a

racial identity as aligned with the given categorization and description of the US Census Bureau's categorization of "Asian" (n.d.). Race in this study is defined through Merriam-Webster's definition as "any one of the groups that humans are often divided into based on physical traits regarded as common among people of shared ancestry" (n.d.). This is socially defined and is primarily dependent on how one identifies themselves.

Additionally, ethnicity is differentiated from race as ethnicity is defined as "the fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). This definition regards the East Asian heritage criteria of the Asian American individuals being recruited. The additional criteria within this social identity are intended to provide a closer exploration of a specific topic despite the great heterogeneity found in the Asian American demographic. It is also to acknowledge the high degree of heterogeneity that exists, especially across ethnicities, cultural differences, and social forces that contextualize Asian immigration. Through this acknowledgment, this study seeks to avoid overgeneralizing while maintaining the openness of diversity that emerges from this complex identity.

The age range remained broad, ranging from 18-65 years old, to create the capacity for multiple immigration generation statuses. By providing a wide age range, I intended to allow for those of differing ages and generation statuses to be included in this study given immigration generation status can differentiate lived experiences even among specific demographic features. However, the criteria that one has had to reside in the United States for a minimum of two years was to emphasize the experience of immigration and experience residing in the context of the United States. This criteria was also an emphasis on the "American" dimension of the "Asian American" identity.

Recruitment Methods

Recruitment was initiated through convenience sampling within spaces that had a high concentration of Asian Americans. These spaces included but were not limited to Christian organizations on campuses (i.e. Journey Church of Atlanta), class (i.e. Asian American Women Writers), and social groups These interlocutors were recruited through previously established relationships between the researcher and these spaces. Additionally, snowball sampling, which can be defined as "existing participants recommend[ing] additional potential participants," was also utilized (The American Psychological Association, n.d.). Thus, relationships between interlocutors were also involved in recruitment. Initial interest in participation of the study was expressed by interlocutors organically. This took the form of interlocutors, who have already had prior relationships with the researcher, expressing interest in the researcher's thesis, which led to their interest in participation. Information on the study was verbally described and participants were given greater information on study participation via email if interest was seriously expressed. All individuals were residing in the local Atlanta area at the time of data collection. There were four Korean Americans and one Chinese American ranging from 20 to 22 years of age. There were three males and two females. Two interlocutors (A and C) identified themselves as having a low-income background. Only one interlocutor (E) was not enrolled in university at the time of research.

To preface the following description on success and well-being, I acknowledge these interlocutors belong to a specific subgroup of Asian Americans. All five interlocutors were second-generation immigrants whose parents (as first-generation immigrants) immigrated to the United States to pursue opportunities related to their livelihood, which included economic opportunities and higher education. Motivation for immigration was not to flee war or political

turmoil. Additionally, all interlocutors were receiving or received higher education from prestigious institutions in the local Atlanta area (i.e. Emory University, Georgia Tech).

Since this study pertains to well-being, I recognize that none of the interlocutors mentioned disabilities or chronic illnesses. I do not assume the lack of disclosure translates to a lack of disability or illness. However, I do believe this is an important detail to consider in exploring how these interlocutors described well-being. This consideration arises from the understanding that health including physical health is a privilege that may often be taken for granted. These qualities are identified to establish the following findings are not representative of all Asian Americans and to suggest a critical approach to what attributes of identity (or lack of) may affect belief systems.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The following literature review seeks to cover relevant literature ranging from fields of health to social science on the topics of social identity and belief systems for Asian Americans. Reviewing current literature instills the foundations as to why beliefs should be considered in understanding the lived experiences of individuals in relation to identity. The review is also intended to provide background on the relevance of the concepts of success and well-being for Asian Americans.

I first explore the significance of beliefs and how they are related to social identity. This establishes the foundation of individual and social forces as factors in belief construction. Then, I specify this literature to the Asian American community by providing background on this racial identity. With the current understanding of Asian Americans, I explore two significant concepts related to this identity: success and well-being.

Beliefs & Identity

Belief systems can be defined as "the stories we tell ourselves to define our personal sense of reality" (Usó-Doménch & Nescolarde-Selva, 2016). These beliefs affect how individuals intake information, digest it, and choose to act on it. In other words, belief systems are the lens through which an individual perceives and experiences the world. These lenses can be so powerful that they lead to differential perceptions of reality across individuals depending on what lens individuals wear (Rutjens & Brandt, 2018). Thus, beliefs are not simply a matter of opinion but of one's reality.

The differentiation of belief systems across individuals points to the personalized structures and networks of beliefs "within persons" (Brandt, 2022). This conceptualization of belief systems as "within persons" builds upon Brandt-Sleegers and Goldberg-Stein's model of belief systems as the "property of the individual," which means "each person potentially has their own unique belief system" (Bradnt, 2018; Brandt & Sleegers, 2021; Goldberg & Stein, 2018). Although I acknowledge the unique nature of each individual's belief system established by this model, I also seek to incorporate the context of these beliefs to provide a fuller understanding of how beliefs function.

Belief systems do not emerge solely out of the capacity of the individual. Instead, they are shaped by the social contexts individuals participate in. The relationship between social context and belief systems can be linked through the concept of identity. This relationship works under the framework that experience, or subjectivity, functions in a Janus-faced manner.

The Janus-faced framework is constructed by the two simultaneous functions of "looking out" and "in" (Ozawa-de Silva, 2019, pp. 21-22). The side of "looking in" in this framework refers to the individual experiencing the world as an entity distinct from others. This distinction from the perspective of the self aligns with how beliefs may be "within oneself" because the self is still separate from the world one lives in. On the other side, to "look out" embeds one's personal subjectivity in the shared world that all individuals participate in. The shared world is composed of shared meanings, even when there are differences in how people respond to these understandings. Identity, then, can be a link between the self to this shared world because identity is one way an individual can be presented to the world and how the world is perceived by the individual.

Social identity can be defined as “the ways that people’s self-concepts are based on their membership in social groups” (Leaper, 2011). As social creatures, our social identity becomes a critical governor of the relationship between the social world and an individual. Social identities are a powerful source of beliefs, shaping our systems, institutions, and interpersonal relationships, and even becoming embodied (Gravlee, 2009). How one identifies oneself and is identified by others evokes different responses at the individual and societal level through the way social identities themselves possess meaning. Thus, there are different avenues in which social identities relate to belief systems including exposure to specific environments.

Environment may refer to the physical world the body exists within but also the larger social structures, institutions, and cultural values that the body functions in. These “cultural institutions of government, media, schools, and religions shape what group members think is normal, natural, and possible” (Guest, 2020, p. 544). Thus, these cultural institutions and structures are sources of beliefs because they shape how individuals come to believe “what is normal and appropriate,” which “subconsciously limit their life choices and chances” (Guest, 2020, p, 544). The differential relationships one has with larger societal forces demonstrates how identity may relate to beliefs through the way they experience different sources of beliefs as well as the effect of these beliefs.

Individuals may share similar beliefs even if they are not identical when individuals experience these different influences of belief formation (Brandt, 2018). The similarity across the belief formation process may be attributed to the similarity in social identity. This moderation between institutions and experiences that shape beliefs and belief formation by social identity reveals the role identity plays in how one navigates the social world. Identity, in this moderation, can include class and race, and are indicative of a larger, deeply rooted, system of inequality.

The social world is a product of culture because structures, institutions, and norms are manifestations of beliefs rooted in history and power, which have led to inequalities that act on multiple levels. Given the relevance and saturation of meaning tied to social identity and inequality in the United States, beliefs and lived experiences are intricately affected by social identity, specifically race.

Race

Historically, in the United States, race is one of the most salient aspects of social identity–charged with beliefs rooted in history, politics, and culture. Race is considered a basic social category for which information about a person is readily available based on similar common physical characteristics, primarily skin color (Kite et al., 2023). The perceptions often associated with stereotypes are societally held assumptions made about certain social categories (Kite et al., 2023). These stereotypes can evoke prejudice (attitudes based on categories) and discrimination (hostile behavior based on categories), reinforcing the inequality that exists surrounding race in the United States (Kite et al., 2023).

Currently, literature on race and the lived experiences of racial groups primarily focuses on Black Americans given the history of systemic racism in the United States (Eberhardt, 2019). While it is imperative to study anti-Black prejudice and perceptions, there should be more directed effort to disentangle the complexities of anti-Asian racism in the literature for more intersectional and holistic understandings of race in America. The present study seeks to address this existing gap by shedding light onto the Asian American identity and belief systems.

Asian American Identity

The history and conceptualization of the Asian American identity is incredibly complex given the diversity that this identity encompasses. This diversity includes but is not limited to differential immigration factors, ethnicities, socioeconomic status, and immigration generation statuses. Given this immense heterogeneity composing this "Asian American" identity, it is understandable why there is so much nuance and complications to exploring this identity.

The term "Asian American" was first coined by Gee and Ichioka in 1968 as a means of reclaiming the social and political identity of multiple sub-ethnic groups, which consisted of mostly Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Americans. Now, it has broadened to refer to individuals from over 20 different countries with the majority of individuals coming from China, India, the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). The term Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) has also become mainstream, but because the experiences of Pacific Islanders are more similar to Indigenous populations (e.g., dislocation) rather than Asian Americans, this study will not generalize these groups together. Even when Pacific Islanders are excluded from the description of Asian Americans, the variations within this demographic are vast but often dismissed under this umbrella term.

As mentioned prior, the term "Asian American" includes multiple ethnicities, making it a panethnic identity. Panethnicty can be defined as the process in "which multiple ethnic groups… widen their boundaries to forge a new, broader grouping and identity" (Okamoto, 2014, p. 2). Ethnicity in this study can be defined as "the fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). Although these identifiers are different, they are not mutually exclusive nor do they reduce the value of the other.

Even in the discussion of ethnicity for self-concept, belief is important. This builds upon Weber's description of ethnicity as founded on one's "belief in blood relationships, or on what

people perceive to be true in terms of common descent' more than objective, biological lineage (Weber, 1968; Okamato, 2014, p. 6). This emphasizes the importance of what one believes in and the relationship between identity and beliefs. Whether it is at the broad level of panethnic identification or specific ethnicity, beliefs are important to how one perceives themselves. This identification shapes what one values and how one acts.

How one identifies themselves even within this Asian American identity is shaped by different factors that contribute to the heterogeneity of this group. For over a century, individuals from Asia have immigrated to the United States motivated by factors ranging from hope for better economic ventures to refuge from political turmoil. The motivations for immigration, generations from immigration, ethnicity, values, and practices are only a number of factors that differentiate individuals within this group. These differences also contribute to different processes of belief formation, and, thus, different beliefs.

Theories of Belief Formation

In the investigation of beliefs and Asian American identity, specifically relevant to immigration, I explore theories of belief acquisition and influence. Since mass immigration from Asian countries has been rather recent, immigration is relevant to understanding beliefs. The characteristic of immigration generation status may be an important nuance in understanding how beliefs are formed and held. This takes into account how one navigates two primary sources of belief information: the place of immigration and emigration. Even within the same household unit, the degree to which individuals hold and are influenced by these two sites can differ. The process of how one shapes and is shaped by the beliefs of their country of origin and current country of residence are understood through acculturation and assimilation.

Acculturation is defined as when "an individual from one cultural group learns and adopts elements of another cultural group, integrating them into his or her original culture" (SAMHSA, 2014). Assimilation, on the other hand, is an "outcome of acculturation" that indicates a "complete adoption" of the culture of the new group (SAMHSA, 2014). Classic theories of acculturation propose that acculturation is linear with a steady simultaneous loss of the culture of origin in tandem with increased gain of the mainstream culture. However, this linear depiction is an oversimplification of a dynamic and complex lived experience. A more appropriate alternative theory is segmented assimilation theory, which proposes "patterns of acculturation, adaptation and assimilation may vary" (John et al., 2012; Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Additionally, an alternative to the classic linear assimilation theories is the bilinear model of acculturation. The bilinear model theory of acculturation proposes that Asian Americans existing within two cultural spheres retain their indigenous culture (i.e. enculturation) and adopt the dominant culture (i.e., acculturation) along two different spectrums (Guan et al., 2020; Kim et al., 1999; Kim & Omizo, 2006). This theory emphasizes the immigration generation as a key differentiator among Asian Americans as it predicts first-generation immigrants are more likely than further removed generations to retain Asian cultural values. These theories should be considered when attempting to understand the nuances of the possible relationship between belief systems, specifically for beliefs about success and well-being.

Asian American Identity & Beliefs About Success

Although the immense degree of diversity in the umbrella term Asian American was established in this review, this identity is often applied neglecting such diversity. The term "Asian American" has led to the false assumption that Asian Americans are a homogenous

group. This has led to a limited conceptualization of Asian Americans as driven and exemplified by stereotypes such as the Model Minority, which increases the dismissal of individual differences.

A key stereotype and concept associated with the Asian American identity is success. Success is frequently correlated to this group through the limited lens of popularized representations and stereotypes that depict Asian Americans as the "Model Minority." This "Model Minority" and success is often measured on the socioeconomic scale with an emphasis on academic and professional excellence. This perception is historically and politically rooted with enduring consequences today.

Historically, the association between educational and economic success with Asian Americans emerges from the Immigration and Nationality Act signed in 1965, which abolished the previously established quotas' limits on immigration from Asia. This act encouraged immigrants from the science and technology field to immigrate given the high demand for high educational and professional skills that would be valuable to the Cold War. The value of high education and capital that tends to enable immigration from this field curated what group of individuals could come to the United States. Through this curation, the demand for "those who can contribute most to this country" centered the immigration demographic to be those deemed most "successful" in valued professional fields or given their socioeconomic status. The encouragement of professional and technical immigrants not only changed the immigration landscape in the U.S. with the increase of immigrants from the Philippines, South Asia, Korea, and China but also provided substance for the Model Minority stereotype (Asia Society, n.d.).

The Model Minority refers to the constructed identity of Asian Americans as examples of successful integration into the White dominated American society (Walton & Truong, 2022).

Success in this context is defined as high socioeconomic status as well as the lack of "issues." This success described in assimilation is associated with high academic and economic achievements. The emphasis of these achievements were employed and continue to be utilized as an argument of the United States as a meritocratic society and land of opportunities. Asian Americans, then, are case studies of immigrants who were able to succeed "in spite of the persistent color line and because of their racial (often coded as cultural) differences" (Walton & Truong, 2022; Wu, 2014). The attribution of "racial" or "cultural" differences as the source of Asian Americans' success was intentionally done to isolate Asian Americans from other racial groups, primarily Black Americans, by White elites in power (Shih et al., 2019).

Although generalizations and stereotypes are harmful, it is also critical to investigate in better understanding how social identity and its associations shape one's perspective of themselves, beliefs, and actions. This exploration of beliefs are not intended to encourage further stereotyping or prejudice but to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between identity and beliefs.

The connection between success and Asian American identity warrants relevance given the various means by which these two constructs are reinforced and influential even if they are not generalizable to everyone identifying as an Asian American. Thus, if these ideas apply to a certain extent to one's lived experience, it is important to understand how specific expectations and beliefs can shape an individual and a larger group. To dismiss these stereotypes and generalizations as an ineffective myth would dismiss the effects these larger beliefs and meanings related to social identity may have.

These stereotypes, especially in their emphasis on success, may influence beliefs held by Asian Americans themselves, demonstrating the potency of these societal beliefs on individuals

themselves. These externally projected beliefs about identity that emphasize success may, then, also be reinforced through techniques practiced within the Asian American community, which strengthen the association between success and Asian American identity.

For example, the internalization of the Model Minority can be seen as the engagement of stereotypes with personal belief systems of Asian Americans— demonstrating the influence of stereotypes regardless of accuracy. The internalization of the Model Minority captures the way stereotypes, even if they are harmful, interact with the stereotyped. For example, the Model Minority was found to be a possible source of how Asian American students form their expectations about their academics (Cherng & Liu, 2017). Success, here, may involve education, wealth, or prestige as informed by the Model Minority stereotype.

Additionally, another possible explanation of how Asian Americans formed such high standards for academic achievement was through the Immigrant Bargain (Cherng & Liu, 2017). The Immigrant Bargain also emphasizes the need to succeed like the Model Minority stereotype, but motivation is derived from a different source. For the Immigrant bargain, motivation stems from non-first-generation children feeling pressure to make their parents' choice to immigrate "worth it" (Cherng & Liu, 2017). To make their parents' sacrifices and struggles justifiable, children may perceive the path of education to a high-paying job as "optimal." Success, then, may appear to be socioeconomic prosperity but it may be more deeply rooted in relationships or immigrant-related factors. Although the Immigrant Bargain impacts non-Asian Americans, Asian Americans may experience pressure to succeed for or influenced by their parents due to values more prominent for Asian Americans. The Confucius value of "filial piety" may be one of these values.

Filial piety is traditionally viewed as “the duty of adult children to care for their elderly parents” but also entails broader respect, obedience, and reverence to parents (Lim et al., 2022). This virtue was found to be a key motivator for Asian American students to financially assist and provide translation services to their parents (Harrington, 2022). Filial piety and a collectivist perspective that centered family also led to an awareness of sibling contributions, which shaped how Asian Americans provided this help to their parents (Harrington, 2022).

The collectivist attitude of Asian families that leads individuals to see themselves as inseparable from their family unit can be a value significant to the understanding of Asian Americans and their associated notion of “success.” This significance placed on family may amplify the existing Asian American values of stigma, shame, and the need to protect one’s reputation because it applies beyond the individual self to the family. Thus, the pressure and expectation to succeed become a reflection of the family in addition to the self (Kramer et al., 2002).

Success is also tied to the Asian American community through mechanisms practiced within it as well. This reveals that the relationship between Asian American identity and success, even as defined as a generalization, is much more complicated and significant than just a stereotype. In fact, the mechanisms employed to emphasize and promote success for Asian Americans were so common and potent that Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese Americans who did not feel they “succeeded" did not feel they were “authentically of their ethnicity” (Lee & Zhou, 2015, p.172). As a result, they often distance themselves from their ethnicity, which only further “reinforce the specious link between ethnicity and achievement” (Lee & Zhou, 2015). This not only speaks to the closeness between one’s social identity and the ideas associated with

it but also the significance of understanding the influence of how “success” affects Asian Americans

The mechanisms utilized to iterate and reiterate success for Asian Americans were found in a study done on Chinese Americans and Vietnamese Americans across first, first-and-a-half, and second-generation immigrants (Lee & Zhou, 2015). Techniques included bragging rights and reinforcement strategies that strategically highlighted a very specific standard of success, which was measured as academic or professional achievement. The practice of parents bragging to other parents about their children’s achievements while informing their own children of other’s achievements strategically highlighted “success” while hiding those that did not fit this conception of success. Success in this study was also found to be captured as four specific careers: engineer, doctor, lawyer, and scientist. This occupational definition of success is familiar to many Asian Americans even if they do not subscribe to such beliefs. Additionally, the success framework was maintained through reinforcement strategies. Reinforcement strategies included intentionally choosing homes based on the “reputation and quality of local public schools,” demanding “their children be placed in APs (advanced placement courses),” and pointing “to the highest-achieving siblings and co-ethnic peers as reference for success” (Lee & Zhou, 2015, p.70). The use and accumulation of ethnic capital, defined as “institutional investments that parents make in their ethnic communities,” were also utilized as a part of the active ethnic networks that advertised information relevant to this achievement mindset (Lee & Zhou, 2015, p. 71).

Through this review, the relevance of success to the Asian American identity can be identified as emerging from mechanisms within the Asian American community and outside of it as well. The belief of success as significant to the limited perception of Asian Americans in the

United States as well as how it influences the lived experience of some Asian Americans make success a belief system warranting further exploration.

Asian American Identity & Beliefs About Well-Being

The significance of beliefs about well-being differ from that of success in the way that well-being for Asian Americans tends to be overlooked rather than overly saturated like success. This gap in scholarship about Asian American well-being follows the same historical pattern of scholarly neglect. Even among existing understandings in this topic, there tends to be an oversimplification and overgeneralization in the study of well-being for Asian Americans in a similar reductive style as stereotypes. There are also mixed findings, contributed by the high degree of heterogeneity that exists within the demographic that limits the extent of generalizability as well as challenges research done on this group (Chu & Sue, 2011). Rather than discourage scholarship, this should call for a more nuanced execution and interpretation of research, which I seek to acknowledge in this study.

In addition to this scholarly gap, there is importance in understanding beliefs about well-being in general because it has implications such as the actualization of well-being. Beliefs, as mentioned earlier, are informed by the culture the individual is embedded in, and they interact with the institutions in the individual's context.

The cultural context the individual exists in is a key informant on beliefs about what is "well." This builds upon Kleinman's argument that illness, suffering, and abnormalities of the physical body are dictated by the shared understandings of culture that teach individuals how to make sense of these experiences (1988). Since culture can govern how individuals perceive their bodies, categorize symptoms, express suffering, and define what is considered "normal"

well-being in contrast to “abnormal” being (Kleinman, 1988). Then, culture as shared understandings of beliefs and meaning can influence what being “well” means.

I utilize the term “well-being” to broaden one’s conceptualization of what it means to be “well” beyond just “health” to promote a positive state as well as to allow for flexibility for interlocutors. Health is still encompassed in this conceptualization given the growing recognition of health as a positive state that goes beyond just the “physical” biology of the body. So, literature researching health specifically is still of great value in this study. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 2023). However, there are a range of definitions of health and these can vary across individuals.

How one defines health and the belief systems surrounding well-being at the individual level have been found to manifest in well-being through one’s actions driven by beliefs. This is embodied in the Health Belief Model, which establishes the relationship between individual beliefs on well-being and the actualization of these beliefs in one’s physical health. The Health Belief Model was designed under this notion to predict health behavior based on one’s health-related beliefs based on: perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefit, perceived barrier, cue to action, and self-efficacy (Orji et al., 2012). When the Health Belief Model was extended to include “four new variables: self-identity, perceived importance, consideration of future consequences, and concern for appearance,” it was found to have a 71% predictive capacity for healthy eating (Orji et al., 2012). This correlation between belief systems and actualization of health demonstrates that individual beliefs have power in shaping well-being. Even in cancer patients, it was found that “greater success at living one’s values was significantly related to improved well-being and distress related-outcomes” (Ciarrochi et al.,

2010). This indicates individual beliefs are potent agents in shaping one's well-being. However, this does not establish a direct translation between health beliefs and manifestations of health. There are other factors, in and out of one's control, that could facilitate and modify this relationship. The importance of this correlation is to recognize that beliefs are important to well-being and that what informs those beliefs is important.

Specifically for Asian Americans, the role of beliefs have been proposed as possible explanations to the findings on Asian American well-being. A key area for this consideration has been Asian American mental health.

Even when controlling for "location, age, gender, education, or Asian subgroup," Asian Americans have been found to greatly underutilize mental health services compared to their racial counterparts in the United States (Chu & Sue, 2011). The low usage rate of mental health services cannot be translated as a lack of mental health issues. In fact, it was reported that "33% of Korean American adults experience symptoms of depression," and suicide was within the top two leading cause of death for Asian Americans aged 10 to 34 (Schlossberg, 2023; Kim et al., 2015; Shih et al., 2019). The gravity of these statistics are amplified by high rates of suicide ideation and suicide attempts (Schlossberg, 2023; Shih et al., 2019). Given the existence of these issues, what may explain such a low employment of mental health resources? Current scholarship has identified barriers "such as harmful stereotypes and bias, language barriers, and lack of insurance" as potential rationale (Schlossberg, 2023).

In particular, to better explore the role of beliefs in this underutilization of resources, the attributes of stereotypes, bias, and differential values Asian Americanst are further explored. Even beyond mental health services, "many Asian Americans tend to avoid the juvenile justice of legal system, mental health agencies, health services, and welfare agencies" in general

"because the utilization of services for certain problems is a tacit admission of the existence of these problems and may result in public knowledge of these familial difficulties" (Chu & Sue, 2011). Here, the value of family as a unit of importance, shame, and maintaining one's reputation influence how individuals engage with larger institutions. Thus, the low utilization of services could indicate the differential relationships Asian Americans can have with systems in the United States due to differential values and beliefs.

Additionally, the avoidance of institutional support reinforces and speaks to the power of beliefs manifested as stereotypes, specifically the Model Minority for Asian Americans. The Model Minority stereotype has been found to discourage demands and usage of public services or government resources due to the stereotypical belief that Asian Americans are capable of not only adjusting but also succeeding "quietly" without needing any help. Such assumptions are a disservice to Asian Americans and other minority groups as the myth pits minorities against each other– discouraging solidarity and allyship. It also has implications beyond politics into mental well-being as this belief sets high expectations for Asian American youth, which is a top stressor, and can lead to "isolation and bullying… who then experience depression and anxiety" (Schlossberg, 2023).

The rationale for these findings demonstrates how the degree of value given to certain beliefs such as stigmatization and familial reputation shapes well-being. These values may contribute to why, for example, individuals may seek help "very late" in their illness experience (Lin & Cheung, 1999). The reputation, not just of oneself but the family they identify with leads to different responses to illnesses and disorders from Asian Americans in comparison to their White American counterparts. For example, Asian patients with schizophrenia in America tend to "contain" this within the family similar to Korean parents who "contain" their children with

autism within the family (Lin & Cheung, 1999; Grinker, 2008). Their containment can be seen as a response to the fear of stigma and shame that reflects directly onto the family unit. However, in this response, it also reinforces and demonstrates the enduring power of stigma.

Stigma, which endures specifically around mental health for Asian Americnas, may also lead to a different cultural understanding, manifestation, and response to well-being. Dr. Ito finds the lack of conversation surrounding mental health in Asian American family cultures due to stigma, shame, and fear of judgment one of the most common barriers to mental health access (Scholssberg, 2023). Given that sharing such issues is not the norm within families and is often characterized as a personal weakness, there is a lack of information on family history and own self-assessment as to their mental struggles (Scholssberg, 2023). The belief that "mental illnesses" are not valid or "real" is common among Asian societies including Asian Americans despite the large steps taken to legitimize these illnesses. However, this belief may also contribute to the high somatization of symptoms that Asian Americans report over "emotional" symptoms, which emphasize the lack of mind-body dualism that often characterizes Western biomedicine (Zhang & Ta, 2009; Lin & Cheung, 1999). It may also explain the low likelihood for Asian immigrants to report any DSM-IV disorders (John et al., 2012).

These findings should be taken critically, which isn't to negate or invalidate the relevance of these findings that are applicable to many Asian Americans. Instead, it acknowledges that certain factors and beliefs mean and operate differently for different subgroups. The high heterogeneity of this demographic includes differences in immigration generation, reasons for immigration, ethnicity, English proficiency, and gender. This calls for a more nuanced understanding of Asian American well-being that takes into account these factors. For example, the age of immigration correlates with major depression, nativity with obesity, and greater

English proficiency with better self-rated health (Takeuchi et al., 2006; John et al., 2012; Zhang & Ta, 2009). Additionally "rates of mental health diagnoses… differ between generations regardless of ethnicity" with those of second-generation immigration status having "higher rates of psychopathology" (Hong et al., 2014). These differences could be due to immigrant-related factors that differentiate how subgroups report and measure symptoms as well as the life stressors, discrimination, and "adoption of diet and behaviors of mainstream U.S culture" they experience (John et al., 2012). Different subgroups and immigration related factors may also shape the degree to which personal belief systems and actualizations of well-being align with how individuals interact with broader systems in the United States, which would yield different results on Asian American well-being as well.

Beliefs About Success & About Well-Being

The beliefs about success and well-being are important to better understanding Asian Americans independently, but they may also work interdependently in their influence on Asian Americans. This builds upon Guan, Gloria, and Castellanos' study that found beliefs related to Asian American identity were influential on how individuals perceived their own well-being (2020). In this study, Guan, Gloria, and Castallenos studied female Chinese American undergraduate students. They found Asian American identity-related beliefs including those about success such as Model Minority internalization and parental expectations were related to beliefs about their well-being (2020).The beliefs these Asian Americans had were captured through three dimensions: psychological, social, and cultural, which all related to the Asian American identity in some way. The psychological dimension included perfectionism including maladaptive perfectionism, and self-esteem coping. The social dimension included parental expectations, family support, and Model Minority internalization. Finally, the cultural dimension

included values enculturation, values acculturation, environment, and congruence. These dimensions build upon and reflect commonly associated beliefs of Asian Americans such as the hyper-emphasis of success, filial piety, Model Minority stereotype, familial identity, enculturation, acculturation, and saving face.The three dimensions were also found to function together to shape students' perceptions of their own well-being.

In the analysis of the psychological and social dimensions, the pressure to succeed was amplified by expectations from parents and the internalization of the Model Minority stereotype. The dimensions themselves yielded correlations with the psychological and cultural dimensions having the greatest significance, demonstrating the interwoven influence these beliefs have on one another. There were nuances within the findings of this study with differences in the generation of college students and division of school (i.e. upper, lower). A key difference that aligns with the current understanding of cultural values is the possibility that first-generation college students at a lower-division school bear a greater burden to be "familial educational trail blazers" compared to later generation students at upper-division schools by setting high standards constructed by their parents and stereotypes. This intricate influence of a multitude of belief systems in relation to one's self assessment of well-being exemplifies how social identity, specifically the Asian American identity, influences beliefs about well-being. Although these findings cannot be generalizable to the entirety of Asian Americans because the subjects were a specific subgroup, it suggests the relationship between beliefs about success and beliefs about well-being.

Given the strong emphasis on beliefs about success for these Asian Americans along with the lack of emphasis on understanding and practicing well-being, these concepts could interact disproportionately. The notion of success at the cost of well-being may be a potentially

internalized belief held for Asian Americans driven to immigration with the hope of the American Dream or under pressure of the Immigrant Bargain. Although how these are perceived with one another call for further investigation, the importance of beliefs about these concepts independently and possibly together are identified through the relevance of these concepts to Asian American identity.

Conclusion

This review establishes the significance of beliefs and how these beliefs relate to one's identity, context, and experience. The relationship between beliefs and identity are not only regulated by an individual's personal experience but also involve larger social forces of shared meaning. In the United States, racial identities evoke certain meanings formed by stereotypes, and the brief background on Asian Americans identified success as a particularly important meaning associated with this social identity. The current understanding of well-being, specifically the role of beliefs in this understanding for Asian Americans, was also explored to acknowledge how beliefs and identity may interact. By exhibiting the importance of success and well-being specific to Asian Americans as a group specifically, I illuminate what concepts may be utilized to gain a fuller picture of belief systems and perspectives held by Asian Americans.

Chapter Three: Beliefs About Success & Well-Being

Introduction

In this chapter, I identify the beliefs on success and well-being Korean Americans and Chinese American described in their narratives. Although the narratives collected from the individuals in this study were not intended to be representative of all Korean and Chinese American narratives, the narratives presented in these findings are rooted in sociocultural contexts. Individuals do not merely just exist in but actively participate in these contexts. Thus, they index the various experiences that emerge from their complex social identities, which are created and create different experiences, networks, and beliefs. This means they come from a very specific context that is unique to themselves, even if there are similarities to others of similar contexts or identities.

The use of narratives addresses the reductive manner in which Asian Americans have previously been discussed. I reference reductiveness as a way to describe the way the complexity found in identity, group, and experience are often funneled into a limited understanding due to stereotypes or a lack of scholarship. Reductiveness was challenged not only in the form of narratives but also in the content shared by interlocutors.

The content of belief systems were holistically conceptualized with a strong emphasis on affect. Holistic conceptualization in this study describes the formation of concepts as broad and encompassing multiple domains rather than concentrated on just one. “Affect” is also informed from a psychological perspective as the superordinate, general understanding of “feeling states,” which may include emotions and mood, but are not limited to these specified categories (Niven, 2013, pp. 49-50). The use of affect is more concerned with the focus on how one *feels* rather than a definitive categorization of specific arousal.

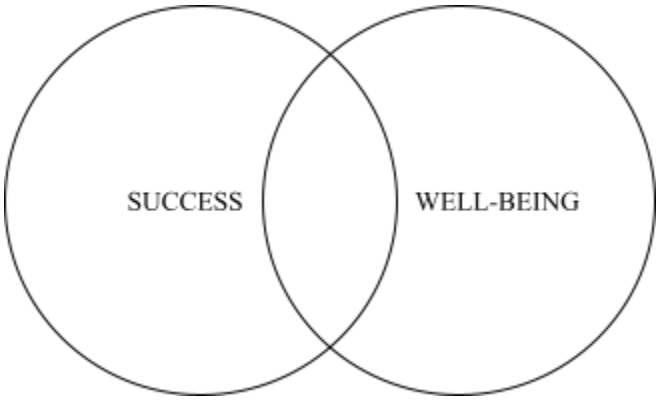
Such complex descriptions strayed from the typical generalizations associated with Asian Americans. Through the lens of holistic and affective approach, I further explore different sub-themes such as relationships and stability that are important in these belief systems.

The chapter begins with a preface regarding my shifted reconceptualization of the relationship between success and well-being to better contextualize the following exploration of how my interlocutors defined success and well-being. I identify and utilize the framework of holistic and affective definitions to explore both beliefs of success and well-being. Additionally, I specify further on certain sub-themes such as the dimension of relationships and *feelings* of stability that were relevant to these belief systems under the holistic and affective framework. Finally, I elaborate further on how the conceptualization of success and well-being overlap. To summarize, I identify and elaborate on the two themes found across belief systems about success and well-being found by interlocutors: holistic conceptualization and affect. Through these specified lenses, I not only elaborate further on sub-themes relevant to these concepts but also recognize where these two concepts overlap.

Preface: Success and Well-Being

I began this study intending to further understand the relationship between success and well-being at the intraindividual level. However, what started as an understanding of two independent concepts in relation to one another shifted to blur into a much more interconnected conceptualization. Due to this interconnection, it is crucial to understand these concepts less as rigidly bounded and more dynamically connected. The framework I employ to capture this interconnection is through a Venn Diagram (as seen below). The Venn Diagram helps recognize success and well-being as concepts that are independently described but overlapping in these definitions. Holistic and affective elements found in the belief systems of success and well-being

provide insight into this point of overlap. Through these shared elements, I am able to recognize better the ways in which success and well-being overlap and fuse at specific points.



Success

There tends to be a specific idea of what success is concerning Asian Americans as amplified by popularized tropes, but the complex beliefs of success described by interlocutors starkly contrast these preconceived and limited notions. The specific and limited notions of success center around the socioeconomic "success" facilitated by academic and professional prestige or achievements associated with Asian Americans. However, success was defined to go beyond these stereotypical conceptualizations by interlocutors. Success, instead, was described holistically and affectively. This challenged the reductive definition of success associated with Asian Americans while revealing their deep humanity in what they care for that goes beyond academic or financial success. The following narratives are responses to the question: "What does success look or mean to you," which reveals the holistic and affective approach involved in constructing the beliefs of success.

“A” was a 21 year old male, who identified himself as second-generation Korean American. He was enrolled in university at the time of the interview. He also explicitly disclosed he was of low-income, which is a relevant identifier in understanding the following findings:

> “I think it's [what success looks like] changed a lot since my time here at Emory. I came in with the idea of success being very financially based– one where I can support myself but also my parents and live a comfortable life. And not to say that's completely gone. I do think that's an important part of how I like to find success, but I think I've matured in my time here at college and my life perspective has changed. I think I like to see success more holistically: to take in my personal happiness and the health of my loved ones, my ability to do work I find meaningful, and a big part of my view on success is how well I live out my faith as a Christian… I think my parents, their view on success is inherently rooted in the fact that they came to America as an immigrant, which is by design a very big sacrifice on their part for my sake as well as the sake of my sister. So, I think their version of success or their definition of it would be how well my sister and I are able to live a life that we want and that we can support. I think my version of success is inherently different because I wasn’t the one to make that sacrifice. So, I think there’s that inherent difference between how I view success and how my parents view success. But I do think the area that overlaps is our view that while money is important, it is not a sufficient factor of success.”

“C” was a 20 year old male, who identified himself as second-generation Korean American In addition to A, he was the only other interlocutor that revealed his socioeconomic status by communicating his experience growing up as low-income. He was enrolled in university at the time of the interview:

> “I'm inclined to think of my definition of success relative to my parents. Maybe because I’m second-generation. I know there’s the idea that immigrants want their children to do better than they did themselves. I think part of me subscribes to that theory of financial stability. I guess I think of financial stability as a big one, but more specifically to me, I think of higher education as really integral to my success at least. And I think I see it as a trajectory from college to career to having children to being financially stable and allowing each generation that comes after me to be more comfortable and live more happily or easily than my parents did.”

“D” was a 20 year old female attending university at the time of the interview. She identified herself as a second-generation Korean American:

> “I think success is being able to achieve what you want to achieve. Setting the goal and achieving that goal rather than a tangible list of things that account as what success is in life. People can succeed in different ways and there's nothing like as I said earlier, there's nothing tangible to define what success is, but I think it's very personal and individual to what you want to do in life. I think most times it would be related to your happiness or what you think is worthwhile doing in your life and then achieving that and having that I think is success… the day that I recognize that I have succeeded is the day where I like really enjoy the life that I’m living if it's not like a spectacular life. But just like, waking up in a house that I earned with my money and a house that I truly cherish with possibly a family that I love. And having time to spend time with the people that I love.Also, having a job that I really am passionate about and also like is it helps me to provide for the family that I love. Also having time to like pursue the hobbies that I really enjoy and make me happy. And like kind of having a balance and all the different domains in my life. I think that is what success is.”

“E” was a 22 year old second-generation Korean American female. She was not enrolled in university at the time of the interview:

> “Success to me is just very much being content with where you are in life. I think that can very much tie into financial stability, having a job that you enjoy or having people around you that you enjoy spending time with. And so I guess, success, I guess, in that way is kind of connected to like emotions in a way, but that doesn't mean like the daily fluctuations of being sad one day or, I don't know, joyful the next. It doesn't mean you're not successful. But, I definitely think, when I was home more like pre-college and stuff, my idea of success was more money based or what job you have and being on the pre-med path— like oh, becoming a doctor, but I think that was very much influenced by my parents. I think after coming to college and stuff, my ideas very much changed… It became even as simple as like, oh, like getting. I don't know, like a meal with a friend and having a really good time. You know, just being content with life even at that moment. You don't necessarily have to have stability now, but if you have people around you, for example, that you love and love you, stuff like that, like that's success.”

In the complex and individualized beliefs of success shared by interlocutors, I identify the holistic approach and affect as significant characteristics of these beliefs, which counter the

reductive characteristics of success usually associated with success and Asian Americans. Generally speaking, success is related to "the attainment of fame, wealth, or social status" as defined by Oxford Languages and utilized as the top search result by the power search engine, Google (n.d.). Given the stereotypes of Asian Americans including the Model Minority and "nerds," the emphasis of wealth, fame, and prestige are amplified towards specific expected direction through the avenue of academic or professional excellence. This direction, even within the internal Asian American community, points to specific career paths such as medicine, law, and engineering (Lee & Zhou, 2015). However, contrary to the expectations that emerge from a limited focus on Asian American success, success was defined more broadly in terms of what domains success was related to and more subjectively to what feelings it encompassed. The multidimensional and feelings oriented definitions of success revealed a much less materialistic and unexpected understanding of success compared to the stereotypes and previous ways success has been explored for Asian Americans.

The affective nature of these beliefs of success revealed itself in the multifaceted picture of success: it was not just one tangible goal that defined success but different aspects of life that would help promote and achieve specific affects such as stability or happiness. The affects mentioned in the descriptions of success included positive feelings and subjectivity of one's self-assessment such as stability, happiness, and contentment along with positive feelings towards what they *do* such as love, meaning, enjoyment, and passion

Affect was identified to differing degrees by the five interlocutors, although it was present in all their responses. For the three interlocutors that utilized a multifaceted description of success (A, B, D), it appeared in the aspects that were mentioned would construct a successful life such as the healthy presence of their loved ones, a meaningful job, or hobbies.

Interlocutor E was explicit about her use of affect, primarily contentedness, as the definer of success as she stated, “success to me is just very much being content with where you are in life” and how “success in that way is kind of connected to emotions.” Similarly, Interlocutor D employed a feeling, happiness, to define success as she explained how “those little pockets of joy is what makes something happy, and lets me feel successful. You see success and happiness as interchangeable terms.” Both interlocutors E and D emphasized these affects could occur at very simple levels such as having a meal with a friend, which illustrated that it was what one feels (or wants to feel) that shaped what these individuals deemed to be success in a holistic way. Thus, success as perceived and shared by interlocutors was not driven by materialism as much as it was driven by *feeling*. The importance given to subjective feelings reiterates the stark contrast to the prestigious academic, occupational, and financial definitions of success that could be anticipated for a group so heavily perceived as the Model Minority.

The holistic aspects of these beliefs were either explicitly recognized in stating that it was “holistic” (A) or by the mention of a variety of domains. Finances and relations were two significant facets that were frequently included in conceptualizing success across interlocutors.

First, the way finances was discussed in defining success can be recognized less as the accumulation of wealth and more as the affect of stability and security that it would provide. Success was described less by monetary or financial achievement across all participants and more by the affect that may be enabled by monetary means. This specific idea of success existed in tandem with the acute understanding of finances as unignorable in the context of this society. D recognized the undeniable role of money by stating: “our society in our world moves on money and to have money you need a career and job.”

Even for C, who was the interlocutor that described success in relation to finances the most, he specifically nuanced his definition by utilizing finances as a modifier to the object of importance: stability. Additionally, he outlined the goal of finances as a means of stability that would enable “each generation that comes after me to be more comfortable and live more happily or easily than my parents did " to emphasize finances were a means, not the end. The significance he gave to finances and stability was attributed to his experience growing up with financial instability. However, even for interlocutors who did not identify as low-income, finances were an important aspect to establish security in, especially for the sake of being able to sustain themselves, their families, and/or their desired lifestyle.

The affective and holistic nature of the beliefs were also reiterated in the exploration of the means to money: work. However, occupation was not reduced simply to a means. Rather, it was another domain that could bring positive affect including meaning, satisfaction, joy, and passion.

Relationships were another crucial component to the holistic understanding of success that touched on the affective nature of beliefs. The element of relationality was significant in every interlocutor’s narratives as it was encompassed either through the inclusion of sharing life with loved ones (e.g. “having time to spend with people that I love”) or the welfare of loved ones (e.g. “health of my loved ones"). In fact, for E, the affect of contentment that was evoked from simply “getting a meal with a friend, having a really good time” and to “have people around you… that you love and love you” defined success. The desire and need “--even on a physiological level– to bond, belong to, and connect with others and places was evident in the inclusion of relationships and support systems in the perceptions shared about success (Ozawa de-Silva, 2021, p. 10). Relationships mentioned in narratives also encompassed anticipated

support systems and future relations such as future families. The care given to relationships even for the ones not yet established indicated the degree of importance sociality had for individuals. Thus, the ability to establish, maintain, and encompass these relationships in the way success and life were shared, were key aspects of "success."

The significance of relationships in understanding success as closely linked to affect was understandable given that "affect is.. social in nature" (Ozawa de-Silva, 2021, p. 30). Sociality can be perceived from both the evolutionary and cultural lens because emotions are the "product of an evolutionary past that includes all of humanity (and are therefore not merely individual), and they are shaped by the cultures we live in (and are therefore, again, not merely individual). Furthermore, almost "all emotions are social in nature" (Ozawa de-Silva, 2021, p. 30). This was evident in the repetition of "love" that D mentions in who she wanted to share life with, whether it was her future potential family or people in general, the feelings of love and joy she had (or would have) could only exist in relation to them.

A "relationship with God" was also a relationship crucial to success for B, but faith was mentioned by A, D, and E as well. The inclusion of religion in the relational framework of success builds upon a prominent belief in Christianity that Christianity is not necessarily a religion but a relationship between God and the individual. Thus, to be "successful" in this spiritual realm, was to cultivate a relationship with God, similar to how one cultivated a relationship with others. This inclusion of religion in belief systems will be elaborated on in Chapter 4.

Well-Being

The elements of holistic conceptualization and affect I identify in the following descriptions of beliefs on well-being provided nuance into the associations of well-being for

Asian Americans. Conceptualizations of well-being found in this study appear to diverge from the existing literature that found an emphasis on the "physicality" of well-being (even in the discussion of emotional health) and the stigma of mental health (Zhang & Ta, 2009, Schlossberg, 2023). In this study, well-being centered on a broad, multidimensional approach as well as on how one felt.

The following three narrative excerpts demonstrate interlocutors' holistic beliefs, which are most evident through the multifaceted response structure:

A:

> "I think it's a multifaceted view on well-being. Of course, I think physical health is very important. Taking care of my body. Not being ill. That's important. Mental wellbeing is very important to me as well. On making sure that I'm taking care of my mind, managing my stress well, expressing my emotions in the way that I feel. Think spiritual health is also very important to me. Making sure my relationship with God is where I need it to be and where it should be, and that it's a living relationship."

"B" identified himself as a 21 year old second-generation Chinese American. He was attending university at the time of the interview:

> "Two ways: physically and emotionally. So like physically: are you eating properly, do you have everything you need? Hygiene? Everything like that. So basically, 'are you healthy?' I would say is physical wellbeing. And then emotional well-being is like: is there some issue in your life that's always on your mind? Is something dominating your thoughts? Or are you more just like, are you okay with everything right now, like there's not really any issue that's always constantly on your mind"

D:

> I think before well being used to only be like physical and mental health, but I think lately, I've been shifting the definition of well-being to having good physical health, mental health, spiritual health, financial health– having good financial security, can also be like economic security. I was doing a similar interview with my mom.I was asking her like what she thinks

> well being is and she said it's like having good balance in all the different domains in your life: like physical, financial, mental, spiritual, I think she also said like community."

The following two definitions illuminate and rely on more affective descriptions of well-being:

C:

> "I think of my own wellbeing as also connected to how stable I feel like my family is or how stable or successful I feel. Success isn't the word, but do you know what I mean? I think, maybe, it's hard for me to put a definition on well being, but I think of it almost like practicing or striving for stability. I think, maybe, I don't practice well being in a lot of ways, but my personal well being, I'm more inclined to think of it as the work that I do or what I produce. Like the hours that I spend on work and the paychecks I get from work and where that puts me and where that puts my family is what I think of, and I know that's not really what well being is. So trying to think of, okay, let me try to think of well-being because I don't think that's what we're supposed to think of it like that…. Yeah, I just think of well being and like my own well being as tied up with my own stability and how comfortable I feel. I think a lot of that has to do with how I perceive my own achievement, and, I think, a lot of it has to do with my financial stability and how I didn't feel exactly financially stable for a lot of my life. So, I think, I see, in my life, unfortunately, like the more financially stable and the more I feel like I'm achieving the more "well" I am."

E:

> I think well being to me is, definitely, like, even though I mentioned before, there's fluctuations in your emotions throughout the day, or like one week is like really different from the next, having sort of a level like contentment or like joy. Maybe that's like connected to faith too. Like even in sorrowful moments or like moments where you just feel like things are really bad, like being able to have joy like, yeah, have joy in God. So, I think that idea has, definitely, very much, influenced how I see well being in my own life. I think, recently, it's definitely been like my well-being kind of has been based on people, like being able to just see people, have good conversation, spend quality time with people. Yeah. I think quality time is a big thing for my well being. I feel like those are the moments where I just feel the most, I guess, like full in a sense– the most like satisfied with life, and yeah, just or like intellectually stimulated too. If anything, that's one of the things I definitely think I missed about college: being intellectually stimulated every day because, I don't know, even like, especially if you're taking really fun classes, like I don't know. It just brings joy. Yeah, so I guess that's what like well being is for me: being able to be stable and content.

The holistic character identified in the given beliefs of well-being provided a nuanced understanding of well-being that incorporated multiple realms of meaning for interlocutors. A, B, and D utilized a multidimensional structure to illustrate well-being as two items (physical, emotional), three items (physical, mental, spiritual) or four items (physical, mental, spiritual, financial). The holistic perception of well-being was also revealed in the means to achieving well-being. For example, E, who defined well-being affectively as contentedness and joy, believed she could achieve this through spiritual, social, and intellectual avenues. Thus, even if the definition of well-being was described more affectively, there was still a holistic framework in understanding the practice and approach to well-being.

Although in scholarship, mental and emotional well-being are differentiated, these terms were used interchangeably across individuals. The "mental" and "emotional" functioned similarly as a contrast to the "physical" realm of their body. Here, there was a separation of the external, deemed relating to the physical body, and the internal, deemed relating to the experiences within the self that may be less readily identifiable by external metrics. The awareness and care given to "internal" wellness shifted away from the findings in literature that stressed the underutilization of mental health services, the stigma of mental health, and emotional stoicism in family dynamics (Chu & Sue, 2011; Lin & Cheung, 1999).

My findings countered popularized understanding of well-being for Asian Americans in a way that revealed its reductionism rather than accuse it of inaccuracy. I cannot emphasize enough that there are real barriers to and a critical need for research and application in the field of mental health for Asian Americans. This was apparent in my findings as A and B both acknowledged it was not from their parents that they learned to include mental or emotional health as part of their well-being. B explained it was not a norm to "express… emotions deeply"

or discuss such vulnerability despite feeling safe to do so with his parents, simply because it was not established within their family culture. Here, emotions and vulnerability were not taboo out of fear or shame but out of awkwardness. The lack of emotional sharing experienced by B aligned with tropes embedded and made popular within the Asian American community. Tropes included emotional suppression or lack of communication of such topics within families, specifically between first-generation immigrant parents and second-generation immigrant children. The generational difference even within the parent-child dyad in understanding mental and emotional health was a key characteristic to consider as all my interlocutors identified themselves as second-generation Asian Americans.

However, the difference in perspectives between parents and children was not intended to generalize across first-generation parental influences as there was a diversity in interlocutors' perceptions on what their parents believed and how it influenced them. For example, D noted it was through her mother's importance of non-physical well-being including the mental, spiritual, financial, and communal aspects of life that shaped her own holistic definition of well-being. The variety within the perceptions between parents and their children display the complexity of mental and emotional well-being for Asian Americans. It also evoked the question as to how internal and external well-being may be differently understood. For instance, both parent and child may place importance and care towards their mental and emotional well-being, but it may be interpreted and felt differently, especially given the differing degrees to which the various cultural contexts they grow up in shape their framework. Thus, what I state here is an observation that there is a growing awareness and care for mental and emotional health by Korean and Chinese Americans and there are nuances to even more easily recognized understandings of "internal" well-being.

For those that didn't define well-being in an explicitly multidimensional way, it was defined affectively. The *definement* of well-being as affect was an intriguing approach revealed by interlocutors. For instance, C defined well-being as related to his stability and E defined well-being as more enduring feelings of contentedness and joy. The utilization of affect to define well-being builds upon the growing movement towards a positive definition of well-being rather than a negative definition where being well is simply the "lack" of detriments. Through affect, definition of well-being centered on the positive feelings that one desired rather than a lack of negative experiences.

The focus on how one feels also introduced another perspective to previous literature, specifically about mental health. Existing literature on Asian Americans had found a greater somatization of emotional and mental suffering– pointing to the more prominent role of the "physical" rather than the "emotional" for Asian American well-being (Zhang & Ta, 2009; Lin & Cheung, 1999). The concentration on feeling and affect revealed in these findings, then, illuminated an area worth exploring given that it diverged from previous findings. A critical detail to consider with this investigation would be immigration generation statuses given all interlocutors in this study were second-generation immigrants.

Success & Well-Being: Overlap

In my initial aim to explore Asian American well-being at the individual level, I identified the significance of success related to beliefs surrounding this identity and sought to explore the relationship between the beliefs on success and well-being. However, I discovered it was increasingly difficult to understand these two concepts of success and well-being as separate concepts given their integration and similarities.

First, I identified the degree to which success and well-being were interconnected as perceived concepts in that some interlocutors identified couldn't have one without the other. In this way, the manifestation of what one believed as success could not occur without well-being. This was stated by E, who said she "can't have success without well-being." Additionally, D echoed the sentiment of deep integration between the two concepts in exploring the relationship between success and well-being:

> I think it would be hard to call my life a success if I wasn't doing well. I guess that's like a way, to say well being. Yeah, like, if I achieved a goal of mine, but I didn't have well-being in that life as I'm living out that goal, I wouldn't say that's necessarily a success for me. So yeah, I guess well-being is very important to what success is. A successful life is a life that I have well-being. Like I said earlier, those days that I described what I think a successful life is like even right now, if I have the privilege to go to a school that I truly enjoy going to, and I'm learning and being in class that I like and am passionate about and have friends that I love, and can keep in touch with the family dialogue. I think that is success, and, within that life, [I'm] being able to manage my well being through self care routines and activities… I think there can be cases where you get lost in the pursuit of your goals, which you deem as success. Then, find yourself working towards it but not being well, and kinda being lost in that like, "oh this is what I thought would be successful to me, but in reality, I'm not doing well". I can see that being like a cognitive dissonance, I guess. I don't know. I think you don't have to like deem something as success from the beginning and keep it as successful. Like once you get there and you're not happy about it, it doesn't have to be, you don't have to keep it to be successful. Like once you get there and you're not happy about it, it doesn't have to be.

In this case, the beliefs on what success and well-being mean were so deeply interconnected that success did not exist without well-being.

Although the beliefs of success and well-being were explored differently through the lens of holism and affects, these two lenses enabled clarity in how these concepts overlapped. The multidimensional conceptualization of both success and well-being contributed to identifying which domains were significant to both. These domains included finances,

spirituality, and relationships, which were embedded in the definitions and means to success and well-being.

For instance, A included living out his faith as a part of success and acknowledged spiritual health as a part of well-being. Additionally, E included finances and faith as elements of a successful life and well-being. These shared aspects of significance for success and well-being indicated that perceived satisfaction in one domain of "success" would lead to feelings of "wellness" and vice versa. Therefore, the actualization of such concepts as well as the beliefs about them were interconnected at specific joints of commonality.

The similar affects in defining success and well-being also illustrated the congruence of both concepts as they shared the desired feeling one was pursuing. This was evident for E as she identified contentedness as a primary definition for how she viewed both success and well-being. Thus, for her, feeling content would indicate that she was living a successful life and that she was well– fusing these two concepts at the affect of satisfaction.

Stability was also another affect shared between success and well-being, and its repetition as a core belief about well-being and success reiterated the observation that these two concepts were deeply interconnected. The shared emphasis on stability was observed across more than one interlocutor as captured in the language of financial security or emotional stability discussing success and well-being. Stability was particularly prominent for C, who defined success and well-being primarily through stability. The feeling of security was also associated with family as indicated in his statement that his well-being was "also connected to how stable I feel like my [his] family is."

The perspective of the family as closely linked to one's own self aligned with the collective orientation valued in Chinese and Korean cultures, where the family is often the

primary unit of importance. The broadening of success from the welfare of the individual to the family was found in the desire some interlocutors shared in being able to provide for their families. This collective orientation and significance of the family is considered characteristic of traditional Asian values with the ability to fulfill one's role in the family, work for the sake of the family, and cohesion within the unit to be of great importance (Kramer et al., 2002). Familial and collectivist cultural emphasis was influenced by Confucianism, a belief system with roots in China, Korea, and Japan, that promoted values such as filial piety. Filial piety was relevant in the discussion of the Immigrant Bargain, which explored the dynamic between first and second-generation immigrants. To preface, this is not to assume family is not of importance in the United States, but to expand on the specific expectations and "appropriate" means of valuing family exercised in Chinese and Korean culture that influenced Asian American belief systems, which may differ from the traditional values of the United States.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the beliefs of Korean and Chinese American interlocutors in this study illustrated the depth and complexity of their beliefs that go beyond what is primarily associated with success and well-being for this demographic. Their beliefs, in their full complexity, also demonstrated that success and well-being were tightly associated with one another. Such findings were not intended to be generalized representations of Korean and Chinese Americans' beliefs, but, instead, reveal the nuances within individual belief systems that provide a fuller understanding of existing literature as well as this identity.

Chapter Four: Influences of Identity on Beliefs

Introduction

In this chapter, I identify low economic status and religion as two aspects of social identity significant to belief systems. Being low-income was found to be a primary influence on belief system construction for interlocutors A and C, who revealed they grew up low-income. The experience of financial insecurity appears to have internalized instability, leading to an increased desirability for stability. This heightened emphasis on stability was manifested in the beliefs shared about success and about well-being. Additionally, the magnitude of finances felt in these interlocutors' lived experience was reflected in the magnitude of finances found in their belief systems. However, finances did not define belief systems for interlocutors. Rather, the financial insecurity in A and C's lives appear to have challenged them to truly contemplate and choose how they would perceive the role of money in their lives. The prominence of this factor was acknowledged in this study, but in the broad framework of Asian Americans, low socioeconomic status is a factor largely overlooked as a product of the model minority myth.

Religion, specifically Christianity, and church in general was a theme warranting further investigation because it was one of the few themes found across *all* interlocutors. The shared experience with religion and Christianity in this study aligned with the commonality of Asian Americans', specifically Korean Americans', relationship with the ethnic church. This theme's influence on beliefs builds upon existing understandings of how religion can shape belief systems through fundamental spiritual teachings such as the importance of prioritizing one's relationship with God (which was found in this study). However, religion and church membership also went beyond adding a spiritual nuance to the interlocutors' holistic ideas of success and well-being by functioning as a site for belief formation for beliefs outside of

spirituality. This non-spiritual relevance of the church reveals how individuals who did not subscribe to these beliefs could still be influenced by religion and church.

Low-Income

Despite the lack of visibility given to low-income Asian Americans due to popularized tropes of socioeconomic success, this study found low-income lived experience to be a primary factor in shaping beliefs. The intensity of influence was found through A and C, who identified as coming from a low-income background. The role financial difficulties played in belief formation was evident in A and C's emphasis on stability as a crucial component to success and well-being. Financial insecurity's force on belief systems was also recognized in A and C's dissonance between their idealized beliefs and the beliefs actually acted on.

A and C's expressed importance to their low economic status was further explored through the way race and socioeconomic status intersected for Asian Americans more broadly. This intersection has primarily led to the invisibility of low-income Asian Americans due to the "successful" minority trope projected onto the group. The framework of the Model Minority underplays the significance economic conditions can have on Asian Americans because it does not fall within the socioeconomically "successful" stereotype mold.

Among the five interlocutors in this study, A and C identified themselves as either low-income or having come from low-income backgrounds. The other three interlocutors, B, D, and E, did not disclose their class status. B, D, and E had come to reside in the United States through at least one parent's pursuit and opportunity in higher education, specifically in the fields of science and technology. A and C's decision to disclose their financial status while their counterparts did not, reveal how, often, it is only when something becomes a concern that it becomes visible in one's life. Thus, whether it is financial, social, or, even, physical, aspects of

lived experience, they are felt more fully when they are not fully realized and recognized as a privilege. The effects of finances, specifically the lack of monetary means, were evident not only in this study but also in the way finances has and continues to actively engage with belief systems and the reality of Asian Americans. This was identified through A and C's own acknowledgement that finances, specifically being low-income, was an undeniable factor in their perspectives on success and well-being. C explicitly listed factors of his identity that shaped his belief systems. Included in this list was his experience growing up low-income:

> "I think I would start with what factors I think have shaped my personal beliefs the most. I think I would say being an Asian American, being second-generation, plays a big role in shaping my personal beliefs. I also think growing up low-income and having those experiences like losing our home and having to work for a lot of my life also play a big role. I think growing up religious was also one that I would say is a big one"

A also acknowledged the powerful role finances played in his beliefs even when he actively sought to be unconfined to finances. He declared that "it's close to impossible to grow up in a low-income household and not be concerned about finances in regards to your future success" despite his own belief that success was more than money. A's use of the term "impossible" indicated to what degree finances influenced his beliefs about success.

Throughout A and C's descriptions on what they believed about success and well-being were, they often attributed their conceptualizations to their low-income circumstances. The significant presence of finances was also recognized in existing literature. It was found that within Asian Americans, the difference in class, specifically between the lower to the middle and upper class, led to drastically different experiences in areas such as resource accessibility and familial support (Shih et al., 2019).

Although stability was a theme found across interlocutors in their beliefs about success and well-being, it was amplified for those that identified themselves as low-income. The

amplification could be attributed to the experience of living with financial insecurity. Insecurity, as it appears to have been internalized, yielded a heightened emphasis on stability, specifically financial stability. However, a crucial nuance to this value of stability was that it encompassed more than just finances. The factor of finances did not translate into A and C as the defining characteristic of success or well-being. Rather, it translated more closely to a desire for comfort, stability, and security rather than the objective accumulation of wealth. This was captured in C's definition of well-being:

> " I think of well-being as not feeling unstable. I feel like I've talked about this a lot, but I think that I'm realizing this now, unfortunately, but I think a lot of that has to do with financial instability growing up. And the fact that I had to work a lot in high school. For context, I started working my sophomore year of high school at a Mexican restaurant to help my family pay bills and worked all throughout high school and college. I think that work and providing for both myself, my family, has become so much a part of my identity that I see my own well being as tied up with how stable I can feel in knowing that, and how secure I feel knowing that I'm closer to stability and that I'm not unstable. They feel very close to related for me"

Stability as a desired attribute relevant to more than just finances builds upon the understanding that money is a force that has a reach into multiple domains. Finances, especially when it is an unstable or limited source, can affect multiple aspects of life including relationships, which suggests instability in finances may result in instability in these areas as well. This was found in C's explanation of how finances often dictated the role his mother had in his life as her availability was dependent on her education and career. His mother's prioritization and family's prioritization of occupation was said to be sourced from the need to "get to somewhere more comfortable" as well as the reality that they did "not having [have] a lot of money going on" (C). Thus, C's relationship with his mother was inconsistent due to the financial needs of the family, which led to a level of instability within the household.

Even for E who did not identify herself as growing up low-income, the relationship between finances and stability was revealed in her parents' experience with financial difficulty:

> "[my mother was] kind of hell bent on making sure my sister and I became doctors, and I hated that growing up, which is, I guess, kind of ironic now. But, yeah, I think for her, success is definitely, even now, very much me and my sister being financially stable. Cause I think there are so many times where, for example, my dad. Like there was a period of time in high school where he couldn't get grants like it was really hard. So, like financially, that was pretty difficult for my parents"

Although E's mother shared the desire for stability that other interlocutors in this study revealed, there was a difference in the means in which E' mother and the other interlocutors believed they could achieve this affect. E's mother, a first-generation immigrant, believed a career in medicine, a valorized and prestigious occupation frequently associated with Asian Americans, was the optimal path to financial stability. Her ideal profession for her children aligned with existing literature that have found the Model Minority stereotype and popularized concepts of success specify the means and directions of success (Lee & Zhou, 2015). The means and directions of success are often governed by the selective visibility given to occupations such as doctors. E's mother's desire fits under the Model Minority as an ideological and racialized framework that can shape one's perception of what success is and how to achieve it.

Additionally, I propose immigrant generation status could be a key characteristic to consider in the comparison between the beliefs of E's mother, who is a first-generation immigrant, and other interlocutors, who are second-generation immigrants. This detail should evoke consideration of how projected images and internalized beliefs of the Asian American identity may differ between immigration generation statuses. The possible differentiation aligns with the predictions of the bilinear model theory of acculturation that those of different

immigration generation statuses adhere to values around them differently (Guan et al., 2020; Kim et al., 1999; Kim & Omizo, 2006).

The agency demonstrated by individuals' movement away from finances as an all-defining influence on beliefs contributed to the shift away from success as being solely financially understood that the emphasis on stability exhibited. A and C, despite the longevity and depth finances played in their lives, practiced a resistance to money completely defining their belief systems. They challenged the "expected" means and definition of success as informed by the socioeconomic metric that the Model Minority is often measured by. C's active refusal against these expectations despite the way his low-income experience was still imprinted onto his description of success could be seen as another way economic status shaped his beliefs:

> "Growing up low-income meant that I should want traditional success more and more. I should want the high paying job. I should want financial stability over anything. But, I think what I couldn't have predicted and my parents couldn't have predicted was that being low-income just made me care a lot more about issues that I want to address and redress. Rather than just being rich, you know? And I think that this misalignment happens there with a lot of people in my life –not a lot of people in my life– but I think my parents, especially, and a lot of my friends, who are really more interested in making a lot of money. I think I see a lot of parallels between me and other low-income friends who care more about certain issues than about getting the bag you know? And maybe that sort of paradox is there, I think, because of the upbringing that we had. Yeah, and, so, I think there's a very clear misalignment there. But, I've also found that alignment here with a lot of people at Emory. I think that I've met a lot of people who feel similarly about a lot of things and who care about social progress, either on issues of housing or politics or of Asian-americans. I think it's kind of gotten me out of the box of 'I have to make a lot of money, I have to follow this path.'"

A's statement echoed C's that the most formative part of practicing agency and resistance over these expectations were the exploration of beliefs with those who shared similar identities and beliefs about non-materialistic desires. However, in A's experience, his parents were also included in this reshaping of his beliefs on success:

> " I think I came in with the idea of success being very financial based: one where I can support myself, but also my parents, and live a comfortable life. And not to say that's completely gone. I do think that's an important part of how I like to find success, but I think as I've matured in my time here at college and my life perspective has changed, I think I like to see success more holistically…. I think once I came to college I've met a lot of other low-income Asian Americans and having conversations with them was the first step in opening up my perspective on success in general. I do think that was the first step, but the most important step in my opinion, was having conversations about finances with my parents. They've always been open with me about our family's financial difficulties growing up, but I think since I've come to college, they've been a bit more open in terms of having conversations where they see me as a mutual or another adult. And we're able to talk about the psychological and like the emotional, the relational impacts of living as low-income throughout my childhood, and I think having those conversations with them and hearing their ability to express like their regret, but also their hopes for me to not be too– not have my definition of happiness or success be too confined by finances. I think that was a big step as well in terms of how my perception on success has changed… I think there's nuance that I've gained from conversations with other people who share the same identity: Asian American and low-income… I think the most impactful nuance has been the idea that, as cliche as it may sound, like money can not and does not guarantee happiness, and there's much more meaning to life when it comes to success. I do think there was definitely reinforcement in terms of the shared emotional aspects of growing up low-income, but I think it was interesting to see the different philosophies on finances that my peers had. Of course, influenced by the way that their parents kinda raise them thinking about money"

Here, the shared identities and experiences A found in others, including at college, contributed to A's ability to practice agency over what he believed in despite the strong effect of his low-income background. The role others with similar backgrounds had on empowering this sense of agency, and on beliefs overall, points to the importance of making visible this community of low-income Asian Americans.

Additionally, the personal navigation of contexts that one does not necessarily have control over illuminated how beliefs are impacted by social identity and context. Beyond individual beliefs on success and well-being, low economic status appeared to affect the

relationship between the perceived experience of pursuing success and well-being as concepts.

The low-income component of one's sense of self was found to contribute to the dissonance between what individuals wanted to believe in and what they perceived they actually acted on. Tension between individual's perception of idealized belief systems and actualized belief systems was apparent in the belief interlocutors had relating success and well-being. Even when A and C did not want to be so heavily shaped by their experience growing up low-income, their self-awareness enabled them to recognize the influence their financial background had and has on them. This was particularly salient in their beliefs and practice of well-being as stated by A:

> "I think my perception of success, as much as I like to believe it isn't rooted in financial stability.. I think if that component of my definition of success is lacking, I think I feel insecure. In the ways that success influences my well being, I think, now as a senior, looking out and trying to get a job, I think that uncertainty of if I'm able to support myself financially postgrad, I think that has been a big influence on my mental wellbeing. Even if I'm taking care of myself and even if I'm doing well physically, emotionally, and spiritually, it's difficult to escape that mindset of how vital finances can be. I try not to be too influenced by that link between monetary success and my wellbeing, but it's difficult not to. So, I do think that there is a strong link between the sense of stability and if I'm on the trajectory to support myself financially because I think if that's challenged, I feel like my overall well being is dampened, in a way, that if it was, say, my physical health or my emotional health, if that was the thing to suffer as opposed to my financial stability, I think my overall health wouldn't be as negatively impacted. So, I do think financially… My definition of financial stability plays a disproportionate role and how it influences my wellbeing."

A's internal struggle in his cognitive dissonance between a less financially defined concept of success and his actual experience of unconsciously giving power to finances pointed to the influence of finances. Here, we see the relationship between how one's concept of success may relate to well-being and the substantial role finances has in determining this relationship. A

explained the relationship between success and well-being was “disproportionate” because financial stability took priority over other aspects of well-being. This priority, regardless of A’s “ideal” conceptualization of success and well-being, exhibited the magnitude of finances. The impact on well-being and mislalignment between idealized beliefs and actuality revealed by A was also reiterated by C: “well-being was so closely tied up with success. I'm not proud of that, unfortunately, but think that's where I’m at.” Thus, even in the agency and vigilance interlocutors practiced against detrimental beliefs or behaviors on their well-being, the strength of finances on well-being was clear. The strength and prioritization of finances was also found in C and his family’s understanding of well-being. For C and his parents, their well-being, specifically their physical and emotional health, were considered a privilege to care about in the face of financial needs:

> “health was sort of viewed as a privilege. Health care and both, both health care and just like, health, like being healthy was the privilege. It wasn't really a need and now there’s a sort of access to it… how I think my parents started growing up and how I kind of maybe still see it now as that like I think for my parents, they had to be successful in order to take care of their wellbeing and also feel like they were okay and well and stable... I think my lived experience, I think my parents put health priorities at the very bottom. It wasn't a very big priority at all. And I think that wasn't because they don't believe in living a healthy life or living a long life. I think it was just when it comes to sacrifice. What needs to be prioritized? I just don't think health was at the top… for my parents at least like until they saw it as the problem it was it wasn't a problem. It didn't have to be because I think as immigrants and as a family that Just put a lot of emphasis on education and career and trying to get by. I think health was just not as important. And I think that also is interesting because my family is doing a lot better now.As much as I talked about growing up low-income and how that shaped my life like we’re comfortably not low-income anymore, and I think that's also changed my family a lot and I think it's changed me a lot. But now that we're able, I guess, now that we have what we need to get by, and now that my parents and I aren't so stressed about the bare minimum, and our barest needs, I think that emphasis on health is back again. Well not even back again, but the emphasis is there now.And now health is more of a priority… when you're kind of going through it and when Life is not stable and it's not good, You don't see any sort of longevity. Like you're not looking forward. You’re focused on the problems at hand. And

> you know, a life well lived, a life long lived, is not a priority when you have that many other problems. But now that my family is doing a lot better, I think. They see a future. And they see how that's an important part of that future. Both like physically and literally and like in that, if they prioritize health like they can live a longer life than not die and be ill."

In this way, physical well-being was considered a luxury and attention was only given to it when physical health was threatened or when financial needs were met. Finances, therefore, were a crucial variable in the relationship between beliefs including those of success with well-being and well-being at large.

Although socioeconomic status, specifically being low-income, was found to significantly shape belief systems, it also interacts with other aspects of social identity including race. A particular way these two aspects of social identity intersect is in how the stereotypes associated with the Asian American make invisible the realities of low-income Asian Americans. Although there are significant proportions of the Asian American community who identify as low-income or find finances to be a pressing matter, class issues in the Asian American community are a largely understudied issue primarily due to the Model Minority stereotype.

Beliefs interact with the reality of low-income Asian Americans through the Model Minority myth, which makes invisible this demographic and their needs. Due to the specific way success is painted by the Model Minority, there is a restrictive visibility on the "successful" Asian American at the cost of simultaneously overshadowing the financial issues, disparities, and struggles of the Asian American community (Shih et al., 2019). The reality is, there are a number of groups that suffer under this shadow as their lived experiences and issues are made invisible, and, therefore, go unaddressed. These groups are often underrepresented given the broad diversity in the Asian American community, and even when represented, done so selectively to align with the Model Minority ideology.

Asian Americans were found to be the racial group with the largest income gap according to "census data from 1970 to 2016," but they are often easily generalized to show only those in the upper brackets of financial "success" (Lopez et al., 2017). Additionally, ethnic groups within the Asian American population display drastic disparity in income with certain groups being in the highest and lowest rates of poverty (Shih et al., 2019). Rarely is the popularized archetype of Asian Americans inclusive of those in these high rates of poverty.

Finally, even groups with high visibility are selectively framed to make invisible the financial struggles that threaten the concept of Asian Americans as the "problem-free," American Dream story. For example, Korean Americans are a relatively prominent group of Asian Americans associated with success. However, what is popularly known about this group is their high higher education rates (with over 50% of Korean Americans having advanced degrees) rather than the low rates of health insurance (at only 54%), which have drastic consequences on health (Cook et al., 2014). Thus, the Model Minority functions to inaccurately portray the United States as a meritocracy, which dismisses the social and structural forces of inequality. Identity framing also dismisses the individual hardships and systemic need for change in the Asian American community. Additionally, selective frameworks of social identity including the Model Minority acts as an "ideological frame" (Shih et al., 2019; Osajima, 1993). The stereotypical selectivity molds out-group and in-group members' perspectives of Asian Americans. The Model Minority is "consistent with how oppression operates" because it leads to the internalization of "an identity that resembles the images the dominant group defined and imposed on them (e.g., the Model Minority) and come to accept and believe the myths and stereotypes about their group" (Shih et al., 2019; Osajima, 199). I acknowledge that the beliefs surrounding success as Model Minorities impact belief systems but would also like to include individuals exercise

resistance against these impositions. In the navigation of belief systems, individuals in this study were found to demonstrate agency. Beliefs surrounding success as stereotyped Model Minorities were found to impact belief systems, but individual agency should not be neglected.

In conclusion, being low-income created a nuanced experience of the Asian American identity often underrepresented due to the Model Minority myth despite its significance on molding belief systems. The experience of growing up low-income or identifying as low-income were found to be particularly enduring in yielding a complex relationship to beliefs about success and well-being as exemplified by A and C's narratives. The relationship's complexity was demonstrated in the dissonance between idealized beliefs and perceived actions, where finances had a persistent impact even if interlocutors did not actively want it to. Despite such potent effects, A and C exhibited a determination to define success and well-being to be more than monetary achievements.

Church & Religion

Although belief systems are personal to each individual, this study identified the importance of the contexts these individuals were situated in, which shape these beliefs. A particular context shared by all the interlocutors in this study was the church. Church and religion broadly have been found to be potent agents of belief shaping, but given its intersection with other aspects of identity such as ethnicity or immigration status, it appears to play a particular role for Asian Americans. The commonality of church and religion were identified by all five interlocutors even if they were meaningful in differential ways. This shared theme was significant at the level of beliefs as it informed belief systems and functioned as a site for belief shaping. The role of church and religion, specifically for Asian Americans, especially for Korean Americans, was also important to acknowledge due to the role it plays for a high proportion of

the population. Church and religion were found to be crucial players in the Asian American lived experience as it acted in convergence and separation from the Asian American identity.

To preface, I do not intend to impose religiosity onto this group but, rather, display the prominence of religion and church on the Asian American community. The commonality found in this study's interlocutors points to the larger commonality of church and religion in the broader Asian American lived experience. Additionally, I do not coin the terms "church" and "religion" as necessarily synonymous though they have significant overlap. The distinction comes from the findings that even non-religious Asian Americans have found church to be an experience significant to their beliefs and lived experience. The significance of this factor is situated in the understanding that church does not function solely in the realm of spirituality and faith but also in other aspects of lived experience. The religion explored in this study was Christianity because it was the religion all the interlocutors affiliated with.

Additionally, I acknowledge the limitation of this study due to the convenience and snowball sampling utilized for its methodology. Most of the individuals came from a specific local religious organization composed primarily of Korean Americans and Chinese Americans. The organization is a non-denominational Christian church in the local Atlanta area that has fellowships on Emory and Georgia's Tech campus. However, even for the individual who did not identify as religious (C), he included religion in how his belief systems were formed. This is not to universalize religion and church for all Asian Americans, but to explore the theme of religion and church commonly found in many Asian Americans' lived experiences (Pew Research Center, 2023). The prominence of church membership and Christianity is so heightened that other scholars have studied Korean immigration to better understand "their active congregation-oriented religious activities" (Min, 2013). Although this study was not

representative, existing scholarship that supports the commonality of this theme indicates church membership and Christianity are valuable points of investigation for Asian American.

Across all five interlocutors, the theme of church and religion were a clear theme shared even if it was shared differently. A, B, D, and E either explicitly identified themselves as Christian or implicitly identified their faith as a significant factor to their beliefs through the inclusion of this aspect in their narratives. C stated he would not consider himself religious given his disbelief in the religious teachings he had grown up with, but he also explicitly acknowledged religion as a significant factor in how he shaped his beliefs. Thus, even for the one interlocutor who did not consider himself a believer, there was a clear acknowledgement of how church and religion were important to the interlocutors' beliefs and the process of how they came to them.

The commonality and presence of church even in the broader Asian American community outside my interlocutors, especially Korean Americans, are historically and culturally situated. Church and religion for Asian Americans have been relevant for a high proportion of Asian Americans even with the declining rates of religious affiliation found in the United States. The percentage of Asian Americans who identified as Christian has decreased from 42% to 34% from 2012 to 2023, but they are still the "largest faith group among Asian Americans," and 18% of Asian Americans felt close to Christianity "for reasons aside from religion" (Pew Research Center, 2023). Breaking down this statistic into ethnicities, 59% of Korean Americans and 23% of Chinese Americans identified as Christian in a study conducted in 2022-2023 (Pew Research Center, 2023). Korean Americans were also found to be the "largest Protestant immigrant group in the post-1965 era" with about 550 "Korea Protestant churches… in the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area alone" (Min, 2013, p. 2). The high prevalence of

Korean American Christians is important in contextualizing this study given the majority of interlocutors were Korean Americans that grew up in a Christian church.

The large proportion of Korean American Christians is shaped by cultural, political, and historical forces. History of American missionaries to South Korea, who "encouraged Korean converts to emigrate to the United States, a Christian nation, and the American churches' sponsorship of immigration facilitated Korean American Christian immigration (Chai, 1984, p.303). Additionally, even Korean immigrants who came after this period, "half of whom were Christian prior to arrival, reinforced the tradition established by the early Korean immigrants." (Chai, 1984, p. 303; Hurh & Kim 1984, 1990). The family reunification facilitated by the Immigration Act in 1965 also led to an increased number of Christian Korean Americans as the Korean Americans already residing in the United States encouraged their family members, who were most likely Christians, to immigrate as well. Thus, Protestant Christianity's prevalence in Korean Americans reflects its significance in Korea and in the United States for this specific demographic (Yoo & Chung, 2008, p.4).

The commonality of church and religion for the experience of Asian Americans may also be linked to the social and geographical landscape of immigration to the United States. Immigrants, in general, were more incentivized and likely to move to areas with existing high concentrations of a specific ethnic population, and these high concentrations are more likely to have established institutions such as churches (Davis & Kiang, 2016). Considering immigration status and ethnicity, it is also important to note church membership and religion do not function the same across racial groups in the United States.

The role of church and religion continue to have enduring effects even after initial immigration for Asian Americans for various reasons. Religion, specifically, is a powerful agent

in shaping belief systems because it provides a specific "set of beliefs based on a unique vision of how the world ought to be, often revealed through insights into a supernatural power, and lived out in community" (Guest, 2020, p. 577), In general, the role of religion has implications for belief systems through two avenues: the intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic orientation describes a true belief and pursuit of the religious teachings while an extrinsic orientation recognizes religion as a means to nonreligious goals (Allport & Ross, 1967). Belief systems are heavily shaped by intrinsic religious orientations because they are informed by their religion under the paradigm that the religious teachings are the ultimate truth to center their lives around (Allport & Ross, 1967). However, religion may also shape beliefs through its function in extrinsic means outside of the spiritual sphere.

The exploration of the extrinsic function of church and religion for Asian Americans help contextualize why this theme was found so prominent for this community. Although more applicable to first-generation immigrants, even non-Christian Koreans would engage with Korean churches after immigration "primarily because it met their practical needs associated with immigrant adjustment" (Hurh & Kim, 1990; Min, 1992; Chai, 1984, p. 304). The continued engagement with church for reasons other than spirituality reinforced the established and growing presence of the Korean church (Hurh & Kim, 1990; Min, 1992; Chai, 1984). Four of these practical, extrinsic needs relevant to even non-believers were fellowship, maintenance of culture, social services, and social status (Min, 1992; Chai, 1984). These functions of ethnic churches as "vehicles of preserving ethnic culture and identity" and community, capable of providing practical assistance, were of increased importance for immigrants who experienced "uprooting, existential marginality, and sociocultural adaptation for rerooting" (Hurh & Kim,

1984; Hurh & Kim, 1990; Chai, 1984) In this way, church and religion performed intrinsically and extrinsically, bolstering the large role of church for believers and non-believers alike.

The role of religion for interlocutors was evident in the nuances of their beliefs about success and well-being that incorporated their faith. For the four interlocutors who identified themselves as Christian, success and well-being were not framed simply in the secular but the spiritual as well. This was revealed in differential ways including in the additive structure where spirituality was an additional component to non-faith related items. B captured this differentiation between the "spiritual" and "secular" in his definition of success:

> "From a worldly perspective, I would say success is finding a stable job, having a family and, I do get, having an education is a part of finding a good job, and then, maybe, having a well rounded social life. I guess that's how I would define success from a worldly perspective. I definitely still think education, having family and all the things I listed above are still stuff that I strive for, but both my parents were Christian, or they came to become Christians after moving to America. So, growing up, I had a Christian background. So, I think something that I would define as, I wouldn't call a success, but a goal for me is also to maintain my relationship with God. I think that comes before all else."

Here, there is a clarification of the "worldly perspective," which can be described as the secular, and the additive feature of faith to this "worldly perspective" in what he valued as a successful life. The importance of this addition was demonstrated in the priority given to faith as he stated his relationship with God "comes before all else." His prioritization appeared to have been informed by his parents' teachings that "Yes, these things [worldly things] are important such as education and getting a job, but your spirituality, relationship with God comes first even at the expense of these other things." The costly value given to faith also appeared in D's perception of her mother's belief on success:

> "But I think knowing my mom and like How dedicated she is to her faith.I think if I asked her this question. Her definition of success is like fulfilling what God has planned for her.I think like she thinks her like mission in life was to raise good kids. And like

> that's why she was able to fully sacrifice her life and her job and whatever else that she wanted to do and just like hone in on taking care of her kids. So I think for her that's like what she sees as success"

D's mother's definition of success (as perceived by D) revealed the significance of faith not only through the explicit statement that faith was such a priority she was "able to fully sacrifice" but also in how faith completely defined her belief about success. Additionally, the disproportionate value given to religion was found in A's definition of success. He described living out his faith as a "big part of my [his] view on success" while other aspects were not given the same description of effect size. Therefore, this addition can be understood less as a second thought and more as a leading thought on his beliefs about success. The additive structure was also evident in A and D's inclusion of "spiritual health" in defining well-being. This follows the multifaceted nature of beliefs on well-being that was explored in the previous chapter.

The emphasis on faith in the beliefs about success and well-being for A, B, and D was also shared and shaped by their parents. Their shared emphasis was evident in the discussion on the prioritization of faith.

In B's introduction to the importance of his faith, he began with the fact that his parents were Christian, which led to his own faith. This transition indicated the role his parents' religious beliefs had on his beliefs about both religion and success. B's pattern of belief adoption was also found in D as she shared how her mother's beliefs on dimensions of well-being, which included spiritual health, aligned with hers. The connection between beliefs between the parent-child dyad was revealed in A's interconnected beliefs on success and well-being. A's interconnection of beliefs refers to the inclusion of well-being as a part of A's perception of success. A's understanding of what his parents believed to be success encompassed their whole family rather than just their individual success. The intergenerational notion of his parents' beliefs about

success were found to shape his beliefs as well. For his parents, A believed success meant it was their children being able to be "healthy and happy." This looked like:

> "That we eat well. That we're surrounding ourselves with good people, good friends. That we go to church. Yeah, I think, and also have a good relationship with them and our family as a unit. Yeah, I think those things. It's a pretty straightforward and simple outlook on what it means to be happy and healthy."

The inclusion of A and sister going to church as A's parents' ideal image of success revealed the magnitude of importance religion has on their beliefs. A's own practice of "going to church" as a means of practicing his spiritual well-being along with his inclusion of faith in his belief systems demonstrated the way he may have been informed by his parents' beliefs in forming his own.

Finally, in understanding how church and religion shape the content of the beliefs on success and well-being, I explore how beliefs about success and well-being are related to one another. As established previously, the beliefs about success and well-being overlapped, and a point of overlap was found to be religion. Beliefs about success and about well-being met at the shared theme of religion that were found in both belief systems. For instance, A defined an aspect of success to be "how well I [he] live out my [his] faith as a Christian" and an aspect of well-being to be "spiritual health." Spiritual health for A meant "making sure my [his] relationship with God is where I need it to be and where it should be and that it's a living relationship." In order to take care of his "spiritual health," he shared he had a "rhythm of faith" that he relied on. A' rhythm was described as the routine of "going to church, doing Bible study, praying, reading my Bible every day. " Although this was how he took "care of myself [himself] spiritually," which made it a means to well-being, it was also a means to success because he partially defined success as living out his faith. Thus, this overlap of religion for both beliefs on

success and well-being were intertwined since being religiously "successful" could also mean to be spiritually "well."

A characteristic of Christianity that complicated this conceptualization is the underlying belief that one cannot "succeed" in Christianity given the Biblical teaching that it is a faith by God's grace rather than works (*English Study Version,* 2001, Ephesians 2:8). This was evident in interlocutors' emphasis on the relational understanding of God as seen in A's definition of spiritual health. Paralleling human relationships, the relationship one has with God would be difficult to measure and evaluate as "successful," especially given the intangibility of one's relationship with God. The difficulty in deeming faith as a "success" was revealed in B's hesitation to identify maintaining his relation with God a "success." Hesitancy did not lessen the importance of faith in B's description of success, but his hesitancy may be attributed to the lack of "achievement" one can place onto a relationship. The lack of achievement orientation, then, reinforced the relationship between one's perceptions on success and well-being as spiritual success emerges from the practice of religion or the feeling that one is "well" in their relationship with God. The metric of success and well-being for aspects related to health as how one *feels* reiterated the theme of affect and interconnection of beliefs about success and well-being.

As explored previously, the church was not a site restricted to spiritual teachings given its multi-utilitarian role. The church was found to function as a site for belief-making beyond just spirituality for interlocutors. The versatility of the church and importance as a site for belief construction was more complex given the notion that the role of church cannot be understood as synonymous across racial groups.

Religion, generally, has been identified as a powerful shaper of beliefs given its demands for believers to consider the spiritual teachings as truth and adhere to it as a priority. An early

indication of religion's role on belief making for children who grew up in religious backgrounds could be the decision to continue to adhere and adopt or contest and disassociate from their upbringings. This stage of "adolescent religious development is characterized by choosing from a variety of options. These options can include maintaining a previously held religious affiliation (or lack thereof) that has been socialized by parents, ending any religious affiliation entirely, or converting to a new religious affiliation" (Davis & Kiang, 2016). The crossroad of choice was found in A, B, D, and E, who held onto their affiliations, and in C, who ended his affiliation. The choice to maintain or end religious affiliation demonstrated the interlocutors' adherence or contestation to religious beliefs taught in the church. This established the church as a place where individuals could practice belief adoption, contestation, and making.

Additionally, the stage of choice in what one should believe was found to have implications beyond spiritual beliefs. The relevance of this stage of choice for non-religious beliefs appeared to have emerged from the extrinsic function ethnic churches play for Asian Americans. This was captured in C in his resistance rather than adoption of the beliefs informed by the church. Here, the challenge to Christian beliefs led to challenges to other beliefs, especially about success in relation to "traditional" expectations.

> "I started to question like Christianity and also like the networks I had through religion. And, also kind of started to question whether I wanted to go down a path of very traditional success in the sense that I would just pursue wealth and pursue stability. Even though they [his parents] wanted me to, they couldn't really control that, and I think that's where we kind of diverged… My parents are very religious. Very Christian. I started going to church at the age of one, and I think when my parents.. As my mom moved —that period I talked about earlier, where I was given a lot more freedom, was also a time where I had a lot more freedom to choose what I believed in. I was able to choose whether I wanted to go to church or not because my dad wasn't home either way, so he couldn't make sure I went. I think that was a time where I just started to question a lot more things: both God and religion and also just everything my parents had kind of taught me growing up. I think my shift away from church kind of —just because of experiences I had at church and some people who kind of shaped my view of religion

> ended up kind of tainting it– I think that marked a big shift for me and like questioning everything I believe in... I don't know. It was the first time I had kind of gone against the grain in my life and gone against something I was taught and believed in so fervently. I think, since then, since the first time I questioned religion, for better or for worse, I think it's allowed me, or kind of taught me, how to question a lot of the things in my life. Also, a lot of the beliefs that I was taught and a lot of beliefs that the people around me held I think came from religion… Main idea is that my turn from religiosity shaped a lot of my beliefs and made me kind of misaligned with a lot of the people like my parents and a lot of the beliefs I held growing up. And that's kind of like shaped how I feel. It just shaped a lot of my beliefs and like what I'm passionate about now I think was marked by my turn from religiosity. ”

Given the link the church and religion has with culture and ethnicity in ethnic churches, the church was found to be a site where beliefs on identity were shared and influenced. The physical space of the ethnic church facilitated the congregation of those with similar identities. Such congregating may have enabled easier connection and feedback about beliefs given the shared experiences and culture that could evoke a deeper level of understanding. The shared space of church as a space to explore beliefs aligns with existing literature that found “Asian Americans use religious conversations in religious spaces to face questions about their relation to their country of origin, personal and collective identities, and the organization of American society and culture” (Carnes & Yang, 2004, p. 3; Smith, 1971; Smith, 1978). The commonality of identity in the given space cultivated comfort and stability as well as bonding (Alumkal, 2003). These relationships between congregation members may be more easily formed due to similar struggles, experiences, beliefs, and values even if they were not religious in nature.

The importance of discussion and exploration of beliefs with others, especially those that share similar concerns, were evident in A and C's recognition that it was through conversation with other low-income Asian American that formed their beliefs. Although, more broadly,

low-income Asian Americans are less identifiable, the ethnic church in its function as a place of communion for those of this shared identity, make even nuanced experiences like growing up low-income a point of commonality. In Alumkal's study, "Eric," a university student who was involved in a Korean campus fellowship and Korean church, identified church as the place where he was able to find others with similar experiences that allowed for greater connection through relatability (2003, pp. 102-103):

> "I guess I saw people with the same circumstances as myself with parents who own a business, parents who were well off in Korea and went to college but came to America and who own dry cleaners or vegetable stores. So I was able to relate more easily with them. Also, because you those similarities, you just click better in terms of little jokes or whatever."

Thus, church was found to be an important site for how beliefs were created, shaped, and challenged because church was an important site for ethnic community. The importance of being in community of those with similar social identities was revealed through C's description of how drastic even a 30 minute change from a predominantly white to largely Asian population could be:

> "I grew up in a very white, very conservative suburb of Dallas with very little diversity. With a lot of people who I don't think I would be friends with today or would spend time with today because I think I come to think about things differently. But, I moved in Dallas to Carrollton. That small move in it of itself– it was a 30 minute move– but that small move marked a big shift for me in terms of realizing what kind of people I feel comfortable in, what issues I care about, and realizing that there was, that I could form some sort of personal identity. Being in a non-White environment– it's really formative. After spending a lot of time in an environment where you kind of feel like not really included, you know. So, I think that little move marks a big shift for me, and, then, I think coming to Emory in an environment– I have a lot more people in my life that I feel more comfortable with that think a lot of the same things that I think, that have have a lot of the same experiences that I have, and care a lot."

Additionally, churches in the form of religious organizations and fellowships on college campuses continue to be of importance in its influence on belief systems through community with other Asian Americans (Kim, 2008). In fact, it was found that Asian Americans, specifically "Korean and Chinese Americans, predominate in the major campus evangelical organizations of many top colleges in America" (Kim, 2008). Establishment of religion and church on college campuses was especially important considering college is a formative period for belief contestation and formation. In B's case, the result of this community's influence was recognized in the reinforcement of his beliefs because the individuals around him shared his values. These shared values could have emerged due to the adherence to the same religious teaching or through similar backgrounds. B explored his alignment with his peers of similar religious backgrounds while differentiating others that do not share this identity in his belief about success:

> " I think a lot of my friends right now are from a church organization that I go to. I would consider a lot of my close friends to be from this organization. As a result, they also have a similar background in terms of having a religious background. So, while also striving for academic success and finding a job and everything, they also strive for that relationship. So, I think in a bubble, I do think the people around me, at least my close friends and like my extended friends, do share the same goal? However, like I mean compared to the overall– like if you just look at people in general– I would say most people look more at just jobs and stuff from a monetary perspective, versus me where I think growing up, my parents always emphasized the fact that: Yes, these things are important such as like education and getting a job, but like your your spirituality, relationship with God, comes first even at the expense of these other things. So, I think having that, kind of shaped my priorities a little bit differently than the generic person who is maybe not spiritually involved."

Thus, B's beliefs on success were not only informed by religion but also reinforced through his parents and peers found in church. This demonstrated the extrinsic function of sociality and intrinsic orientation to the religious teachings that position the church as a site significant to

belief systems. In this way, the extrinsic role of the church and its ideologies are compounded to position church as a site of belief formation.

Church and religion was a prominent theme that was uniquely shared by all interlocutors in this study. Through the intrinsic and extrinsic functions of the church and religion, these aspects of experience were found to nuance the content of the holistic beliefs about success and well-being as well as the relationship between the two. Additionally, the church was identified as a crucial site for belief processing and shaping. Religion and church were contextualized in the interaction between religion, race, and immigration related aspects of identity.

Conclusion

The experience of growing up in a low-income and Christian setting were two facets of identity critical to interlocutors' belief systems. Low economic status shaped belief systems by centering the experience of instability and finances. This may have led to a greater importance given to stability rather than the accumulation of wealth. The produced idealization of stability appears to have emerged through the contemplation of money, which taught interlocutors money was not everything.

Additionally, religion and church appear to have shifted beliefs about success and about well-being from the secular to include the spiritual for those that identified themselves as Chrisitan. The Church, in its intrinsic and extrinsic function, contributed to the relational aspect of Asian American belief systems through the encouragement to prioritize one’s relationship with God and in its construction of a community that facilitated belief formation.

Class and religious standing captured the way the self and one’s belief are embedded in social contexts that contributed to the formation of belief systems. Through individual agency

within the larger contexts of social influence, there were differences within interlocutors as well as similarities in what one believed about success and well-being. These beliefs emerged from themes related to Asian American identity given that the racial aspect of their identities nuanced the way low-income and religion played out for these interlocutors. Therefore, in understanding how economic status and religion and church shape belief systems, one must acknowledge the complexity of individual and larger social elements that contributed to the process of belief construction.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Summary

This study sought to explore the content and factors of what shaped beliefs about success and about well-being for Asian Americans through the direct narratives of Korean Americans and a Chinese American. These beliefs and the ways they relate to each other and one's identity were incredibly complex. The substance of beliefs about these two concepts were deeply saturated with personal meanings as they went beyond traditional conceptualizations of success as wealth and well-being as physical. Going beyond these conceptualizations led to manifestations of these beliefs as multifaceted and holistic. Beliefs about success and well-being were measured less by climbing up a hierarchy or objective biological markers but about how one *felt* they were doing. It was these subjective and holistic descriptions that defined the beliefs on success and well-being for these interlocutors. These themes of affect and multidimensionality challenged the reductive associations of success and well-being placed onto this group through stereotypes and popularized understandings. The affective and holistic approach found in belief systems also illuminated the fusion between these two concepts.

Beliefs about these concepts were found interconnected to one another to the point where they did not exist without the other for some interlocutors. For example, D established that a life could not be defined as successful without well-being, and C believed the pursuit of success had to be through well-being. Thus, in the ways interlocutors defined, related, and pursued these two concepts, there was overlap.

Although belief systems were subjective and personal, they did not emerge or exist in a vacuum. The social context in which interlocutors participated in were critical sites of influence for their belief making. Two particular sites and agents of influence were the economic,

specifically low-income, conditions surrounding two particular interlocutors as well as the religious environment all five interlocutors were raised in. For the two interlocutors who identified their low-income background, it appeared this aspect of their identity enhanced the allure of stability to the point where it became a significant aspect of their beliefs on success and well-being. The increased appeal seems to originate from their continuous experience of instability. The experience of financial insecurity and its enduring effects led to the unignorable presence of finances on belief systems and the perceived pursuit of actualizing these beliefs.

Additionally, religion and involvement in the church appeared to influence the direction of belief systems for believers by fixing their perspective to go beyond the "worldly" conceptualizations of success and well-being to incorporate the "spiritual." The significance of spirituality was embodied in the importance of one's relationship to God. Even for the interlocutor who did not identify as religious, the church was a place where beliefs beyond religious teachings were adopted and challenged. The church functioned as a critical place of belief formation given those with similar identities (e..g Asian Americans, Korean Americans, low-income Korean Americans) congregated there together. The significance of religion and church found in shaping beliefs aligned with existing scholarship that linked church to the Asian American identity.

Religion, church, and class contexts were not completely unique for interlocutors as shared points in interlocutors' backgrounds yielded shared points of experience. For example, historical and larger social forces made Christianity prominent for Korean American immigrants, and this prominence is identified in the common theme of Christianity across narratives. Thus, larger social forces and contexts that may be specific to identity (e.g. race, immigration status) may lead to certain shared beliefs or factors of belief formation.

Factors such as economic status and Christianity were nuanced experiences and connected to the broad framework of Asian American identity. The commonality of beliefs that indicate commonality related to identity and social contexts demonstrated that even personal beliefs "within" the individual were not separate from one's external world. The influence of belief systems reiterated the complexity of beliefs as well as the forces that shape these beliefs, especially relative to identity, because they did not appear to exist independently.

Agency

Influences were not received by interlocutors without agency as interlocutors navigated what they chose to believe in even if this navigation was not always a cohesive or linear process. The incoherent process and existence of belief systems were captured in the struggle between what interlocutors felt they "should" believe and what they felt they did believe in. However, agency was recognized through the "realization [that] I [they] had freedom to choose my own path" (C). This freedom was an acknowledgement of one's ability to choose what to value and what they could believe was success and well-being. The ability to exercise this choice, even if it was not completely in one's power to select their background and contexts, did not always manifest as a divergence from sources of influence such as religion and parental figures. Instead, both the adoption and resistance against what individuals felt they "should" believe given their financial, religious, familial, and racial background were manifestations of agency. D captured this in her fluctuating relationship between her Asian American identity and beliefs about success:

> "I think when I was younger, I was [aware of the] very common Asian American trope of being a doctor or lawyer or whatever to make enough money. I think my perception of that was very against or opposite of that. So, I would lean very far on the other side and be like, 'money isn't success, money isn't everything.' Yeah, like, rather on the other

> side, does that make sense? But, I think as I grew up and interacted with careers and money and jobs. I think I was able to come to the middle somewhere to recognize that my money is a means to happiness, but it's not everything."

The ability to recognize one's choice can be difficult under the pressure of various forces such as parents, stereotypes, religious teachings, and personal experiences of financial struggle. However, belief systems cannot be understood to be at the mercy of these forces while neglecting the agency of individuals, who have the power to change their realities. These individuals were found to be empowered through experiences that allowed them to share and recognize more fully different aspects of their identity such as being low-income, Christian, or Asian American. C puts it like this:

> "Growing up, I had a lot of Asian friends who went on and worked in business, worked in finance and made a lot of money. I think my parents really wanted me to strive for that. And I think at Emory, I've met a lot of people, Asian Americans, who have helped me get in touch more with that side of me. That's really cliche but have helped me get in touch with my Asian side. Also, I think there's a lot of cliches and stereotypes around Asian American, being second-generation Asian American. There's so many stereotypes on how we should live and how a lot of people do choose to live. But, I think there are a lot of people here who have inspired me– showed me what my rewriting of my parents definition of success and well being could be right, you know?"

Agency is an important aspect to consider in better understanding the complexity of beliefs, identity, and the social contexts individuals are situated in. This study found these three components (beliefs, identity, and context) were deeply interconnected in the way they were shaped by one another. The content of beliefs and the process to get to these beliefs went beyond the popularized understandings of the Asian American identity and experience. Thus, we must not fail to neglect these stories and the agency that these sharing of stories can enable in what is understood about Asian Americans.

Limitations

Although this study was not intended to be a full representation or generalization of Korean Americans or Chinese Americans, work in this field would greatly benefit with an increased number of interlocutors to expand a broader variety of beliefs and backgrounds. A larger number of interlocutors would address the gaps that emerge in this study due to convenience sampling as well as in expanding different perspectives that this study did not include.

Additionally, the broad range of ages in recruitment were to allow for multiple generations, specifically of immigration, but only those who identified as second-generation immigrants were able to be recruited. The intergenerational immigration aspect of the Asian American experience would be notable to investigate given the differential experiences of specific immigration generations could yield differential belief systems including those of success and well-being.

As mentioned in my initial interest in the conceptualization of success and well-being for Asian Americans, the narratives that evoked my interest often prioritized success at the cost of well-being. However, the deep interconnection between success and well-being as overlapping concepts were contrary to the expectations of how I thought these two concepts would relate. This fused perception of success and well-being came from a limited demographic of second-generation immigrants. There is a possibility that first-generation immigrants have a varying conceptualization of success and well-being, which may be more separate and less overlapping, as many are preoccupied with the responsibility of meeting one's immediate needs. The nature of uprooting one's life and resettling in a new environment often comes with great financial burdens and pressing issues that may make well-being a secondary priority. The need to

"make it" as additionally prompted by the American Dream, may focus on the importance of success over well-being for those who chose to immigrate due to socioeconomic reasons. On the other hand, those further removed from initial immigration and the associated pressures to meet their basic needs may be afforded the luxury to consider aspects beyond just making ends meet including their well-being. Greater opportunities such as higher education enabled by the provision of first-generation immigrants may also influence the perception of success intergenerationally.

These possibilities for differential beliefs about success and well-being and their relationship were alluded to by the differences identified by the interlocutors and their account of their parents' (first-generation immigrants') beliefs. However, these differences were recognized through the perspective of second-generation interlocutors rather than from both the parent-child dyad. In order to consider the most personally accurate understanding of what first-generation individuals believed in, further study must hear directly from these individuals. Through this inclusion, a clearer comprehension of similarities and differences may be discerned. It would also disentangle similarities and differences in belief systems between these two groups that may emerge not from immigration status but from other factors.

Given the scope of this study, further investigation is required to better explore the implications and actualizations of these beliefs and aspects of identity. This can be specified to different relationships within the explored concepts such as: the relationship between beliefs on success and objective measures of well-being, low socioeconomic status and measures of well-being, beliefs on success and the actualized pursuit of it, and so on. The shift away from beliefs explored in this study to the manifestations and effects of them would provide a more complete understanding of how success, well-being, and identity as broad concepts interact.

Closing Remarks

In conclusion, I would like to thank my fellow Asian Americans, who willingly shared their beliefs and stories with me. I had initially come into this study carrying the thoughts and conversations I shared with other Asian Americans around me, which led me to more closely study the lived experiences and narratives of my community. However, I was struck by the complexity and immense humanity demonstrated in the beliefs shared in this study that went beyond my own expectations that had been built upon existing associations between success and well-being with the Asian American community. The beliefs my interlocutors shared were charged with meanings that were both personal and shared collectively. Beliefs were simple in what individuals valued in the present and hopeful in what they desired in the future.

The inability to fully capture the nuances and complexity of these beliefs reflect how difficult it is to capture the nuances and complexity of each individual even within a shared identity. This is not to negate the importance of group specific studies or the findings relevant to them or their commonality. Instead, I simply urge us to put the individuality of people at the forefront of our minds, especially in the study of groups often easily generalized.

Interlocutors in this study exercised agency over how they shaped their beliefs despite the larger forces in their environments and experiences. This demonstrated the ways individuals rewrite and choose what they seek to subscribe to in this life. The significance of agency is crucial to the further call for full representation of those in the Asian American communities with the intent of empowering them to not only shape their personal beliefs but also their narratives at a broader scale. Thus, by providing a platform for the complexity of these narratives, I hope to give courage and empower other Asain Americans to delve into what they truly find meaningful and for these stories to inspire one another. We must persist in advocating

for Asian Americans in studies of success, well-being, and identity, and to allow for voices within the community to be heard.

Appendix I

Emory University
Oral Consent Script
For a Research Study

Title: Embodying the Asian American Identity: Exploring Belief Systems & Well-Being

IRB #: STUDY00006437
Principal Investigator: Dr. Chikako Ozawa-de Silva
Associate Professor of Anthropology Emory University

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Chikako Ozawa-de Silva
Associate Professor of Anthropology Emory University

Dr. Brendan Ozawa-de Silva
Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics

Introduction and Study Overview

Thank you for your interest in my Asian American research study that specifically includes Asian Americans with East Asian heritage. We would like to tell you what you need to think about before you choose whether or not to join the study. It is your choice. If you choose to join, you can change your mind later on and leave the study. Participants may fully withdraw, and none of their responses will be used. Should you want to partially withdraw or omit certain questions or responses, these sections of your responses will not be included.

The purpose of this study is to provide insight into the Asian American experience and observations of the perceptions and manifestations of beliefs relating to success and well-being. This study will take about 8-10 months to complete.

If you join, you will be asked to participate in 1 qualitative interview lasting approximately 30 minutes to an hour. Interviews will be recorded and only accessible by the research team.

Risks are minimal but may include loss of time and any psychological discomfort that may be caused by talking about your personal experiences. A breach of confidentiality is also a possible risk despite the measures that will be taken to de-identify and securely store data.

You may not benefit from joining the study. This study is designed to learn more about the Asian American culture and lived experience. The study results may be used to help others in the future.

Your data will be de-identified and only accessible by the research team. Data that is shared in the form of study results, publications, and literature will not contain any identifiable information and will be given a pseudonym.

Once the study has been completed, we will send you the results of the study and what they mean if requested. We will not send you your individual results from this study.

Study records can be opened by court order. They also may be provided in response to a subpoena or a request for the production of documents.

Storing and Sharing your Information

We will store all the data that you provide using a code. We need this code so that we can keep track of your data over time. This code will not include information that can identify you (identifiers). Specifically, it will not include your name, initials or date of birth. We will keep a file that links this code to your identifiers in a secure location separate from the data.

We will not allow your name and any other fact that might point to you to appear when we present or publish the results of this study.

Your data may be useful for other research being done by investigators at Emory or elsewhere. We may share the data linked by the study code, with other researchers at Emory, or with researchers at other institutions that maintain at least the same level of data security that we maintain at Emory. We will not share the link between the study code and your identity.

We may also place data in public databases accessible to researchers who agree to maintain data confidentiality, if we remove the study code and make sure the data are anonymized to a level that we believe that it is highly unlikely that anyone could identify you. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

Confidentiality

Certain offices and people other than the researchers may look at study records. Government agencies and Emory employees overseeing proper study conduct may look at your study records. These offices include the Emory Institutional Review Board and the Emory Office of Compliance. Emory will keep any research records we create private to the extent we are required to do so by law. A study number rather than your name will be used on study records wherever possible. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results.

People Who will Use/Disclose Your Information:

The following people and groups will use and disclose your information in connection with the research study:

- The Principal Investigator and the research staff will use and disclose your information to conduct the study.
- Emory may use and disclose your information to run normal business operations.
- The Principal Investigator and research staff will share your information with other people and groups to help conduct the study or to provide oversight for the study.
- The following people and groups will use your information to make sure the research is done correctly and safely:

  - Emory offices that are involved in study administration and billing. These include the Emory IRB, the Emory Research and Healthcare Compliance Offices, and the Emory Office for Clinical Research.
  - Research monitors and reviewer.
  - Accreditation agencies.
- Sometimes a Principal Investigator or other researcher moves to a different institution. If this happens, your information may be shared with that new institution and their oversight offices. Information will be shared securely and under a legal agreement to ensure it continues to be used under the terms of this consent.

Contact Information

If you have questions about the study procedures, appointments, research-related injuries or bad reactions, or other questions or concerns about the research or your part in it, contact: Chikako Ozawa-de Silva at 404-727-4489 / cozawad@emory.edu or Emily Jang at 469-834-2147 / Emily.jang2@emory.edu

This study has been reviewed by an ethics committee to ensure the protection of research participants. If you have questions about your **rights as a research participant**, or if you have **complaints** about the research or an issue you would rather discuss with someone outside the research team, contact the Emory Institutional Review Board at 404-712-0720 or 877-503-9797 or irb@emory.edu.

To tell the IRB about your experience as a research participant, fill out the Research Participant Survey at **https://tinyurl.com/ycewgkke.**

Consent

Do you have any questions about anything I just said? Were there any parts that seemed unclear?

Do you agree to take part in the study?

Participant agrees to participate: Yes No

If Yes:

_____ _____

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion Date Time

_____

Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion

Appendix II

Interview Questions

1. Where were you born?
2. Do you identify as Asian American or some other way?
3. How old are you?
4. Do you have any favorite memories or hobbies from your childhood?
5. How did you come to reside in the United States? How long have you lived here?
6. What does success mean or look like to you?
7. What do you think success means or looks like in your parents' (or caregivers') eyes?
8. What does well-being look like to you?
9. What do you think well-being looks like in your parents' (or caregivers') eyes?
10. What has been your experience in seeking your description of success? If you do not seek this, why not?
11. Growing up, did you talk about aspects of well-being within your family unit or close community?
12. In what ways do you think you pursue, practice, or can achieve well-being?
13. How does your perception of success as you have described it affect your well-being, if at all?
14. How do you think your identity as an Asian American living in the United States shapes your perceptions of success and/or well-being if at all?
15. In what ways do you feel your personal belief systems align or do not align with those around you?

a. Do you believe or have you experienced differences in opinions on success of well-being within your family unit or others in the Asian American community?

16. As you were growing up, what factors shaped your beliefs about well-being, success, and being an Asian American?

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