

As a researcher at the intersection of social work and education, my current and future research focuses on the psychological, social, and systemic mechanisms that shape mental health and education outcomes for minoritized students. My work speaks to the social work field in three ways. First, it names historical and ecosocial processes such as colonialism, systemic oppression, and family socialization as key factors in the internalization of oppression. Second, my scholarship centers the lived experiences of minoritized populations and not whites through critical race and anti-coloniality theories. Finally, my research applies an intersectional lens to explore the malleability of social identities and how they combine and interact with systems of oppression, to create unique mental health and educational outcomes.

Positionality

I am a Pilipinx immigrant and first generation college student from a low socioeconomic status (SES). The excitement I felt in taking my first undergraduate elective course dissipated as the professor began to rattle off statistics on educational disparities. Shame began to seep in as I quickly realized that disparities in access, admission, achievement, and persistence rates did not favor students who look like me. For example, only 20% of first generation college students attain a postsecondary degree compared to their non-first generation peers (49%). Ultimately, though, this shame fueled my curiosity about why these disparities exist. The more I discover the reasons behind the disparities, the more passionate I become about eliminating them. My lived experiences and decade long career in the field of education, coupled with graduate-level training in social work, have given me a unique perspective for understanding the comprehensive aspects of educational disparities that minoritized college students face in the United States.

My growth as a researcher is informed by both my scholarly endeavors as well as my social activist efforts. My three years of experience working with Dr. Calzada and the SHSSW Committee on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) have provided me the opportunity to apply the skills and knowledge I have obtained from my scholarly endeavors. Drawing on my knowledge of minoritized student populations, I developed a survey to collect data about students of color and their experiences of microaggressions; conducted a review of SHSSW syllabi for DEI content and co-facilitated discussions with faculty on expanding DEI in their courses; and founded the first SHSSW DEI Student Task Force. My commitment to DEI extends beyond the university. My work with Dr. Yolanda Padilla, Director of CSWE Center for Diversity and Social & Economic Justice, has helped me think critically about challenging marginalization. As such, I was a contributing author on an issue of the Center's Educator Resource, and I currently sit on the CSWE Task Force to Advance Anti-Racism. I was also featured as a panelist on *Overcoming Resistance and Securing Partnerships for DEI Initiatives* at CSWE's annual national conference. These experiences inspired me to write a critical essay on addressing inequity across ecological levels, published in a special issue of *Women, Gender, and Families of Color*.

Development as a Scholar

Since entering the doctoral program at the Steve Hicks School of Social Work (SHSSW), applying CRT and using an intersectional lens have been imperative to my work. Under the supervision of Dr. Esther Calzada, Professor and Associate Dean of Equity and Inclusion, I directed a qualitative study to explore the intersecting factors that contribute to educational disparities among minoritized students. I helped conceptualize the study, obtain IRB approval, and lead recruitment efforts. I then conducted focus groups with a sample of 85 students, led the data analysis, and submitted a manuscript as first author (under review for the *American Educational Research Journal*). This paper was selected as one of the 40 premiere presentations out of hundreds of submissions at the 2020 annual Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) national conference. Our results indicate that historically excluded students who hold intersecting minoritized identities (e.g.,

BIPOC and low SES) feel varying levels of school belonging, which create different and mainly adverse educational experiences. As co-Principal Investigator with Dr. Calzada, we were awarded funding from the University of Texas at Austin's Vice Provost for Diversity to further explore the relationship between students' identities, belonging and school context. I am currently serving as Project Director on this project and will take the lead on authoring another publication. Drawing from our findings so far, I spearheaded the writing and submission of a grant proposal to the Spencer Foundation this past summer.

A related line of inquiry I am pursuing explores how historical trauma in minoritized populations influences mental health and education disparities. I am the first author of a publication in *Social Work Research* about historical trauma and mental health interventions among Indigenous Peoples. This systematic review demonstrated that historical trauma, a form of internalized oppression, is associated with mental health, and that mental health interventions that address historical trauma are severely lacking. Similarly, through my comprehensive exam paper, I found that colonial mentality, another form of internalized oppression, is linked to mental health among Pilipinx Americans and mental health interventions that address colonial mentality are also severely lacking. Both Indigenous and Pilipinx students are currently facing significant achievement and mental health disparities.

Dissertation and Future Plans

All of these scholarly endeavors, grounded in my commitment to DEI, have directly informed my dissertation plan. Research about minoritized populations, particularly Asian, Pacific Islander, Desi Americans (APIDA) in general is lacking, and even more scarce when trying to understand disparities through CRT. Moreover, since the onset of COVID-19, more than 6,600 incidences of anti-APIDA discrimination have been documented, compounding the urgency to explore ways to better support APIDA populations. To address these gaps, my dissertation uses a sequential, explanatory mixed-methodological design to understand the relationships between internalized racism (IR) and mental health and education (MHED) outcomes among APIDA college students. My research questions are: 1) how does IR affect the academic success and mental health of APIDA college students; and 2) what role does critical consciousness (CC) play in resisting IR. The first study is a cross-sectional survey of APIDA undergraduates. I use structural equation modeling to test a postulated causal model of IR as a predictor of MHED, considering the role of CC. The second study builds on the quantitative results to further explore the processes that contribute to IR, and the pathways to resist IR. This is important because in contrast to systemic racism, IR is potentially malleable—that is, it can be addressed through psychosocial interventions to mitigate the experience of racism on racial minorities. My dissertation is funded through two grants through the University of Texas at Austin's Vice Provost for Diversity. I aim to package my dissertation work and build on this program of research by applying for a grant through the National Institute of Minority Health to develop, test, and implement interventions that minimize the internalization of oppression and improve the MHED outcomes for students situated across multiple minoritized groups.

Socioeconomic status is positively correlated with health outcomes. Postsecondary education is often touted as a vehicle for social mobility, especially for minoritized groups. Yet, minoritized students continue to face barriers to attaining and completing postsecondary education. As a minoritized student myself, I am committed to producing research that reduces these social and health inequities.