Cultivating My Identity Through Research and Service

Many aspects of my identity are invisible to my peers, colleagues, and mentors. When others interact with me, my Chinese-American identity is prominent. Although I do have Chinese heritage, one of the most salient aspects of my identity is having grown up in rural Appalachia. Additionally, because I am the first in my family to receive a college degree and the first to pursue an advanced degree (i.e., a first-generation college student), portions of my identity have been hidden under the disguise of being a model minority. My invisible identity has shaped my experiences to become acutely aware of my "Appal-Asian" self and cultivated a research interest in sociocultural influences on motivational beliefs in education. More specifically, it has led me to consider the experiences of other individuals who are also unique or minoritized in their educational settings (e.g., women in engineering, first-generation college students, racial minority students, students from rural Appalachia). My research background in educational psychology and personal experiences leave me uniquely qualified me to consider how exposure to others who share similar social identities might influence students' pathways.

I began conducting research during my first year of undergraduate studies with the P20 Motivation and Learning Lab (directed by Dr. Ellen Usher). My research in this lab has considered social factors that influence student motivation in several contexts. Notable studies include examining stigma consciousness among at-risk students at an alternative school, academic mindsets of students from rural Appalachia, the influence of perfectionism on students' math self-efficacy, and motivation in an undergraduate engineering setting. I have presented this research at several regional, national, and international conferences including meetings of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the Society for Research on Adolescence (SRA), the American Psychological Association (APA), and the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI). I have also received two university research fellowships to fund this work, including an Undergraduate Summer Research Fellowship and a fellowship with the Center for Equality and Social Justice. My undergraduate honors thesis, which explored social factors that influence students' engineering self-efficacy, was awarded the James Miller Award for Honors Thesis Research in Psychology. More recently, my research has focused on the implementation of a social-psychological belonging intervention for first-year undergraduate students. For my Master's thesis, I am using intervention data to examine how feelings of similarity and delivery modality might influence the efficacy of the intervention on first-year students' belonging and academic outcomes.

I have also conducted research with other scholars in educational psychology to broaden my expertise. I am also a member of the Applied Psychometric Strategies Lab (directed by Dr. Michael Toland), where I am involved in a scale development project to measure resident advisors' self-efficacy for their job requirements. I am also collaborating with researchers and scholars outside of my university (Dr. Jamaal Matthews and Dr. DeLeon Gray) on a large-scale study examining how middle school teachers cater to students' sense of belonging in their mathematics classrooms. This project, funded by the Mindset Scholars Network, aims to validate a belonging-centered observation protocol that will serve as a practical resource for researchers and practitioners seeking to provide equity-focused feedback to mathematics teachers.

In addition to my pursuits in research, I have always been compelled to take an active part in my community. This year, I was selected to speak at TEDx event in Corbin, Kentucky—the first ever TEDx event in an Appalachian community. At this event, I shared my story of being grounded in my own intersecting identities being an eastern Kentucky-native and a first-generation Chinese-American citizen. My story, titled "Discovering—and rediscovering—my

identity," described the humbling experience of growing up in a neglected region of the U.S. that is too often mislabeled as ignorant.

My service work has helped to broaden the impact of my expertise. During my undergraduate studies, I volunteered as a chair member for the University of Kentucky Mountain Cats, a program dedicated to outreach and mentorship for Eastern Kentucky students. I was also a peer tutor for undergraduate students in an introductory psychology course, and was invited by the Psychology Department faculty to describe my research experiences to first-year psychology majors. At the end of my undergraduate studies, I received the departmental award for Excellence in Internship and Service and was also nominated for the Outstanding Psychology Major Award.

Upon enrolling in the Master's program in educational psychology, I quickly found my research niche. My specific research interests were sparked by the 2018 U.S. senate election, in which the U.S. made history when many states elected their first politicians from groups underrepresented in Congress (e.g., the first Muslim congresswoman, the first Black congresswomen, the first Native American congresswomen). I was excited that children with underrepresented identities will finally see individuals like them in these roles. This led me to consider how students with marginalized identities interpret the social world and how these interpretations might influence their beliefs and subsequent educational outcomes. What does feeling similar to a role model do to one's sense of belonging, motivation, or other self-beliefs? I want to investigate how feeling similar to someone or seeing representative role models might influence students' beliefs in educational settings—especially for those who often don't see themselves play successful roles in education and beyond.

As I move towards a career as a social scientist, I have also begun to curate my future program of research. In the future, I hope to enter the field of academia to further my research as a faculty mentor, and continue serving students of marginalized identities. From there, I hope to conduct high quality research to better understand social-psychological factors that empower diversity in education. With this goal in mind, I hope cater my education, research, and scholarly work to a career in academia. This includes expanding my theoretical understanding of learning and motivation, as well as my expertise in statistical techniques and research methodologies. Additionally, I also hope to establish a pattern of scholarly research with further conference presentations, grant proposals, and research publications. I also hope to gain experience with curriculum development and instruction to foster my skills in teaching undergraduate students.

Upon completion of my Master's degree, I am eager to pursue a doctoral degree in Educational Psychology at the University of Georgia, with a specialization in Applied Cognition and Development. My desires to attend this program stem from the its emphasis on developing research methodologies to better understand cognitive processes that underly student learning and motivation. I am also drawn to Dr. Emily Rosenzweig's work in developing and testing social-psychological interventions that can that shape students' motivational beliefs (e.g., cost, values, ability beliefs) in STEM. Her research aligns closely with my own interests by examining how educational researchers can effectively reduce achievement gaps between minoritized students and their more privileged peers. I believe your program provides ample opportunity for me to thrive in my studies, research, and scholarly work. As I move forward, I am hopeful for an opportunity to be considered for the doctoral program at the University of Georgia.