The Role of Instructors in Fostering a Sense of Belonging for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander University Students

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The Role of Instructors in Fostering a Sense of Belonging for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander University Students

Kehaulani Oleole Malzl

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Role of Instructors in Fostering a Sense of Belonging for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander University Students

Kehaulani Oleole Malzl
Department of Education, BYU
Master of Teacher Education

An alarmingly high level of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) college students in the United States end up dropping out of secondary education institutions. One important predictor of academic success and retention at the secondary level is student sense of school belonging. This thesis explores NHPI college students’ perceptions of how their university instructors foster or undermine their sense of school belonging. A snowball sample of 97 NHPI students participated in 18 focus groups that included students from various islands and ethnicities in Oceania who were attending one U.S. university in the Pacific Rim. Focus group data were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic analytic approach. Open coding was conducted to investigate ways that NHPI participants talked about how their instructors did or did not help them feel a sense of belonging at the university.

Four main findings emerged from this study. First, NHPI students were able to articulate ways their instructors fostered or undermined school belonging, highlighting the importance of instructors for fostering school belonging. Second, responses reveal that NHPI students feel a sense of school belonging when instructors show care and build bridges for academic success. NHPI students also noted why these were so important for them, given their cultural backgrounds and experiences. Conversely, when instructors failed to show care or build bridges, NHPI students shared how directly and devastatingly their sense of school belonging was undermined. Third, many NHPI students shared the positive and negative impacts of these school belonging experiences as pertaining to academic self-efficacy, motivation, and persistence. Finally, NHPI students articulated how important it was for them to have instructors who chose to attend to the student-teacher relationship and were able to provide cultural representation within their classrooms.

There are several implications from this study for university instructors who work with NHPI students. First, the teacher–student relationship really matters for these students and instructors must develop relationships with their NHPI students in meaningful ways. Second, instructors should seek to create safe spaces for their NHPI students to speak and share. Third, instructors need to be explicit in their instruction and build the bridges for academic success that NHPI students cannot build for themselves. Overall, instructors should be made aware that they really matter for fostering or undermining NHPI students’ experiences of school belonging in the college or university setting.

Keywords: Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, school belonging, teacher role
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My husband, Philipp, has been my rock throughout this entire experience—encouraging me, cheering me on, and picking me up when I did not believe I had it in me to keep going. Oftentimes, he took on the entire household while I worked in my office studying and writing. He has been my greatest support, and I would not have made it to the finish line without him. At age 50, I have been in the classroom for almost 20 years and most of our children are adults living away from home. However, I knew early on that one of my many reasons for pursuing this degree was to help them believe that anything is possible at any age or stage in life. Not only have they sacrificed time with me, but they each encouraged me along the way. My children are the best reminders of why I care so deeply about helping my students succeed.

As a high school teacher who influences young people daily, I needed to return to the classroom as a student myself so that I could learn how to better care for my students. I aspire to be that teacher who builds bridges for all of my students and provides access for them to succeed—most especially for those students who may find themselves at times marginalized but are just as brilliant and eager to succeed as their peers. This research is dedicated to them.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE .................................................................................................................. i

ABSTRACT ..................................................................................................................... ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................................................. iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS ............................................................................................... iv

LIST OF TABLES .......................................................................................................... vii

CHAPTER 1: Introduction ............................................................................................. 1

  History of Colonization in Oceania ........................................................................ 1

  NHPI’s in the United States Today ....................................................................... 3

  Statement of Purpose ............................................................................................ 5

  Research Question ............................................................................................... 5

CHAPTER 2: Review of Literature ............................................................................... 6

  Belonging—A Universal Need ............................................................................... 6

  School Belonging .................................................................................................. 7

  Impact of Teacher–Student Relationship on Belonging in School ....................... 8

    Impact of Professor–Student Relationships on Belonging in University .......... 9

    Impact of Professor–Student Relationship on Belonging in University for Minoritized Groups .......................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 11

  Impact of Teachers Who Recognize the Cultural Wealth of Marginalized Students .......................................................................................................................................................................................... 13

  Impact of Teachers–Student Relationships on Belonging for NHPI Students ...... 14

  Impact of Teachers Who Recognize the Cultural Wealth of NHPI Students ........ 16

CHAPTER 3: Method .................................................................................................... 19

  Research Question .................................................................................................. 19
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Positionality</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Questionnaire</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Protocol Questions</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Data Analysis</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending to Ethics and Equity</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4: Findings</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Instructors Do That Foster a Sense of Belonging for NHPI Students</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Care</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding and Valuing My Ethnic and Cultural Background</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating Safety for NHPI Students’ Input and Opinions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers Who Connect</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Bridges for Academic Success</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Culture That Fosters Interaction and Participation</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodating for NHPI Students’ Educational, Linguistic, and Social Backgrounds</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Instructors Do to Undermine NHPI School Belonging</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Understanding or Connecting with Students’ Backgrounds</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Accommodating for Understanding and Inclusion</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of What Instructors Do to Inhibit NHPI Sense of School Belonging and the Negative Impact</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1  Frequencies of Background Characteristics ............................................ 21
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islander (NHPI) population in the United States, is close to 1.6 million (Jones et al., 2022). Between the years 2000 and 2010 this group grew by more than 40%. As a result of this growth, it is projected that by 2030 this group will make up more than two million of the U.S. population, representing just over 0.5%. This rapid increase of the NHPI people is second only to that of the Asian American demographic (Day, 2021; Hafoka et al., 2020).

History of Colonization in Oceania

As a whole, the NHPI population in the United States is very diverse. NHPIs living in the United States come from numerous islands in the Pacific which are made up of three distinct groupings. The first grouping is Polynesia, meaning many islands. It includes the islands of Hawaii, New Zealand, Samoa, Tonga, Easter Island, the Cook Islands, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Niue, Wallis and Futuna, and French Polynesia (Fischer, 2013; Hafoka et al., 2020). The second grouping is Micronesia, meaning tiny islands. It includes Palau, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, and Kiribati (Fischer, 2013; Hafoka et al., 2020). Last is Melanesia, meaning black islands. These islands include Fiji, New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, the Santa Cruz Islands, the Banks Islands, Vanuatu, and New Caledonia (Fischer, 2013; Hafoka et al., 2020). Within each grouping, there are multiple cultures, languages, and ways of life. In total, there are close to 20,000 islands with 450 different languages and 24 different ethnic groups throughout the Pacific (Fischer, 2013; Hafoka et al., 2020; Spickard et al., 2002). This vast region, named the Pacific Islands by colonizers, is known to its inhabitants as Oceania (Fischer, 2013).
The history of these island groupings in Oceania is as complex as its many islands. Before the islands were colonized by Europeans or Americans, the people of Oceania migrated within and between island nations, creating routes of trade and connection (Fischer, 2013; Spickard et al., 2002). The people of these island nations were primarily independent, living off the land and ocean (Fischer, 2013; Spickard et al., 2002). Each had its own form of leadership whether it be a monarchy, a clan system, or something in between (Fischer, 2013; Spickard et al., 2002). However, things changed drastically once Europeans, and Americans discovered the islands. At first many came to the islands as visitors, stopping by for supplies along their voyage trade routes. Eventually, many would stay on the islands, gradually gaining the trust of monarchies, and in some cases, expecting to own land, and a say in the government (Fischer, 2013; Spickard et al., 2002).

In time, most monarchies were illegally overthrown by their American or European visitors while other island nations sought colonization for economic and strategic purposes (Fischer, 2013; Spickard et al., 2002). This colonization brought about great shifts in demographics for the islands of Oceania—impacting each island differently depending on the history of colonization (Fischer, 2013; Spickard et al., 2002). The Japanese infiltrated Micronesia (Fischer, 2013; Spickard et al., 2002). France colonized French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna (Fischer, 2013; Spickard et al., 2002). Britain settled in New Zealand, Fiji, and Pitcairn (Fischer, 2013; Spickard et al., 2002). Germany populated the Independent State of Samoa and Micronesia (Fischer, 2013; Spickard et al., 2002). Chile subjugated Rapa Nui (Fischer, 2013; Spickard et al., 2002). Australia (Britain) took over Norfolk, Papua New Guinea, Cook Islands, Tokelau, and Niue (Fischer, 2013; Spickard et al., 2002). The Netherlands and Indonesia occupied Irian Jaya (Fischer, 2013; Spickard et al., 2002). The United States
overthrew the Hawaiian monarchy and after World War 2, they also occupied Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa (Fischer, 2013; Spickard et al., 2002).

During colonization, newly arrived Americans and Europeans introduced diseases that severely reduced some island populations (Spickard et al., 2002). They also brought to the islands thousands of indentured servants to work the land or mine on various islands (Spickard et al., 2002). The British brought Indians to Fiji, the Americans brought Chinese and Portuguese to Hawaii (Spickard et al., 2002). Colonizers committed the atrocity of black birding or tricked and kidnapped thousands of Pacific Islanders back to their colonizer’s countries to work in their mines or plantations as slaves (Spickard et al., 2002). Thousands of Hawaiian and Samoan seafarers were recruited to guide whaling ships up the coast of the North Pacific, taking them far from their island countries (Fischer, 2013; Spickard et al., 2002). All these layers of movement set into motion the immigration of the peoples of Oceania, and till this day, the NHPI people have continued to migrate throughout the Pacific and into the United States (Spickard et al., 2002).

**NHPI’s in the United States Today**

The majority of NHPI’s from these nations residing in the United States today are Native Hawaiians, Samoans, Chamorros, Fijians, Marshallese, Tongans, and Tahitians (*Pacific Islander Americans*, 2023). NHPI’s in the United States have varying relationships to U.S. citizenship or nationality. Due to colonization, history, or political alliances, some NHPI’s are U.S. citizens, while others are U.S. nationals, some are documented immigrants while others remain undocumented. For example, American Samoans are U.S. Nationals, while Tongans may come in and out of the United States without any specific status and can either be documented or remain undocumented (Hafoka et al., 2020). Many end up being transnational, maintaining ties
and connections to family and culture in both the United States and their country of origin.

(Fischer, 2013; Hafoka et al., 2020; Spickard et al., 2002).

This growing and diverse group has not been faring well in the United States college and university educational system. For example, close to half of those who are accepted into a university end up abandoning their post-secondary education and do not persevere towards degree completion (Teranishi et al., 2020). In addition, recent data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, show that only 23.8% of the NHPI population hold a bachelor’s degree (Day, 2021). This is lower than all other groups except Native Americans and other North American indigenous groups.

NHPI students from the islands typically leave their island nations to attend universities throughout Oceania or in the United States, New Zealand, or Australia. Although there are dozens of universities within Oceania, the largest of which is the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, many islands do not have access to universities, and many students are not able to pursue the schooling they desire within the consortium available to them in Oceania. Thus, there is an established pipeline for students to attend universities in New Zealand or Australia and the United States.

For many NHPI students in the United States, leaving their island nation to attend university is their first time living away from home, and may also involve acclimating to a different educational system—depending on the colonial history of their island. This can be a legitimate challenge for NHPI students in the U.S. higher education system. Other NHPI students in the United States are children of NHPI immigrants who came for schooling or work generations earlier. The varied immigrant and educational histories of the diverse NHPI student population in the United States can complicate meeting the social, emotional, and academic
needs of these students. One important predictor of academic success is school belonging (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Kim & Lundberg, 2016; Thomas, 2002). According to Tinto (2017), school belonging has also been shown to promote school retention for university students.

**Statement of Purpose**

There is very limited research about NHPI college students in the United States, yet the alarmingly high levels of college dropouts, described above for NHPI students in the United States, points to a clear disconnect in helping students to feel like they belong and to stay at university. Given the increasing numbers of NHPI’s in the United States, and the low levels of college completion, it is imperative that we learn more about the experiences of NHPI students in the United States, and what matters for promoting school belonging at the university. One important question that this study addresses is how university professors who work with NHPI students are attending to these student’s particular needs. The purpose of this thesis is to explore NHPI college student perceptions of how their university professors help them feel a sense of belonging at school.

**Research Question**

What do NHPI students, at one U.S. university in the Pacific Rim, say their university instructors do to foster or to undermine their sense of school belonging?
CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Belonging—A Universal Need

In 1995, Baumeister and Leary published a fundamental article titled, “The Need to Belong.” In this groundbreaking publication, they argue that it is human nature to seek out and persist at maintaining belonging relationships. Both the cognitive, emotional, and even physical welfare of humans are affected by the need to belong. So much so, that even the possibility of losing a belonging relationship causes great distress to those affected. The authors also observed that as humans we spend a great deal of time contemplating our belonging relationships and how to maintain and develop them (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

A lack of feeling a sense of belonging can lead to serious side effects, including loneliness, anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts or actions. There can also be negative physiological results such as fatigue, lower resilience to sickness, and undesired weight loss. Sometimes feeling a lack of belonging can even lead to negative behaviors such as crime, promiscuity, and drug use (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

In contrast, there are many positive outcomes for those who feel a sense of belonging. These include positive emotions such as joy, peace, and safety as well as increased self-esteem and motivation. There is also evidence that belonging can promote greater overall physical health and well-being (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Feeling a sense of belonging, important for general well-being, has also been shown to have a significant and positive influence for students when they feel like they belong in school.
School Belonging

School belonging means that one feels accepted, cared for, included, supported, connected to, and respected within their school community (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Brouwer et al., 2016; Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Simply put, it means that one feels that they belong at school. These feelings of inclusion and acceptance can be felt from their peers, from their teachers and administrators and from other school personnel (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; van Herpen et al., 2020; Walton & Brady, 2017; Wilcox et al., 2005). Students report feeling a sense of belonging within their university community when they experience positive classroom interactions with teachers and peers, participate in campus clubs and campus activities and have access to support systems specific to the university life (Thomas, 2002; Tinto, 1997).

Studies have shown that school belonging is a predictor of student academic perseverance both among K–12 students (e.g., Blum, 2005; Bouchard & Berg, 2016; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Osterman, 2010) as well as among students in college and university settings (Brouwer et al., 2016; Kim & Lundberg, 2016; Thomas, 2002). For many students attending university, feeling a sense of belonging is directly connected to their likelihood to persevere through rigorous university experiences and complete a university degree (Kim & Lundberg, 2016; Tinto, 1997; van Herpen et al., 2020). Conversely, a lack of feelings of belonging while attending university can result in negative outcomes such as poor academic performance, feelings of isolation and even eventual school withdrawal (Booker, 2016; Crowe, 2021).

Vincent Tinto’s Theory of Individual Departure (Tinto, 1993) from secondary institutions states that for students to persist, they must be able to integrate at the school in two ways: academic integration and social integration. His initial theory was derived from the lens of the institution, meaning, how institutions can encourage students to persist (Tinto, 1993). However,
in 2017, Tinto reevaluated his theory from the perspective of the student. Tinto recognized that in order for students to persist, they must be motivated. This motivation is fluid and can increase or decrease depending on three influences: their self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and their perception of the value/relevance of the curriculum. Interestingly, both self-efficacy and perception of curriculum influence a sense of belonging. And, according to Tinto’s revised theory, sense of belonging directly influences motivation which can lead to academic persistence—meaning students are more likely to persist toward college completion (Tinto, 2017). However, Tinto’s model of motivation has been validated with majority culture students, and questions remain about how well it applies to minoritized students, including NHPI students (Tinto, 2017). It is not clear how feelings of belonging for NHPI students relate to being integrated into educational institutions or the ways that NHPI students feel a sense of belonging in those spaces.

This study focuses on how NHPI students in one institution of higher education in the Pacific Rim express feeling a sense of belonging at school. While there are several elements that contribute to a students’ sense of belonging in a university setting (Braxton et al., 2000; Brouwer et al., 2016), the teacher–student relationship has been found to be a significant factor in promoting feelings of belonging for university students (Kim & Lundberg, 2016; Wilcox et al., 2005). This research project will focus primarily on the impact of the instructor–student relationship and instructor practice in promoting NHPI students’ sense of belonging at the institution described above.

**Impact of Teacher–Student Relationship on Belonging in School**

A considerable amount of the research on student belonging has been carried out in K–12 school settings. These studies have demonstrated that one of the greatest influences on students’
sense of belonging in these grade levels, is the teacher–student relationship and classroom pedagogy (e.g., Allen & Bowles, 2012; Blum, 2005; Bouchard & Berg, 2016; Osterman, 2010). For example, Osterman’s (2010) review about the impact of teacher–student relationships and classroom pedagogy in grades K–12, revealed that teacher relational moves in high schools were found to significantly impact students’ sense of belonging. Some examples of teacher relational moves included caring teacher behavior, teacher support, addressing individual needs, knowing students by name and encouraging autonomy (Osterman, 2010).

In addition to Osterman’s work, several other studies have identified classroom pedagogy that fostered a sense of belonging. These included explicit instruction, cooperative learning, classroom discussion, and setting classroom norms that ensure peer acceptance, cooperation, and respect for all. Teacher relational moves and classroom pedagogy in grades K–12 that fostered students’ sense of belonging further promoted academic perseverance in high school (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Blum, 2005; Bouchard & Berg, 2016; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Osterman, 2010).

Impact of Professor–Student Relationships on Belonging in University

Studies with students in college and university settings reported very similar findings (Kim & Lundberg, 2016; Wilcox et al., 2005), specifically noting the paramount importance of the professor–student relationship and classroom pedagogy for these students as well. A body of scholarly work has demonstrated that caring and supportive behavior by professors is directly related to an increase in students’ sense of belonging (e.g., Kim & Lundberg, 2016; Thomas, 2002; van Herpen et al., 2020; Wilcox et al., 2005). Studies show that mentoring both inside and outside the classroom (Brouwer et al., 2016; Kim & Lundberg, 2016; Wilcox et al., 2005), increasing instructional time (Thomas, 2002; Tinto, 1997; van Herpen et al., 2020), and
encouraging increased peer interaction (Tinto, 1997; van Herpen et al., 2020; Wilcox et al., 2005), are all essential relational moves for cultivating feelings of belonging. Pedagogical moves such as encouraging peer collaboration (Thomas, 2002; Tinto, 1997; Wilcox et al., 2005), enacting inclusive teaching strategies (Thomas, 2002; van Herpen et al., 2020), and providing for extended classroom discussion (Braxton et al., 2000; Thomas, 2002) also positively contributed to feelings of belonging for university students. Beyond promoting feelings of belonging, these relational and pedagogical moves resulted in higher levels of thinking, cognitive growth, self-efficacy, and ultimately academic persistence for students as well (Crowe, 2021; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Kirby & Thomas, 2022).

A study by Crowe (2021), found that professor mentorship through a scholarship program where students worked closely with professors on research, significantly related to students feeling a sense of belonging and resulted in greater perseverance and satisfaction with their major. Similarly, Kirby and Thomas (2022) collected data from an online survey given to 367 students to determine how caring professor behavior, and classroom pedagogy impacted classroom belonging. Caring professor behavior and classroom pedagogy were found to positively impact classroom connection among students and between students and professors as well as perceptions of a supportive classroom climate. Surprisingly, caring professor behavior extended beyond promoting classroom connection and shaping classroom climate by positively impacting classroom learning, academic performance, and motivation (Kirby & Thomas, 2022).

Similarly, a review on professor–student relationships at the university level by Hagenauer and Volet (2014), found that professor–student relationships in the form of a scholarship opportunity that increased faculty interactions through academic support, positively contributed to student retention, motivation, participation, academic fulfillment, performance,
intellectual progress, and deep learning. The same review also found that the professor–student relationship is most vital in the first year of university when students are making the transition to university life. Most importantly, they found that the academic support provided through the professor–student relationship can be the single most important relationship for at-risk students (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Findings from these studies illustrate the vital role professors play in fostering a sense of belonging in their students and as such supporting university students towards academic persistence and ultimately completion.

**Impact of Professor–Student Relationship on Belonging in University for Minoritized Groups**

For racialized and ethnically minoritized groups, feeling a sense of belonging is often more complicated and challenging than it is for their White peers (Booker, 2016; Gray et al., 2018; Strayhorn, 2019). Much of this has to do with social biases, discrimination, and the overtly Eurocentric curriculum that minoritized students regularly face (Booker, 2016). According to Booker (2016), minority students at the college level experience microaggressions, harassment, classroom hostility, invisibility, and at times even derogatory comments. Further, there are often hidden power dynamics in schools where marginalized students find they have little cultural/social capital or equity in these Eurocentric educational spaces (Booker, 2016; Fong et al., 2023; Gray et al., 2018; Strayhorn, 2019). Without the proper support systems in place to navigate what can often be a challenging system, minoritized students may begin to believe their only option is to leave the university and seek opportunities elsewhere (Hausmann et al., 2009; Tinto, 1997).

These negative effects can be significantly mitigated when minoritized students have access to college supports that foster an increased sense of belonging. Of all the supports available, one of the single most influential is the role of the professor (Booker, 2016; Garcia et
al., 2019). Because racially minoritized students are already at-risk, the professor–student relationship and classroom pedagogy are fundamental in cultivating the protection and support that feelings of belonging provide, helping these students negotiate the already difficult demands of university life (Holloway-Friesen, 2021; Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Positive teacher–student interactions and inclusive classroom pedagogy are crucial for supporting minoritized students at the university and may help to aid students who are more determined to persevere through their college experiences (García et al., 2019; Thomas, 2002; Walton & Cohen, 2011).

For example, Holloway-Friesen (2021) investigated faculty mentoring on feelings of belonging for Hispanic graduate students at three universities. Her longitudinal study revealed that when students were mentored by faculty, there was a significant positive correlation between academic self-efficacy and sense of belonging. This increased sense of belonging had several positive effects including increased self-efficacy, higher levels of peer support, higher levels of classroom comfort, higher perceived faculty support, and higher likelihood of seeking support from faculty both in and out of the classroom (Holloway-Friesen, 2021).

Another study conducted by Booker (2016) investigated Black women’s sense of belonging and college persistence through focus groups and individual interviews of six Black women. She found that students felt like they belonged at school and had an increased desire to persevere when they perceived professors to be relatable, engaging, and enthusiastic. Students similarly perceived professors to promote belonging when they took time to get to know their students, encouraged authenticity, addressed tough topics, and were available and approachable. Students noted that when professors made efforts to support them in these ways, they felt they belonged and had an increased desire to persevere (Booker, 2016). Conversely, when professors made students feel ashamed for seeking support outside of class, singled them out when Black
topics were discussed, or ignored biased or racist remarks, students felt dismissed, ignored, and minimized (Booker, 2016). One student in this study, who reported having a negative interaction with her professor, dropped the class and, eventually, her major (Booker, 2016). Findings from this study highlight the profound impact professors can have on minoritized students—both in managing their relationship with their students and through their classroom pedagogy.

**Impact of Teachers Who Recognize the Cultural Wealth of Marginalized Students**

One teaching orientation that has shown to be beneficial for minoritized youth is recognizing the “cultural wealth” (Yosso, 2005) of students from minoritized backgrounds. Culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012) have been shown to positively impact the schooling experience and academic achievement for minoritized youth in a variety of ways. Yosso (2005), advocates for marginalized students through critical race theory specifically developing a community cultural wealth model and focuses on how the cultures of minorities should be seen as resources rather than positioned in deficit ways. She challenges the way race and racism negatively impact educational systems and encourages those in power to refocus how they see and value the culture of marginalized groups in educational spaces. Yosso (2005), emphasizes that those in power have the opportunity to “emancipate and empower,” but, too often, perpetuate a system that continues to oppress (p. 74). As marginalized groups recognize their reservoirs of cultural wealth, they can feel empowered with these cultural assets they already have access to (Yosso, 2005). Teachers can help foster a sense of belonging in their minority students by seeing them through this lens of cultural wealth.

Empirical studies support Yosso’s theoretical work. For example, a study by Fong et al. (2023), examined the impact attending Tribal Community Colleges (TCC) can have on Indigenous students’ success. These colleges encourage and foster Indigenous students’ cultural
ways of knowing and belonging. It was found that attending a TCC did not directly impact overall GPA, but rather, attendance in a culturally supportive environment such as TCC positively impacted their students’ sense of belonging and indirectly positively affected their academic achievement (Fong et al., 2023).

In a review by Gray et al. (2018), the authors discuss the complex experience of school belonging for Black high school students through a lens of critical race theory. One component of this review is a discussion of the cultural and political aspects of the schooling system that have the potential to promote a sense of belonging in Black students:

When educators engage students in scholastic activities that uphold and reinforce students’ esteemed cultural meaning systems, we call this an instructional opportunity structure. This opportunity structure can therefore be thought of as the cultural alignment between that of the activity setting and that of the student. Finally, when educators collaborate with students and take actionable steps toward eliminating structural barriers that devalue minoritized populations in the school and surrounding community, they are creating an institutional opportunity structure. (p. 98)

This study looks at how professors do or do not promote school belonging for minoritized youth—specifically NHPI students—at one university, where their cultural backgrounds may or may not be viewed as resources by their professors.

**Impact of Teacher–Student Relationships on Belonging for NHPI Students**

Currently, there is very limited research on NHPI students’ sense of belonging. Most of the research with NHPI students has been carried out in New Zealand and Australia, with a majority of these studies focusing on grades K–12. In terms of NHPI high school students, several studies found that the teacher–student relationship had a significant impact on NHPI
students feeling a sense of belonging (Averill, 2012; Siope, 2011; Spiller, 2012). Teacher moves such as caring teacher behavior (Averill, 2012; Siope, 2011), listening to the needs of students, connecting with students (Siope, 2011), and trusting that students are capable of meeting high standards (Spiller, 2012), all resulted in students feeling a sense of belonging. This increase in belonging impacted their cognitive growth as well as their emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being (Averill, 2012). Studies showed that where teacher caring was strongly felt, students had the greatest engagement, willingness to access assistance, higher self-belief, and perseverance (Averill, 2012; Siope, 2011).

One study was conducted by Peeters et al., (2020), combining video recorded observations and interviews in a New Zealand high school math class and found that NHPI students avoided seeking help in front of the class. By contrast, they noted that White, majority New Zealand students were more likely to ask for help in front of the class. However, Peeters et al., (2020) further noted that when the psychological risk was lower, NHPI students were more likely to ask for help in private. In fact, 62% of NHPI students said they were more likely to ask for help when psychological risk was minimal (Peeters et al., 2020). For example, students noted that—after the lesson—they might ask the teacher or a friend for help, or they might wait to ask for help from family members at home. These scenarios represented more psychologically safe spaces to ask for help for these NHPI students. As teachers become more aware of these particular needs for NHPI students, they can better help their students feel a sense of belonging and encourage the positive outcomes that a sense of belonging fosters.

A longitudinal study by Froiland et al., (2016) was carried out with 111 Native Hawaiian students in Hawaii to examine the impact of teacher autonomy support in their high school math classes and the student’s intrinsic motivation, math achievement (through collected test scores),
and sense of school belonging. Teacher autonomy support in this study was defined as teachers showing the students respect, value, encouragement, care—all components of fostering belonging (Froiland et al., 2016). The results showed a positive correlation between teacher autonomy and all three variables (Froiland et al., 2016). Interestingly, an additional finding was that students advanced farther in their math classes than they originally anticipated (Froiland et al., 2016). Thus, we can conclude the significant impact the teacher–student relationship can have on NHPI high school students’ sense of belonging and school performance.

**Impact of Teachers Who Recognize the Cultural Wealth of NHPI Students**

When it comes to recognizing the cultural wealth of NHPI students, Vaughn et al. (2021) wrote an article titled, “Cultivating Cultural Kipuka: Pacific Islander Practitioner Reflections.” *Kipuka* in Hawaiian is essentially an oasis in nature, a place where things can grow (Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, n.d.). The authors’ hope is to encourage discussions among university practitioners that will inform and encourage all educators to incorporate culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy for their NHPI students. These authors invite all institutions to “normalize cultural practices within academia” (Vaughn et al., 2021, p. 32) and remind us that having a culturally relevant curriculum benefits both the NHPI and the non-NHPI population. Furthermore, Vaughn et al. (2021), advocate specifically for Pacific Island studies courses at the university level and argue that it is essential for a culturally relevant education. In addition, they warn against tokenism and warn that NHPI culture should not merely be viewed as a product. Last, to recruit and retain more NHPI student enrollment, Vaughn et al. (2021) encourages institutions to increase the number of NHPI tenure track faculty. They recognize the positive impact NHPI faculty can have in being responsive and supportive of the NHPI student population. As institutions consider the recommendations from this article and more specifically
as professors recognize the importance of cultivating cultural kipuka, NHPI students’ sense of belonging can increase.

Another study by Kana’iaupuni et al., (2017) aimed at determining the effects of culture–based education (CBE) on Native Hawaiian students. Sixty-two middle schools and high schools in Hawaii chose to participate in a self-report study about their educational experiences. These schools were made up of programs that incorporate CBE and others that use conventional (Western) curriculum. Comparisons were made between the two types of approaches these schools used and the results confirmed many of the findings from previous studies about the effects of incorporating CBE for indigenous groups. There was evidence of many positive outcomes including self-efficacy, higher college aspirations and greater connection to their communities. Additionally, one of the most significant findings was the correlation between CBE and Native Hawaiian students’ sense of school belonging. Students who participated in classes where teachers incorporated CBE, had six times higher sense of school belonging than those who only received the conventional Western curriculum.

In an article titled, “The Schooling Experiences of Pasifika Students,” Annie Siope (2011) compares her NHPI immigrant high school student experience in New Zealand during the 1970s–1980s with NHPI immigrant high school students in New Zealand 30 years later. She interviewed NHPI immigrant students from two New Zealand high schools which have worked towards being culturally responsive. Here she describes the positive impact teachers can have when they do just that:

… teachers who taught from their hearts, rather than from obligation or duty, were the ones who made a significant difference. Often these teachers were secure in their own cultural identity and willing to encourage the same from their students. These teachers
became the ones students felt engaged with and hungry to learn from. It was these “responsive, readily accessible, reasonable adults” whose collective wisdom recognised and then activated “our” potential for learning. These teachers enabled the migrant dream of parents and families to come to fruition. (p. 15)

Her findings emphasized the profound impact teacher–student relationships can have on NHPI sense of school belonging. Most especially when teachers are intentional about being culturally responsive.
CHAPTER 3

Method

The purpose of this thesis is to explore NHPI college student perceptions of how their university professors help them feel a sense of belonging at one university. This project is part of a larger study whose purpose was to better understand constructs of ethnic identity and school belonging for NHPI college students. This study focuses on data that relates to students’ sense of school belonging.

Research Question

What do NHPI students, at one U.S. university in the Pacific Rim, say their university instructors do to foster or to undermine their sense of school belonging?

Researcher Positionality

I am a Native Hawaiian, born and raised in Hawai‘i and moved to the western United States several years ago. I am currently a high school math teacher as well as a graduate student. I joined the research team after the data was collected and was able to participate in transcribing the data in the early Fall of 2022. I analyzed the sections of the focus group data that focused on what students said about their instructors.

Participants

A snowball sample of 97 NHPI university students participated in this study. Participants were recruited using a multi-pronged approach to invite as many students as possible across the variety of ethnicities within the NHPI group at the university to participate in the study. Recruitment tools included posters posted around campus including main social gathering areas, eating establishments, near student life offices, and all high traffic areas. Flyers were also handed out in person across campus and emails were sent to instructors and student presidents of the
cultural clubs, asking them to announce or advertise the study. Finally, requests were made for referrals from study participants themselves—inviting them to bring friends to focus groups if possible. The recruitment flier and posters included a QR code allowing easy access for students to take a Qualtrics pre-registration survey to qualify for participation in the study (see Appendix A).

The pre-registration survey included questions about demographics including age, ethnicity, and place of birth. This allowed the team to include students who were 18 years or older and identified as NHPI—according to the inclusion criteria of the larger study. The pre-registration survey also asked for contact information and days and times of availability to attend focus groups. A few days before each focus group session, a reminder text was sent out along with the time of their focus group and a map directing students where to go, along with an invitation to bring along other NHPI friends if possible.

Of the 97 NHPI students who participated in the study, the majority were female, and most were between the ages of 21 and 25. A range of NHPI ethnicities were represented in the sample from all three island groupings—Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia—with a majority of participants having origins in Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa. Most students were born outside of the United States. A demographic survey was collected after students signed consent forms and Table 1 below lists the demographic characteristics of the participants in the study.
### Table 1

*Frequencies of Background Characteristics: Paper 1 and Paper 3 Respondents (N = 97)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hawaiian</td>
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<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Māori</td>
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<td>7.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Melanesian</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Micronesian</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Samoan</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tongan</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100%</td>
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*Some participants have multiple ethnicities*

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>Cook Islands</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>7%</td>
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<td>Melanesia</td>
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<td>1%</td>
</tr>
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<td>New Zealand</td>
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<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tahiti</td>
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<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Setting

The setting for this study was a private U.S. university in the Pacific Rim, whose primary mission is to serve students from Oceania and Asia. In 2019, 29% of its student body were made up of international students and nearly 22% of its student body were NHPI students. Data was collected during the Summer Term of 2022. A total of 18 focus groups were conducted, each consisting of 3 to 8 participants, for a total of 97 participants. Focus groups were held in the evening in a campus classroom and lasted anywhere from 60 to 90 minutes. Dinner was provided and all focus group interviews were video recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

There were always two members of the research team present for every focus group, and an insider/outsider approach was intentionally used for facilitating the focus group interviews. Three members of the research team are themselves NHPI. Researcher 1 is a U.S. citizen with Samoan and Tongan ancestry, who attended primary and secondary school in Oceania and is currently an assistant professor of psychology in the United States. Researcher 2 is a graduate student, born and raised in Oceania, with Fijian, Rotuman, and European ancestry. She attended primary and secondary school in Oceania and has continued all of her post-secondary education in the United States. The third member of the research team is a White middle-class woman from the western part of the United States and currently an associate professor of teacher education in the U.S. As stated above, I am the fourth member of the research team.

Because of the unique understanding Researchers 1 and 2 have as NHPI, one of them was nearly always the lead as main facilitators for each focus group interview. Researcher 3 was present for every focus group interview but only took the lead in facilitating in focus group interviews when the NHPI members of the research team had conflicts of interest with
participants (family members, close friends, or students). Thus, each focus group interview was facilitated by both an insider and an outsider to the NHPI community and culture, helping elicit insider knowledge and explanations to benefit the outsider researcher. This approach was deliberate, because there is limited research on how NHPI students perceive and experience a sense of belonging. These focus groups were further constructed to ensure participants had the opportunity to share all aspects of their sense of belonging that otherwise might be missed due to cultural ways of doing, thinking, feeling, and connecting.

Unfortunately, one recording of a focus group with five participants did not record any sound. As a result, Researcher 2 contacted these participants and had them email their responses to the research questions directly to her. Their responses were added to the rest of the transcripts being stored on a secure drive.

**Measures**

As stated above, my research is a portion of a larger study whose purpose is to identify the connection between ethnic identity and a sense of belonging for NHPI college students. As a teacher myself, I am personally interested in the impact of the teacher–student relationship in fostering a sense of belonging for NHPI students. As such, for the purpose of my research, my analyses only focused on the questions from the protocol related to school belonging, and were analyzed for participant responses about their own experiences of how they perceived ways that professors, teachers, teacher-aids or instructors (I will use the term instructor to be as inclusive as possible) did or did not foster their sense of school belonging at the university.

**Demographic Questionnaire**

As mentioned above, every participant was invited to fill out a survey to collect demographic information. This survey was distributed at the beginning of the focus group.
meetings, after the study was explained and consent forms collected, and before the focus group portion of the meeting began. The survey included questions about age, ethnic identity, place of birth, place of parents’ births, and place of high school attainment. See Appendix B for the demographic survey.

**Focus Group Protocol Questions**

The focus group interview protocol questions were divided into three sections: ethnic identity, school belonging, and academic achievement/attainment. See Appendix C for the entire interview protocol. As mentioned, for this thesis project, analysis focused on responses to the questions about school belonging (questions 5–9 on the Focus Group Interview Protocol).

School belonging questions were created based on a validated measure of school belonging called the Simple School Belonging Scale (SSBS). The SSBS (Whiting et al., 2018) is a unidimensional measure consisting of 10 items. The scale measures if and how students feel connected to their school. Sample items included “People really listen to me when I am at school” and “People at this school are friendly to me.” Items on the SSBS use a 4-point Likert scale ranging from “YES!,” “Yes,” “No,” and “NO!,” with a total of 40 possible points (Whiting et al., 2018). Strong school belonging, on the SSBS, is indicated by higher scores. The Focus Group Interview Protocol turned these Likert-scaled questions into open-ended focus group interview questions for this study. The questions were organized from broad to more narrow, in order to elicit as much information as possible about students’ feelings of school belonging. Each focus group was presented with the following questions in this order:

**School Belonging**

1. What does it mean to you to feel like you belong at your school? How do you know when you feel a sense of school belonging?
2. When do you feel most connected to what is happening at school? (in classrooms, with teachers, at lunchtime, with other students, after school, etc…)

3. Can you describe the times you have been able to share your perspectives and feel a part of the school? If so, in what ways have you done so?

4. What role does language play in your sense of belonging at school? (does/did your home language match the language of your schooling? What was that experience like?)

5. Look at the measure (SSBS). What do you think about how it might measure school belonging? Is there anything missing here from these questions that would better help us understand the ways that you feel like you belong at school as a Pacific Islander? (Do you think that this varies by the ethnic group of the students?)

6. What else would you want us to know about how Pacific Islander students belong at school?

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

As mentioned above, the participants were all de-identified before transcription of the focus group video recordings. All data was transcribed by two researchers, Researcher 2 (mentioned above) and myself. Both transcribers are NHPI, which allowed us to have an insider’s perspective to correctly transcribe various words and phrases in NHPI languages. The data was analyzed using an iterative analytic process. I employed a thematic analysis approach using an open coding system (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2014) to look for ways that NHPI participants talked about how their professors did or did not help them feel a sense of belonging at the university. I used MAXQDA software to organize, code, and analyze the data. Members of my thesis committee, who were also part of the research team, assisted me in
analyzing the data. The team met together, using convergent agreement to discuss emergent codes and from there determine themes and the organization of data.

**Attending to Ethics and Equity**

IRB approval was given by the university for each research team member where the study was conducted (see Appendix C). To ensure that ethics and equity were attended to, participants were invited to sign a consent form (see Appendix D) and focus group facilitators were explicit that the research team would keep all information shared during the focus groups confidential and encouraged participants from each group to do the same. Facilitators were careful to ask follow-up questions, to help ensure understanding and clarify any misconceptions. Participants were also given the opportunity to withdraw from the focus groups at any point during the process and were guaranteed they could withdraw their data at any time. All interview transcripts were de-identified and stored in a secure server accessible only by the PI and research assistants.

Of the 97 students who participated in the study, 34 different student voices from 8 different Pacific Island nations were represented in the quotes to illustrate the findings. Each participant was identified by a pseudonym, their gender, and ethnicity. Participant names were intentionally replaced with culturally appropriate pseudonyms to honor their unique backgrounds while still preserving their anonymity. The quotes used are illustrative and widely representative of what participants shared about their experiences of instructors fostering or undermining their sense of school belonging.
CHAPTER 4

Findings

NHPI students in this study clearly articulated ways that they perceived university instructors fostering school belonging, as well as what they did that undermined their sense of belonging. Overall, data from the 97 NHPI students participating in 18 focus groups revealed three main themes: teacher care; building bridges for academic success; and undermining school belonging. The first two of these main themes show ways that teachers foster school belonging, while the third main theme is filled with examples of ways instructors failed to promote—or blatantly undermined feelings of belonging. Codes were applied to student interviews whenever they spoke about their instructors—and these codes were organized into the themes noted above. Overall, there were 72 instances of student talk about their instructors that were fairly evenly distributed across main themes. For example, there were 30 instances of teacher care, 22 of building bridges for academic success, and 20 for undermining school belonging. Data are organized by themes below and each code within the themes will be defined and described to answer the study research question: What do NHPI students, at one U.S. university in the Pacific Rim say their university professors do to foster or undermine their sense of school belonging?

As data were explored to answer the study research question, I also noted emerging themes related to how students felt what instructors did to foster school belonging mattered in their schooling experiences more broadly. These data were coded as positive impact and negative impact. These included reports of increased or decreased self-efficacy, motivation, and academic outcomes. Following Tinto’s (1997) model of student persistence, I note the instances when these data co-occurred with belonging data, to illustrate ways that school belonging connects to these academic outcomes. Additionally, I noted how these students recognized their NHPI
cultures, traditions, and previous experiences as this influenced the impact instructors had on fostering or undermining their sense of school belonging. I coded instances where students addressed this directly and coded these data as cultural lens. This data will be described in the final section of this chapter.

**What Instructors Do That Foster a Sense of Belonging for NHPI Students**

NHPI college students easily described moments when instructors fostered their sense of school belonging. These students articulated instances when they felt care from their instructors and when they felt that their instructors built bridges to support their academic success. Both themes—teacher care and building bridges for academic success, emerged as important for helping NHPI students feel a sense of school belonging. In this section, I will present data that illustrates each of these themes.

**Teacher Care**

“Teacher care” was described by participants as interactions with teachers that increased the positive teacher–student relationship and fostered school belonging. Participants used descriptive terms such as, “connect with,” “relate to,” “encourage,” “kind,” “wanted to help,” “value our opinion,” “space to share,” and “understanding.” These were grouped and identified with the following codes: (a) understanding and valuing my ethnic and cultural background (b) creating safety for NHPI students’ input and opinions, and (c) teachers who connect. These three categories of teacher care were described by the students as promoting a sense of school belonging and, often, co-occurred with the positive impact of contributing to their academic self-efficacy and motivation.
Understanding and Valuing My Ethnic and Cultural Background

The code “understanding and valuing my ethnic and cultural background” included instances when students talked about instructors who take a genuine interest in understanding a student’s ethnic and cultural background, their communities, the importance of their language, customs, etc. For these NHPI students, instructors who took the time to learn about and value their ethnic background was important because it showed them that their instructors cared about who they are, and things that are relevant and important in their lives. One student noted that “I feel like when [an instructor] recognizes, you know, who you are, your culture, and your, your place there … it’s really important” [Levenia, female, Caucasian, Cook Islander]. This student continued to say that she “really appreciate[s] it … when professors, you know, recognize that you bring, … something different to the table, a different perspective” [Levenia, female, Caucasian, Cook Islander].

One student noted when instructors wanted to know about their cultural perspective, saying “they would often like ask for opinions or wanted to know more about Tonga, mainly because there were only … three of us … in the class” [Sulieti, female, Tongan]. Another participant noted how a specific instructor “always talks about, … cultural humility and how he always wants to get … people’s opinions on what the culture is and things like that” [Lopaka, male, Native Hawaiian]. Participants described how they felt cared for when teachers took the time to “go the extra mile” to try and understand them. One participant summarized these feelings by saying:

So that sense of … understanding and them trying to relate to us, like majority of them are native teachers. … And like, how do they relate you? They don’t even know us islanders, some of them don’t even know … the countries and stuff like that. But them
just trying to, I guess, read up to understand how you’re feeling. And sometimes they say stuff and you’re like, “wait, how did they know this is happening?” So just knowing the fact that they’re going and doing the extra mile, trying to understand what you, what you felt or what you’re doing at the moment. It’s like, oh, you belong to this place. I belong here. [Esita, female, Indo-Fijian]

Another participant connected how an instructor’s care, through learning about and understanding her cultural backgrounds, helped her to build confidence and self-efficacy in navigating school life. This was coded as positive impact as it co-occurred with the category “understanding and valuing my ethnic and cultural background.” This student recounted a difficult incident that a caring teacher helped her navigate.

I had an issue, some drama with some professors in the years back, but I had a teacher that knew about my connections and the more he understood, like where I was coming from with my perspective, it helped me become more confident in addressing the issue … because he understood my background and he understood like my culture in a sense.

[Inaria, female, Micronesian, Pohnpeian]

Students shared how meaningful it was when instructors valued them for who they are, in terms of their cultural backgrounds, languages, and customs. When instructors took the time to understand and learn about them, they felt cared for and knew they mattered in these classrooms and school spaces. They felt a sense of school belonging.

Creating Safety for NHPI Students’ Input and Opinions

Another code that emerged from the theme teacher care was, “creating safety for NHPI student’s input and opinions.” There were eight instances where students shared experiences of when they felt safe to share and be heard by their instructors. This included experiences when
students felt their opinions, concerns, and needs were listened to and seen as legitimate. This was directly linked to students feeling a sense of school belonging. As one participant shared,

I feel like when you’re sharing and when you’re actually heard and they do what you ask of them, that’s when you’re like, “okay, I was actually heard and my opinion matters here” … that’s when I feel more like, yeah, I belong here, I matter to you.” [Akesa, female, Indo-Fijian]

Several students noted that when they felt their opinions were valued by the teacher, they felt like they were safe to share their opinions and themselves in the classroom. For example, one student noted that the way her instructor valued her perspective helped her to know she could share opinions, needs, and concerns without worry. She reported that:

When you have a teacher that actually values like what you are trying to bring across … you can actually share things in your own perspective without having to worry about, is this gonna cause me to fail or is this gonna make me succeed? [Manaia, female, Samoan].

Another student echoed a similar experience, highlighting the importance of instructors creating safety in their classrooms for these NHPI students to share themselves, helping them to feel valued, connected, and cared for—and the importance of that for belonging. She noted that:

We’re so grateful that they they’re so open minded, giving us the space to share our opinions and our thoughts that we get to feel the connections that you, I don’t know, whatever that connection is, but you know, between a teacher and a student, like you, you, you, you feel like, like you feel that sense of belonging where, you know, like you, “I’m in the right place.” [Sefina, female, Samoan]
These NHPI students described how they felt a sense of belonging when their instructors valued their input and opinions, creating safety and spaces for them to share in their classrooms. They noted how, when they were listened to and their opinions were valued, they knew they mattered, and their teacher–student relationships were strengthened. One student summarized these experiences perfectly, “It’s very fulfilling to know that the professor or the teacher kind of knows where you’re coming from and doesn’t really have a judgment of what you say … and that’s a connection” [Lehiwa, female, Samoan + Portuguese].

**Teachers Who Connect**

Another code that emerged from the data was “teachers who connect.” Student voices in this theme highlighted experiences with instructors who made efforts to connect with their students in several ways. They used terms such as “kind,” “wanted to help,” “been very good,” “know my name,” “understanding,” and “I feel like I matter.” They then described how each of these teacher moves helped them feel a connection with their instructors and foster their sense of school belonging. Many of these students further pointed out how these connections also co-occurred with positive academic outcomes.

In total there were 10 instances when students talked about teachers who connect. One student wrote, “When I got here, that’s another thing that made me feel, you know, a sense of belonging to the school, [because] the professors, they really … wanted to help us” [Sitiveni, male, Fijian]. Another student added, “like the social work … professors are more understanding. Like they know what it’s like to be different kind of thing” [Isa, female, Samoa]. Another student added, “Every class that I went to, I felt like I matter to the teacher” [Anewa, female, Māori]. Each of these students shared that when their instructors show care for them in
various ways, the students felt a connection with their instructors, and this strengthened the teacher–student relationship—ultimately fostering their sense of belonging.

Three students emphasized how instructors knowing them by name was an immediate connection for them. For these students it did not matter when the teacher used their name, whether in class or greeting them in passing. But the effort on the instructor’s part to learn their names and pronounce them correctly was meaningful for the students and helped them feel connected. One student illustrated this in her experience:

It’s them like you going into a room and them knowing you by name, especially if you’ve been in the class for like a few days or a few weeks. Even though your name is hard to pronounce, but if they make it their business to, like, know you by name and you go into classes and they call you by name. … If they were to do that, I feel like I’m at home.

Despite what they look like on the outside, if they make a good business to know you by name, and they respond to you too on campus right away. [Aimata, female, Cook Islander]

Aimata described beautifully how the effort of her instructor learning and pronouncing her name properly, fostered her sense of belonging. She explained, “I feel like I’m at home.” For these students living so far from home and for many whose first time it is away from home, this really mattered for belonging at the university.

As I attended to the instances when positive impact codes co–occurred with “teachers who connect”, I noted that when students felt connected to their instructors, they felt like they belonged. These experiences increased motivation to learn, energy, interest in working hard and finishing their assignments, as well as class attendance. Similar to what Aimata expressed above, other students noted that when they felt more connected to the professor, they felt more
motivation toward learning. For example, Elei said, “[With] these professors that I really connected to, the class becomes really interesting and … I put more effort to learn in the classroom and outside of the classroom.” This same student also noted, “That’s when, like you feel more like what she said you feel more excited to [go to class], you feel more energized to do the assignments, to finish your work early without waiting to finish at the end” [Elei, female, Samoan]. Similarly, another student said, “The more they’re kind to us, the more we feel like we want to come to class. We’re there, we’re ready to learn” [Apenisa, male, Fijian].

A few participants continued by identifying the positive impact of teachers who connect by making the effort to learn and pronounce their names. Aimata, for example, specifically spoke about how when teachers knew her name, she was motivated to participate in classroom traditions, saying, “I’ll say the prayer every day because you know my name” [Aimata, female, Cook Islander]. Another student identified how when an instructor knows his name, he feels more comfortable approaching them for help. In his words, “if they know me by name, it makes it easier to go ask them for help” [Etuate, male, Tongan].

Finally, Elei was able to articulate clearly how feeling connected to an instructor led directly to an increased sense of belonging and the positive impact on her academic motivation. She recounted how one instructor’s decision to be open and vulnerable through sharing a personal experience fostered a sense of connection with that instructor and motivated her to work harder to succeed academically. She said,

When he shared [an] experience, [you think], “Oh my gosh, that’s what happened to you too?” And you … feel kind of connected through that to the professor. And [you just feel] like you have that sense of belonging. Like someone else kind of feels that same kind of
feeling that I have felt before. And so you feel like, “Okay, like this person understands me. I’m gonna … try my best to … succeed,” or something. [Elei, female, Samoan]

In all cases, students clearly articulated the importance for instructors who show care by connecting with their students. Students noted that instructors connect with them in a variety of ways, including, being helpful and understanding, helping students believe that they matter, and learning and saying their names. Although these may seem like simple relational moves on the part of the teachers, when instructors foster the student–teacher relationship through acts of care, the impact on the students’ academic self-efficacy and motivation can be substantial.

**Building Bridges for Academic Success**

The second main theme that participants noted that instructors did to foster belonging was to build bridges for academic success. Students noted that they felt like they belonged in school when instructors specifically worked to ensure students had access to the content in and curriculum of their classrooms. Students highlighted the importance of instructors explicitly providing ways for them to participate and accommodating for their various educational backgrounds. Students used phrases such as “comfortable to talk,” “where everyone shares,” “make sure you understand,” and “help me pronounce it right.” Two codes emerged as important for building bridges for academic success. These include (a) classroom culture that fosters interaction and participation, and (b) accommodating for NHPI educational, linguistic, and social backgrounds. Each of these codes illustrate ways that students noted instructors who built bridges for them in their classrooms, which fostered a sense of school belonging for these NHPI students.
Classroom Culture That Fosters Interaction and Participation

The most frequently cited way that students said teachers build bridges for academic success was by creating a classroom culture that fostered interaction and participation. There were 13 instances where students talked about the importance of being in classrooms where they could participate and interact with others to foster a sense of belonging at school. Students named specific pedagogical moves and instructional choices that created spaces in classrooms that fostered participation and interaction—building bridges for academic success. They appreciated when teachers engaged the whole class in discussion–based learning, as well as provided opportunities for small group discussions. Structuring opportunities to share learning was cited as extremely important, including doing group projects and classroom presentations. Students even appreciated when their participation was attached to a grade as they felt that it motivated them to acquire important skills. Last, students noted the importance of having one-on-one interaction with teachers either in person or via email. All of these instructional elements were identified by the students as extremely helpful for ensuring participation and interaction, which contributed to positive feelings for the instructor and a sense of belonging in the classroom.

Students clearly valued instructors who worked to ensure that all students had the opportunity to speak up in class and prioritized engaging the entire class in discussions. This could be either with the whole class or in small group discussions. For example, one student talked about her English class saying that it was about 90% discussion. She said, “It was a small group, so I was more comfortable to talk” [Pua, female, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Native American or Alaskan]. One student highlighted how classroom discussions fostered belonging with both peers and the teachers. She noted:
I feel more connected in classrooms … when there’s discussions where everyone just shares together and even if it’s the students that you never really talk to, and you don’t know, but once there are discussion that everyone … brings in their thoughts and like that, that’s how I feel connected with the teacher as well.” [Camari, female, Fijian]

Providing space for classroom and small group discussions helped students to strengthen relationships by sharing themselves and learning from others. This emerged as an important factor in building connection and a sense of belonging for these students. As one student said, when talking about her experience in a classroom, “That was my shining experience where I was … able to talk about that stuff … And then learn about people’s experiences” [Pua, female, Native Hawaiian, Asian, Native American, Alaskan Native]. Another student noted that sharing her perspective “made me feel part of something” [Manaia, female, Samoan].

Students appreciated being asked or expected to do in-class presentations or group projects. One student reflected on where they felt most like they belonged, saying, “I think for me it is also in the classroom, especially when they do … projects, like group projects” [Manaia, female, Samoan]. Another student noted how doing class presentations increased her comfort level in the classroom, noting:

There’s this professor, one of my classes she’s, she’s really good. So, we get to present in class like every week and I guess that’s something that … really boosted my morale, being able to stand up and then just to talk. And then I’ve seen the big improvement. Whenever I present, I felt comfortable. And I felt confident. From where I was when I started this semester to where I am right now, I could say that I’m learning and I’m doing as I go … but I’m grateful with all that. I know that I’m learning as things go by. [Ovini, male, Fijian]
These kinds of assignments and classroom activities offered increased opportunities for interactions among students, as well as increased confidence in being able to present and participate in learning.

Similarly, several students appreciated when their classroom participation was graded, and there was an expectation for participation that was evaluated. They recognized this as an opportunity to acquire skills that were outside their comfort zone that were important for participation and belonging. As this student noted,

Coming here, I was like, ‘oh no,’ like you had to participate. If not, you won’t have any grading participation. So, I feel like that helps, that really helps with me being able to share my perspective and my opinion and with my connection with the teacher … that helps me out with my comfort zone. [Sulieti, female Tongan]

This student articulated how making classroom participation mandatory was helpful in getting students to participate, something they had not had to do in previous schooling experiences. These NHPI students found the explicit valuing of their participation in class to be affirming, and they appreciated the requirement to share themselves as a way to foster a connection with their teacher.

Finally, students appreciated the small class sizes at the university that allowed them more one-on-one interaction with instructors and mentors. For example, one student noted, “I think the setting that we have here at [name of school] allows us to do that. Just cause the classes are a bit small … We have time with our professors to have one-on-one questions and answers” [Epeli, male, Fijian]. Another agreed that “So like in classroom … I don’t say anything just in the back of the class, whatever … But, when I feel more belongs, when I go up and actually like talk to the professors” [Tamaroa, male, Tahitian]. He continues to say that,
Most of my learning I’ve done in psychology is from time [with] my mentor. Like when it’s just him and me and I’m just able to, you know, that belong that I get from that has actually helped me a lot more with what I wanna do in the future and what I wanted.

What I do in class. [Tamaroa, male, Tahitian]

Students felt that being able to participate in the classroom meant they were able to share themselves as well as learn about others in ways they were not able to in classrooms where teachers did not intentionally create spaces for interaction and participation. They further articulated the positive impact on their self-efficacy when instructors fostered interaction and participation in the above cited ways. For example, Ovini shared in the above cited quote, “I felt comfortable. And I felt confident. From where I was when I started this semester to where I am right now.” Pua and Sulieti both echoed similar sentiments about the impact of instructors facilitating interaction and participation. Pua said, “I was more comfortable to talk” and Sulieti shared, “That really helps with me being able to share my perspective and my opinion.” As instructors took care to provide explicit opportunities for students to share, students felt a connection with their instructors and peers in the classroom and this sense of school belonging resulted in the positive impact of increased self-efficacy to more regularly participate in class.

**Accommodating for NHPI Students’ Educational, Linguistic, and Social Backgrounds**

The second code that emerged under the theme “building bridges for academic success,” was “accommodating for NHPI students’ educational, linguistic and social backgrounds. There were seven instances when students noted instructors who were intentional about helping them develop strategies and skills necessary to speak, share, and participate in their classroom discussions. Other students appreciated the instructors who recognized their many educational differences and intentionally made appropriate accommodations for these differences. Similarly,
students voiced how important and helpful it was to have instructors who took the time to ensure understanding. Last, students pointed out the significance of instructors who were available and responsive to students either after class or via email.

One student shared his experience with not having practice sharing his opinion in class and how his teachers helped him develop the strategies and skills necessary to do so. He shared the following experience:

So I remember when I first got into that class, I was, you know, very shy to share my opinion … And then the professors taught us a bit of strategies to be able to share your opinion … And now that we are approaching the end of the semester, I’ve seen a lot of growth … just how I was able to build that confidence to speak. You know not only be confident around my Fijian brothers, but also confident around native English speakers and those people from other countries. [Sitiveni, male, Fijian]

This instructor explicitly taught skills for how this student could share his opinion in class, bridging cultural norms and spaces for this student. This student recounted the impact of this explicit instruction that enabled him to expand participation not only in the classroom but in broader and more diverse communities.

The following student clearly described her experience of instructors who reached out and made it explicitly clear they wanted to hear from her.

For me, it’s coming from the islands. In the classrooms, back home we are encouraged to speak up, but we don’t necessarily do it, and here our professors are like, “speak, speak, come talk, come and talk.” So, for me, that’s just like, oh, going the extra mile, they want to hear my voice. They want to know what I’m thinking. So, for me I feel that’s my sense
of belonging. They’re going the extra mile. It’s not just me going to them, they’re come towards me as well. [Esita, female, Indo-Fijian]

Because these instructors made the effort to connect with Esita, she felt an increased sense of school belonging. There was a clear sense of reciprocity, just as Esita stated, “It’s not just me going to them, they’re come towards me as well.” NHPI students need to feel this in order to believe that they can participate and belong in school.

A few other students noted how meaningful it was to have instructors make specific accommodations for them, based on their educational backgrounds. Students noted when teachers sought to understand the diverse student body in order to build bridges between what students bring and what students still need to succeed academically. For example, one student noted several ways his teacher made accommodations for him in and outside of the classroom. “I love the way she taught that class. She understands what my struggles are, and she will email me or send me the way she taught the class” [Tala, male, Samoan]. He continued by saying,

Even if I struggle to say words, she will help me pronounce it right. And that is the kind of environment like learning environment that I want … having [an] understandable teacher like, like [teacher’s name] it really helps that student to achieve and, you know, get that A. [Tala, male, Samoan]

Another student shared her experience with an instructor who made himself available after class so she could get the help she needed.

I usually wait for all the kids to go out of the classroom, and I go up to my teacher, “oh I’m really struggling, can you please give me a little bit of time for my assignment” … and it’s really helped me get through these first few weeks. [Taufa, female, Tongan]
These instructors helped students feel a sense of belonging, as well as motivation to succeed, by intentionally providing the accommodations necessary in specific instances to support these individual students.

Some students shared how impactful it was to have instructors who regularly follow up with them to check for understanding. Students described how this support by their teachers impacted their academic experience not only by ensuring they have a clear grasp of the content but providing a level playing field. As one student stated, “Most of my professors like repeat themselves? Eh, like they ask question, if you do not understand” [Apenisa, male, Fijian]. Another student described a similar experience, “You never feel dumb, he’ll talk to you and make sure you understand. I really appreciate that about him” [Akesa, female, Fijian]. This student went further to explain:

I feel like it makes so much more sense now … in his classes you have Caucasians, and you have the islander nations, and he always teaches us very simply … I feel like he caters to our needs … I feel like he really understands us and teaches us. [Akesa, female, Fijian]

Students noted that having instructors who are intentional about checking for understanding, and teaching in ways that ensure understanding, are building bridges for academic success—which also helps them feel like they belong at school. Thus, closing the gap between the various languages, educational backgrounds and experiences and helping these students know they never have to “feel dumb” [Akesa, female, Fijian] is an important way that instructors can foster school belonging for their NHPI students.

The last way students described instructors that accommodate for the NHPI students’ various educational, linguistic, and social backgrounds is through being responsive to student
questions either after class or via email. As one student put it, “Like most of my professors they’ve been … “you don’t understand come meet me at my office,” like these are resources available … there’s no reason why we fail … we are blessed” [Apenisa, male, Fijian]. Apenisa recognized that because his instructors were responsive and available to answer questions and provide extra support, he would not fail. For this student, having instructors who were responsive fostered his sense of school belonging, as a result, he felt a sense of reassurance and a greater capacity to succeed.

Students clearly expressed the meaningful ways instructors met them where they were academically, making deliberate accommodations to support them. Some of these ways included sending an extra email, teaching them how to pronounce new words, checking for understanding or giving extended time to complete work. Each of these instructional moves provided the students with opportunities to build skills, learn the curriculum, and engage in classroom learning—all essential for feeling a sense of school belonging.

One way students reported an increase in school belonging is when instructors accommodated their cultural, linguistic, and academic backgrounds to help them develop specific academic skills. They also noted how this had a positive impact on their academic confidence, self-efficacy, and motivation to succeed. For example, as Sitiveni stated above, “I was able to build that confidence to speak.” Or like Tala shared, “it really helps that student to achieve and, you know, get that A.” And last Apenisa said, “there’s no reason why we fail … we are blessed.” These students clearly noted that when their instructors fostered school belonging by making academic accommodations, their sense of school belonging increased directly impacting their confidence, self-efficacy, and motivation in positive ways.
What Instructors Do to Undermine NHPI School Belonging

One theme emerged which we called undermining school belonging. There were 20 instances where students talked about ways that instructors undermined their sense of school belonging. This ranged from instructors who students felt simply did not care or did not invest in ensuring their students would succeed to instructors who exhibited outright discrimination. Three codes emerged from the analysis: (a) not understanding or connecting with students’ backgrounds, (b) not accommodating for understanding and inclusion, and (c) discrimination. Participants used phrases such as “talk really fast,” “don’t care if you’re not understanding,” “ignorant to the culture,” “didn’t understand what I was going through,” “being shut down,” “only picked on some students,” “we were sitting there just really lost,” and “teacher just teaches and you just listen.” In each case, NHPI participants noted how these measures by instructors weakened and reduced their sense of school belonging.

Not Understanding or Connecting with Students’ Backgrounds

The first counterexample that emerged was, not understanding or connecting with students’ backgrounds.” Several students illustrated the negative impact instructors have on their sense of belonging when instructors lack the skills, or cultural awareness to understand their NHPI students and their backgrounds. Students felt that their instructors did not understand what they were going through as international NHPI students. When it came to their cultural and educational experiences, these students came from very diverse backgrounds. Their transition to a new country and new educational system could be extremely challenging and at times isolating. When instructors lacked the skills and cultural awareness to understand these NHPI students, and to connect with them, this often left students feeling lonely and overlooked, thus inhibiting their sense of school belonging.
Students were articulate in sharing the impact of these painful experiences. For example, Esita shared that, “One semester … I guess the TA, it was her first semester and … she couldn’t necessarily connect to the Pacific Islanders. And in that class, like the Islanders, we struggled the most” [Esita, female, Indo-Fijian]. Another student added, “When I first came to school, I felt like my professors really didn’t understand what I was going through as a student” [Isa, female, Samoan]. She continued, saying, “Yeah. For people who don’t grow up outside of the United States, they didn’t understand what a lot of us have had to go through. We may have had similar experiences, but just, it’s not the same” [Isa, female, Samoan]. Each of these students relayed experiences of instructors who did not show care or connect with them as NHPI students. It left the students feeling overlooked and as one student pointed out, they “struggled the most” [Esita, female, Indo-Fijian]. These students recognized that when there was no connection with their instructor, this undermined their sense of belonging.

*Not Accommodating for Understanding and Inclusion*

The second counter example that emerged was “not accommodating for understanding and inclusion.” For this code, several students described instances when instructors failed to make academic accommodations based on the needs of their NHPI students. In some cases, this may have been unknowingly on the part of the instructor, while in other cases students perceived that instructors did not care enough about them to make accommodations despite the students making their needs clear. In all cases, instructors did not make accommodations to ensure participation and understanding, both of which students in this study have reported as being crucial for academic success and school belonging.
One student shared the following, “basically they just share and then leave. They don’t care if you’re understanding or not” [Sitiveni, male, Fijian]. Another student described her experience of not being understood by an instructor and not understanding a lesson.

You feel like you don’t belong when you can come to a classroom atmosphere that they don’t even know what you’re saying or you don’t even understand the lessons and the interactions are not there then you know for sure you’re not supposed to be there.

[Nalesoni, female, Tongan]

Not all students felt instructors were intentional when ignoring them or not caring about their learning, nonetheless, these students’ needs were overlooked and as a result the students believed they weren’t “supposed to be there.”

Some students shared experiences in classrooms where they had clearly requested specific accommodations or help and their instructors either dismissed or ignored them. As one student shared,

For example, one of my classes, the teacher talks really fast and she would, she would talk really fast. She thinks that she’s okay with it, but she would always say, “oh, that’s okay,” really fast. And then she, she goes slow for like a moment, and then right back to her speed that she’s comfortable with….We don’t know all the vocabularies and it takes us a while for us to process things, information, different language. It also, it also builds a barrier that we don’t feel like we’re belonging in the classrooms. Like, you know, whenever you feel lost in the lecture, like, what am I doing here? Like I shouldn’t be in right now. You don’t feel like you belong there just because you’re lost outta nowhere.

Cause of, you know, how fast the teacher talks. [Sefina, female, Samoan]
Other NHPI students echoed similar experiences. They recognized that when their instructors spoke too quickly, they could not understand or participate. This prevented the students from gaining access to the curriculum and participating in classroom learning. These student experiences of instructors not attending to requests or clear needs for accommodation left the NHPI students feeling uncared for, undermining their sense of school belonging.

Another student shared an experience of trying to communicate her needs to the instructor and being shut down. She described that “in this class … she gave us the criteria and I met them. When I asked, she said, ‘No that’s a C grade when you’re not meeting the requirement.’” This student continued:

I was getting frustrated because I tried so hard … to reach the amount of where she was asking for, mind you it’s a free expression activity. So, she was giving me all these crappy grades for all this work we were doing and she literally just shut me down like no you’re going to get that. Never-mind because my opinion don’t matter, your mind is already set. [Lanuola, female, Samoan]

This female student further notes how this is especially hard for her as an NHPI student, as it can be difficult to speak up to authority figures, such as teachers. She highlighted this difficulty for her, and other students saying,

So, what I’m trying to say is that it’s hard to express opinions, especially us Polynesians we were taught to respect our elders <other heads nodding> and it’s frustrating most of the times. So, all we do is leave it alone and do whatever. I kind of did that and just thinking about it now, I wish I did something more. [Lanuola, female, Samoan]

Eventually, Lanuola expressed regret at not sharing her perspective and difference of opinion about the grades she was receiving because she felt like grades was an arena that really mattered.
However, she also expressed a sense of hopelessness and futility in bringing the issue to her instructor, saying, “No matter how many times I explain, it was the same thing over and over again. So even then at a school like this, you get shut down without knowing that you are being shut down” [Lanuola, female, Samoan].

Each of the experiences above described ways students saw a lack of care from their instructor, in particular for their NHPI students’ academic needs. Whether this was intentional or not, students clearly identified when instructors did not take the time or make the effort to ensure their NHPI students could participate or understand in class, or when their concerns were completely ignored—preventing them from accessing content and the curriculum. These missed opportunities by the instructors left the NHPI students feeling unheard, unseen, uncared for, and as a result, undermined their sense of school belonging.

**Discrimination**

The third counterexample that emerged was discrimination. There were eleven instances where students described experiencing linguistic, ethnic, and racial microaggressions and at times outright discrimination. In this code, students often used the term “discrimination.” They sensed that they were “put on the spot,” told they “don’t speak well,” not “being challenged to be better,” “looked down” on, penalized for using British English, and—in one case—they were told by an instructor that they had to “dumb down” the exams for them. As students shared these counterexamples it was clear that they felt these instructors missed opportunities to build bridges and help them to belong at school. In every instance, students revealed the negative impact instructors had on their sense of school belonging.
Below is one example of a student who recounted the impact of linguistic discrimination. He along with other NHPI students sat in that classroom silent, feeling as if their language was not valued, appreciated, or allowed in the classroom. He noted that:

The teacher was speaking and the students were giving answers and we were sitting there just really lost … [But in the class] even if you wanted to answer a question, you felt like you couldn’t cause of the way you spoke. You felt like you would be ridiculed as well because of the way you spoke. So there felt like there was some discrimination there.

[Viti, male, Fijian]

A few other students shared other experiences of linguistic discrimination by being penalized for using British English—the official language of their island nations—versus American English. “Even just the way we spell things in New Zealand, completely different to America, and I would get pulled up for that in assignments. It can be really frustrating” [Maia, female, Māori]. Another student added, “So many times … my essays, ‘this is spelled wrong.’ This is not wrong. It’s really not. This is just wrong for America” [Alisi, female, Fijian].

In these experiences, students experienced linguistic discrimination that impacted their sense of belonging. They expressed feeling both ignored, underappreciated, and unfairly penalized by their instructors for using the English vernacular of their home countries, as well as submitting assignments using the British English dialect of their previous academic instruction. They noted a lack of flexibility, or recognition of the legitimacy of the varieties of English around the world, as punitive and delegitimizing. These students reported the ways instructors failed to support them. Rather than recognizing their linguistic differences as strengths, students felt that instructors discriminated against their languages in ways that undermined their sense of
value and set up roadblocks to their academic success. These experiences left the students feeling hurt and uncared for—directly undermining their sense of school belonging.

Several students spoke candidly about their experiences of feeling discriminated against more globally because they were NHPI students. Taufa shared,

I think that um, my whole school, four years here, I did feel like I was being … I don’t know … discrimination? … Like, you can feel like you are being treated … I was treated like that because I’m from Tonga. “Oh, she doesn’t know English. She doesn’t speak well, her English is broken.” … So that’s when I feel like I don’t belong because I think “Oh I’m not smart enough to be in this class.”… Don’t make them feel like they’re not smart or … stupid in a class, but, encourage them. “Oh yeah you can do better,” that would make the person feel “it’s ok.” … No matter the differences … it will be very obvious but don’t make it known to the person. [Taufa, female, Tongan]

Taufa [female, Tongan] felt that she was being treated differently in some of her classes because of her status as an international NHPI student. She recounts her perception of instructors’ attitudes toward her because she is from Tonga. Unfortunately, she seems to have internalized the narrative that she was not smart enough, or that some instructors thought that way about her, and she clearly hoped for more support and encouragement—both of which her instructors failed to provide.

Another student shared an experience of discrimination where she felt some of her instructors failed to hold her to a higher standard, instead telling her mediocre grades were good enough for her. She expressed frustration about the seeming mismatched expectations she held for herself, versus what she perceived from her instructors as an NHPI student, saying:
I think one question that I think is important … right here in [name of university] is, am I being purposefully pushed, is the word, to reach my full potential? Because … some of the teachers are like “it’s okay, as long as you get a C you’ll pass.” And you’re like, “No I want you to help me reach an A!” Like I’m here to be pushed to reach something better, to do better. [Maliana, female, Tongan]

She went on to share another experience of discrimination when an instructor assumed that because she was Tongan, it was not possible she would be such a good writer.

And then like, I remember someone reading my assignment and they’re like, “Oh you’re really smart!” in a surprised tone. And I mean they’re like… “Oh, I like the vocab that you use is really good, I really like the jargon, the good terms that you had. Like yeah because you’re Tongan right?” “Oh, I’m from NZ.” “Oh!” <look of disbelief from student>. So, from then, one thing I want to make sure that I ask in every class. Am I being challenged to be better? I don’t want to just be like it’s okay just be comfortable as long as you do good. I want to be challenged. [Maliana, female, Tongan]

The most demeaning example of an instructor demonstrating discrimination came from this student:

Yeah. I think for me, what does it mean to feel like you belong at school? I think when I first came to school, I didn’t feel like my professors really understood who I was, you know. Like [because] a professor made a comment in class. I can’t remember what class it was. But they had said, “Oh yeah, one of my other friends who works at another university said like, ‘oh, how does it feel to have to dumb down your exams for your students?’” And I remember thinking like what? … And I thought, is that how people view us … is that how people view me? [Isa, female, Samoan]
This instructor using the word “dumb” in reference to this group of students is painfully degrading and insensitive. The worst outcome of this shameful comment is the impact it had on the students. Students believed that if this instructor and his colleague thought this of them, then perhaps everyone does.

This section illustrates the microaggressions and blatant discrimination some NHPI students reported experiencing. NHPI students in this study noted the times their instructors failed to recognize their intellectual and academic attributes and instead expected less from them and for them. These negative interactions or lack of interactions altogether, left the students feeling neglected, invisible, and in some cases unworthy of being equally challenged and pushed along with their peers of other ethnicities and backgrounds. Ultimately, these actions by instructors were neglectful and hurtful and clearly undermined the NHPI students’ sense of school belonging.

**Summary of What Instructors Do to Inhibit NHPI Sense of School Belonging and the Negative Impact**

Altogether there were 20 instances where NHPI students reported instructors undermining their sense of school belonging. Participants recalled experiences where instructors failed to accommodate for understanding and inclusion, failed to understand their students’ NHPI backgrounds and connect to them, and discriminated against their NHPI students racially, linguistically, or academically.

As students shared experiences of instructors undermining their sense of school belonging, there were several instances where the same students shared the negative impact this had on their academic self-efficacy, confidence, and motivation. Students were made to believe that they were at a deficit compared to their non-NHPI peers. For example, Elei [female, Samoa]
explained, “In that class … I feel like I probably lack something.” Although she did not describe precisely what she “lacks,” the feeling that one is lacking has a direct impact on one’s self-efficacy. Viti, [male, Fijian] described having similar feelings of being viewed through a deficit lens, which resulted in lowered confidence. “Even if you wanted to answer a question, you felt like you couldn’t cause of the way you spoke, you felt like you would be ridiculed.” Because the instructor failed to value the linguistic skills of the NHPI students in this class, Viti, along with his NHPI peers, lacked the confidence to answer questions. Instead, they sat in silence—denied access to participate. A third student shared the negative impact she experienced when her school belonging was undermined. Taufa [female, Tongan] shared how she believed instructors and peers saw her, “Oh she doesn’t know English. She doesn’t speak well, her English is broken … So that’s when I feel like, ‘Oh, I’m not smart enough to be in this class.’” Taufa was made to believe that she wasn’t enough. Her self-perception in that class was shattered. In all three cases, students shared that when instructors undermined their sense of school belonging, their self-efficacy was negatively impacted. They were made to believe that they lacked something and as such were robbed of the confidence and motivation to participate.

In addition to experiencing a decrease in self-efficacy, one student shared how a lack of school belonging undermined her motivation to attend class. Esita [female, Indo Fijian] shared, “That was the class where I would come, ‘oh do I have to go to class?... my grade can take one hit, I’ll be fine.’” Esita articulated clearly the price she was willing to make—lower attendance, lower learning, lowered grade—to avoid facing a neglectful instructor and negative classroom culture.

Each of these quotes illustrates the negative impact instructors had on their NHPI students when they failed to care for, connect with, and build academic bridges for their NHPI
students. Students’ academic self-efficacy and motivation to participate were negatively impacted, with one student reluctant to even attend class. Students were led to believe that they lacked the skills and ability necessary to be successful in these classrooms. They were made to believe, “you know for sure you’re not supposed to be there” [Nalesoni, female, Tongan].

Cultural Lens

A major focus of this study was to clarify how school belonging is experienced by NHPI students, and to illuminate how instructors uniquely mattered for fostering or undermining school belonging for these students. In order to answer this question, I noted instances in the data where NHPI students talked about their culture, traditions, backgrounds, and previous experiences that shaped the impact instructors had on fostering or undermining their school belonging. I also attended to ways that students felt their culture was represented in the university classrooms. I called this theme “cultural lens,” as I looked for instances where students described their cultural lens explicitly. This code co-occurred across many of the belonging codes, illustrating how instructors matter differently for these students’ sense of belonging, because of who they are and where they came from. Two codes emerged in this theme that I called: “respecting authority: not speaking up,” and “representation matters.” Both of these themes illustrate how students’ cultural backgrounds and experiences inform their understandings of the ways instructors matter most for them for fostering belonging in the university classroom.

Respecting Authority: Not Speaking Up

Across culture groups, students in this study shared aspects of the traditional social hierarchies that exist in their Pacific Island communities that impact their expectations for interacting with their instructors. These NHPI students clearly described the traditional hierarchy
that included norms for respecting authority, seniority, and tribal leaders. They explained how these cultural norms impact behavioral expectations that they know their place—which is not to speak unless spoken to. In other words, these students were raised to respect and honor those above you by staying quiet. For example, Epeli stated “Back home uh, most of the pacific islands are the traditional hierarchy. We have those who speak and those who listen” [Epeli, male, Fijian]. Some students related how gender norms might play a role—especially for the female students. For example, a female student shared her gendered experiences with her island’s system of hierarchy.

When I was growing up with my grandparents, in like the home, it’s always the men that have a say in the home. If you want to share your feeling on anything, you’re not allowed to say anything. Being a girl [Taufa, female, Tongan].

Students clearly articulated how their Pacific Islander culture systems directly impacted how they saw themselves in relation to their instructors, who they viewed as being senior to them and people who they were expected to respect. As one student described, “I remember when I first went to [Name of University], all of our teachers would say all Fijians are so quiet, so shy. Please ask us questions. It’s not us being shy, it’s us being respectful” [Semi, male, Fijian]. He continued by explaining that being quiet demonstrates their respect for their instructors. “Because you are always taught to … respect your elders, and one way we show respect is by not questioning authority. And so, coming to college, one way Fijian students did that … is not to say anything” [Semi, male, Fijian]. Another student expressed similar feelings about keeping concerns to himself so as not to disrespect his instructors. “Sometimes we keep our concerns to ourselves because we respect them. Cause they’re older than us or they are in higher ranking, professors” [Apenisa, male, Fijian]. As students explained their cultural protocol for speaking
versus staying quiet, it became very clear that instructors from other cultures could easily misunderstand their silence as anything other than showing respect.

Many students described the differences between the expectations of students at the university, in contrast to the typical schooling systems in Pacific Island nations where teachers typically use more direct, explicit instruction. NHPI students are accustomed to listening and watching their teachers and doing more rote learning. As one student from Tonga explained, “in high school, you go to class and you see the board full of notes, from left to right, and you just copy the whole thing. And then memorize it, and that’s it. We don’t ask questions at all” [Taufa, female, Tongan]. She continued by identifying the contrast between the school system she grew up in versus this new system she’s been introduced to. “But not here, everyone’s asking questions and you see all the Tongans in the back row sitting and being quiet the whole time. I think back home it affects how our schooling…. Whatever they say, you follow” [Taufa, female, Tongan]. Another student shared the contrast between the two systems as well as the fears associated with acclimating to a new one.

So, I know for most of us back home, it’s probably sort of our culture kind of thing to either sit and be quiet or not answer questions and so some of us are still trying to come out of that comfort zone or maybe are still probably have that fear, sort of. [Talei, female, Fijian]

Although there is discomfort associated with entering a new school system, Talei shares how she and her NHPI peers are cognizant of the contrasting systems and how they want access to and are making efforts to participate in this new system. These student voices underscore why instructors who care and build bridges are able to foster belonging for these students, who are working hard to negotiate different cultural norms and schooling systems. Teachers who foster
belonging care about their NHPI students and will meet them halfway. Just as Esita stated above, “It’s not just me going to them, they’re com[ing] towards me as well.”

_Representation Matters_

Students in this study were in agreement that having instructors who were themselves NHPI, or who incorporated NHPI related content into their course curriculum mattered for fostering belonging. First, students spoke clearly about the comfort and feelings of safety they have when they interact with instructors who are themselves from the islands. As one student shared:

To give an example … I walked in that door, I saw a [NHPI instructor] and I felt a homely sense of, you know, I felt comfort … I don’t know how to explain that, but it’s the effect when the instructor’s’ or whoever’s running the school is, has some kind of relation or background to where we come from. [Kaelo, male, Tongan]

Students described the comfort and feelings of safety they felt when they had instructors who looked like them, spoke NHPI languages and shared common experiences and cultural backgrounds. This familiarity set the NHPI students at ease. Another student noted, “When there are professors that are from your background … I think it’s easier to communicate to them regarding matters like cultural beliefs and stuff like that” [Masina, female, Samoan]. She continued by comparing her experiences of interacting with NHPI instructors to other instructors. “I think it’s easier to communicate and talk to them about these things because you feel more comfortable … as a Pacific islander around them and … more than other professors that you feel like would not get you” [Masina, female, Samoan]. Having instructors who can both empathize with what they are experiencing and with whom they share common backgrounds, instantly
brings them a sense of safety. This student described a similar experience to the one before, of walking into a classroom with an NHPI instructor.

Something that I notice that makes a big difference is when I walk inside the classroom and the instructor is a Pacific Islander. There is a sense of understanding, unspoken understanding that is there, that otherwise would not have been there…. There are some things that because of where we grew up … we understand unspoken vibes with the moment … It’s just a sense of security when mutual understanding is based on where you come from. [Kaelo, male, Tongan]

In addition to recognizing the comfort of having an NHPI instructor, a couple of students from the study also talked about the comfort of having instructors both NHPI and non-NHPI who incorporate NHPI curriculum. This meaningful connection to their homelands and people had a significant impact on feeling understood and seen and helped them more deeply connect to the curriculum in these classrooms. One participant relayed the following experience:

What I’ve noticed, is that like Pacific Islander professors, you know, they’re able to use experiences or like examples that we can relate to, for instance … I took a math class and … on his video lecture he used an example that Polynesians can relate to and it just made it so much easier for me to, to understand. And so even in like those analogies and in the teaching, I feel like make us feel seen. [Malosi, male, Samoan]

He continued by describing how this instructor’s carefully crafted lessons impacted the overall classroom culture.

That was one of the first classes where the entire class was just validated … and even the Americans, like we were best friends with the Americans in the class because of just the
way he was able to create that environment. And using examples that we all could relate to. [Malosi, male, Samoan]

By incorporating NPHI examples into the curriculum, this instructor ensured his NHPI students would have opportunities to make meaningful connections. This instructor not only built bridges to academic success but also built bridges of connection between these NHPI students and their peers from other cultures.

The rigor and stresses of moving to a new country with a completely new set of cultural norms can be extremely daunting for these students. However, when they see an instructor who is NHPI, or they have an instructor who intentionally connects NHPI culture to the curriculum, they trust that these shared cultural values mean their instructors will be supportive in their academic endeavors. These students also recognized that their NHPI instructors personally understand the cultural hierarchy of the islands and have learned how to navigate living in both cultures—something these students are just beginning to discover.

**Conclusion of Findings**

Overall, there were several main findings from this study. First, NHPI students were able to clearly articulate ways in which their instructors fostered and undermined school belonging. Students’ responses were to general questions about school belonging, thus these unsolicited responses about instructors underscores the importance of instructors for fostering belonging for the students in this study. Second, students’ responses reveal that NHPI students feel a sense of school belonging when instructors show care and build bridges for academic success. There were several, yet specific, ways that instructors were able to show care and build bridges, and students were able to talk about why these ways were so important for them, given their cultural backgrounds and prior experiences. Conversely, when instructors fail to show care or build
bridges, NHPI students’ responses clearly articulated how directly and devastatingly students’ sense of school belonging was undermined. Third, as students shared their experiences with instructors who fostered or undermined their sense of school belonging, many shared both the positive and negative impacts of these experiences as pertaining to academic self-efficacy, motivation, and persistence. Finally, NHPI students in this study articulated how important it was for them, as NHPI students, to have instructors who chose to attend to the student–teacher relationship and were able to provide cultural representation within their classrooms. These were the instructors who were successful at fostering school belonging for them at the university.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to learn more about the experiences of school belonging for NHPI university students in the United States. More specifically, this study explored NHPI students’ perceptions of how their university instructors promoted or inhibited a sense of belonging at school. Ninety-seven NHPI students at one university in the Pacific participated in focus groups where they were asked general questions about school belonging. Analyses focused on what students said about how their instructors facilitated or undermined their sense of school belonging.

A major finding from this study is that NHPI students were able to clearly identify ways that their instructors supported or undermined their school belonging. These findings emerged from general questions about school belonging, with very little prompting about their instructors specifically, thus highlighting the importance of instructors on the experiences of belonging for NHPI students at the university. Student voices specifically reveal the ways that NHPI students perceive their instructors to either foster or inhibit school belonging, providing invaluable information for instructors who work with NHPI university students. Further, many students in this study explicitly identified why these instructor moves were so important to them as NHPI students as they viewed their experiences through their cultural lens. Finally, students also gave voice to the positive impact that feeling a sense of belonging in school had on their confidence and academic self-efficacy, as well as their motivation to attend school and achieve academically, providing support for Tinto’s (2017) model of student persistence.

Two main themes represent what NHPI students said their university instructors do to foster school belonging, while one main theme represents what students said their instructors do
to undermine belonging. Themes that represented ways instructors fostered belonging were named teacher care and building bridges for academic success, while the theme that represented times when instructors undermined school belonging was called undermining school belonging. Codes that make up each of these major themes point to the relational nature of school belonging for NHPI students. Students reported feeling a sense of school belonging when they felt like their teachers cared about them, and when they cared enough to build bridges for them to succeed academically. Conversely, students reported times when instructors failed to understand them, didn’t care enough to accommodate their academic needs, or plain discriminated against them as examples of when students felt their sense of belonging was undermined.

Findings from this study are in line with work by Noddings (2012) who writes about the ethics of care as part of an effective and equitable teaching practice. She writes, “from the perspective of care ethics, the teacher as carer is interested in the expressed needs of the cared-for” (p. 773). She further discusses how part of being interested in the needs of students requires listening to them. “Listening to the ideas of students is clearly important … At first, it may be frightening, but when students realise that their thinking will be respected, they enter the spirit of dialogue” (Noddings, 2012, p. 773–774). Similarly, students in this study felt cared for by instructors who were intentional about fostering participation and interaction in their classrooms. Students highlighted instructors who knew how to engage the whole class in discussion or made sure to place students in small groups, and even ensured they were available outside of class. As these students felt cared for by their instructors in classrooms and school spaces, they reported an increased sense of school belonging.

Findings from this study are well situated within Yosso’s (2005) work and theorizing on cultural wealth. She calls for teachers to see their students of color through a lens of cultural
wealth—meaning to see what these students bring with them to school as resources and various forms of capital—rather than viewing them through a deficit perspective. As Yosso (2005) stated, “indeed, the main goals of identifying and documenting cultural wealth are to transform education and empower People of Color to utilize assets already abundant in their communities.” She went on further to explain, “these forms of capital draw on the knowledges Students of Color bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom” (p. 82). In this study, NHPI students felt cared for by instructors who learned about and understood who they were, including (perhaps specifically) their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Students felt seen and known when instructors were intentional about recognizing their NHPI students “cultural wealth”—helping them to feel they were legitimate and important in these academic spaces. Specifically, NHPI students in this study noted how they felt cared for when their instructors invited them to speak, present and otherwise participate in classroom discussions. As some students noted, it can be easier for NHPI instructors to connect with their NHPI students because of shared implicit cultural knowledge. However, one important takeaway from this study is that instructors who are not NHPI can connect with and care about their NHPI students in important and effective ways. All instructors can value the cultural wealth of their NHPI students. For the NHPI students in this study, instructors fostered a sense of school belonging when they showed that they valued and cared about who their NHPI students were and where they came from, and then intentionally created spaces for them to share their ways of knowing and being in the classroom.

Students also reported ways that instructors explicitly taught academic skills to bridge cultural, social, and educational norms. Delpit (2006) speaks directly about how teachers are responsible for making sure this cultural bridging happens in their classrooms. She writes that
“students must be taught the codes needed to participate fully … within the context of meaningful communicative endeavors; that they must be allowed the resource of the teacher’s expert knowledge, while being helped to acknowledge their own ‘expertness’ as well” (p. 45). She continues by warning, “If [students] are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier” (p. 24). In this study, students noted those instructors who made expectations for academic success explicit and provided various forms of academic support such as helping students to pronounce new words, sending emails of the lessons, or helping students learn the skills for speaking in class. These instructors were cited for bridging the cultural educational norms of these students’ prior experiences with this new U.S.-based university context through explicit instruction. These skills and strategies helped these students gain access to curriculum and to participate not just in the classroom, but in other previously inaccessible spaces at the university. These instructors implemented what Delpit (2006) wrote about teachers who build bridges between cultural spaces for students who are unfamiliar with the norms of their new academic environment. The instructors in this study were able to guide their NHPI students to participate in the culture of power within their classroom settings.

One important aspect of this study is that many NHPI students reported experiences related to how an increased sense of school belonging contributed to increased academic confidence, self-efficacy, and motivation to achieve. Specifically, students noted how when instructors fostered school belonging through teacher care and building bridges for academic success, they wanted to finish assignments early, they looked forward to being in class, and they had the self-confidence to speak and participate. These findings provide support for Tinto’s (2017) model, underscoring how school belonging matters for self-efficacy and motivation, both
of which can lead to school persistence and better overall academic outcomes for these NHPI university students.

Unfortunately, students in this study were also very clear about identifying what instructors did that undermined their sense of school belonging. These findings were essentially the opposite of caring about or attending to who these students were as people. Students in this study reported experiences of instructors who appeared they did not care to learn about or understand their backgrounds. They also had instructors who failed to build bridges of academic access and class participation. Worst of all, they reported several experiences of discrimination. Although there was a range of intention, from microaggressions to outright blatant discrimination, the damage done by these instructors was still felt deeply by the students in this study. Students reported feeling uncared for, isolated, and targeted—all feelings that undermined these students’ sense of school belonging. To help avoid these outcomes, Delpit (2006) advocates for diversifying faculties—hoping to build bridges of understanding among faculty which can then be applied in their classrooms. Student voices from this study support Delpit’s call when they talked about how comforting it was to have NHPI faculty as their instructors. For these students, representation matters, both in terms of their instructors and in terms of culturally relevant content in the curriculum. Delpit goes on to state that “members of a diverse faculty can also assist each other in understanding the needs of—and avoiding unintentional slights or insults to—diverse students.” She continues by stating, “no individual can be expected to understand the intricacies of every culture without the assistance of members from those cultures” (p. 123). For the students in our study who had these experiences, the negative impact of their sense of school belonging being undermined resulted in feelings of low self-competence, low motivation to do assignments or attend class, and overall feelings of resignation. All outcomes that could
potentially negatively affect NHPI students’ motivation to persist through college completion (Tinto, 2017).

A major contribution of this study is a clearer understanding of why what these university instructors did mattered specifically for the NHPI students in this study. NHPI students used their cultural knowledge and understandings to identify why instructors who showed care and were able to build bridges for academic success were particularly positively impactful given their specific backgrounds and experiences as NHPI students.

When students shared about their culture and experiences they spoke about the shared aspects of the traditional hierarchies in their Pacific Islander communities. One important aspect of these cultural hierarchies is the behavioral expectations that they, as youth, know their place—which is not to speak unless spoken to. These students reported being raised to respect and honor those of higher positions by staying quiet. Without knowledge of these cultural norms, instructors might misinterpret their silence as indifference, introversion, or apathy. This misunderstanding could easily prevent instructors from recognizing the academic goals and needs of their NHPI students, leaving them to fend for themselves. Additionally, when NHPI students talked about having instructors who are themselves NHPI, they expressed feelings of immediate comfort and safety. These students recognized that because of their shared backgrounds with their NHPI instructors, an unspoken understanding could exist between them. They reported that these instructors had an immediate connection with them and could more easily build bridges of care for academic success. These were likely the same bridges these NHPI instructors themselves crossed when they first left their islands to pursue academia.

There are several implications from this study, each pointing to the significant role of instructors in fostering school belonging for their NHPI students, and what instructors can, as
well as should not do, to foster school belonging. The teacher–student relationship really matters for these students. As such, instructors must be intentional about fostering school belonging for their NHPI students and avoiding these negative outcomes. First, instructors must learn about and understand who their NHPI students are—their backgrounds, their interests, and their cultures. Understanding who their NHPI students are is essential for these students to feel seen and understood. Second, instructors need to create safe spaces for their NHPI students to speak and share whether in the classroom or in person. NHPI students need access from their instructors to participate and share themselves. Third, instructors must develop relationships with their NHPI students in meaningful ways. These efforts do not need to be grandiose, just authentic. Instructor moves can be as simple as knowing and pronouncing their NHPI students’ names properly. Fourth, instructors need to be explicit in their instruction—both in how to succeed in their class and what the expectations are. Instructors need to be clear about how classes may be different from what they experienced before. In each of these four points, instructors need to understand that their role really matters for NHPI students to experience school belonging, in that their instructors are meeting them halfway. Building the bridge that they cannot build for themselves, and thus showing them how much their instructors care.

This study brings to light the significance of the instructor’s role for promoting school belonging for NHPI college students. As indicated in the literature above, when it comes to school belonging, teachers have the single greatest influence on their students. As such, this study has implications that reach far beyond the NHPI university student community. The voices of the students in this study could potentially come from any student, with any number of backgrounds—first generation college student, international student, single parent student, a student who has never lived away from home, or an older student returning to finish college.
Regardless of their backgrounds, every university student deserves to have instructors who are caring, who are intentional about building bridges of academic success, and who recognize the reservoirs of cultural wealth these students bring with them (Yosso, 2005).
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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Flyer

BYUH Pacific Islander
Focus Group Participants Invited

“Ethnic Identity and School Belongingness”

You are invited to join a research focus group discussing ethnic identity and school belongingness among male Pacific Islander BYUH students. This focus group will be an hour long with a break in the middle. A meal will be provided to all participants.

To participate in this focus group, you must:

- Be a Pacific Islander BYUH student
- Sign a consent form
- Choose one of the times that best fits your schedule

Sign up at:
shorturl.at/gwCDY
or
follow the QR code

For more information about the focus group contact
Melia Fonoimoana Garrett melia.fonoimoana@gmail.com
Drs. Spencer Scanlan and Erika Feinauer erika_feinauer@byu.edu
(Principal Investigators)
APPENDIX B

Demographic Questionnaire on Ethnic Identity and School Belonging

Thank you for joining our focus group. Our goal is to better understand ethnic identity and school belongingness among Pacific Islander BYUH students. Please fill out the questions below to help us have a greater understanding of this topic.

Name _________________________________

Are you a BYUH student? (Mark yes even if you are taking off the summer)

• Yes
• No

Age ____________ Phone number ________________________________________________

Email
________________________________________________________________________

I identify my ethnicity as (check all that apply)

• Fijian
• Māori
• Marshallese
• Micronesian
• Native Hawaiian
• Niuean
• Samoan
• Tahitian
• Tongan
• Asian
• Black/African
• Caucasian
• Hispanic/Latinx
• Middle Eastern/North African
• Native American or Alaskan Native
• Other ____________________

Where were you born?

• Hawaii
• Continental United States
• Other ________________

Where were your parents born?

• Hawaii
• Continental United States
• Other ________________
Where did you graduate high school?
- Hawaii
- Continental United States
- Other __________________

What do you identify as your religion? ________________________________
APPENDIX C

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

MEMORANDUM
Application Approval Notification

TO: Spencer Scarlan
FROM: Boyd Timothy IRB Chair
       Brigham Young University – Hawaii
       808-675-3931
       boyd.timothy@byuh.edu

SUBJECT: IRB Application Number: # (21-61)
Project Title: Ethnic Identity, Religiosity and School Belonging among Pacific Islanders students in Hawaii

Approval Date: October 12th, 2021
Expiration Date: October 12th, 2022
Application Type: New
Research Type: Non-Exempt
Application Review Type: Expedited

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Brigham Young University – Hawaii approved your application. The research was approved in accordance with 45 CFR 46 of Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, and the University’s IRB policies and procedures. The IRB approves waiver of signed informed consent as per criteria in 45 CFR 46.116(d). Please reference the IRB application number (above) in any future communication regarding this research.

Recruitment/Consent: For research requiring written informed consent, the IRB-approved and stamped informed consent document is enclosed. The IRB approval expiration date has been stamped on the informed consent document. Please keep copies of the consent forms used for this research for three years after the completion of the research.
Continuing Review: If you intend to continue to collect data from human subjects or to analyze private, identifiable data collected from human subjects after the expiration date for this approval (indicated above), you must submit a renewal application to the IRB Manager at least 30-days prior to the expiration date.

Modification: Any changes to the approved protocol must be approved by the IRB before the change is implemented, except when a change is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. If you would like to modify the approved protocol, please submit an addendum (Protocol Modification) request to the IRB Manager. Requests to modify an active protocol may be submitted at any time by the Principal Investigator (PI) sending a signed letter or email to the IRB Manager. The letter should state the specifics of the changes and should include: the rationale for the changes, a detailed description of the procedures, an explanation for how the changes will affect the risk to the subjects, and any appropriate supporting documents — such as new versions of consent forms, data collection instruments, and recruitment materials. Be sure to include the project title, IRB application number, and the name and email address of the person to whom the approval letter should be sent. Finally, if any additional researchers are to be added to the project (including students), please supply their investigating role and email address. If revised versions of documents previously approved by the IRB are being submitted, they should be labeled as such (for example, revised on March 28, 2008). If the original application was reviewed by an IRB committee member (in an expedited review), please send a copy of the addendum request to the IRB member. Please do not submit modification requests on IRB application forms. Also please note that any addenda do not change the duration of IRB approval. The expiration of IRB approval is based on the date when the most recently submitted application was approved, not when the addendum was approved.

Unanticipated Problems involving Risks: You must promptly report to the IRB Manager any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

Student Researchers: Unless otherwise requested, this IRB approval document was sent to the PI. The PI should share a copy of the approval document with student researchers or others as necessary. This IRB approval document may be a requirement for student researchers applying for graduation. The IRB may not be able to provide copies of approval documents if several years have passed since the date of the original approval.

Additional Information: If you need additional information or have any questions or concerns, please contact the IRB Manager.
APPENDIX D

Consent to be a Research Subject

Introduction
This research study is being conducted by Dr. Spencer Scanlan at Brigham Young University – Hawaii, and Drs. Erika Feinauer and G.E. Kawika Allen at Brigham Young University to examine BYUH personnel perceptions of the constructs of and connections between ethnic identity, and school belonging for Pacific Islander students at BYUH. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are BYUH faculty, administrator, or counselor.

Procedures
You will be asked to participate in one Focus Group Interview that will be conducted in the Center for Learning and Teaching Conference room and scheduled during the three-week period of November 27 - December 17th, 2021. Multiple times will be offered and you may sign up for just one that is most convenient for you. Focus Group Interviews will consist of 5-7 members and no longer than 90 minutes. Focus groups interviews will be video and audio recorded, then transcribed.

You will be provided copies of the following instruments; 1) Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised; 2) the Religious Commitment Inventory, and 3) The Simple School Belonging Scale. You will also be provided with our Working Theory Document. We will use the Focus Group Interview Protocol that you have been given with this consent form to talk about how you perceive and understand issues related to ethnic identity, religious commitment, and school belonging for students at BYUH.

We will provide a light refreshment.

Risks/ Discomforts
There are minimal risks for participation in this study. However, you may feel emotional discomfort when answering questions about ethnic identity, religiosity, or school belonging. When participating in the focus group, it is possible that you may feel embarrassed when talking in front of others. Please look over the Focus Group Interview Protocol so you can be sure you will be comfortable discussing any of the topics. You may leave the Focus Group at any time, with no repercussions. The moderator will be sensitive to those who may become uncomfortable.

Participating in this study also presents risks to confidentiality, as these conversations are being recorded. We will mitigate this risk by transcribing the recording and de-identifying the transcripts. We also remind you, as a participant, not to disclose the contents of this conversation or discuss who participated in this conversation with anyone outside of this Focus Group. That will help to ensure confidentiality to all who participate in this study.

Data Sharing
We will keep the information we collect about you during this research study for analysis and for potential use in future research projects. If the study data contain information that directly identifies you: Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be stored securely and separately from the rest of the research information we collect from them.
De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community, with journals in which study results are published, and with databases and data repositories used for research. We will remove or code any personal information that could directly identify you before the study data are shared. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data. The results of this study could be shared in articles and presentations, but will not include any information that identifies you unless you give permission for use of information that identifies you in articles and presentations.

**Benefits**
There are no direct benefits to subjects. However, it is hoped that through your participation researchers will learn more about how Pacific Islander students experience school belonging at BYUH. As BYUH personnel, you will have access to our de-identified findings which may be of benefit to you in working with the Pacific Islanders students at BYUH.

**Confidentiality**
All information provided will remain confidential and will only be reported as group data with no identifying information. All data, including transcriptions from the focus group and the scanned Working Theory documents will be stored on a password protected file on BOX, and only those directly involved with the research will have access to them. After the research is completed, the questionnaires and tapes will be destroyed.

**Compensation**
There will be no monetary compensation. However, you will receive a light refreshment during the Focus Group Interview.

**Participation**
Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at anytime or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to your class status, grade or standing with the university.

**Questions about the Research**
If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Dr. Spencer Scanlan at 808-371-4150 spencer.scanlan@byuh.edu or Dr. Erika Feinauer at erika_feinauer@byu.edu

**Question about your Rights as Research Participants**
If you have questions you do not feel comfortable asking the researcher, you may contact Dr. Boyd Timothy, IRB Chair, (808) 675-3931, boyd.timothy@byuh.edu

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will and volition to participate in this study.

Signature: ___________________________________________ Date: __________________