3-17-2020

A Critical Phenomenological Study of Female Asian American Leadership in Higher Education

Jenny L. Elsey
George Fox University, jelsey@georgefox.edu

A CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF FEMALE ASIAN AMERICAN LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Jenny L. Elsey

FACULTY RESEARCH COMMITTEE:

Chair: Susanna Thornhill, Ph.D.

Member: Jolyn Dahlvig, Ph.D.

Member: Scot Headley, Ph.D.

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the

Doctor of Educational Leadership Department

in partial fulfillment for the degree of

Doctor of Education

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

March 17, 2020

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION | EDD

"A CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF FEMALE ASIAN AMERICAN LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION," a Doctoral research project prepared by JENNY L. ELSEY in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership.

This dissertation has been approved and accepted by:

		Committee Chair
Susanna Thornhill		
4/3/2020	Susanna Thornhill, Ph.D.	Associate Professor of Education
Jolyn Dahlvig		
4/3/2020	Jolyn Dahlvig, Ph.D.	Professor of Education
Scot Headley		
4/3/2020	Scot Headley, Ph.D.	Professor of Education

ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study used a critical approach to explore the lived experiences of five female Asian American administrators who lead at predominately White institutions of higher education. Given the lack of female Asian American representation in senior-level positions across college and university campuses, the study aimed to understand how participants made meaning of their leadership experiences and what factors they viewed as important to their success. Participants indicated a strong desire to tell their stories. Four major findings surfaced in the analysis of data: (a) participants were trailblazers in their respective positions; (b) participants experienced a tension between wanting to avoid the entrapment of perceived female Asian American stereotypes or facing the consequences for stepping outside of those expected stereotypes; (c) participants experienced a constant state of exhaustion as a result of the implicit bias directed at them; and (d) participants indicated mentorship, opportunities, and allyship as factors that enabled them to achieve success in spite of the challenges. In keeping with a critical approach, this study acknowledged the tension between the needed representation that this study brings to existing literature and the risk of tokenizing the participants' experiences. This study sought to provide a full picture that included the challenges the participants experienced as well as the resiliency and strength they demonstrated in their leadership. Implications for this study suggest a need for understanding racial challenges outside of a black and white binary, investing in female Asian American leaders, and increasing opportunities for mentorship with other female Asian Americans.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a first-generation student, one of the challenges is "that you don't know what you don't know." I did not know how this research would transform me as a scholar practitioner. I also did not know how completely dependent I would become on my community in order to finish. My journey through this dissertation process would not have been possible without the love and support of my family: my life-long partner, Erik and my two children, Kai and Rhys. I am eternally grateful to my parents, Ching-Chung and Lok-Ah-Kuen Lei. They braved unknown and sometimes hostile spaces and sacrificed everything so that I could be the first in our family to achieve any level of post-secondary education. I dedicate this accomplishment to them and to my paternal grandfather who dreamed of having a doctor in his family but did not live long enough to see his dream come true.

I thank George Fox University's faculty and staff in the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership Department. I would like to express my sincerest and deepest appreciation for Dr. Susanna Thornhill, who held me to the highest standards as a scholar and also knew how to support and care for me when I felt tired, stuck, and discouraged. I am also grateful to Dr. Jolyn Dalhvig and Dr. Scot Headley for their time and guidance as committee members. I appreciated the balance of challenge and support that all three provided throughout the course of my dissertation process.

The completion of this study would not have been possible without my doctoral cohort and the critical friends who supported me by reading drafts, sending encouraging emails, and checking in on a regular basis. I am extremely grateful for a supportive professional environment that understood this was an arduous process and gave me space to complete the work. I am indebted to all my students and colleagues who cheered me on and spoke life into me when I

showed up exhausted. Their support and solidarity were a constant reminder of why I pursued a doctoral degree and specifically why I chose the topic of this study.

Words are insufficient for expressing the deep level of gratitude and appreciation that I hold for the participants in this study. Their stories opened my eyes to new ways of understanding female Asian American leadership. The spaces they occupy are better because of their leadership and I believe that higher education as a whole will benefit, if it can recognize and empower more leaders like them. They have inspired me to continue finding ways to uplift the voices of other Asian American leaders. In the meantime, I hope that I have honored their voices with how I have presented their experiences and I hope that this study will further serve the Asian American community, particularly in higher education.

Finally, I acknowledge that none of this would be possible without a spiritual formation process and a God that has pushed my worldview beyond the confines of my own self-interests. If left to my own accord, I would still be pursuing my own personal gains. So, I am grateful for the mysterious ways that move and guide us into a deeply meaningful life. This study is one small part in my desire to join with the work of God to bring about a world where people are liberated to live into their fullest potential for the good of humanity and the glory of God.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

Asians/Asian Americans currently represent the second fastest growing racial/ethnic group in the United States. The student population in higher education also reflects this growth trend. However, representation at the administrative levels on college and university campuses lags behind. The American Council on Education (ACE) released their Race and Ethnicity Report in 2019 revealing that while Asians comprise 5.7% of the undergraduate student population and female Asian students representing over half of that number, 6.3 percent of graduate student enrollment, and are the second-fastest growing student group by race after non-White Hispanic, Asians only comprise roughly 2% of senior-level administrators in higher education (Espinosa et al., 2019). Female Asian Americans are further underrepresented in these leadership roles.

The gap between student representation and representation at the administrative levels proves problematic in light of reports like the one conducted in 2010 indicating that students who are at-risk persist at a higher rate when they are able to interact with faculty and administrators who self-identify in ways that are similar to their own identities (Fincher et al., 2010). Asian students persist to graduation at a higher rate than any other racial group (Espinosa et al., 2019), which has led to a belief that they are thriving on campus. Growing research demonstrates, however, that Asian students are not thriving and that these students face challenges in mental health, racial discrimination, and a lack of sense of belonging (Ancis et al., 2000; Chung, 2014; Cress & Ikeda, 2011; McGee, 2018). One particular study indicated that Asian students utilize campus resources at a lower rate than their peers; however, having greater representation in administrative roles on campuses could lead to better utilization of resources that are readily available (Maramba, 2011). Representation is important and those who have decision-making

power need to understand the lived experiences and unique needs of Asian/Asian American students. Our campuses need Asian American leadership and more specifically, female Asian American leadership, who can provide insight into the experiences of Asian/Asian American students and better inform policies and systems.

Background of Issue

A lack of empirical data, both qualitative and quantitative, has resulted in a lack of literature on the Asian American leadership experience. Researchers pointed to three predominant reasons for this problem: research in ethnic studies is undervalued in higher education (Arday, 2018; Bornstein, 2008; Oikelome, 2017), Asian Americans have been "de-minoritized" and therefore are excluded from research on ethnic and racial minorities (Lee, 2006; Pak et al., 2014; Park & Liu, 2014), and there is a sheer lack of their representation in leadership roles (Maramba, 2011; Mena & Vaccaro, 2017). Therefore, what is known to even a lesser degree is how do Asian American women make meaning of their own leadership experiences as administrators on college and university campuses, particularly within predominately White campuses.

Another phenomenon, the myth of the model minority represents a challenge to understanding Asian American female leadership. The "model minority" label was first used in 1966 by a journalist who touted the accomplishments of the Japanese community and declared that this group of minorities have been able to overcome prejudice and discrimination to achieve the American dream (Petersen, 1966). As a socio-political tool, it separated Asians from other racial minorities and perpetuated a belief that Asians no longer experienced the barriers of systemic racism. This effectively minimized critical narrative that conveyed the challenges still

experienced by the Asian American community (Manzano et al., 2016; Ng et al., 2007; Sakamoto et al., 2012; Suzuki, 2002).

Female Asian American leaders also face institutional challenges that arise from organizational culture and perceptions. Lord, Brown, and Harvey (2002) described system constraints that affect the way leadership is perceived and accepted in organizations. A group of researchers later tested and confirmed that racial stereotypes affected the hiring of Asians into leadership roles (Sy et al., 2010). Researchers have coined terms such as the "glass ceiling" and "glass cliff" to describe specific challenges women face in attaining leadership positions at the same rate as their male counterparts (Bornstein, 2008; Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Madden, 2011; Shepherd, 2017). The intersection of racial and gender barriers complicates the pursuit of leadership positions for female Asian Americans (Johnson & Howard-Baptiste, 2017; Turner, 2002).

Significance of Issue

The racial makeup of the US population is changing and data shows that there has also been a shift in the demographics of students who are enrolling in higher education. Representation at the leadership level on campuses, however, has not shifted accordingly. Given the lack of representation in leadership roles, there is a dearth of understanding around the nature of the lived experiences of female Asian American administrators in higher education. This provides a challenge for any rising female Asian American leaders who need mentors and road maps to guide them on their leadership journeys. Female Asian American leaders may also find it difficult to imagine themselves leading at the institutional level because they have not seen it modeled for them.

Studies on female leadership in higher education have shown that mentorship is one of the key factors to the retention and success of these women in their roles (Chang et al., 2014; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Tran, 2014). Access to mentorship becomes restricted when there is a lack of representation on campuses. Research examining the lived experiences of female Asian American administrators who have been able to attain leadership roles offers the possibility of broader access to mentors for aspiring leaders, even if those mentors are not present on their own campuses.

Research also needs to focus on what is working rather than simply focusing on the what is wrong. Deficit-based research risks perpetuating an image that underrepresented communities are lacking and suffer because they themselves are deficient (Harper, 2010). Focusing on the lived experiences of the few, rather than focusing on the lack of representation, centers the voices of participants and orients the field toward hope and increased understanding of these individuals' meaning-making.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to explore the lived experiences of female Asian American administrators in order to better understand how they make meaning of their leadership journeys through predominately White institutions. An exploration of literature revealed that a lack of representation limits the research on Asian American leadership in higher education, the stereotyping of Asians as the model minority leads to an accepted belief that they do not struggle to achieve success (Manzano et al., 2016; Park & Liu, 2014; Suzuki, 2002), and Asians have been broadly de-minoritized within higher education despite the challenges they continue to face (Lee, 2006; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Pak et al., 2014). A body of research is

growing around Asian American students that both examines and challenges the last two realities but there is still a need for more understanding around faculty and administrative experiences.

This study sought to center the voice of female Asian American leaders in a way that allowed them to define what is meaningful to them in their experiences. It leaned in to a conceptual framework for asset-based research. It also brought in a critical design element that acknowledged the way research has been used in the past to pit the Asian American community against other racial minority groups. Thus, this study ultimately aimed to serve the Asian American community within higher education.

Research Questions

The key research question guiding this study was, *what is the lived experience of female Asian American administrators within predominately White institutions*? Several sub-questions also informed this study:

- How do female Asian American administrators define their leadership style?
- How do female Asian American administrators understand their leadership in light of their racial/ethnic and gender identities?
- How do female Asian American administrators navigate the notion of power on predominately White campuses?
- What aspects of their experiences do female Asian American administrators identify as significant to their success?

Conceptual Framework

Joining in an academic dialogue and adding to a body of research required an acknowledgement of the framework that has shaped my approach to this study. This is in

keeping with the constructivist foundation to a phenomenological study that asserts knowledge cannot be "found" but rather it is socially constructed and interpreted through multiple realities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In more concrete terms, I needed to recognize that there are existing theories that shaped how my research questions were formed, how data was collected and analyzed, and how findings were discussed. Three primary conceptual frameworks have guided my assumptions, beliefs, and approach to this study: Critical Race Theory, asset-based research, and critical research. This section highlights the important assumptions of each framework and offers a few examples of how they have been used in other studies.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in the field of law and was first used by Derrick Bell who argued that questions regarding objectivity, property rights, and human rights needed to be viewed and questioned in light of race and the racialized experiences of people in society (Ladson-billings & Tate, 1995). CRT makes three primary assertions:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States.
2. U.S. society is based on property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool through which we can understand social inequity.

Ladson-billings and Tate take CRT further by connecting its specific tenants to the field of education. They argue that students continue to be rewarded or admonished based upon their ability to conform to white normative culture and that this culture works to preserve the property rights of white society. It is important to note that property rights include physical property as well as intangible but salient objects such as status, leadership positions, and the right to determine who is included and who is excluded.

Researchers have applied CRT to studies in a couple of explicit ways. The first is to assert the need to elevate and preserve the voice of racial minorities. The second is to question the dominant narrative that at one time existed within research literature claiming that inequities are due to the shortcomings of individuals from underrepresented and underperforming communities themselves. This leads to intentional investigations of the systemic ways racial minorities are intentionally and unintentionally excluded. Subsequently, a growing number of education scholars question the ways that research is being conducted in communities of color. This shift in framework and approach is fundamentally affecting how these scholars approach their research questions, which in turn impacts the instruments they choose to use and the data they collect (Harper, 2010; Neilson & Suyemoto, 2009). Utilizing CRT, these researchers argue that current models and frameworks were developed to study primarily White participants and new models need to be developed to address the different experiences of non-White participants (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Neilson & Suyemoto, 2009). It also highlights the need for more direct and authentic voices of people of color to be represented at all levels in the process of research.

Another critique made regarding studies on underrepresented and/or underperforming groups in higher education is that researchers focus too much on a deficit-model when approaching educational problems of practice. In a study on the achievement of Black, male undergraduates in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), the framework was flipped from “what is not working” to “what is working” for that particular group of students (Harper, 2010). Research questions were reframed so instead of asking, “Why do so few Black male students enroll in college?” researchers asked, “How were college aspirations cultivated among Black male undergraduates who are currently enrolled?” Harper

(2010) tapped into sociological and psychological theories such as social capital theory, attribution theory, and CRT to demonstrate how a shift towards an asset-based model uncovered new insight into relationships and environments that were pivotal to the success of Black male students in STEM.

This asset-based approach also leads to scholars to incorporate culturally appropriate knowledge into their research methods. Neilson and Suyemoto (2009) argued that researchers who do not do this risk missing important information of the lived experiences of the very participants they wish to understand. In their study, they employed a set of interview questions typically found in studies examining the career trajectories of leaders in higher education. The analysis revealed similar themes between the Asian American leaders and other similar research conducted with White leaders, with only nuanced variations between the two. Incorporating their own knowledge about cultural values, the researchers went back to the participants with newly-developed interview questions and gained a much different picture regarding the motivation of the Asian American leaders and how they pursued their career trajectories. This spotlights the importance of considering the participants' cultural background as an asset that ought to inform the design of any study wishing to include them.

Finally, this section on conceptual framework would not be complete without addressing the role of critical research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe critical research as more than a type of research and argue that it can be better understood as a framework or perspective from which to interpret and analyze data. Kincheloe et al. (2018) state that critical research is best understood as "research that attempts to create conditions for empowerment and social justice" (p. 237). The common factor between these two and other scholarly definitions is that critical research aims to examine the nature of power within research contexts, namely, who holds

power, how is it negotiated, and what structures in society reinforce those distributions of power. As demonstrated in her doctoral dissertation, Yao (2014) used critical theory as a framework to explore the notion of belonging among Chinese international students in a residence hall. She not only explored the lived experiences of the students themselves, but took time to provide context for the institution and residence hall, allowing readers to see how the power of determining who belonged and who did not belong was negotiated.

CRT, asset-based research, and critical research have all played an important part in this study's design. These frameworks guided decisions that were made at every step of the process, which is important to acknowledge. It has also been important for me, as the researcher, to acknowledge the ways in which this study was built upon the scholarly work of those who have come before me.

Definition of Key Terms

There are terms commonly used and understood by those who work day-to-day within any given field of study. In order to increase accessibility to a broader audience, this next section defines key terms important to this study. Clarifying the context for how these terms will be used help avoid misconceptions or misunderstandings. Some terms such as "the model minority" and "Critical Race Theory" are addressed in greater detail in either the literature review or conceptual framework of the study. The following list identifies terms that are used but not addressed in later sections.

Asian versus Asian American: For this study, it is important to note the complex nature of how Asian or Asian American is defined. While a high number of those identified as Asian or Asian American are also identified as immigrants, there is a separate category for international students, faculty, staff and administrators within higher education literature. The experiences of

second-, third- or fourth-generation Asian Americans differ greatly from those of more recent immigrants but both groups are often lumped into a singular category if they are not identified as international. So, while popular contexts can use the term "Asian" to refer to those represented in an international context, in academic literature, "Asian" and "Asian American" are used interchangeably to refer to those who are either citizens or permanent residents, regardless of where they were born. "Asian" is also used to identify a racial category while "Asian American" denotes an ethnic identity. Within the literature review, I will use the term that the researchers chose within their studies. This study is particularly interested in the experiences of second-, third-, fourth-generation Asian Americans, and therefore, will predominately use the term Asian American. One key exception will be unless a participant chooses to identify with a different term and in such instances, I will use their chosen term.

Asian American Generational Differences: Immigrants or those who were not born in the United States are most commonly referred to as first-generation. Those born in the United States to immigrant parents are referred to as second-generation. Subsequent generations are referred to as third-generation, fourth-generation, and so forth. More recently, some first-generation Asian Americans have begun to use the term "1.5" to reference the fact that while they were born overseas, they identify more closely with the experiences of second-generation Asian Americans; this is typically due to their young age at arrival in the United States.

People/Women/Students of Color: The term "people of color" was first used by White researchers as a way of placing all racial minorities into one category. It was then adopted by non-White researchers who approached ethnic studies through a Critical Race Theory lens to describe the common experiences racial minorities have in navigating systems of White dominance and power. Recently critics have begun to question the use of the term, specifically in

response to the normative assumption that White people have "no color." While debates continue, the term continues to be accepted within both academic and popular contexts.

Predominately White Institutions (PWIs): This term refers to institutions whose primary racial makeup of students, faculty, administrators, and staff are racially identified as White. It can also refer to institutions whose student racial makeup has reached a minority majority but whose faculty, administrators, and systems remain White-centric.

Historically White Institutions: This term is distinguished from PWIs, and refers to colleges and universities that historically held explicit exclusionary admissions and hiring practices. Scholars have argued that laws and policies that maintained segregation continue to impact the experiences of underrepresented minority groups in education today (Aguirre & Martinez, 2003; Ladson-billings & Tate, 1995).

White Supremacy or White Dominance: In an academic setting, the terms "White supremacy" or "White dominance" are used to describe systems that are created and maintained to keep power and possession in the hands of the current dominant majority culture. The roots of these terms come from Critical Race Theory, which asserts U.S. society is based upon property rights and the intersection of race and property gives an analytical tool through which we can understand social inequity (Ladson-billings & Tate, 1995). This is not be confused with the association of extremist groups such as Nazis and Skinheads, though these are most certainly evident symptoms. It is important to note that both White and non-White people participate in White supremacy and White dominance. Discomfort with privilege, entitlements, rights, and the ways people consciously and unconsciously seek to maintain power are part of the systems that perpetuate inequities. I introduce these terms and these ideas to point to these systemic influences as an important consideration in my study.

Concluding Thoughts

Female Asian Americans aspiring to leadership positions in higher education face several potential challenges. One of these challenges is the lack of mentorship and successful examples to follow. With limited research and literature on the experiences of female Asian American administrators, it is difficult to encourage and guide future generations of leaders. Their presence in leadership roles on our campuses are important, however, with growing populations of Asian American students as well as other racial minorities. Female Asian American administrators who have been successful in attaining their roles and navigating their institutions offer unique insight into their leadership experiences and the meaning that they make from those experiences. By describing and exploring those experiences, this study has the potential to identify pathways and practices that may be useful in guiding future female Asian American administrators.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Literature around the lived experiences of female Asian American leaders in higher education is limited. This is in part due to the lack of representation within administrative positions in higher education institutions. In addition, many of the current studies on administrative diversity are centered around the experiences of Black and non-White, Hispanic leaders. Gender also adds another layer of limitations. The purpose of this literature review, therefore, was to explore the current body of research that can provide context to the multi-faceted ways female Asian American administers may experience their leadership. The organization of the review was structured around three main themes: the experiences of Asian Americans broadly in higher education, the experiences of female administrators of color with an emphasis on predominately White institutions, and systematic challenges for diversifying leadership in higher education.

Criteria for Inclusion/Exclusion of Articles

I made several considerations as I determined which articles to include in this literature review and which to exclude. Except when providing context for the history of racial minorities within higher education, articles were limited to the past 20 years to highlight recent demographics, conversations around race, and the ways that research on racialized experiences of ethnic minorities has evolved over time. I included articles that were focused primarily on the leadership experiences of racial minorities along with articles on the leadership experiences of women (including White women) in higher education. I did this because there is limited research specifically centered on Asian American women, and I wanted to give context on how gender adds another dynamic to how leadership may be experienced. Articles on the leadership

experience of students were primarily excluded to maintain a focus on the professional experience.

Asian Americans in Higher Education

In 2016, Asians represented 5.7% of the total undergraduate enrollment, reflective of their representation in the broader United States' population (Espinosa et al., 2019). They also represented the highest level of degree attainment of any racial category. However, numbers alone do not accurately represent the experience of Asians in higher education (Hune, 2011). This section discusses three significant themes highlighted in literature around the Asian experience in higher education: the concept of the model minority, examining the de-minoritization of Asian Americans with higher education, and the ways stereotypes present challenges and barriers.

Demographics and Representation

The American Council on Education (ACE) recently released their 2019 report on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education (Espinosa et al., 2019). As of 2017, Asians represent 5.7% of the United States' population. This is a 2% difference between 1997 and 2017, making Asians the second fastest growing racial group after Hispanic, non-White. Between 2009 and 2019, Asians experienced a 30% increase in its population and projections toward the future point to a continuation of this trend (Teranishi & Nguyen, 2012). It is important to note that in 2003, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders were given their own category and therefore while they were counted as part of the Asian group in 1997, they were not identified as an Asian American subgroup in 2017. Asians have the highest levels of degree attainment with 55.4% of the population having attained a bachelor's degree or higher. Asian students ages 16 to 24 were also more likely than any other racial group to enroll in an undergraduate program immediately

following high school or an equivalent competency. In 2016, 57.2% of the Asian population between the ages of 18 to 24 were enrolled in college. These numbers are particularly remarkable considering that historically, Asians represented only roughly 5% of the total undergraduate student population.

Shifting towards faculty, staff, and administrative representation, the numbers told a mixed story regarding Asian representation in higher education. In the fall of 2016, Asians comprised 9.3% of all full-time faculty across U.S. universities. The numbers were evenly distributed across the faculty classification of full, associate, assistant professors, and instructors or lecturers. Asian faculty members were also more likely to be employed at four-year public institutions. However, Asian representation plummeted to roughly 2% for administrative positions in higher education. Within cabinet-level positions, Asians were most likely to occupy roles such as Chief Information Officer or Chief Accounting Officer. When it came to the presidency, Asians only represented 2.3% of all college and university presidents across all institution types. They were more likely to be found at public, research institutions, community colleges and minority-serving institutions.

Asian American students also had the highest first-year persistence rates across all racial categories at both public and private four-year institutions. At a glance, some researchers and administrators concluded that Asians in higher education were doing well in these environments and, therefore, had been largely ignored in research, rendering them an invisible minority (Museus & Kiang, 2009). Since the inception of the term “model minority” and despite the perpetuation of the term in socio-political circles, researchers have worked to disrupt the narrative that reinforced stereotypical characteristics of Asian Americans such as superior intellect and deference to authority as reasons for the successes experienced by the group.

Although the perception as a model minority appears to be positive, it has had and continues to have a negative impact on the student experience for Asian Americans (McGee, 2018) as well as the faculty and administrative experience in higher education (Hune, 2011; Sy et al., 2010).

Myth of the Model Minority

Petersen (1966) first coined the term "model minority" when he wrote an article for the *New York Times* titled "Success Story: Japanese-American Style." Petersen described how Japanese-Americans were able to come back from internment camps and rebuild their lives despite having faced deep discrimination. He remarked on their achievement as a group in avoiding behaviors that validated the negative stereotypes that were thrust upon them, saying they were able to create and restore a more positive presence, in contrast to what he considered to be the unrulier behavior of the Black community. Peterson went so far as to say, "the Japanese-Americans are better than any other group in our society, including native-born whites" (Petersen, 1966, p. 21). It is important to note that this article, along with a handful of others, was published in the context of the Civil Rights Movement and used to contrast the behavior of one racial group (Asians) with another (Blacks) as a way to shame those in the Civil Rights Movement and argued that they did not need to use disruptive tactics in order to achieve success and equity (Manzano et al., 2016).

The concept was further perpetuated by Herrnstein and Murray in 1994 when they published the highly controversial book, *The Bell Curve*. Herrnstein and Murray (1994) contended that intelligence had both biological and sociological links and asserted that Asians were genetically predisposed to higher levels of intelligence. Though these were two of the most notable publications, ideological beliefs entrenched in the model minority can be traced through many sociological, cultural, and political influences (Kaibara, 2014). The term has since come to

encompass other Asian identities, particularly Desi Americans and East Asians such as Chinese and Korean.

This notion that Asians have proven that a group can overcome their initial stigmatization as minorities, whether due to genetic disposition or intentional effort, is a barrier to understanding the actual lived experiences and challenges that Asians face broadly throughout society and more particularly in higher education (Suzuki, 2002). More recently, new narratives are emerging that resist this stereotype and the oversimplification of Asian American experience, pointing out the "myth of the model minority" (Kamassah, 2010; Pak et al., 2014; Turner, 2007; Yamagata-Noji & Gee, 2012). Researchers who worked against the notion of the model minority argued that data needs to be disaggregated and that research attending to the lived experiences of Asians in higher education is essential (Hune, 2011).

One of the challenges of the model minority stereotype is that Asians, as a racial category, encompasses 48 distinct ethnic groups. The levels of educational achievement from dominant groups such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean and East Asian Indian, masked the more serious underrepresentation issues in Southeast Asian populations such as Cambodian, Vietnamese, Laotian, and Hmong (Teranishi & Nguyen, 2012). Findings from research conducted by the National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education showed that in comparison to their East Asian counterparts, Southeast Asians were more likely to attend community colleges, enter four-year institutions academically underprepared and leave educational institutions before attaining their degree (Pang et al., 2011; Teranishi & Nguyen, 2012). These Southeast Asian communities also demonstrated higher than national average poverty rates, which affect the types of resources and educational preparation available to them. Similar data also highlighted the disparity that Native Hawaiians and Pacific

Islanders experienced in regards to educational access and attainment. This prompted researchers to advocate for a distinction to be made between Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, which officially took place in 2013 (Hune, 2010; Teranishi & Nguyen, 2012).

These findings highlighted the problem of seeing Asians as a monolithic group. The belief that Asians as a group have achieved success, can dissuade research into their actual experiences, which has implications for policies at both institutional and governmental levels (Teranishi, 2012). One example was the establishment of the Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) designation as part of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007. This designation came decades after the identification of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSI) (Espinosa et al., 2019). Institutions designated as AANAPISI, HSI, or MSI become eligible to apply for federally funded grants. Thus, the delay in identifying AANAPISI institutions had also resulted in a significant loss of financial resources for institutions.

In response to the model minority rhetoric, some researchers actively pushed a counter-narrative. In an effort to demonstrate that the concept of a model minority is unfounded, authors and researchers worked to show that achievement numbers alone did not accurately reflect the Asian experience, resulting in identifying ways in which Asians are still lagging behind non-Hispanic white achievement and how Asians still experienced disparity and racial discrimination (Manzano et al., 2016; Ng et al., 2007; Suzuki, 2002). This response created the term “myth of the model minority.” Not all researchers, however, saw the myth of the model minority as a helpful narrative. Rather, another counter-argument has been made that the notion of the myth of the model minority was perpetuated for political purposes within higher education and was equally unhelpful in fully understanding the Asian experience (Sakamoto et al., 2012). A shift

has also been made to critique the more deficit-based approach found in the debunking of the model minority narrative and proposed a more nuanced approach that validated the challenges faced while also working to expose the contributions and strengths of the Asian community to higher education (Manzano et al., 2016).

The model minority stereotype profoundly impacted the experiences of Asians in higher education. It was in part responsible for the lack of inclusion in research exploring the needs of underserved and minoritized populations by rendering the population invisible due to perceived success (Museus & Kiang, 2009). Various studies articulating the experiences of people of color typically excluded or only marginally mentioned Asian Americans (Jackson & Harris, 2005; Johnson & Howard-Baptiste, 2017; White & Hollingsworth, 2005; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). The model minority narrative also pitted Asians against other minority groups, creating a false sense of competition for resources and recognition (Pak et al., 2014). It also continued to mask the discrimination that Asian students, faculty, staff and administrators face within their institutions (Museus & Kiang, 2009).

De-minoritization of Asian Americans

The de-minoritization of Asians and Asian Americans is tied to the perception of Asians as the model minority. It specifically refers to both the intentional and unintentional removal of minority status for Asians and assumes that as a racial group, they have achieved equality with Whites and no longer require special attention or support (Lee, 2006). In some instances, the removal of minority status also leads to a perception that Asians are over-represented in higher education. This de-minoritization negatively impacted the experiences of Asian Americans in higher education as well as the ways Asian Americans were represented within research.

Perhaps one of the most notable examples of the de-minoritization of Asians within higher education in the last decade was the *Students for Fair Admissions vs. Harvard* trial. The context for this trial stemmed back to conversations in the mid-nineties around affirmative action, a legislative policy designed to create greater access to higher education for underrepresented racial minorities. During this time, certain groups argued that Asians would be the group that most benefitted from the removal of race as a basis for consideration in the admissions process at elite institutions (Espenshade & Chung, 2005). However, further study confirmed that when test scores and grades held steady, White applicants were three times more likely to gain admission at elite or selective institutions than Asians (Espenshade & Radford, 2009). As a result, researchers posited that White applicants would continue to benefit the most from the removal of race as a consideration for admission. Despite this knowledge, rhetoric persisted that racial preferences were no longer needed in the admissions process due to the perceived success and over-representation of Asians (Park & Liu, 2014).

One study on Asian Americans in student leadership revealed the challenges faced when institutions "forget" that Asians have racialized experiences as minorities on campus (Chung, 2014). In this case study, Asian American students noted that their group was placed under the broader leadership umbrella rather than with other minority student groups. This led to several challenges. The Asian American students felt over-powered by the White student voices because they were the only minorities in their leadership group. It also put the Asian American student leaders in a situation where they felt a constant tension between the two groups and ultimately felt disconnected from both group. This culminated in a situation where the Asian American student leaders were accused of not supporting conversations about the racial climate on campus

because of their perceived absence. In reality, the Asian American student leaders were simply not included.

Finally, though Asian Americans continued to be underrepresented at leadership levels in higher education, they were often left out of studies on the leadership experiences of people of color, regardless of gender (Bornstein, 2008; Jackson & Harris, 2005; Mena & Vaccaro, 2017). Many institutions did not include Asians in their definition of ethnic minorities or underrepresented populations and therefore they were not represented in the sampling (Lee, 2006; Museus & Kiang, 2009). Other times, they were simply forgotten due to their now perceived over-representation.

Other Challenges and Barriers

Another recurring theme highlighted throughout literature was the "double-whammy" effect of Asians being seen as both the model minority and a perpetual foreigner (Lee, 2006; Ng et al., 2007; Suzuki, 2002). The concept of the "perpetual foreigner" refers to the notion that Asians are consistently perceived as non-American. While the model minority stereotype served to dispel the notion that Asians face any discrimination, the effect of the perpetual foreigner stereotype created in society an unconscious fear about the (potential) overrepresentation of Asians. This became harmful when individuals stepped outside of the expectations that the model minority created, particularly shattering the idea that Asians kept their head down, worked hard and did not make trouble which were all viewed as characteristics of their success (Ng et al., 2007). Subsequently, their complaints were either not taken seriously, completely dismissed, or generated a perception that they were attempting to cause a disturbance (Suzuki, 2002). These stereotypes worked against Asians who did not adhere to the stereotype, regardless of whether they were perceived as positive or negative.

While the model minority stereotype is used to demonstrate how a racial minority group can overcome challenges to achieve the same level of success as the dominant group, Asian students, faculty, staff and administrators continue to report both individual and systemic discrimination. In a study that took a quantitative look at student perception of campus culture by race, Asian students repeatedly reported experiencing more discrimination, whether by peers or faculty members, than their White counterparts (Ancis et al., 2000). Asian students were also "more likely than White counterparts to experience pressure to conform to racial and ethnic stereotypes regarding academic performance and behavior, as well as to minimize overt racial-ethnic group characteristics in order to be accepted" (Ancis et al., 2000, p. 182). It is interesting to note that in this study, only Black students reported experiencing more discrimination than Asian students.

Students and faculty have both reported a sense of stereotype threat as they navigated their educational and professional spaces, recognizing that their actions will either serve to reaffirm stereotypes or bring the consequences of stepping outside of perceived "acceptable" behavior for an Asian American (Chung, 2014; Hune, 2011; Schmader, 2010; Steele & Aronson, 1995). A recent study took a closer look at how even positive stereotypes can be harmful by examining the experiences of Asian students in the STEM field, where it was typically assumed that they achieved great success (McGee, 2018). Twenty-three Asian STEM college students were interviewed as part of a larger qualitative study, along with 23 Black STEM college students. The findings indicated that both positive and negative stereotypes had detrimental effects on students' mental and physical health. Here the perpetuation of the model minority stereotype was evident in the ridicule students received if they did not perform as well as expected and/or the dismissal of students' success achieved because the achievement "should

have come naturally." One student noted his classmate's response to receiving an 89 on a test, quoting, "This is like an Asian fail, right? Don't go jumping off a building or shoot yourself over it!" (McGee, 2018, p. 9). This sort of reaction to a stereotype, not the grade itself or even whether the student perceived the grade to be a failure, was what deeply affected the student.

In a four-year longitudinal study of undergraduate students across the US, Asian American students were found to be more likely to experience feelings of depression and were also more likely to perceive their campus climate as negative than other student racial groups (Cress & Ikeda, 2011). In the same study, researchers found that Asian American males reported higher levels of depression connected to a perceived negative campus climate. A positive correlation between levels of reported depression and perceived negative campus climate was found for both Asian males and females, though the relationship was slightly stronger for Asian males. This was concerning given the high levels of perceived negative campus climate found among Asian American students in other studies (Ancis et al., 2000; Chung, 2014) and demonstrated that while Asian students were persisting through to graduation, they may be experiencing serious struggles along the way.

Students were not the only ones facing challenging climates on college and university campuses. Hune (2011) used a secondary data analysis of qualitative studies to describe how Asian American female faculty experienced stereotype threat and discrimination in the classroom. The faculty voices described how students question their authority and expertise in the classroom because they did not fit the perceived (white and/or male) archetype of a faculty member. Even if the faculty member exhibited qualities associated with White men, they were still punished because then they were perceived as stepping outside of the expected norms for Asians. The study found the term "dragon lady" (Hune, 2011, p. 315) disparagingly applied

numerous times when the Asian female faculty presented themselves as professional and self-assured. The perpetual foreigner stereotype also affected how faculty members were treated regardless of whether the individual was native-born or exhibited an accent.

Concluding Thoughts

The experiences of Asian students, faculty, staff and administrators in higher education was deeply affected by the stereotypes that persisted around their racial identity (Pak et al., 2014; Suzuki, 2002; Teranishi & Nguyen, 2012). Regardless of whether the stereotypes themselves were perceived as positive or negative, they ultimately had a negative impact. The literature on the broader experiences of Asian Americans in higher education provided context to how female Asian Americans might experience one part of their identity in their leadership roles.

Female Administrators of Color

Students reported higher levels of engagement and a higher perception of campus support when they were able to see people in leadership who reflected their identities and lived experiences (Fincher et al., 2010; Maramba, 2011). Women of color, however, were underrepresented when it came to leadership roles within higher education. Preparing leaders from underrepresented identities for leadership roles, however, had challenges given that empirical data about minority and gender-based representation was limited and have produced mixed findings (Wolfe & Freeman, 2013). The low representation of Asian American female administrators, specifically, created challenges for researchers looking to conduct empirical studies. They were also often left out of the equation when discussing women of color broadly (Bornstein, 2008; Jackson & Harris, 2005; Mena & Vaccaro, 2017) and many institutions did not include Asians in their definition of ethnic minorities or underrepresented populations (Lee, 2006; Museus & Kiang, 2009). Therefore, this literature review included the experiences of

female administrators broadly and noted that there is an opportunity for more research to be conducted on the experiences of Asian American women in higher education leadership. For the purposes of this literature review, three main themes emerged: (a) the burden of needing to be exceptional as a leader, (b) how gender and race intersect to create a unique experience for women of color, and (c) the roles mentorship and fit play in attaining leadership positions and navigating these positions successfully.

Exceptionalism

When Jackson and Harris (2005) surveyed 43 out of the 59 available African American female college and university presidents, they found that a higher percentage of these presidents held a doctorate than any of their other White and/or male counterparts. One possible explanation is this indicated that these women were expected to accomplish more before being considered qualified for the presidency. In an autoethnographic approach, Howard-Baptiste (2017) gave a chronological account to how she was consistently set apart as "chosen" and exceptional (p. 169) throughout her educational career. This led to a fear that she would be "found out" and discovered that she was not as accomplished or special as others perceived her to be (p. 171). In similar fashion, then president of Pacific Union College, Knight (2011) described personal experiences of needing to envision and charter new and unknown territories. Throughout these reports was an undercurrent that women of color must do more than their male or White female counterparts, or "be exceptional," in order to be placed or seen in their leadership roles.

In contrast, Mena and Vaccaro (2017) found that the women of color in their study experienced pervasive feelings of invisibility and isolation at their predominately White campuses. The study employed a critical narrative ethnography to highlight issues of injustice

revealed through the stories of their participants. These women experienced invisibility professionally, interpersonally, and in their leadership through both structural and individual microaggressions. Being the "only one" was a reoccurring theme throughout the narratives of all of the participants (Mena & Vaccaro, 2017, p. 307). The women also described stories of being ignored and left out of invitations on both a social and professional level. Two women who had achieved senior-level leadership positions shared examples of how their leadership was ignored by those both above and below them in their hierarchical structure. One of the implications discussed by the researchers was the challenge women of color faced in being seen as leadership potential. The results of this study, coupled with the studies demonstrating the challenges of exceptionalism, shed light on how female administrators of color experienced a double-edge sword because they can simultaneously experience hypervisibility and invisibility in their roles.

Intersectionality of Gender and Race

There are a couple of foundational theories that are important to understanding the complexities of the ways women of color experience leadership. The first is Eagly's role of congruity theory of prejudice, which states

> that the perceived incongruity the female gender role and leadership roles lead to two forms of prejudice: a) perceiving women less than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and b) evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leadership role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman. (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 573)

Eagly established through decades of research that the perception of gender roles created a prejudice towards women taking on leadership roles and positions. The second is Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, which originally asserted that black women have a unique experience that is both similar to the experiences of black men and white women and yet is still "greater

than the sum of racism and sexism" (Crenshaw, 1998). The theory has evolved into the understanding that when people hold multiple marginalized identities, the intersection of these identities produce distinct encounters with discrimination. Intersectionality allows for a "both/and" approach to the literature available on leadership experiences outside of the White, male-centric perspective. Therefore, this next section gives a glimpse into research across leaders of color broadly and White women, while acknowledging how women of color may both embody similar experiences and embody their own unique experiences.

Arday (2018) spoke primarily to the racialized challenges of leaders of color through a collective biography. These leaders said they continuously face microaggressions connected to their racial identities. His participants were predominately men of color but did also highlight the experiences of a few women of color. One participant described facing consistent resistance to her leadership and the difficulty of being viewed as inferior to her White counterparts. Another highlighted the inability to separate the issue race and gender from their leadership experience. Each leader articulated the need to navigate these scenarios in ways that would not jeopardize their influence and positions because otherwise they would be seen as a threat to their White peers.

Haslam and Ryan discovered an interesting phenomenon now known as the "glass cliff," which was later affirmed by three empirical studies conducted by the pair (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). Haslam and Ryan first coined the term when they noticed that women were more likely to be selected for senior-level positions such as CEO or president when the organization was in danger of failing. They later conducted research showing that people preferred female leaders over male leaders when they perceived an institution to be in crisis. Unfortunately, an implication of this phenomenon is that these female leaders may then be perceived as

incompetent if the institution truly does fail, resulting in confirmation bias that women do not lead as well as men.

There is also a commonly-held belief that women resist pursuing senior-level positions without a great deal of encouragement or endorsement from others (Shepherd, 2017). Pulling empirical data from her doctoral study, Shepherd identified what she called "interesting and counter-intuitive gender-related findings" (p. 84) to speak against this belief. One of those findings was that women were equally as likely to hold aspirations and consider applying for a senior management position as their male colleagues. However, women were held at a disadvantage because they were more than twice as likely to be unsuccessful in attaining a senior management role. This led to discouragement and for some an abandonment of those aspirations. It also meant that it took women longer to pursue management positions, which affected their ability to achieve the highest echelons of leadership such as the presidency. Shepherd also identified other factors such as risk-aversion and geographical limitations that worked as barriers to the advancement of women into leadership positions in higher education thus ascertaining that agency and aspiration were not factors in regards to upward mobility for the group of women she studied.

Madden (2011) reviewed social psychological and organizational development literature to examine how gender stereotypes and leadership styles may impact how leadership is perceived in higher education. One notable correlation documented was how "competency" was viewed as a polar opposite to "friendliness." Less friendly characteristics (typically stereotyped as being male in nature) were viewed as competent when demonstrated by men in leadership roles. However, women who exhibited these same competency characteristics were viewed as less feminine, resulting in a different type of negative perception (Madden, 2011). Women can

also internalized these stereotypes, which created a perception that they did not see themselves as leaders. Those vulnerable to stereotype threat may also be persuaded to avoid leadership roles in order to take on more non-threatening subordinate roles (Davies et al., 2005). Studies like Shepherd's (2017) challenged this notion, however, by revealing that women may indeed have consistent aspirations to be leaders, though they may be less confident that they possess the necessary "competencies." Madden concluded that institutions needed to recognize the impact that gender stereotypes can have on the effectiveness of empowering more women in higher education.

One critique of studies like the ones mentioned previously is that they did not take into account the increased complexities of issues like this for women of color (Jackson & Harris, 2005; Kamassah, 2010; Turner, 2007). It was still worth identifying the themes that have appeared in these studies, however, because there are shared experiences regardless of race and implications for women of color that men of color may not experience. They also highlighted the additional challenges that women of color specifically face that their male, both White and non-White, and White female counterparts may not experience due to navigating experiences associated with the intersection of race and gender. Oikelome (2017) conducted one of the few studies that compared the experiences of White women and women of color in their journeys as college and university presidents. While they shared some common challenges such as a more restricted route to the presidency than men, they also diverged in their experiences as the White women rarely considered their racial identity when navigating their spaces. By comparing these experiences side-by-side, Oikelome helped demonstrate the need for research studies such as this one to consider intersectionality for female administrators of color.

Another study, conducted in 2016, more closely examined the intersection of race and gender (Rosette et al., 2016). It surveyed 180 participants across the United States, who were told that the purpose of the study was to examine people's perception of women of different races. Overall, Asian American women were viewed as intelligent, competent, and hard-working, as well as socially aloof and passive. In general, the stereotypes assigned to Asian and Black women were different from the stereotypes assigned to women as a broad category. The researchers theorized that in light of other well-established theories regarding leadership position, that the mixed perception of Asian women would have implications for the types of leadership positions perceived to be best suited for them.

Role of Mentorship and Fit

Another well-documented theme in the literature around female leaders of color was the benefits of and need for mentorship. Mentors were credited for both pushing individuals towards aspirational roles (Pyke, 2013) and providing on-going communal support to sustain women in their roles (Chang et al., 2014). While the benefit was clear, the role mentorship specifically plays was less clear. Women may be less likely to pursue mentors for the purpose of career advancement than men (Chang et al., 2014). Women did not consistently report that mentorship played a significant role in motivating them to pursue advanced positions, though, they did say that it played a role (Hill & Wheat, 2017). Additionally, there was a noticeable lack of women of color in top leadership positions who could serve as mentors for those who aspired to those positions (Chang et al., 2014; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Maramba, 2011).

One particular study examined mentorship among female leaders of color at a Hispanic serving institution (HSI) – this was notable because a bulk of the literature focused on mentorship among women of color at predominately White institutions (Tran, 2014). Though

there were similarities across contexts, Tran's findings demonstrated a nuance in the mentorship experience when women could find mentors who shared racial and ethnic identities. This qualitative study found that mentoring in this context could be summarized in the following four themes: (a) mentoring was not always visible, (b) mentoring was constant, (c) mentoring was self-initiated, and (d) mentoring was multi-dimensional.

Another study on mentorship conducted in the context of faith-based institutions revealed that the ability to "shadow" another female leader significantly reframed participants' own thinking about their leadership potential and aspirations (Longman & Lafreniere, 2012). Participants noted that they received insight into how things "really worked" and it was this tangible piece that was significant to their experience (p. 54). This finding was part of a larger mixed methods study looking at the advancement of senior-level female leadership across a set of institutions collectively known as the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities. The women in these institutions faced a different set of challenges related to theological and ideological barriers. Pulling themes across this spectrum of studies revealed similarities in experiences as well as how mentorship depended upon institutional contexts.

Finally, the importance of finding an institution that was a good fit was articulated as a significant priority for female leaders of color, particularly those who served as presidents. For the Black women in Oikelome's (2017) study, participants pointed to the notion of fit as both a strategy and reason for achieving their success. Each of the three female presidents in Turner's (2007) study, who were considered firsts for their campuses, were situated at institutions that reflected their own cultural backgrounds. The congruence that these women found not only served to mitigate some of the challenges they faced in predominately white spaces, they also allowed the women to pursue opportunities that reflected the ways they had hoped to make a

difference through their role. Presumably, this factored into the persistence of the female presidents in their positions. Institutional fit may not be the only consideration, however, as Mena and Vaccaro (2017) found implications in their narrative study that institutions also needed to consider the community and environmental fit around them as they considered successful retention efforts for female administrators of color.

Fit is often used in reference to an individual's acceptance within an established system and/or culture. Fit can also be used in describing how an institution and its surrounding community matches an individual's desired outcomes both personally and professionally. Perhaps one of the most surprising finds was to see geographical trends identified in recent research. First, female administrators of color were not only more likely to be found in specific institution types (e.g. two-year, public, minority-serving, etc.), they were also more likely to be found in particular regions of the country, namely the West Coast and the South (Flowers & Moore III, 2008; Shepherd, 2017; Turner, 2007). Institutional fit, specifically but not limited to campus demographics, demographics of the surrounding areas, and the institutional commitment to diversity and change, was also important for women of color as they considered their pathway to presidency (Oikelome, 2017; Turner, 2007). One participant in Turner's (2007) study articulated that while they were sought after for top leadership roles, their commitment to their partner's career held them in one geographic location until their partner neared retirement. This notion was affirmed by another study, pointing to the ways family responsibilities play in women's decisions to pursue advanced roles (Pyke, 2013).

Mena and Vaccaro (2017) found that the women of color in their study experienced intense feelings of loneliness in their roles. These feelings extended into the communities and environments outside of their campuses as well. One participant noted, "we feel socially

isolated" (p. 309). Another participant referenced the difficulties faced when living in an area with few minorities, lacking easy access to basic services such as restaurant and grocery choices, hair salons, and resonant places of worship. These instances, combined with on-campus systems and culture, all contributed to a deep sense of isolation and invisibility among participants. Mena and Vaccaro (2017) recommended that institutions not only address internal environments but also take into consideration surrounding communities when looking to recruit and retain women of color.

Concluding Thoughts

Due to the low numbers of female Asian American administrators at institutions of higher education, this literature review examined the experiences of female administrators of color broadly. It was also evident that the literature available primarily consisted of qualitative studies. A couple of notable exceptions included a study looking at the factors predicting the pursuit of administrative positions among Asian American faculty (Gin, 2013) and another study looking at the glass ceiling effect, also among Asian American faculty (Lee, 2002). It is important to note, however, that these studies utilized a larger representative group of women of color in higher education and were not limited to those in leadership roles. There have been other attempts at quantitative studies, most notably one aimed at discovering the career path to presidency of African American women (Jackson & Harris, 2005). The study was able to achieve a high percentage of respondents, but the overall number of available participants was still limited. So, while the themes found in this section may serve as launching points in understanding the experiences of female Asian American administrators, the gap in literature indicated there is still a great deal of room for more research.

System Constraints in Diversifying Leadership

While institutions recognize benefits in having diversified representation in top leadership positions (Fincher et al., 2010; Hohamad Karkouti, 2016), even those with progressive equal opportunity policies continue to have difficulty recruiting and retaining underrepresented leaders (Pyke, 2013; Shepherd, 2017). Earlier sections addressed the challenges that people of color and women of color face in overcoming stereotypes and the negative consequences they experience when stepping outside of what others may perceive as acceptable behavior for their gender and/or race. These challenges carried implications for institutional hiring practices as well for the available pathways to leadership for men and women of color (Arday, 2018; Gin, 2013; Joslyn, 2018; Sagaria, 2002; Sy et al., 2010; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015; Yamagata-Noji & Gee, 2012).

Some researchers chose to focus on the individuals themselves in order to identify lived experiences and find implications that can inform system changes needed to diversify the administrative landscape, while others chose to look at organizational systems themselves. Many of the latter also took a critical approach to their studies. In particular, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and critical feminist theories were frequently utilized in these studies as frameworks for analysis. Critical theories were useful in identifying dynamics of power and how power was negotiated in ways that maintained said power with a dominant group (Kincheloe et al., 2018). This final section of the literature review focuses on key system constraints within institutions that may prevent the placement and advancement of underrepresented ethnic minority leaders.

Leadership Prototype

In an examination of internal system constraints, one of the dominant themes was how a perceived archetype of leadership dominated and persisted within an organizational culture. Lord

is credited with first articulating the concept of leadership prototype as an organizational leadership theory and the likelihood of people being assigned into leadership roles based upon how closely they followed the culturally-accepted prototype (Lord et al., 2002). There have been several studies, predominately within the field of organizational leadership, that have built upon Lord's work that demonstrated how the prototype was typically seen as White and male. Two researchers merged implicit theory perspectives and a role congruity framework and found in a two-part quantitative, experimental study that people's pre-disposition to believing that human attributes are fixed can predict the level of gender-bias evaluation of women in authority (Hoyt & Burnette, 2013). A group of researchers looked at leadership in the reverse and found that people more closely associated the role of the ideal follower with the female gender role (Braun et al., 2017). Another group of researchers worked across four studies and demonstrated that organizational roles, and specifically universal leadership traits, were more strongly associated with those from a White-majority group (Gündemir et al., 2014). Their findings also indicated that these associations were at least partially implicit and unconscious.

Also, specifically in building upon Lord's work, a group of researchers based in public four-year institutions across California looked at the function of race when it came to occupational fit for Asian Americans. In a survey of 131 business undergraduates, students were told they were participating in a study on personnel decisions and given four vignettes: Asian American engineer, Asian American salesperson, White engineer, and White salesperson. They found that Asians were preferred for engineering occupations while Whites were seen as better suited for sales positions (Sy et al., 2010). They found a belief in the racial stereotypes that Asians are more socially reserved, passive, and technically superior served as dominant factors in the preferences. In the function of leadership, participants preferred Whites in both

occupational roles. Similarly, in looking at gender stereotypes, researchers found that female leaders were negatively perceived when they demonstrated expected gender traits as well as when they demonstrated traits and characteristics outside of their gender norm (Madden, 2011; Shepherd, 2017).

Fit and White Sanction

An older study in 2002 examined how models of filtering impacted administrative search processes at one particular institution. The notion of "fit" became an identified theme that was pulled from participants' reconstruction of their job interview processes. In particular, fit had three main properties: (a) fit included a sense of whether others both within and outside of the institution would accepted the candidate, (b) fit did not replace competency but it did serve as an added requirement that was judged by individually and internally defined criteria, and (c) fit served as a code word for appropriate cultural capital (Sagaria, 2002). It was particularly present in the valuative filtering stage (the point in the process where behavior, leadership style, and image were taken into consideration), which is where issues of cultural bias became most prevalent.

In cross-examining the experiences of female presidents of color, there was evidence that their career paths to leadership positions such as the presidency were more difficult than their male, White counterparts (Bornstein, 2008; Gasman et al., 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2005; Shepherd, 2017). Oikelome (2017) found that women needed to follow traditional and academic paths to the presidency, contrasted with research indicating more male presidents come from non-academic or non-traditional backgrounds. Leaders of color were also more likely to be placed into positions considered to be "dead-end" positions in higher education such as Chief Diversity Officers or other affirmative action roles (Bornstein, 2008; Gasman et al., 2015).

Bornstein (2008) found that women were more likely to be pushed into longer career tracks due to first pursuing professional occupations rather than academic positions, attending to family responsibilities, and/or being passed over for promotion. In looking at choice within career moves, this elongated career track proved to be a strong motivation for women to discontinue their pursuit of top leadership roles, even if they might have desired further advancement at one point in their career (Pyke, 2013).

The lack of administrative diversity within institutions can also be seen as racial homogeneity perpetuated by historical precedence. Park (2018) used a framework identifying four interlocking elements of climate first developed by Hurtado et al. to take a look at the power and impact of historical legacies of exclusion within historically White Greek life. She used a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate how racial exclusion can occur without any formal policies affirming it. Indeed, it can even occur when members insisted on a "color blind" ideology and practice. The unspoken legacy became embedded within culture, along with the notion of "fit," and assumed archetypes.

A study based in England examined the idea of "white sanction" in the hiring and promotion of individuals within a broad-spectrum of institutional types. Although the study was based outside of a U.S. context, this study still carried relevance because of the shared cultural similarities between the two countries. "White sanction" can be defined as "having to gain endorsement for progression, [and] promotion from White colleagues" (Miller, 2016, p. 6). Several participants in this study specifically referred to White colleagues as "gatekeepers" and articulated the need for these colleagues to advocate on their behalf in order to progress within an institution. Miller (2016) compared and contrasted this lived experience with the belief in meritocracy that persists within Western education.

Concluding Thoughts

There is a lack of research that could bring race and gender into the mainstream discourse of institutional leadership (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). While the lack of administrative diversity can be seen as an issue, typically the approach is to view this as inherently the responsibility of racial and ethnic minorities to overcome. Neilson and Suyemoto (2009) provided one example of how shifting researchers' cultural lens can lead to a very different result in the pursuit to understanding about how to recruit and retain leaders of color. They produced a richer understanding around the motivations of Asian Americans in their pursuit of leadership roles when they shifted their interview questions to consider cultural frameworks. Critical theory also gave a different insight into how power is managed within institutions and more specifically to how power is maintained. Shifting these perspectives yielded much different understandings, which in turn impacted practice. The findings discovered thus far by scholars can offer institutions insight into the challenges that women of color face within predominately White institutions, both internally and externally. However, more research is needed in order to better understand the nuances.

The purpose of this literature review has been to explore the current body of research offering insight into the multi-faceted ways female Asian American administrators may experience their leadership. The exploration highlighted challenges and barriers that Asian Americans and female administrators of color face both within an institution as well as challenges and barriers that persist in broader society. It has also revealed that literature is limited when it comes to the actual lived experiences of female Asian American administrators. It is this gap in research that this study intended to address.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Phenomenology served as the methodological choice for this study into the lived experiences of female Asian American administrators in higher education for several reasons. First, because it prioritized participants' voices, research such as this has the potential to shed light on an underrepresented and misunderstood set of experiences that may be shared in common by those who work in similar spaces. Phenomenology also accommodated two priorities for this research: cultural responsiveness and a critically-grounded call for change.

Phenomenology has its roots in the philosophical thinking of Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche (van Manen, 2016). Phenomenology emphasizes the importance of the lived experience as the human ability to become conscious of experiences and make meaning of those experiences, which constructs reality. Therefore, if we are to understand the reality of a phenomena, then we need to see it through the eyes of the participant as they live it and make meaning from it.

As noted in the literature review, there have been a great deal of assumptions made in regards to the experiences of Asian Americans in higher education due to cultural perceptions. There is a need to understand how female Asian Americans administrators experience higher education, particularly in predominately White institutions, as voiced by these leaders themselves. We should not deem a minority population worth studying only if they are struggling, nor should we study successes as a means to shame other racial minorities. Van Manen (2016) argued that phenomenology requires the researcher to remain in awe of the very thing she or he is studying, rather than trying to objectify the experience for other purposes. This is the very essence that this study attempted to preserve: to ensure participants' experiences stand on their own merit simply because they have experienced it.

Elements of critical research were also incorporated in this study for the purpose of understanding how these lived experiences fit within and further revealed a larger system that perpetuates the on-going misrepresentation and under-representation of female Asian American leaders in higher education. Kincheloe et al. (2018) wrote, "critical research can be best understood as research that attempts to create conditions for empowerment and social justice" (p.237). Critical phenomenology seeks to uncover the hidden past that shapes the ways in which particular people groups make meaning of their experiences (Guenther, 2020). It expands on Merleau-Ponty's concept that understanding and perception is formed by integrating a historical record of experiences, also known as body schema, in order to understand how gender and racial schemas are formed and negotiated. Critical phenomenology also struggles for "liberation from the structures that privilege…certain experiences of the world while marginalizing, pathologizing, and discrediting others" (Guenther, 2020, p. 15). In service to the Asian American community that aspires to leadership within higher education, this study leaned into a framework that addressed the system(s) as part of our deeper understanding and worked to challenge readers of this study to enact change.

Participant Selection

Participants for this research were identified through purposive and snowball sampling that were based on several identifying characteristics: Asian American who self-identified as female, non-international, holding a dean role or above at a predominately-White institution (also referred to as a PWI) and who indicated a willingness to participate in a study such as this one. An email was sent to higher education professionals who were known to the researcher, asking for volunteers who either fit these characteristics or could recommend others who fit the study

parameters. Five women, ranging from dean-level roles to vice presidents, responded affirmatively.

The characteristics listed above were selected with purpose. While in popular culture, Asians can be lumped together broadly, it has been noted that research in higher education makes the distinction between those who identify as internationals, those who identify as immigrants who have taken up permanent residence, and those who identify as second-, third-, fourth-, fifth-, etc., generation Asian Americans. This study sought to understand the lived experience of primarily the latter. This study also identified those in formal leadership positions rather than working with a broader concept that leadership can be embodied regardless of title. This decision was made in order to provide a unified baseline for understanding the experiences of the participants. As referenced earlier, Critical Race Theory (CRT) points to the systemic influences that reify these formal positions as the property and right of White people to hold. This concept became particularly evident in studies like Sy et al. (2010) where pervasive stereotypes of Asian Americans shape the perceptions of leadership fit. Finally, the selection of Primarily White Institutions (PWI) as the setting for leaders' experiences was due to the fact that often times Asians are seen as having achieved equal status with Whites (Park & Liu, 2014), which in part contributes to their de-minoritization. As a result, this study sought to explore how then might female Asian Americans describe experiences of their leadership in settings where there is a perception of achieved equality.

Data Sources and Collection Procedures

The nature of data in qualitative research can seem ambiguous in comparison with data collected in quantitative research because the information given is subjective in nature and, depending on the context of the study, is not meant to be generalized (van Manen, 1990). Neither

is it wrong to consider that which is collected through interviews and observations as data and to point to van Manen (1990), who goes back to the original Latin meaning of the word "datum" as something that is "given" or "granted." It is in this context that data is evident in the experiences life "gives" us; participants indeed "grant" the researcher something in sharing their lived experiences.

Interviews

Interviewing was the primary form of data collection for this study because "at the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth" (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). This connects to the reasons phenomenology was chosen as the best methodology for this study. Interviews also bring the researcher as close to the lived experiences of the participant as possible by removing the need for a data-collecting instrument; the interviewer/researcher becomes the instrument (van Manen, 1990).

This study used a semi-structured interview protocol in keeping with the principle intent of phenomenology: to uncover the meaning that participants make of their lived experience (van Manen, 2016), which demands flexibility for participants to dictate direction in interviews. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was crafted with specific considerations given to elements of an asset-based approach (Harper, 2010), culturally-responsive layout (Neilson & Suyemoto, 2009), and ethical design that balanced the desire for knowledge with the use of the knowledge to promote human welfare (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). After conducting the first phase of interviews, I adjusted the protocol for phase two and phase three based upon the direction of the participants' responses and the relevancy of the questions.

An informal pilot of the interview questions was conducted prior to the start of the study in order to learn how participants might respond to specific questions and to how they might

respond to the researcher as a self-identified Asian American female (Glesne, 2006). As a result of conducting this informal pilot of interview questions, I was able to see how my participants may give me less details in their responses because they assume a shared understanding and experience. Therefore, I made a note to pay attention and asked follow-up questions that prompted my participants to fully describe their experiences. This proved to be helpful throughout the process as questions for clarification led to deeper exploration in some instances.

Seidman (2006) established the three-interview series in order to explore in-depth both the participants' lived experiences as well as the meaning they assign to those experiences. The following describes this process:

1. Interview One – The goal of the first interview is to uncover a focused and detailed history in light of the topic being explored. Participants are asked to reconstruct their early experiences into present day. Interviewers are encouraged to frame their questions around "how" as opposed to "why" in order to prevent the participant from speculating at this stage.
2. Interview Two – The second interview pulls out the concrete details of the participants' current lived experience. Again, the interviewer will need to avoid opinion and speculation and is tasked with guiding the participant to reconstruct details and put their experiences into context.
3. Interview Three – This is the stage where the interviewer asks participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences. In particular, the participants will be asked to make intellectual and emotional connections between their work and life.

While working to stay true and respect the structure, I employed a slight variation of the three-interview series by incorporating a focus group in place of the third set of interviews.

Focus groups can especially useful when exploring a new domain because it allows for participants to engage in lively exchange that can reveal more robust, varying viewpoints than individual interviews alone (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This method also accommodated the desire to take into consideration the communal culture that many Asian Americans embody, believing that a culturally-responsive designed study will yield richer data (Neilson & Suyemoto, 2009).

Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, and Zoran (2009) make a number of recommendations regarding best practices while conducting focus group interviews. In particular, they mentioned a need for a moderator team. Due to privacy concerns around participants' identities, I opted to conduct the interview myself, without a partner. The use of a synchronous online platform also created a different dynamic that both mitigated and created concerns. For instance, the use of an online platform decreased the amount of body language and physical interactions between participants. This both allowed for me to focus more on spoken content and also resulted in potentially lost non-verbal data. In the end, four out of five participants were able to participate in the focus group and I conducted the fifth participant's third interview in a one-on-one setting.

The three-part interview also provided challenges regarding timing and timeline for completion. Seidman (2006) recommends ample time between interview phase so that the participant has time to reflect on their experiences. I was working with a particular timeline in order to complete the study for the purpose of graduation so I had to modify the timing between each individual participant's interviews while still maintaining the space for reflection. This was helped by the timing of when I conducted the interviews whereas the semester break provided a natural pause between phase one and phase two of interviews. Therefore, phase one interviews

were conducted in mid-December 2019 and phase two interviews were conducted between early-to-mid January 2020. The final focus group interview was conducted in late-January 2020.

Synchronous Online Interviewing

The interviews took place by offering participants the option of choosing between technological platforms, such as FaceTime, Google Hangout, Skype, or Zoom, allowing for greater flexibility to access participants across regions while preserving the ability for the researcher to respond to non-verbal cues such as facial expression and body language throughout the interview. Beyond the essential element of building rapport between researcher and participant, these elements are especially important when working with people from high context cultures (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The ability to access participants across regions was also important in enabling me to protect the identity of each participant given their scarcity in the field. In preparation for the interviews, I took into account the need to practice and familiarize myself with the platform so that I did not unnecessarily disrupt the atmosphere crafted for the interview (Salmons, 2015).

Zoom became the preferred method for interviewing because it provided the option of recording both audio and video, which facilitated transcription. This allowed me to upload the audio recording into Otter. Otter is committed to keeping data private and secure and provides a detailed privacy policy. Data was synchronized over an encrypted connection and explicit permission is required for Otter to use any recorded conversations for training and development purposes. This program was ideal because it allowed me to personally work with the transcribing of each interview, giving me greater familiarity with the data and an ability to refine my interview style as I went (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Maxwell, 2005). The video recording also

allowed me to go back as needed to note participant's non-verbal cues and reactions (Erickson, 1986).

Researcher's Notes

Heuristic inquiry advocates for including analysis of the researcher's own experiences as part of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I maintained notes as I conducted the interviews as a way of creating rich, thick descriptions of participants' non-verbal expressions and reactions that provided additional context for analysis. Notes regarding observations of the participants' demeanor and other relevant details were documented. I endeavored to record notes regarding my own reactions and critical reflections as close as possible to the conclusion of each interview. This allowed for me to continuously engage in the process of bracketing and refining my interview procedures.

Analytic Memos

Analytic memos were an additional place for me as the researcher to "dump" my observations and reflections into a written document (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). They served as an audit trail for me to document the decisions that I made regarding the study as I moved through the process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While I went through transcribing the individual and group interviews, I also took time to create analytic memos of emerging themes as well as to note my own personal reaction to the participants' stories. I also found memos useful early on in the development of the study to begin bracketing and to map out how I visualized the study. Saldaña and Omasta (2016) also suggest that if writing is thinking, then writing memos becomes a form of analysis. Memos served as another source of data and provided trustworthiness and credibility in the study.

Data Analysis

The goal of phenomenology is not to make a diagnosis or to offer a theory. Instead, the purpose is to bring awareness and understanding of the "the essential meaning of something" (van Manen, 1990, p. 77). Therefore, data analysis in a phenomenological study such as this one is going to look different from other methodologies. The goal for the researcher is to get as close to the experience and the meaning assigned to that experience as possible (van Manen, 1990). The product (this study) was aimed at providing a composite description that allowed the reader to gain a sense of the "essence" of the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As the primary researcher for this study, I came to an understanding that the process of data analysis was not a simple, compartmentalized, step-by-step process. Maxwell (2005) observed that researchers oftentimes use multiple strategies in their analysis but only coding is mentioned in publications. He emphasized that writing memos, listening to recordings, transcribing, reading transcripts and observation notes, analyzing narrative structure, and so much more are all part of data analysis. I found that my own process of data analysis was an iterative process, like the one described by Maxwell, with significant overlap with points of data collection.

As a result, I intentionally engaged in the process of analysis from the beginning of data collection. Early on, I began analysis by bracketing my own experience, creating an audit trail for the methodological decisions informing this study, and writing memos on my conceptual framework and researcher's background. In the reporting of the findings, I made assertions that I followed up with thick and rich descriptions that came from either my analytic memos or the participants' words (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). The next section articulates three specific approaches I used for analysis.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis, as van Manen (1990) described it, is the process of recovering the theme or themes embedded in the experiences and the meaning participants make of their experiences. This is what gives researchers proximity to the essence of the phenomenon. Discovering and developing themes serve three particular purposes in this study:

1. Provide a process for insightful interpretation and discovery.
2. Maintain a constant sense of openness.
3. Provide a vehicle for the description of the sense we make of the phenomenon being studied. Van Manen (1990) described this as giving "shape to the shapeless" (p. 88).

The process of thematic analysis began with listening to the recorded interviews, transcribing, and then reading the transcripts. Rather than waiting to go through this process once I am finished with all my interviews, I began the process after I completed each individual interview. During this time, I made observational comments (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016) and wrote memos on themes that I saw developing within each participant's interviews and ultimately across all the participants' experiences. I eventually had to make decisions on which themes were incidental to the phenomenon and which themes are essential. Van Manen (1990) provides a good guiding question for when I approach this stage: "Is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete the theme from the phenomenon?" (p. 107). I also had to make decisions on which themes were specific to the individual participant's experience and which themes were relevant across all five participants. This was an important consideration given the priority of preserving the individual voice of each participant.

Horizontalization and Coding

An important component of thematic analysis was deciding on how would I isolate thematic statements. I chose to take two approaches: a wholistic or sententious approach and the selective or highlighting approach (van Manen, 1990). To do this work, I utilized two specific tools: horizontalization and coding.

Horizontalization is the process of laying out all the data for examination and treating all the data as having equal weight (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This dovetailed well with van Manen's (1990) holistic approach to data analysis. Since all parts of the data are considered to be of equal value at this stage, even non-repetitive parts can be linked thematically, which can in turn provide a fuller description. This process incorporated aspects of imaginative variation as I embraced a posture that allowed me to look at the data from multiple angles and perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This proved important because I was able to identify a couple of specific themes that were only mentioned once but were significant to creating a fuller picture of the participants' experiences.

The second part of the process involved coding. More specifically, I utilized in vivo coding, which is the process of lifting and utilizing a participant's own words as analytic units. This involved looking for words or phrases that stood out or that felt particularly salient to the participant in their own re-telling or emphasis of their experience (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). I chose this particular form of coding because it aligned with a critical approach, which aims to elevate and preserve the participants' unique voices. I also employed emotion coding to help me analyze the themes. However, I leaned heavily on the participants' own words.

Member Checks

Since staying true to the participants' own understanding of their experiences and process of meaning-making is essential, it was important for me to employ member checks before

presenting the final study. The goal was to assess whether my analysis "rang true" for each participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I offered each participant three options for member checks: (a) review of individual vignette that included demographic information, (b) review of a basic transcript, and (c) review of the analytic narrative vignette that provided my analysis of their experiences. Only one participant responded to my offer and opted to review their analytic narrative vignette. I saw this as an indication of participants' busy schedules and a passive form of approval. I still sent a copy of their individual vignette to each of the participants regardless whether or not they requested it. I invited their feedback on three things:

1. Did I accurately portray your experience?
2. Did my interpretation of your experiences "ring true" or do "justice" to your experience?
3. Do you have any objections or additional comments?

Although I only had one participant actively choose to review their analytic narrative vignette, I still proactively sent them out to each participant. Due to their busy schedules, I created a scenario where they had to "opt out" rather than needing to "opt in" to do the member check. Due to the importance of member checks for analysis and establishing credibility, I tried to demonstrate that I made a concerted effort to reach out to the participants.

Role of Researcher

Qualitative research pushes the researcher to recognize their own role within a particular study since it works from a constructivist assumption that knowledge is co-created (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; van Manen, 1990). Critical research also recognizes the importance of articulating the positionality of the researcher because of the emphasis on examining power and recognizing that power dynamics always exist between researcher and

participant(s) (Kincheloe et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). As a researcher, I recognized that I bring my own set of assumptions, beliefs, experiences, and biases which makes it impossible to maintain complete objectivity.

Ultimately, I have to acknowledge that complete objectivity is not possible, nor is it the goal of a qualitative study. Rather, I must go through a constant process of uncovering my subjectivity in order to identify where that subjectivity may be influencing the study both negatively and positively (Peshkin, 1988). I approached this study with my own experiences as a female Asian American, the knowledge that I have gained in being in community with other female Asian Americans, and the perspectives I have gained working as a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) officer in higher education. All of these components have the ability to influence how I interview participants, the way participants respond to me, and ultimately how I perceive and interpret their experiences. In order to strive for transparency and authenticity, this next section details my efforts at bracketing my experiences and pre-conceived notions as well as personal reflections related to my background and how I came to this research.

Bracketing

Bracketing is defined as setting aside one's assumptions in order to allow a participant's voice to come through in the analysis (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). This is an important part of identifying the researcher's role and researcher reflexivity in the study (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Peshkin, 1988; van Manen, 1990). Peshkin (1988) argued that a researcher can never fully eliminate bias, therefore, they should engage in an ongoing process of uncovering assumptions and reflecting on personal reactions and emotions to reveal any unconscious bias. This reflexivity, in turn, is important to substantiating trustworthiness and credibility.

Part of my bracketing process is evident in recognizing the conceptual framework that I bring to this study, as detailed earlier. The next two sections go into greater detail how I have used bracketing to recognize my experiences, background, and role all have an impact on the way I conduct this study. To summarize, I recognized that my identity as a female, Asian American, fellow educator and higher education professional who has been identified as a "rising leader" all have an impact on the ways I approached and conducted this study. It has influenced the selection of my topic, the selection of my methodology, the selection of literature for inclusion/exclusion in the study, how I developed the interview protocol, and it influenced my analysis of data. Therefore, bracketing became an ongoing process as I proceeded with the study.

Researcher's Background

The drawing upon personal description of the researcher's own lived experiences gives them an ability to see the possibility that their experiences may also be the possible experiences of others (van Manen, 1990). It can serve as a launching point for orienting the researcher to the phenomenon to be studied. There is a "both/and" quality when incorporating the process of describing personal experiences and then bracketing them that can enrich a study.

In light of this understanding, I want to take time to briefly recount my own identity and experience in higher education. I identify as a female Asian American. I am 1.5 generation; while I was born in Hong Kong, I find that I relate more closely to the experiences of those who are second-generation Asian American. I can recall early childhood experiences of having to daily navigate two different worlds: one at home where the primary language spoken was Mandarin and the cultural expression was Chinese and the second at school where I attempted to fit into the American culture around me. This continued as I grew older and became adept at

code-switching, not only as an act of alternating between two languages but also as an act of moving between two very different cultural expectations.

Professionally, I have worked in higher education at faith-based, private, liberal-arts institutions for over 16 years. Each one of my institutions would be considered predominately White. I began my career working as a residence director. I also have experiences in student activities, new student orientation, student conduct, student government and leadership, service-learning, Title IX, and multicultural affairs. After my time as a residence director, I began to move through various leadership positions including serving as an associate director, director, and ultimately an associate dean. In my thirteenth year, I was identified as a "rising leader" and given the opportunity to participate in a program designed to train and empower professionals for upper administrative positions.

How I Came to This Research

There are a handful of key experiences that I can identify as influencing both my decision to pursue the topic of this study as well as the orientation that I bring to it. The first has been my personal journey through professional experiences. In high school I found myself often placed into leadership positions. This was no different once I entered college and eventually entered into my professional career. In reflecting on my experiences, what I find interesting is that each time I had to be encouraged to pursue those positions. I did not naturally envision myself as a leader until much later into my career. In my reflections, I can also see that I had very few female Asian American role models to who I could look. While I cannot say that one is the result of the other, I have to ask myself if there is a connection. Even as I began to see myself more as a leader, I often had a hard time finding a mentor who can speak to some of the unique paths that I had to

navigate as someone who carried a double-minority status along with the baggage of being either hyper-visible or forgotten because it was assumed that I was doing "just fine."

The second key experience is a pivot that I made five years ago to work as a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) officer. My role on campus was to support students of color and to ensure that our systems and policies were inclusive to historically underrepresented and marginalized student groups. My exposure to student stories deeply pained me as I heard about the multiple ways our systems were failing our racially and ethnically diverse students. Those same stories also allowed me to see the strength and resiliency that these students demonstrated.

The third and final key experience has been my own spiritual formation as an individual. I have come to see that my own ability to make meaning of my life is tied to the work that I do to bring justice to those who experience oppression and to bring healing to those who hurt. A pivotal work that has underpinned the ways that I see this world is Walter Wink's (1998) *The powers that be: Theology for a new millennium*. In this book, Wink argues that personal, spiritual redemption cannot be seen apart from the redemption of the social systems and structures in this world. This framework ultimately became helpful in my understanding of Critical Race Theory and its implications for the work of justice.

These three experiences shaped and guided my dissertation journey. I understood that they impacted the way I collected and interpreted data for this study. Therefore, it has been important to give voice to these experiences and to acknowledge the role they played in this study. As the trends in student demographics shift and the need for administrative diversity becomes more urgent, part of my hope is that this study can contribute to the body of literature in higher education identifying successful practices and pathways for more diverse leadership.

Trustworthiness and Validity

An important consideration for this study is that the aim in a qualitative method such as phenomenology is not to produce proof but to demonstrate plausibility. This means I have worked to ensure the believability that participants said what I am reporting they said (Erickson, 1986). Unlike quantitative studies, the credibility or validity of the study is not based on whether the study can be replicated but rather on whether the results reported are consistent with the data collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Trustworthiness is in part established by conducting the research in an ethical manner and is in part based upon establishing validity, both of which should permeate throughout the entire study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). While ensuring unquestionable validity and reliability is not possible, researchers have identified key strategies for increasing the validity of a study and I chose to focus on three for the purposes of this study: member checks, researcher positionality and reflexivity, and maintaining an audit trail (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2006).

Member checks were both an important part of both data analysis and generating validity for the study. As mentioned in the section on data analysis, member checks were attempted prior to the final presentation of this study. I reached out to participants for their affirmation that my interpretation and description of the results was in keeping with their understandings and meaning-making of their experiences. While I did not receive the engagement I had hoped for, I made sure that I provided enough opportunities for each participant to give their feedback.

The researcher's role and reflexivity were components that are important enough to a critical phenomenological study that I dedicated a section to them earlier in this document. Therefore, I will not reiterate the details here but I do want to highlight that part of its importance is in again providing evidence of validity. Reflexivity is described as the process by which the

researcher works to understand how they impact the study and how they are in turn impacted by the study. The goal is to become conscious of the ways my positionality can affect the study and then to leverage those influences in a positive way (Maxwell, 2005).

It was also important in this process to recognize and document the decisions that I made throughout the study. This included details from how I selected my topic to which interview questions I chose and ultimately how I decided on which themes to focus my attention. To this end, I kept an audit trail and recorded my thoughts and experiences as analytic memos as I moved through the process. Maintaining an audit trail is the best way to demonstrate how and why I arrived at my results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and informs the process of researcher reflexivity.

One final note is to address the subjects of generalizability and data saturation. Though it is widely recognized and accepted that a small-scale phenomenological study is not meant to be generalized to a wider population, Maxwell (2005) made a distinction between "internal" and "external" generalizability. He referred to internal generalizability as the ability to generalize within the setting or group studied. Therefore, tools such as member checks, analytic memos and audit trails help demonstrate evidence for internal generalizability in the process of creating awareness of the essence of the shared phenomena. Maxwell (2005) also highlighted a concept articulated by scholar, Judith Singer, called "face generalizability." This refers to the notion that there are not any obvious reasons to believe that the results could be apply beyond the setting or group studied. This can then serve as a launching point for the development of a theory that can be extended to other case studies of other female, Asian American leaders.

Data saturation is another marker that has been used in order to add to the validity of a study. It was first defined by Glasser and Strauss in 1967 as reaching the point where no new

data is found that could add to the properties of a particular category (Saunders et al., 2018). It was used particularly in reference to the grounded theory methodology. Saunders et al. (2018) stated when research moves out of the realms of grounded theory that there are three other categories of data saturation that emerge: (a) inductive thematic saturation –the emergence of new codes or themes; (b) a priori thematic saturation – the degree to which identified codes or themes are exemplified in data; and (c) data saturation – the degree to which new data repeat what was expressed in previous data. For the purposes of this study, I leaned into the definitions of inductive thematic saturation and a priori thematic saturation.

Ethics

Ethics demand consideration of how to protect each participant and ensure the reliability of the study. As mentioned earlier, ethics also help provide evidence of validity in a qualitative study. Therefore, I worked to follow all codes of professional, ethical and personal conduct. In addition to standard protocol, such as protecting the identity of all participants, I have also addressed the issue of the commodification and colonization of the participants' experiences. This next section will give details regarding specific actions that I took throughout the study.

I ensured that each participant had the ability to make informed consent. Since we were addressing issues of leadership in their respective work, I wanted to be sure that my participants understood the potential risks involved and the ways that I was attempting to protect their identity. Rather than relying on a one-time consent release, I asked participants at the beginning of each of their interviews whether they still consented to being recorded and reminded them that they were able to rescind their consent for participation at any point throughout the process. The informed letter of consent also articulated the anticipated shelf-life of the data as well as how it is stored. Due to the synchronous online nature of the interviews, other considerations that were

taken into account include clearly articulating the type of equipment needed, what measures will be taken in protecting participants' identity in cyberspace, and their awareness that I will include observation of their facial and body expressions as part of data collected (Salmons, 2015).

Due to lack of representation for my participants, it is possible that they may be the only person carrying their unique identity serving in their role at their institution or even in their region. Therefore, I limited the amount of geographical and institutional demographic information offered while still preserving the reliability of the study. I also used tools such as aggregating data and writing composite narratives (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). I also used pseudonyms throughout the entire process in order to ensure that the identities of each participant are protected. This meant I used their pseudonym in the labeling of documents and went through their transcripts to redact their personal names and inserted their pseudonyms instead. The only materials containing their true names are in the original raw video/audio files and their original letters of consent. The pseudonyms were chosen and assigned by me. Each name reflected an Asian American female student leader who I have had the privilege to work with and was used with their consent.

Finally, I want to note the historical ways that research around Asian Americans has been used against them. The image of the model minority has been used to drive a wedge between racial minority groups that can still be felt today (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ng et al., 2007; Petersen, 1966). Also, in spite of a culture that believes in meritocracy, research has been used to limit the admittance of Asians into elite schools (Espenshade & Chung, 2005; Espenshade & Radford, 2009; Park & Liu, 2014). This has led to those with a particular racial agenda to use the Asian community as an unsuspecting agent in removing race as a consideration for admissions (Park & Liu, 2014). Data around Asian American accomplishments further served as rationale

for de-minoritizing Asians and ignoring the challenges that come from stereotypes and lack of representation within leadership roles in higher education.

Raising awareness is the first step in addressing the commodification and colonization of research done in the Asian American community. As a researcher, I am conscious of the ways that research has been done by people in positions of power under the semblance of reform (Seidman, 2006). This is one of the primary reasons for choosing critical phenomenology as the methodology for this study and will further conduct the research in a way that serves and promotes the Asian American community.

Chapter Four: Findings

I aimed to gain a deep understanding of the lived experiences of the five female Asian American administrators who participated in this study. In keeping with the critical framework of the study, my analysis took into account the power systems set within the predominately White institutions where they each worked. I also aimed to preserve the unique voice of each participant while simultaneously connecting the meaning present within their shared experiences. These goals guided decisions, from the development of the interview protocol to which themes deserved attention. The flow of this chapter is structured around the primary research question and four sub-questions:

1. What is the lived experience of female Asian American administrators in within predominately White institutions?
    a. How do female Asian American administrators define their leadership style?
    b. How do female Asian American administrators understand their leadership in light of their racial/ethnic and gender identities?
    c. How do female Asian American administrators navigate notions of power on predominately White campuses?
    d. What aspects of their experiences do female Asian American administrators identify as significant to their success?

Early in the first phase of interviews, one of the participants reminded me that as a researcher, I could easily tokenize her experience, even if that was not my intent. I state this as a reminder for readers to maintain a perspective that recognizes the depth of meaning held in each individual's lived experience in the midst of seeking meaning across collective experiences. This is also the reason I chose to divide this chapter into two primary sections. The first gives an

analytical narrative vignette of each individual participant (Erickson, 1986) and the second section provides a cross-case analysis of all five participants' experiences.

General Demographic Information

The following table provides general demographic information for each of the five female Asian American administrators in this study:

Table 1. Demographic Information about Participants

Name:	Years of Experience:	Institutional Role:	Institutional Type:	Division:	Racial/Ethnic Identity
Eve	12	Dean	4-year, private	Student Affairs	East Asian American
Loveleen	15	Associate Vice President	4-year, public, research	Student Affairs	East Asian American
Rachel	23	Vice President	4-year, private research	Student Affairs	East Asian American
Stephanie	20	Associate Dean	4-year, private	Academic Affairs	Southeast Asian American
Tiffany	25	Dean	4-year, private, research	Student Affairs	East Asian American

The individual geographical locations are not disclosed in order protect the identities of each participant since many are the only female Asian American administrator at their level in their region.

I individually assigned pseudonyms to each participant in order to maintain their anonymity. As I considered culturally appropriate pseudonyms to use, I thought of using the names of female Asian American students whom I have mentored. I reached out to each student to ask for permission to use their names. Their enthusiastic, affirmative response reminded me that the ability for students to see themselves in leadership narratives was a large part of the reason I wanted to conduct this study.

Analytical Narrative Vignettes

This first section is a compilation of my interpretive perspective of the individual participants' leadership experiences (Erickson, 1986). I have the privilege of sharing identities with the participants, which gave me particular insight into their lived experiences. I recognize that personal experience can serve as a starting point for phenomenological study (van Manen, 1990). I also acknowledge that this is part of where the boundaries of research can get unfocused as I worked to avoid superimposing my experiences on their stories. However, being aware of my own experiences has allowed me to discover important ways of orienting my analysis and meaning-making (van Manen, 1990). I found this to be an iterative process as I examined, paused to reflect, asked questions, and examined again. Each time I found myself resonating with a participant's response, I paused and wrote a memo of my personal experience and reflection. The thought process caused me to ask different questions about the participant's experience and gave me a different lens to look at the data before me.

The five women in this study are a small part of a small population since female Asian Americans make up less than two percent of upper administrative leadership within higher education. These women have courageously shared their stories, even as they sensed and voiced concern about whether their participation would pose a risk to their careers. They have shared with me their personal journeys and professional challenges. In order to honor them, I have made intentional decisions to protect their identity to the best of my ability throughout their narratives. I also have worked to intertwine each participant's personal voice with my explanation of how these women have experienced living as female Asian American leaders in predominately White systems and spaces.

Participant One: Tiffany

Tiffany was the first individual to respond to my request for participants. I was very excited because she was known to me within my field and was seen as a trusted leader among many colleagues. Tiffany was a seasoned professional and I knew that capturing her experiences would be important given her length of time in higher education. Though she was quite busy, Tiffany made it clear to me that she was enthusiastic about participating and consistently made herself available for the three-part interviews. When we first signed into our virtual meeting space, I could immediately feel Tiffany's energy and warmth. I could tell, however, that it had been a long day for her since she was just then sitting down to eat her dinner in her office (which she apologized for but I believe that helped contribute to the natural, informal flow and banter of our conversation). Tiffany's sharp wit came through as she narrated her experiences with humor, authenticity, and vulnerability. I found it difficult to refrain from jumping too quickly into the meaning-making phase at times because her insightful reflections often sparked my curiosities.

In our first interview, I sensed that there would be a number of times where I could see parallels, not only within my own experiences, but also across the participants as well. Tiffany recounted how an administrator from her alma mater called and convinced her to take on a newly developed position at the university. Considering that she was not looking to leave her job at the time, there was a sense in Tiffany's narrative that she finally agreed to apply and then accept the position out of respect for this particular administrator and a desire to do work that was meaningful and impactful. The result was that what she imagined would be a small detour in her work experience turned into an entire career transition.

In this first higher education position, Tiffany did good work. She built an entire department, created programs that still exist at the university, and refined infrastructures that empowered others. This was the context for how Tiffany understood her leadership at the time.

> I don't know that I ever was like "Oh, I'm a leader." I think it was like "Oh look, I'm good at what I do." I think that was more of "I'm good at this." I was a workhorse and I got stuff done but I don't know that anybody called me a leader or I saw myself as a leader. I think I saw myself as someone who did good work (Tiffany, 12/5/19).

This mentality of "doing good work" would continue as Tiffany shifted into positions at other institutions. She continued to build programs and departments. In looking back, a hallmark of Tiffany's work was her ability to develop systems and people. A pivot in her work came as Tiffany began to encounter the stories of students of color at the predominately White campuses where she worked. These interactions spurred Tiffany to do a deep exploration into her own racial and ethnic identity as well as try to identify the reasons her students were experiencing challenges and barriers. As a result, Tiffany shifted her focus in higher education to diversity and equity work.

I perceive that it was this shift where Tiffany began to receive conflicting messages about her leadership. Tiffany developed an understanding that people held certain expectations of her due to the ways they perceived her racial and gender identities. In her new roles, Tiffany started addressing campus culture and institutional systems that she viewed as barriers to marginalized student populations. However, the same drive that she exhibited in building programs were now causing her to be viewed by others as a problem when she channeled that energy into advocating for her students. She also experienced an undertone conveying it was not simply that she was challenging systems but that she was an Asian American woman challenging systems.

> It was actually when I was at [institution #2], where I started realizing that you hired me, an Asian woman, to come into the space because I really feel like you thought I would just be okay with the status quo, like, I'm not gonna ruffle any feathers. I will do my job and we'll get stuff done. We're worker bees and hard workers but we are not necessarily seen as leaders. So, I think they just thought they hired a worker bee. I think for me when I really started realizing or perceiving that me being an Asian leader was a detriment to my ability to be seen was when I realized who they were promoting. I started realizing you have to be a certain type of Asian for [them] to like you, to commit to you, to elevate you. That's the moment I realized I'm the wrong type of Asian. So it used to be like at one point, it was like "oh, because I'm Asian" and like, you know, "he just doesn't see me as a leader" and he doesn't want to promote me. No, I'm the wrong type of Asian (Tiffany, 1/9/20).

This proved to be an on-going point of tension for Tiffany as she gained a deeper sense of who she was as a leader. Her experiences led me to believe that people hired her to "do good work" and for her ability to develop programs and people. However, those same people made particular assumptions regarding what good worked looked like. Tiffany's experience was that institutions expected she would check the diversity box, put on some programs for students, and quell any issues that arose. The institution's definition of "good work" did not include assumptions that she would ask difficult questions or make suggestions about how to do things differently. She described one account after another where supervisors challenged her to be more authoritative as a leader but then expected her to be submissive when she advocated for change. Tiffany's experiences highlighted an important element regarding the intersection of how she was perceived as an Asian American female leader coupled with the work she was expected to do in

the roles that she held. The perception that Asian women are hard workers and submissive created negative consequences for Tiffany when she found herself in positions where doing a good job meant challenging the status quo.

> Something that I think is important part of this narrative is that I was pretty much set on never setting foot in higher education again. After my last institution, just realizing, "Look, I've been doing diversity work for 17 years. And if I'm going to be seen as problematic, because I actually do my job (I'm supposed to be creating a different climate on campus, which means you have to challenge power. You have to challenge structures and you have to challenge the privileged ways of knowing and doing and thinking) but if I'm going to get in trouble for that, for doing my job, what is the point of doing diversity and equity work at an institution? (Tiffany, 12/5/19).

In one particular instance, "doing good work" meant that Tiffany did ultimately lose her job. I have chosen to avoid recounting the details she shared with me in order to maintain her confidentiality, but I can share that this was an emotional point in our conversation. She had worked hard to maintain her integrity in doing the right thing and was punished because she was expected to keep her head down and do what she was told.

> It was one of the worst experiences but also the most telling experiences I ever had of how stuff can work in higher ed and how power and positionality and privilege play out. But it was a choice. We make these choices every day. I don't regret my choice. I mean, I don't like the way I was treated, but I don't regret my choice because I feel like I left with integrity. So, I know I did the right thing…and I lost my job over it (Tiffany, 1/9/20).

These experiences deeply shaped Tiffany's perspectives on leadership and the lenses of equity and accountability that she believed were important for leaders to possess. In her second

interview, Tiffany made a comment regarding how rarely she has seen courage demonstrated in leadership. This stood out to me because I see an incredible amount of courage in Tiffany as she has navigated the conflicting messages she has received regarding her own leadership style and weathered the negative consequences of pushing against what is expected of her as a female Asian American leader. Even as she spoke of the lack of courage in the leadership around her, I sensed that she did not perceive her own courage due to the negative messages she had received over the years.

Participant Two: Eve

Eve had responded immediately when I first began to seek participants. She and I had previously crossed paths in our professional settings so I was excited for the opportunity to learn more about her journey as a leader. Prior to our interviews, my impression of Eve was that she was incredibly strategic, intelligent, thoughtful, and had a no-nonsense style to her leadership. As we began our first interview, I noticed that it was the end of the work day and she was still sitting in her office. This made me wonder about how often she stayed to work late or if she was there merely because it was convenient. The walls of her office were painted in cool, inviting colors that projected a sense of calm. Behind her, there was a piece of art that stated, "Be Strong and Courageous" that I recognized to be a biblical reference. Her confident yet careful response to my first question showed me that she was nuanced in her thinking and in her approach to her leadership. Eve gave me a great deal of context to what could have been a very short and direct response, a fact that I immediately appreciated given that this is how I also communicated. Eve's style also meant that I did not need to prompt her much in order to receive detailed descriptions of her experiences, which allowed us to go deep in a short amount of time. As we moved through

the interviews together, Eve's candor and willingness to process openly stuck out to me as courageous and inspiring.

Eve articulated early on that her career path in higher education was a result of finding a job that combined two things that she cared about: ministry and education. She recognized that, in addition to a student's spiritual formation, she also wanted to shape and form the whole person as an integrated being. The story of how Eve found her first job in higher education intrigued me as it gave me insight into how her identity as an Asian American woman "closed certain doors" for her and shaped her path.

> I went to seminary because I wanted to learn more. And I was kind of thinking through or running through different possibilities [for jobs] and the institution that I was from, and even some of my background in the church that I was working for at the time had very particular views of women in ministry, and so that closed a lot of doors actually, for me. I was actually at the end of my first master's degree. I was very open to whatever that could be, because it probably wasn't going to be in certain positions. And then this job popped up. I started looking at the job description every day during midterms and one of my friends was like, "maybe you should just apply" (Eve, 11/25/19).

Eve did not move around a great deal throughout her 12 years in higher education. The position that she was in at the time of this study was only the second one that she had held in those 12 years. As we spent more time together, I came to see that Eve carried a strong sense of responsibility to her communities and this extended to the campuses where she worked. That responsibility kept her in place long after she had lost personal fulfillment in her position. I perceived this sense of responsibility was deeply influenced by her upbringing within her ethnic heritage. In fact, out of all the participants, Eve made the strongest connections around how her

cultural upbringing influenced the ways she lived out her leadership style. I wondered if this is because she was the only participant who articulated being a third-generation East Asian American immersed in a specifically Asian American community during her youth.

Throughout her story, I saw specific instances of her own consciousness around how her ethnic identity made her different and how it directly impacted the ways she experienced leadership. Eve's earliest experiences in leadership made her consciously aware that her phenotype as an Asian American woman would influence how others perceived her as a leader and this continued to trend throughout her professional career. She gave multiple examples where both male and female authority figures felt threatened, either by the work that she was doing or a message she was giving. One example occurred early in Eve's life while she was working at a church. A male leader chastised Eve when she tried to offer help in organizing an event. As she processed the situation, she decided that, in the male leader's mind, administrative skills must have been equated with power and so she was viewed as a threat. Though she attributed these experiences to the ways that people interacted with her identities, she also recognized that she could not always be certain why people had such strong reactions to her, which is part of what made her work exhausting.

> I'm part of the message, I guess. On a day-to-day basis, I'm not always sure which thing is triggering another person, right? I don't know if it was that I just wasn't who [they] expected me to be. Or is it because they don't expect that from an Asian woman? So, part of it is a game. You're trying to identify with each person that holds power that you work with like, "what is their trigger?" And how do I lessen that trigger, so that I can be strategic about playing up something else so that you can receive what I am trying to

> offer to you, right? I'm actually trying to figure out what their triggers are. And the bottom line is, I'm just not actually what people expect me to be (Eve, 12/10/19).

There was a poignant moment in our second interview as Eve was telling me about all the scenarios that her mind plays out in any given situation. Suddenly, she stopped, looked at me, and blurted out, "Am I making you tired?!" We both began laughing because we understood the unspoken burden that came with carrying the mental load of having to navigate these circumstances with such caution. It was a meaningful connection to know that this was a shared experience.

I could see, however, that this same burden also made Eve highly effective at her work. I could tell that she was incredibly strategic and adept at making things happen. According to Eve, her team calls her "the queen of seed planting" referring to the ways that she deliberately drops ideas and maneuvers situations so that they organically unfold with the desired outcomes. She acknowledged that things do not always pan out but that does not prevent her from consistently putting forth her best efforts to present her work and her team with excellence. Interestingly, Eve appeared resign to the fact that she may not be able to make wide-sweeping changes to systems but was determined to continue influencing where she could. As she described the process of "seed-planting" in a couple of separate instances, I observed her strategic mind at work and recognized that it required a certain amount of subversion for Eve to be effective. This specifically played out when Eve described the process of setting up regular meetings with her institution's president. She recognized that she could not outright ask to be put on his calendar because it would be perceived as "too bold." So, instead, she found reasons to meet with him and then ultimately suggested to him that she found these ad-hoc meetings useful and "wondered" if it would be helpful to meet regularly.

This work has also taken a toll on Eve during the course of her career. After only a year into her current role, she told me that she already felt exhausted. She had stepped into the position because she trusted the community around her and they told her that this was the right move for her to make. She also understood that female Asian Americans rarely held positions like the one she currently held. She indicated a heavy sense of responsibility as she mused,

> I actually felt the responsibility of being an Asian woman. I did ask myself, "can I really say no to this job?" My colleagues, we've talked about how people of color don't get offered these positions or promoted or moved into these positions. So once the position got offered, it was like, "Well, are you willing to do your part and step into it?" What is the cost and is the cost worth it? And so, I submitted to that (Eve, 11/25/19).

Even as I ended my time with Eve in our second interview, I sensed that this was an on-going negotiation for her. Her tiredness was palpable and I saw it even in the midst of the smiles that did not quite reach her eyes. For her, there was an immediate sense of tokenization that happened when she stepped into her current role and it seemed to come with the territory. She confirmed what I felt as she spoke of her feelings of loss and sacrifice when she tried to fit herself into the picture of leadership that she sensed others had for her. It was evident in her narrative that she had arrived at a place of understanding that her style as a leader did not match how others perceived her female Asian American identities. She wondered what she had lost in reflecting on how her authority figures prevented her from growing more fully into her capacities both in her past and in her current situations. I found myself wondering the same things for her and with her.

Participant Three: Loveleen

I was introduced to Loveleen through a mutual colleague who had received my email asking for participant referrals. I first began to get a sense of the scope of Loveleen's leadership responsibilities when I worked with her administrative assistant to schedule her interviews. She was an incredibly busy person and I felt humbled by the fact that she was still making it a priority to participate in this study. Our virtual meeting space was the first time I was able to interact with Loveleen face-to-face. She struck me as polished and her presence was both unassuming and commanding at the same time. Within a few moments into our first interview, I also experienced her kindness and collegiality. Her responses to my first questions regarding identity also indicated to me that she was well-versed in the work of equity and inclusion. As she shared with me the scope of her responsibilities, my initial impressions around the magnitude of responsibilities were confirmed as I listened to her rattle off the myriad of elements of her job description.

Loveleen began her tenure in higher education in a manner that felt familiar given that I had heard similar stories articulated by others both within and outside of this study. She started college with the aspirations of pursuing a different career path but pivoted after being introduced to the world of student affairs through on-campus jobs and the student leadership positions that she held. I took note that these experiences were also coupled with mentorship by administrators who recognized her capacities and intentionally invested in her on-going development. Loveleen's professional résumé encompassed a vast range of positions and institutional types. I could see that Loveleen possessed a deep internal drive and knew how to get things done, both of which she later confirmed with her own words.

> A lot of it is just me, that's who I am. I am a very driven person. I am very achievement-oriented. I'm the person who tries to do the right thing, a person who believes in what we're doing. I'm not really great at sitting still.

This mentality has served Loveleen well; she is someone who can build systems and structures and who can accomplish a great deal with what she is given. In some situations, she was not given very much but she still managed to turn meager resources into something much more substantial. In one instance, she explained,

> So, I spent two years as a GA (graduate assistant) in [that office]. I got tremendous experience there because the office was so small at that time. It's quite robust now but when I was there it was a director, myself (a .5-time graduate assistant), and another administrative support person and that is a very thinly staffed [office] for the size of that institution. So, I got a lot of what I would label as kind of "assistant director level responsibilities as a GA (Loveleen, 12/17/19).

In another position, she described,

> Ended up getting the role and then within three weeks of being hired, it was converted to a full-time position. So, I guess I was like, "Okay, we're back to working full time." Within eight months, I had been promoted to an assistant director level position because my experience was not at all entry level (Loveleen, 12/17/19).

Others have also helped her identify that these are skillsets that she possessed and developed over time. Consistent with other participants, the skills came naturally to Loveleen so she did not always see how it made her unique or the effort that she put in to sharpen those skills.

There has been an added pressure placed upon Loveleen's leadership as an Asian American woman who has successfully attained high level leadership positions at predominately

White institutions where there are very few, if any, who are like her. Her role coupled with her identities made her highly visible, both on and off campus. Loveleen recognized that she always needed to put on a public face because she never knew when someone might recognize her and how she was perceived by the broader community had a direct impact on her work. This public face entailed an understanding that as an Asian American woman, she was more likely to be perceived as rude or cold if she was not mindful of her actions. This was a consciousness that she needed to possess at all times and if she let it slip, it could have tangible, negative consequences.

> The challenge is that is I never get to take it off in public. I'm just never allowed to be "off" if that makes sense. I have to wear it all the time. It's omnipresent. My voice never gets to be just Loveleen. I'm exhausted. Battle fatigue is very real…very, very real. And I actually had a moment, like three days ago where I was not my best self. And now I've been kicking myself for it. And I wasn't even rude. I was just direct. And what I'm finding with the level of visibility of my role is that people know me even if I don't them. They're watching me (Loveleen, 1/17/20).

I also saw throughout Loveleen's experiences a tension between how she defined her own sense of leadership and the ways that people's perceptions of her as an Asian American woman influenced her leadership development. She exuded confidence as she described her accomplishments and her development as a leader. There was a depth and nuance as she recounted the ways that she had been treated as an "other" and how meaningful mentorship from trusted individuals helped her to find words to name her experiences. She also demonstrated a posture as a learner; she not only learned from others but delved into theoretical frameworks around power and privilege. I believe this is in part how she came to understand that her phenotypical presentation linked her effectiveness as a leader to people's perception of how she

"should" act as an Asian American woman. I also wonder if it is this drive to be effective that also makes it possible for her to sit in the tension and bend her leadership style without breaking it into something that does not accurately represent her identity.

> (*Referencing the stereotypes around Asian American women who are silent and submissive*) I am none of those things. And I think people perceive me as even bolder than I probably actually am because they're overcoming a stereotype. And I think that's a really critical component of who I am, but I'm also a pretty collectivist leader. And that was not something I developed on purpose. I wish I could say that I did but it is something that I think has evolved for me over time. Because I want to say this in a way that makes sense without being too overgeneralizing: women of color are not allowed to lead from a power command leadership style. We're not. I am real darn direct and that is one of the things that people don't expect from me based on my identities (Loveleen, 12/17/19).

This tension and nuance have also given Loveleen a heightened understanding of how her experience could be tokenized in a study such as this one. I saw this idea of tokenization versus representation take shape as soon as I heard Loveleen articulate it. She coined it as a "double-edge sword," articulating the emotions she experienced when having to juggle the need for representation in the spaces she occupied and the difficulty of losing your experiences and identity as yours, alone.

> I don't think that I can pull apart my Asian American-ness from the many other parts of who I am or my woman-ness from any other part of who I am. And so, I think it's important to tell stories from an identity perspective, and also acknowledge that identity perspective has the potential if not done well to tokenize our positions, right? I think

> these stores are extraordinarily important and how we make meaning of our leadership, and how we're seeing, how we're not seen, specifically how we're not seen. I just think about it a lot in terms of how much value should I be putting in my overall identity and how much value should I just be putting on me? (Loveleen, 12/17/19).

I am grateful that Loveleen possessed the ability to both make meaning of her own experiences, while also seeing how those experiences might situate her in a study like this one.

Participant Four: Rachel

Rachel and I had a relationship prior to her participation in this study. I realized early on that this could introduce complications to her being a participant but given her length of experience as a leader in higher education, I felt that our relationship should not automatically preclude her from participating. When she accepted the invitation, I was thrilled that her experiences could be captured and help inform a deeper understanding for this study. In our first interview, I raised the potential complications and articulated my researcher's curiosity while reminding Rachel that she possessed full control over what she chose to share with me for this study. To the best of my knowledge, I received an authentic picture of her experiences. I sense our relationship buoyed our rapport and allowed us to go deeper more quickly. In watching Rachel's posture and body language, I could tell she was being thoughtful in her responses and our conversation flowed easily. One of the things that I deeply appreciated about Rachel was her positivity, which came out even in the focus group interview as I watched her encourage, affirm, and uplift the other participants.

Even though I was familiar with her story, the uniqueness of Rachel's journey in higher education still surprised me as I analyzed it alongside other participants' experiences. She has spent all 23 years of her professional career at the same institution. She started in an entry-level

position and was promoted through the ranks until she achieved the high-ranking position she held at the time of this study. A few times, she applied for specific positions but most of the time she was thrust into new and higher roles. It stood out to me how many of her titles contained "slashes," such as Associate Dean/Director of Student Activities. When I asked Rachel to reflect on this, I took note of how proud she was in the fact that each time she moved out of one of these slash positions, the university created two full-time positions to replace the work she had been doing on her own. In her opinion, this was a compliment and affirmation of how hard she worked in those positions. She was also quick to acknowledge, however, these experiences could be interpreted differently.

> Whether it's good or not, I felt good about the work I did. It gave me the confidence, right? I have the ability to do two people's jobs and do it well so that I could articulate the value of it, so much so that they have to make it into a full-time [role]. Maybe I am a born sucker who would do a lot of work for nothing but I never saw it as a negative thing. For me, getting the experience was a compensation but that opened doors for [other] experiences.

Rachel was also quick to articulate that she knew her path was not normal. This led me to wonder what experiences allowed for her to have such a unique journey. I recognized that Rachel was the only participant in the study who experienced the privilege of having another female Asian American administrator mentor her throughout her career. This mentorship was deeply important to Rachel and evident in the ways that she continuously referenced her mentor's perspective in forming her own identity as a female Asian American leader. It is noteworthy that that Rachel still had to drive two hours each way to see her mentor.

Rachel's progression of roles and who she had as a mentor were not the only things that made her unique among the five participants. She was also the only one who articulated the development of her identity as a leader as primarily a positive one. I see the connection could be that Rachel exhibited many of the characteristics her institution valued and expected from her. In response to one of the questions asked, she described her ability to produce outcomes as a highly valued skill. It was evident in her experiences that Rachel's work ethic produced the outcomes expected by those in authority above her.

> (*Referencing an earlier experience as a leader in high school*) There was a drive in me that wanted to be in a spot where I was leading. I had this desire to be in a position where I was helping people from a position of authority. So I worked harder than any of them. I showed up earlier. I stayed later. I ran as hard if not harder and looked out for others who may be struggling (Rachel, 11/25/19).
>
> (*Referencing her current work ethic*) I worked my tail off to make sure that what I was producing was quality. I would bust my butt to get it done. I was able to build my own reputation and people knew me for the work I did (Rachel, 11/25/19)

I cannot help but wonder if this work ethic was in part driven by a need to prove herself and to convince others beyond any doubt that she has earned her place as a leader. This idea of exceptionalism is common in the experience of other women of color (Jackson & Harris, 2005; Johnson & Howard-Baptiste, 2017; Mena & Vaccaro, 2017).

In spite of a mostly positive experience, Rachel still had her share of being challenged by stereotypes or viewed by others as a threat because of her racial and gender identities. Early in her career, one her male colleagues told her that if he and Rachel were to compete for a promotion, Rachel would get it because she was Asian and she was a woman. Rachel said this

made her furious. Earlier in the interview, Rachel shared that her mentor had advised her to never allow herself to be a victim of other people's biases. I wondered how this piece of advice influenced the way she internalized her colleague's comments about competing for a promotion. Did these two specific instances come together to reinforce her drive to achieve and prove that she has earned every title given to her? In another instance of conflicting advice, another colleague repeatedly encouraged her to speak up more. A different mentor helped her frame her own perspective about this advice and wondered if perhaps her thoughtful silence is what prompted others to listen more closely when she did choose to speak. These experiences appeared to help Rachel foster a confidence in her own leadership style.

There was one small moment that came during the focus group interview where I could see that there was more to Rachel's positivistic approach to leadership. While it was evident that she had developed a deep confidence in her leadership over time, she was not immune to the constant messaging she was receiving about how female Asian American leaders are perceived.

> So, that tension, I think, I feel it and being one of the few persons of color in the leadership level that I'm in, I do feel the responsibility. And yeah, so that tension, gets…if I reflect on it…it's exhausting. And maybe I don't reflect on it enough. But maybe that's part of my coping skills is to just keep on moving. So that I don't have to because it's too much if I sat down and started reflecting or if I sat down with Tiffany and started talking, probably I could be balling in a few minutes, you know. We'll both be crying kind of thing. So it's one of those "no, it's better to suck it up and go" which probably is… no, not probably, it's not the most healthy thing, and I recognize that. But it's my coping skills that I have to lean into at times just because I don't have time for it (Rachel, 1/28/20).

Though Rachel only mentioned this sentiment once, it was significant. It juxtaposed the perspectives she had shared with me in the first two interviews that we had and gave me better insight into what is happening beneath the surface as she navigated those spaces of leadership. I noticed the tension in her pauses as she appeared to be processing aloud, revealing a comradery that she shared with the other participants.

Participant Five: Stephanie

I was connected to Stephanie through another colleague who had received my call for participants. Through the initial introduction, I learned that Stephanie's role reported through academic affairs, which was different from the other participants who all reported through student affairs. When she said "yes" to participating in this study, I felt grateful because I anticipated her experiences could give distinctive insight. My first impression of Stephanie was that she wore her power well, both literally and figuratively. She wore a light grey blazer that looked tailored and polished. I noticed that her office had neutral-colored walls, matching cherry-wood furniture, and, aside from her diploma and a small plant, lacked personal affects. She was personable and also firm when she let me know that she had a "hard stop" at the time allotted for our first interview. I could tell she shared this information with me as a way to respect and maximize both of our time. It also gave me insight into her schedule and the way that she structures her time.

Since we did not have a connection prior to our first interview together, I spent a good amount of time in that first interview learning about Stephanie's journey in higher education. Like other participants, she did not imagine herself working at a college or university when she first started as an undergraduate student. She was introduced to a career path when she took on a part-time job at her alma mater to help pay for school. She really enjoyed seeing the professional

side of the education process and found herself becoming more involved as she pursued her own degree. One of the things that I first noticed in her story is that she consistently referenced the fact that she still had not made a decision to make higher education a life-long career. She was very much interested in other industries but found herself continually gravitating back into higher education positions. Later I learned that her curiosity spurred her to regularly ask whether she was exercising her full potential in higher education. I could see throughout her experiences that Stephanie intentionally made job decisions based upon opportunities that opened to her, challenges that would utilize her skillsets, and the ability to make a significant contribution. This might help to explain the variety in types of positions, experiences, and institutions that Stephanie has had throughout her 19 years in higher education.

While Stephanie did not use the term "hard worker" to describe herself, her strong work ethic was evident throughout her narrative. She consistently took on positions in functional areas that were new to her and built systems and infrastructures where either none existed or were broken. She had the ability to see the connections and transferable concepts that helped her design whatever system she was in the process of building. Stephanie's ultimate goal in each scenario was to provide better service to students and create stable environments for her teams.

> And so I think those fundamental understandings and I think also being more attuned to how university functions enable me to take on this new position that I've never done. There was no infrastructure, and the community, the university itself didn't really realize what the office really function as…really didn't use the office in the way that I think it was expected and they should have. So, for me, I felt like it was a learning opportunity more than anything. Understanding more how university works as a whole at a policy

> level, as well as affecting change, I was able to use all that to develop this office at this institution (Stephanie, 12/19/19).

The breadth of her experiences gave Stephanie a nuanced understanding of leadership and yet I could also see conflict within her understandings. She articulated two distinct layers to leadership: middle-management and upper-level administration. She considered skills such as ability to execute plans, empathy, and collaboration to be valuable for mid-level managers to cultivate while noting that upper administration needed to demonstrate authority, vision, and effective communication. In our conversations, I gently pushed on this in my questions since the characteristics she mentioned appeared to fall along gender stereotypes and reinforce the over-representation of men in upper-level leadership positions and women in middle-management roles. I could tell that Stephanie understood these characteristics to be situational. Ultimately, she landed on an ideal, which would be a leader who embodied the ability to embrace all of these characteristics at the right moments.

> So, I can see it kind of like if somebody can embody all those two layers. It's exceptional, right? These two levels and layers that I see is almost like a two hemisphere, right? And like I said, if somebody can embody both of those, obviously, you know that exists, but you often see there's some gaps. They do exist. I think I've met one on my path but rarely do you find someone like that (Stephanie, 1/13/20).

In response to this, I offered that I have heard people use the term "unicorns" as a reference to such leaders, indicating the rarity of finding someone who could embody all the skills required at the different levels of leadership. Stephanie agreed. As I have gone over her transcripts repeatedly, I get the sense that Stephanie is one of these so called "unicorns," herself, although, I

believe she would just say that she was not doing anything special and that she was simply a learner who is trying to make a contribution with the skillsets that she possessed.

Stephanie's approach to navigating her identities as an Asian American woman in leadership spaces were similar to Rachel's. They are both conscious of the stereotypes and assumptions that are present even when they were not spoken. Then, there are the times when it was spoken. In one of her positions, Stephanie had a meeting with colleague as part of her strategy to become better acquainted with the institution and the department. The colleague, another person of color, told her that she was going to receive the support she needed because she was a woman of color. Upon reflection and further experience with this individual, Stephanie recognized that this person had good intentions and wanted to communicate their welcome and support. However, this well-intentioned act created an unintended impact that caused Stephanie to become hyper-aware and self-conscious of her identities, making her question whether people saw her gender and racial identities or if they saw her individual competencies and skills. Ultimately, Stephanie became further determined to prove that she belonged in her leadership role based upon her merit.

> (*Referencing the story shared above*) So, I'm thinking what does that mean? And that stuck with me because now I have this thing thinking, "Oh, because you're Asian, you're female, you're going to be successful because you're going to get the support." But in reality, that's not true. But the way it places…it obviously, for me, it was like, well that's actually…I have to prove myself even more. That remains more upfront for me, I think, by the fact that it was mentioned and by the fact that it was even stated. I don't think [this person] meant any harm by it. It struck me because I know that it exists, right? Because I

> know that's thought of and I know it's something that's prevalent. It's just not talked about in that way (Stephanie, 1/21/20).

This particular experience caused me to think more deeply about the exceptionalism that Stephanie and others have demonstrated. I saw throughout Stephanie's experiences that she was naturally driven to take on new challenges and to excel. I wonder, however, how these implicit and explicit messages further enhanced or exacerbated these internal drives for women like Stephanie.

Meta-themes: Reading Across Participant Stories

As I began this study, I had two primary goals: (a) capture the stories of how each participant uniquely experienced their leadership in higher education as an Asian American woman and (b) gain an understanding of the shared lived experiences of these five female Asian American administrators. This next section focuses on the second goal by presenting the meta-themes that I found as I examined the data across all five participants. As I worked to identify themes, I was not concerned with whether every participant's data would fit within each theme. Rather, I sought the thread that connected the participants together and authentically represented their shared experiences. As I looked at the data from various angles, I found that individual experiences sparked questions that then shed a new light on the experiences of the other participants. There was a natural back-and-forth play between the narratives that was unexpected. I particularly found the focus group interview to be instrumental in solidifying the connections I saw throughout the individual interviews.

I have divided this portion of the findings into four sections based upon the sub-questions of the research question: (a) how do female Asian American administrators define their leadership style? (b) how do female Asian American administrators understand their leadership

in light of their racial/ethnic and gender identities? (c) how do female Asian American administrators navigate notions of power on predominately White campuses, and finally; (d) what aspects of their experiences do female Asian American administrators identify as significant to their success?

Trailblazing and Courageous Leadership

The female Asian American administrators in this study were trail-blazers, often taking on roles and responsibilities that others do not, demonstrating immense courage, and assuming a posture of humility. As I listened to each participant give detailed descriptions of their professional paths, I was astonished by how many of these women were the first to hold their respective positions and had built new programs for their institutions. They also stepped into spaces that were broken or had been difficult to fill prior to their arrival. The women did not simply step into these spaces; they also transformed them. Some created entire departments out of singular positions. Others took their departments to new levels of professionalism. Tiffany took on three separate positions in which she served as the inaugural director of those positions.

> I feel like at my first three institutions, I did so many things to establish. I was the inaugural director so I did so many things to establish or re-imagine programs and things. Like they're still doing a family weekend I created my first year there. And when I went to [another institution] there was a lot of building programs there as well. And I mean to the point where when I left I was like you need an assistant director and they did hire an assistant director (Tiffany, 12/5/19).

Stephanie saw the trend in her leadership as she spoke about moving from position to position. Though she did not use the term "trailblazing," it was evident in the work she described doing.

> It was a natural position that I could just step in. What it needed was a leadership that was going to enable a more streamlined, a more defined unit. Again, improving structure, and resources, and better student learning experience outcome. So, there's like this theme that has kind of been occurring. I was able to create a system, recreate, redevelop. We revamped a lot of the structure (Stephanie, 12/19/19).

Eve's team had an interim dean for four years prior to her arrival. She instantly recognized that this meant the staff existed in a constant state of transition for four years so she had to change up her strategy as she stepped into that role.

> I really felt the responsibility to try to bring some stability for the team. So, I think the part that became challenging was that my learning time got cut short. I think when you transition into an institution, at least for me personally, I would like to be the learner. Don't make changes too fast, like want to be able to ease in. But I was realizing very quickly that there were certain things that were at stake. And I think for the institution, for my department, and for other people, so it actually changed how I felt in terms of my own responsibility for my team. And so then it impacted that time much more intensely (Eve, 11/25/19).

All of Rachel's "slash titles" intrigued me so much that I brought them up in our second interview. Multiple times, she held two positions simultaneously. Each time, the university had to create a new full-time position once Rachel drew boundaries around what she could effectively do with the time and energy she possessed. Similarly, Loveleen took on a handful of positions in thinly-staffed offices early on her career. These roles then gave her advanced experience which she then translated into higher-level positions.

What stood out to me was that I did not sense from any of these women that they thought what they did was extraordinary or special. Repeatedly, I heard the phrases like "I am just good at what I do," "I just did it," and "I just knew what to do." Even as these women spoke with confidence about their skillsets, the qualifying term "just" consistently appeared and suggested that while they did not shy away from speaking about their accomplishments, they also felt the need to diminish them. As I analyzed where this need might be coming from, I recalled that both Eve and Rachel explicitly discussed times when they were seen as a threat to someone else's leadership or ability to advance professionally. Eve later on went to talk about how she consistently assessed the ways that her identity triggers others. Eve and Loveleen discussed how they weighed the cost of speaking up against the misperceptions around their identities, knowing that speaking up could become a barrier to accomplishing their work-related goals. In the stories they shared, they errored on their desire to accomplish their work. So, while these women may not have believed they were doing anything special, I wondered if they were conditioned to downplay their accomplishment in order minimize any appearance of threat.

I also noticed that these women exhibited a tremendous amount of courage in their leadership roles. Sometimes, courage looked like willingness to step into a brand-new space that had never been occupied before. Other times, courage was stepping into a situation where people held negative perceptions of the office or role and attempting to fix it. Courage also looked like challenging systems and processes regardless of the consequences. Tiffany's experience reflected this third example. She saw herself as a developmental leader and consistently worked to empower and advocate for her students and her staff. She specifically mentioned throughout her time with me that she was not an authoritarian leader. She did not hesitate, however, to challenge systems and practices that were detrimental to the humanity of those in her care. This

led to the perception that Tiffany was "problematic" and in one instance, eventually led to the loss of her job.

> It was just very clear to me like this is how it gets played. Like, if you question anything, if you go against anything. And for me, because my definition of leadership was, especially in student affairs, was what's best for students and how are we serving students in the most meaningful way. My leadership was not meshing with what they wanted from me (Tiffany, 1/9/20).

This was a theme throughout Tiffany's story. Yet, Tiffany's commitment to the decisions she made was clear. She advocated for her students and for her staff. She also advocated for herself when she realized people were attempting to take advantage of her kindness and perceived submissiveness. She was not afraid to ask questions. She knew she had a choice and consistently made difficult choices; Tiffany's courage was evident in the active decisions she made.

> But it was a choice. And I made the choice to advocate for my team and lose my job versus taking the paycheck. I made the choice to move on when I was being asked to treat my staff members [pause] because I literally at one point in [the] interaction said, "I can't ask my team to do that. It's completely inequitable. It's completely unfair. It is completely beyond their capacity. At some point, something's got to give. I cannot keep working my staff into the ground." And that's when stuff really started hitting the fan because it was like, you know, I wasn't just doing what I was told anymore. We make these choices very day (Tiffany, 1/9/20).

Eve demonstrated her courage in her willingness to address topics and conversations that others on her campuses shied away from but that were necessary for the growth and development

of her students. Her courage was far from brash, however. She willingly made calculated moves and risks in order to achieve her intended outcomes.

> I feel like people have appreciated me articulating the process, or the things that are hard. But what I've also sensed from students at times is they either don't feel heard or they feel like they don't have a space. I realize that makes other people above me nervous at times. So, I think I definitely am walking those lines at certain times. And so I think for myself, at least in my leadership, it's being willing to name certain things in public spaces, even though I know that there is a risk to myself in that and how people perceive me. And I am also fairly transparent about my own journey. I think there is something to naming things that other people haven't named in the past (Eve, 1/28/20).

The idea of sacrifice also came across the interviews. Eve recognized that predominately White spaces contained a certain level of toxicity and required sacrificing her personhood at times. In fact, each of the women spoke about the inability to be their full selves in the spaces they occupied. Yet, she also acknowledged that there was a need for representation so she weighed the consequences and chose to step into a space that served the greater community.

> And then once the position got offered, it was like, "Well, are you willing to do your part and to step into it? What is the cost and is the cost worth it? What am I really willing to sacrifice and what am I not? Like, I feel like I'm still sacrificing more that I think I really should or actually want to. But I think I did feel the responsibility piece (Eve, 11/25/19).

In the focus group interview, Loveleen affirmed Eve's sentiment regarding the need to sacrifice her own voice and opinion for the sake of their roles.

> Those things I have found, for me have resulted in pretty severe battle fatigue even in a year. And so I find myself picking and choosing a lot more than I would like. I don't

> know how long I can do that and be healthy as a human. But I also know that I'm actually making a difference for the institution. It does also come at the personal expense of us. And I think that's a sacrifice that none of our White colleagues will ever understand. And they probably would never give that much for a job either. (Loveleen, 1/28/20)

So, while each individual participant may have articulated different skillsets or possessed different characteristics in their leadership, I found that the thread of courage and sacrifice ran through their stories and these qualities were foundational to the trail-blazing they did in their careers. In Tiffany, Eve, and Loveleen's experiences, the sacrifices were made consciously. They chose to put the welfare and interest of others ahead of their own. As trailblazers, these women also had few examples of how to navigate these situations, making their accomplishments and commitments that much more remarkable.

Double-Edge Sword

These female Asian American administrators constantly navigated between dichotomous expectations and experienced the tension between being effective in their work and being authentic in their leadership. Loveleen use the term "double-edge sword" in her first interview to describe a situation where the very thing she hoped for (representation) also became the very thing that often caused pain (tokenization). The juxtaposition of tokenization versus representation became a salient theme throughout the participants' stories.

> So, it's a double-edge sword but I always am kind of juggling this idea of being both representation and token. That's the coin all the time, especially with other folks of color. I'm so glad I can be representation. I'm so glad I can be a hope. And it's really a struggle when you're the only one (Loveleen, 12/17/20).

The idea of the double-edge sword came out again in the focus group interview as Loveleen talked about the difficulty of navigating between what she saw as an epitomized form of leadership among the predominately White men around her and what she felt was acceptable for her to exhibit. The stereotypes surrounding Asian American women mixed with a perceived bias in leadership qualities often times presented a lose-lose situation for these women.

> I shared a story in one of my [earlier] interviews about attempting to try on some of those leadership skills that didn't necessarily feel authentic, putting them on like a sweater and being heavily corrected for trying to lead with a little more dominance or a little more authority. So, it's very much a double-edge sword where I never want to buy in or play into the stereotype that my identity makes me passive or makes me weak or makes me a poor leader. And simultaneously when trying on those kind of more male-dominated leadership styles, I've been heavily criticized for being too present or too bold, or too many other things. And I think that's a really toxic thing that we as ADPI [Asian Desi Pacific Islander] women face very differently than other women of different colors. (Loveleen, 1/28/20)

Eve accepted that tokenization simply came with the job description for her. The insidious nature of the two dichotomies between tokenization versus representation is that many people do not realize that it is happening.

> It's hard because I think I feel with my position in particular, I actually do get put into certain spaces. I feel like I need to be in certain spaces. But then I think the other part that I'm also feeling is I get asked if…am I just being asked to do it because I'm an Asian woman? I mean they kind of really are leaning into the hope that as an Asian woman, I might do it in a way that is palatable or something like that. People don't realize that

> they're tokenizing you. And so I think that piece also feels, I don't know…"weighty" is not the right word, but it's like "oh, I'm almost asked to be like, inauthentic," but I know they don't realize that's what they're asking of me. But that's really what they're asking of me, right? (Eve, 1/28/20).

Tiffany's experience contained multiple examples of being told that she was not authoritative enough and yet she was disciplined when she exhibited authoritative qualities such as asking questions or challenging status quo. This highlighted the "double-edge sword" of being perceived as submissive or quiet as an Asian American woman. Her actions either reaffirmed a stereotype that Asian American woman are not "authoritative enough" or the underlying bias caused her to be perceived as overly aggressive when she did assert her authority. The culmination of her experiences was enough to make her leave higher education until she was approached by another female leader of color who asked to step into an interim dean role. Tiffany contrasted her two experiences: the first made her doubt whether she was a leader and the second restored her confidence as a leader.

> I pride myself in being a developmental leader. But I've been told that I need to be more authoritative. At my last institution, [I] literally had people tell me [that] I'm not a leader. All it takes is one or two influential people to tell you, you're not a good leader. And that's that. (*Referencing her interim role*) This is probably the first time in my career I've really felt like a leader, not just someone who does good work, but like I'm leading. I think being here, so unfortunately it's really recent, has really helped me see that I have leadership capabilities (Tiffany, 1/9/20).

I saw that the difference between the two situations was that Tiffany's authentic leadership style was valued by the second institution and the leadership above her. This experience also

demonstrated how stereotypes and expectations served as a double-edge sword, cutting Tiffany when she was not being "authoritative enough" and equally cutting her when she pushed back with authority.

Tiffany also articulated the idea of being made to feel like the "wrong kind of Asian." As I looked over the transcripts, this made me wonder if there was a "right kind of Asian." I noticed that Rachel and Stephanie both spoke more positively about their experiences as a leader, though they were both conscious of the stereotypes that surrounded their identities. Eve, Tiffany, and Loveleen were more vocal about the ways they did not fit the female Asian stereotypes of being hard-working and submissive and they were also the ones who most felt the backlash from defying those stereotypes. These three tended to push back while Rachel and Stephanie chose to disprove stereotypes by demonstrating their competencies. In other words, they worked harder. At one point, Rachel discussed the differences between herself and another female Asian American administrator on her campus, who also happened to be a close friend. Her observation highlighted the challenge of representation and tokenization. I have chosen to only highlight certain parts of Rachel's words here but the tension between the two personalities was evident and I am aware that one was rewarded over another.

> And when I think about Asian women leadership, I mean, look at [my friend] and I are both Asian and women, but that's as common as it gets. And then beyond that we are so pickin' different. As far as the way we approach things, we both respect each other's differences and how we navigate it. But we never want to be the one or the other. Are there things that we could learn from each other? Oh yeah. So are we both fulfilling who we are? Yeah, we are (Rachel, 12/18/19).

Thinking back to Tiffany's words about watching who gets promoted, I also begin to see that one particular type of female Asian American leadership personality can be promoted over another in certain spaces. So, I have to wonder if the systems that perpetuate the stereotypes of Asian American women also work to pit these women against one another? In Rachel and her friend's situation, the two women appear to have figured out how to remain supportive of one another, but this may not always be the case. As I pored over the transcripts, I questioned whether it was possible for Asian American women to separate their personal identities and leadership from the narratives thrust upon them.

Exhaustion

All participants overwhelmingly described their experience of navigating systems on predominately White campuses as exhausting, given the mental load required to be consistently assessing their environments. Eve referenced the idea of helping students see "the thing beneath the thing" as a means of helping students become truly self-aware so that they can move past whatever is holding them back. I thought it was the perfect phrase to describe how these women navigate their spaces: since most of the expectations and stereotypes are implicitly communicated, they must discover the "thing beneath the thing" in order to know how to traverse it.

> My friend says I can see the layers. So, I'm able to unpack certain things. But yeah, it's hard to pull out or parse out. There's all these different layers. I'm actually trying to figure out what their triggers are. And when I rubbed them, what that means, and it doesn't always mean that I avoid the rub. It just means that I'm strategic about when I'm going to push for something or advocate for something. And then in what moments I'm going to pull back because it's not strategic to move forward. So as I'm talking about it, I

> feel tired because it makes a lot of work like you were just trying to like…I'm like… It's a lot of work. (Eve, 12/10/19)

It was not only the need to be consistently assessing the "thing beneath the thing" that was exhausting. There was also a tension that the women must hold regarding when to confront the implicit bias that causes that "thing beneath the thing." These difficult conversations and the awkward moments presented themselves in a constant loop. Once they had addressed one situation, another one presented itself. The perpetual nature of the conversation exhausted the women. They acknowledged that it was important to engage in dialogue about equity and representation but also conceded that the conversations were difficult and wished there was no longer a need to have them.

> Exactly, I feel the same way. I'm exhausted. And yet, at the same time, I'm committed to the work. So there's that tension again, right? Like I'm so committed to the work that I want to find ways to increase the dialogue to be in conversation, hard conversations with people, but in a way that they'll hear them, that they'll digest it and consider it. And it's exhausting. Like, it's like I'm having this conversation with you again. I want to stop having this conversation (Tiffany, 1/28/20).

Loveleen talked about "swallowing the harm" when she runs up against implicit bias toward herself and problematic scenarios in her work because addressing the situation directly could actually cause more harm.

> I also live in a reality in which that means I'm supposed to swallow the harm in order to…I have to make a choice point there every single time, right? It's either swallow the harm or address the harm, which puts the labor on me as a POC [person of color], as a woman, as a person who wears marginalized identities in a PWI [predominately White

> institution] space that happens far more often that it probably should. And so that's where my exhaustion comes from, is that it's not just battle fatigue of having this conversation on a perpetual basis. It's having to be very careful about how I present feedback, lest I be transitioned to the angry woman of color (Loveleen, 1/28/20).

As Loveleen shared this, each of the women were nodding their heads and leaning into their screens. In that moment, I felt like I was one of the participants because I could also vividly recall my own experiences and I could feel the exhaustion with Loveleen. The figurative and collective sigh in that space was palpable. Her words set off a firestorm of examples as other women shared the ways in which they could identify with the sentiment.

> When something happens, then it's our job to calm it down. Like we're the person and when everything seems calm, meaning there are no students screaming or faculty or staff screaming, then we did our job. And so what does that look like? And when they, meaning people (administration or not) have this expectation that we should…our role is something different than what it is intended? Meaning we're the peacemaker, whatever that may look like or the "calm-er," then we're doing our job. I think it becomes…the value of what we're expecting to do or what we signed up for is very different than what is being expected. There's that weird tension that we have to kind of navigate and that becomes tiresome too (Rachel, 1/28/20).

> So um, yeah, I just kind of felt all those pieces kind of rolling through me as we were just sharing because I just feel like we don't have spaces to be able to bring who we are to the table and our full selves and I feel like I heard all of us say it that we're tired or exhausted like that is definitely how I feel. There is that double-burden, right? I feel really tired, like I don't really want to do it. (Eve, 1/28/20)

The undertone to these experiences was that the women were not in positions (they did not have the power) to define or set the parameters for the conversations. They were continuously subjected to the perceptions and the ways of doing that were set by the dominant culture present on predominately White campuses.

It is important to note that this exhaustion did not define these women. Their narratives demonstrated an incredible amount of resiliency and determination. I think it is important to highlight this part of their experience to serve as a background context to their accomplishments. Imagine what these women could achieve if they did not have to carry these additional mental burdens and could apply their energy into other spaces. They each had already accomplished so much in their respective positions. Yet, they were exhausted and this exhaustion came from having to navigate the implicit bias directed at their racial and gender identities in addition to all the other responsibilities and stress that normally accompanied their roles. Loveleen's words revealed the heart for the work that these women possessed, particularly their deep commitment to the it.

> And I love my job too. Like I never want that to get lost. I really like this work. I have some amazing colleagues. I have an amazing staff. We're working really freaking hard. We're actually moving and shaking and changing things, and I do have the capacity and the respect of the institution to make that happen. But that doesn't mean that racism and sexism goes away (Loveleen, 1/17/20).

Mentorship, Opportunities, and Allyship

These female Asian American administrators identified multiple factors that were important to their success: mentorship, seizing opportunities, and allyship. Mentorship repeatedly showed up in the participants' stories as a substantial contributor to their

accomplishments. There have been other research studies that have also highlighted the significance of mentorship (Chang et al., 2014; Grant & Ghee, 2015; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Tran, 2014) so I do not want to reiterate what is already known in the literature. What I did find significant in the accounts is how the women spoke of the identities that they did or did not share with their mentor. The ability to have a female Asian American mentor was seen as a treasure and a rarity. Only one of the participants had access to another female Asian American mentor and she referenced this person a number of times throughout her interviews.

> So my mentor taught me: bring all that you can to the table, and not just parts of what people expect you to bring. So, yeah, she taught me a lot about what it meant to be an Asian woman in spaces that are not common for us to be around. She gave me a voice, I feel like, because I saw her with a strong set of voice in a sphere that she was running in. She broke ceilings, I think for a lot of people. (Rachel, 11/25/19)

> So one thing I mentioned to Jenny was my mentor, who was my person that I met with for about 13 years. I would drive up [2.5 hours] so that I could meet with her and she invested in me. So, for me to find someone who looked like me who was leading differently was really critical. (Rachel, 1/28/20)

Loveleen responded to Rachel saying,

> I'm very jealous of your path with a mentor who looks like you. In my career, I've never been supervised by a non-White person until this job, which I think is significant in a lot of ways. And that means all the people that were in my corner, who were fighting for me, were not POC a lot of the time. And I think that makes a difference because I think strong allyship is critical for the success of equity and sharing of power in space (Loveleen, 1/28/20).

Both Stephanie and Loveleen identified that White mentors were still meaningful, particularly because they could provide perspective. The two shared instances where they brought a situation that had racial and/or gender bias undertones to a White mentor. If the mentor confirmed the presence of a microaggression or outright racial and/or gender bias, both women said that the confirmation felt even more validating because of the mentor's racial identity and ability to hold a different perspective. Even if the mentor did not confirm the presence of a microaggression, the women still appreciated the feedback because of the trust built and their desire to have balanced opinions and outlooks.

I saw another common thread in the experiences of these women that attributed to their success: seizing the opportunities that were presented. For Rachel, opportunities came as a result of mentors opening doors for her and inviting her into spaces that she would not have otherwise had access. She described a relationship she had with a former president:

> And he was a mentor. He was and is a mentor and also was a sponsor. I was in positions around different tables that my colleagues, my peers were not around, not even my bosses. Sometimes I would be pulled into situations but whenever I was pulled in, I worked my tail off to make sure what I was producing was quality. And soon, you know, surely through that whole process, I was able to build my own reputation. And people knew me for the work I did. And yeah, so I don't think people realized…I don't think people currently realizes how much doors were being opened by people like [him] (Rachel, 11/25/19).

Eve, Tiffany, and Loveleen were shoulder-tapped and they all decided to say "yes" and pursued those opportunities. Stephanie chose to seize opportunities for learning and growth by regularly taking risks when she moved into unknown professional territories.

> (*Referencing moving from a position in student affairs to academic affairs*) I think it wasn't like a conscious switch; it was more like an opportunity. (Referencing other opportunities that she took) You know it just seems like a good fit, right? It wasn't planned, but I think the opportunity came where I felt like my question was "what would I gain if I took this position?" It was more like this opportunity came along. Is a great timing [*sic*]. And it just seems like a good opportunity because I knew that I could still develop a learned skill set from that (Stephanie, 12/19/19).

As a result, she built an impressive résumé that could allow her to pivot into a number of leadership positions. Though the opportunities presented themselves in different ways to each participant, I saw that the thread was their tenacity in making the most of each opportunity and stepping into roles that may have felt unfamiliar or overwhelming.

Finally, allyship came up a few different times in the focus interview. Allyship can be defined as acts of support by colleagues who carried a level of privilege that the women did not individually possess. These acts were meaningful because they provided a moment of reprieve from the mental load that these women typically carried.

> So there are people who would get it because that's just who they are. And it's in their thinking. It's in their practice. They are the advocates who will speak up, instead of me needing to speak up. So, even subtle things, right? So if you're in a group setting and I'm with all men and we have to take notes…then everyone kind of stares trying to figure out who's gonna take notes. So my role at that point is don't volunteer, right? So I hold off, but if I'm with this particular colleague of mine, he always volunteers when he's sitting net to me. He doesn't even create a pause. He's like, "I'll do it." Or before we even get into it, he's already taking notes. So, I have colleagues like that, [who's] very cognizant

> of the space that I'm living in that he does that, so sometimes I don't have to think about it (Rachel, 1/28/20).

The importance of this situation was that the colleague alleviated Rachel's mental load. Rather than enduring another internal dialogue of how she could assert her leadership without coming across as domineering, this colleague gave Rachel a reprieve and allowed her to focus her energy on the reason why the group was meeting.

Before I end this section, I wanted to point out one more factor that was only mentioned by one of the participants but I consider to be important to the success of all the participants. In her third interview, Stephanie ascertained that it took a particular type of mindset, a certain type of person, to be able to perceive possibilities in spaces that have never been modeled to them. In her observation, many people either assumed they did not belong if they did not see themselves represented or they gravitated into areas where they saw plenty of representation. She believed that the reasons may be because it was either more comfortable to go into places where people were like you or there was an implicit message that "this is where you belong or don't belong." Therefore it was not difficult to see why Stephanie asserted that it took a certain type of person to see past all those things. She made an interesting observation that some Asian American women may have had practice seeing themselves in different ways because they already had to break through cultural barriers and expectation in order to carve a path for their individual identity in a collectivistic culture. Even though this observation was unique to Stephanie, I thought it was important enough to highlight as a finding given that each of the participants demonstrated the ability to be the first or to trail-blaze into new and unfamiliar territories. I believe that they each possessed that particular mindset, even if it remains unclear exactly what that mindset entailed.

Summary of the Findings

As I moved through this study, I wanted to ensure that the unique lived experiences of each participant were honored. As I pored over the data, I recognized that only focusing on the challenges would create an incomplete picture of how these women experienced their leadership. A deficit-based approach would paint these women as victims, which would be inaccurate and damaging to the legacy they leave for other aspiring Asian American female leaders in higher education. Therefore, I leaned into an assets-based approach to analyzing their experiences.

Each of the five participants were trailblazers at their respective institutions. They built systems and structures for departments that did not exist before their arrival. They took broken departments and transformed them into high performing teams. They modeled genuine care for their staff and maintained the dignity and humanity of others in the midst of difficult situations. The participants also experienced colleagues and supervisors challenging their leadership when their actions as leaders were not perceived to be "authoritative enough." Yet, they were reprimanded when they showed authority in their leadership because it did not match the stereotyped expectations of female Asian Americans. All five participants indicated that they were exhausted from navigating the circumstances that prevented them from being their full authentic selves as leaders.

In spite of the challenges, the participants persisted and remained committed to doing good work. They were each driven by a vision of institutions that served students and employees well. They courageously challenged systems that were not serving its people well. Recognizing the challenges, the participants used cunning strategy, preferring to be effective rather than being right. The culmination of these experiences come together to paint a fuller picture of the strength and resiliency the participants demonstrate in their leadership.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership perspectives of female Asian American administrators in higher education. The study highlighted the experiences of participants who worked at predominately White institutions. This offers insight into how these women navigated systems of power created by racial and gender dynamics through a critical methodological lens. It also focused on their intersectional experiences. Intersectionality asserts that individual identity groups experience different systemic challenges based upon the implicit and explicit bias directed at them; thus, the particular cross-section of an Asian American racial identity intersecting with a female gender identity produces unique lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1998). This study contributes to existing literature focused on the experiences of female leaders of color in higher education; it specifically used a critical approach to separate out the lived experiences of female Asian Americans, a group who has been de-minoritized in the context of higher education and therefore often left out or only addressed tertiarily in studies.

This chapter connects broad findings from the study with relevant literature and addresses implications for practice and recommendations for further research. In keeping with critical methodology, I specifically addressed issues that either create or hinder "conditions for empowerment and justice" (Kincheloe et al., 2018, p. 237).

Leadership Practices

Each of the five participants articulated various challenges and barriers to their leadership development. However, I decided to take an asset-based approach to discussing the findings revealed in the experiences of these women rather than focusing solely on the deficits (Harper, 2010). Centering the conversation on the challenges created an incomplete picture of how the participants make meaning of their leadership experiences and diminish their contributions.

Kouzes and Posner (2017) identified five practices of exemplary leadership: (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart. Their study found that leaders who more frequently used the five practices were more effective than their counterparts who used them less frequently. The participants in this study communicated stories that I believe exemplified each of these five practices.

Rachel expressed that modeling the way was an important value to her as a leader. This came through her earliest experiences as a team captain on a sports team where she consistently showed up earlier and stayed later than her teammates. Later on as a vice president, she reflected on how she was encouraged to stop doing menial tasks like setting up chairs when she "has people for that." Ultimately, she decided her service mentality was a part of her leadership identity and she would not ask her people to do something that she was not willing to do. Stephanie spoke of the importance of bringing people into a shared vision. She clearly articulated the need to clarify the values of the institution and to communicate these values to all levels. This strategic communication played an important role to her success as a leader. Each participant leveraged their positions to challenge systems and structures that were in place. This took courage on the part of the women and their actions often times required professional sacrifice. Not a single participant spoke of regret, however. Rather, they each seemed to be driven by a deeper sense of purpose to do the right thing and to ensure student needs were addressed. Loveleen described a number of instances where she utilized her position to meet with staff members throughout the levels of her division. In each instance, she worked to empower each person and actively encouraged them to contribute their ideas to the department. Finally, Tiffany talked about maintaining the humanity and dignity of those whom she supervised, even when she needed to let someone go. Eve repeatedly talked about the environment she created for her team

and her desire to make sure they felt recognized and appreciated. In fact, each participant emphasized the importance of encouraging their colleagues' hearts as a key leadership practice.

Choosing an asset-based approach does not negate, however, the challenges that the women faced in their leadership. Fear of tokenization appeared as a theme across all five participants' words. They each internalized messaging that they had been put into places of leadership because of perceived stereotypes or, worse yet, simply to check a diversity box. Tiffany's story imparts a particular indictment on institutions in regards to diversity, equity, and inclusion positions. These types of positions are specifically created to help colleges and universities see where they need to improve conditions for students, faculty, staff, and administrators in marginalized communities. Unfortunately, Tiffany's reflection that she was hired to be a "worker bee" and would not "rock the boat" as an Asian American woman unmasks the institution's intentions to maintain the status quo. Connecting the leadership habits of the participants to the five practices of exemplary leadership reveals the injustice that is done to these women when their leadership is limited by the stereotypes associated with their identities.

Intersectional Identities

This study makes a significant contribution to the literature because of its intersectional approach. Recent studies expanded our knowledge around how people of color experience leadership outside of a dominant White narrative. This study demonstrated, however, that there is still room to move deeper into these lived experiences and to disaggregate their identities. It leaned into the understanding that the specific gender, racial and ethnic background of participants produced experiences that were unique and specific to the female Asian American women in this study.

Numerous qualitative and quantitative studies have demonstrated that women and people of color face barriers and challenges to their leadership (Arday, 2018; Braun et al., 2017; Davies et al., 2005; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Lord et al., 2002; Madden, 2011; Sy et al., 2010). Studies have also found, despite the perception that Asians do well in higher education, they were still subjected to significant degrees of racism and struggle with their mental health (Ancis et al., 2000; Chung, 2014; Cress & Ikeda, 2011). This study sought to make sense of how those preceding studies might be understood in light of the intersectional lived experiences of female Asian American leaders.

The participants in this study each indicated an awareness of the stereotypes surrounding Asian American women. They told stories about how those stereotypes impacted their leadership experiences, including what happened when they stepped outside of what others perceived as appropriate behavior. These women not only experienced overt comments and reactions directed at their racial and gender identity but some also expressed that they had to learn to adjust their leadership styles according to the stereotypes they faced. Their experiences indicate that the stereotypes of Asian women as being passive and submissive influenced others' perception of them as leaders. This meant that when they asserted themselves, they were in danger of being seen as overly aggressive. This caused the participants to consistently adjust their leadership styles according to the situation they faced. Eve described how she learned to look for trigger sign warnings in others so that she could strategically decide how to proceed with her conversations and actions.

As a result, these women often felt the tension between authenticity and effectiveness. They understood their professional effectiveness came at the cost of being their authentic self, and yet, they chose to be effective. There was also another cost. Loveleen indicated that the

degree to which she negotiated these tensions was not sustainable. Tiffany expressed how these types of experiences led her to make an early exit from higher education.

A question arises: how many people are willing to make the sacrifices that these women have made in order to be effective leaders? In the focus group, participants pointed out they could not imagine their White colleagues paying such a high personal cost for their job. Female Asian American stereotypes not only negatively influenced people's perception of these women as leaders; they also forced them to make personal sacrifices that served as a hidden barrier to their leadership.

Navigating Power

The five female Asian American administrators in this study each resonated deeply with the feeling of exhaustion as they reflected upon how they navigated systems of power on their respective campuses. The stories they shared affirmed the challenges documented by literature around the stereotypes and perceptions of Asian American women (Hune, 2011; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ng et al., 2007; Pittman, 2010; Steele & Aronson, 1995). While Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been applied to the experiences of people of color in higher education broadly, there still remains room for integrating our understanding of the female Asian American leadership experience in higher education within a CRT framework. This next section discusses the implication of applying CRT to the lived experiences of the participants in this study.

Critical Race Theory asserts that society in the United States is based upon property rights (Ladson-billings & Tate, 1995). Therefore, the positions of power and leadership in higher education institutions may be historically viewed, both explicitly and implicitly, as the rights of the dominant, majority culture and/or those who submit to the dominant, majority culture ways of manifesting leadership. Three of the participants made explicit comments regarding being

viewed as a “threat” or “competition” to White, male peers or White males who held a higher level leadership position. Two of the participants experienced negative consequences that were enacted by other people of color and/or women. These two expressed the hard lesson learned that not all women and/or people of color held an equity lens and some would be willing to do whatever it took to maintain their own power. This revealed a scarcity model mentality, where only a certain number of people of color would be allowed to ascend into leadership spaces held by a dominant White narrative.

Two of the participants raised questions around what it would look like if people focused more on lifting each other up and leading with integrity as opposed to fighting to maintain their power. This was both a simple and a deeply profound question to consider. The implications of this question reach into multiple areas across a university system. A thoughtful response would require the ability to give up power and to shed a presupposition that the possession of leadership is the right of a particular dominant culture. In the focus group, participants astutely recognized that those in power set the definition for what is considered good leadership and defined how concepts like civility and effectiveness are administered. Therefore, leaders must recognize their own positional authority and wrestle with how they will leverage their power for the betterment of others.

Contributors to Success

The participants in this study repeatedly pointed to mentorship and finding opportunities as the primary contributors to their success. This was consistent with current literature on mentorship for women and people of color (Chang et al., 2014; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Longman & Lafreniere, 2012; Pyke, 2013). I found it noteworthy that only one participant had another Asian American woman as a mentor. While all the participants had been successful in their

professional roles, meeting with another Asian American woman as a mentor appeared to influence the quality of the participants' experiences. Literature predominately highlighted the importance of mentorship broadly. Evidence in one study suggested, however, that finding a mentor who shared a similar racial and gender identity could impact leadership development in a nuanced way (Tran, 2014).

Rachel was the only participant who had a female Asian American mentor and her description of herself as a leader took on a very different tone than the others. Most of the participants described their leadership styles in opposition to what they saw modeled around them. Their experiences raised a lot of doubt in regards to their leadership abilities. Tiffany did not see herself as a leader until the latter portion of her career. In contrast, Rachel expressed an ability to see firsthand how another Asian American woman navigated spaces of power on a predominately White campus. This did not shield her from facing negative stereotypes and perceptions but she described her leadership development process in a distinctly more positive way. Rachel specifically spoke about the encouragement she received from her mentor to bring her full self to the leadership table, something that the other participants lacked.

The participants also articulated that opportunities were important to the attainment of leadership roles. Some participants had mentors and sponsors open doors to opportunity for them. Others found their own opportunities and seized them. Regardless of how they found their way into an opportunity, they each recognized the value of saying "yes." Opportunities may come at a cost, however. Haslam and Ryan's (2008) "glass cliff" effect may prove dangerous at some point to the participants who are still in the prime of their career. One of the participants had already experienced scrutiny that felt tied to her racial and gender identities in the wake of an unpopular but necessary decision. This is something that mentors and sponsors need to be

aware of as they encourage and recommend their female Asian American mentees to pursue certain opportunities.

I find it insufficient for Asian American women to simply attain positions of leadership in higher education. As with all people, I desire that they thrive and achieve success, both personally and professionally. The participants in this study communicated exhaustion and sacrifice that were profound. It is unjust for them to carry this burden on their own and these findings offer unique insight to institutions so that they better develop and support their female Asian American leaders on campus.

Implications for Practice

While generalization to the broader population of female Asian American administrators in higher education is beyond the scope of this study, it offers new understandings that could provide insight into best practices for institutions desiring to recruit and retain a diverse administrative team. Several suggestions for universities reveal themselves: (a) develop systems of support across all leadership levels for Asian American women, (b) expand diversity conversations and trainings beyond a black and white binary, and (c) re-assess strategic diversity plans and diversity, equity, inclusion positions.

Supporting Asian American Women on Campus

Exhaustion, loneliness, personal sacrifice, and tokenization framed the participants' experiences at their predominately White institutions. In light of these realities, institutions need to provide better systems of support for Asian American female leaders. Specifically, universities can take the following steps: (a) hire more Asian American women, (b) establish affinity groups, (c) create pathways for mentorship with other Asian American women, and (d) invest in the leadership of female Asian American students.

In her popular TED Talk, Nigerian author, Chimamanda Adichie (2009), explained, "the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." Hiring more Asian American women removes some of the tension between representation and tokenization. It also relieves the sense of loneliness that comes with lack of representation. It will not solve all the problems but it is a start.

Once there are more Asian American women present, universities need to establish affinity groups that allow them to come together and share in their common experience. The focus group in this study provided a space for the participants to meet other Asian American women who held similar positions and they each indicated that the experience was life-giving and something they needed to recreate moving forward. Leadership at the top is already lonely and these women's identities increased their sense of loneliness. If a critical mass is missing within an institution, then it should connect their people to organizations like APAHE (Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education). NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) also has an Asian Pacific Islander Knowledge Community that engages members around the current issues, trends, and research facing Asian Pacific Islanders Desi Americans in higher education.

Asian American female leaders also need other Asian American women to serve as mentors. The participants in this study were grateful for the mentorship they received, even when they did not identify with their mentor's racial and gender identity. However, they also experienced challenges and setbacks when they tried to emulate the leadership styles of their mentors, particularly White, male mentors. In contrast, Rachel, the only participant who had an Asian American female mentor, spoke about how her mentor showed her ways to navigate

systems and power that felt authentic to her identity. Rather than figuring out what not to do, Rachel benefitted from following in the footsteps of her mentor.

Finally, each of the five participants shared how, when they began their undergraduate student journey, they had intended to pursue a different career path. Their stories reveal how female Asian American students face a long list of barriers when it comes to finding a career in higher education without the intervention of professional staff, including but not limited to the lack of representation in leadership positions (Maramba, 2011; Pak et al., 2014; Pang et al., 2011; Suzuki, 2002). The experiences of the women in this study, however, show administrators that they can play a key role in recruiting more Asian American women to work in university settings by encouraging their leadership and providing opportunities to explore career paths.

Beyond Black and White Binary

This study revealed that the participants experience a deep level of exhaustion due to navigating toxic environments that resulted from people's lack of cultural competency. There is hope, however. Rachel described the relief she felt when another allied colleague would step into spaces for her and give her reprieve from having to address inappropriate statements or assumptions about her role as a leader. Eve and Loveleen both articulated the need to shift the burden of addressing problematic situations away from people of color and those who possess marginalized identities to those in the dominant majority. These instances point to the need for people to be educated and more aware of the impact of their words and actions.

While many institutions offer some type of diversity, equity, and inclusion training, a majority of these conversations still center on a black and white binary. While there has been better inclusion of Latino/a identities, Asian Americans continue to be left out of the narrative. The literature and the findings in this study show that Asian Americans continue to experience

discrimination that is unique to their racial identities. Institutions need to make it a point to include Asian American experiences when they develop trainings or when they bring in speakers to discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion matters. The participants demonstrated an incredibly high capacity for achievement and yet expressed profound levels of exhaustion. I wonder what these women would be capable of achieving if they did not have to devote such an intense amount of mental and emotional energy to navigating the implicit and explicit bias of others.

Re-assess Diversity Programs and Outcomes

While diversity training and programs are important, a couple of notable experiences highlighted in this study reveal that universities need to take a deeper look at the purposes for establishing diversity programs and positions. Tiffany's experience as a diversity affairs officer serves as a "canary in the coal mine" warning to those deeply invested in diversity, equity, and inclusion work. My own experience and connection to other diversity affairs officers indicate that it is common for people in those roles, regardless of racial and gender identity, to question whether they were hired into a position meant to check the diversity box. Tiffany wrestled with a different level of tokenism as she considered whether the stereotypes surrounding Asian American women caused her employers to hire her with the expectation she would work hard without challenging systems and disrupting status quo.

Tiffany's story gave me pause as another Asian American woman currently working as a diversity, equity, and inclusion officer. Many of my colleagues put in long hours because they want to create a better environment for their students who hold marginalized identities. Unfortunately, they tend to run into systems that refuse to change to accommodate the diversity that is present in the community. When that happens, we can either believe the institution is intentionally blocking our efforts or we can believe that the institution is well-meaning and

simply needs more help. As a matter of survival, we often choose to believe that our institutions want to change but need time. What if we are wrong and how long do we labor and wait to find out?

Institutions may also experience their own unconscious bias at play. They may desire to see true change but have not reconciled what change means for their traditions and ways of doing business. Predominately White institutions may think they are being hospitable to racial minorities, while implicitly communicating via systems and structures that these communities are merely guests welcomed to the space at the benevolence of the host. Equity requires that those with marginalized identities are given ownership to move furniture around and paint the walls. Universities will need to decide if racial minorities are guests or if they are part of the family. Tiffany's words, "if I am going to get in trouble for that, for doing my job, what is the point of doing diversity and equity work at an institution," serve as a haunting reminder that colleges and universities have more soul-searching to do when it comes to their diversity efforts.

Recommendations for Further Research

I recommend two primary areas for further research on understanding the lived experiences of female Asian American administrators in higher education: diversifying the representation of participants and looking more deeply into the themes found within individual experiences. Asian Americans are not a monolithic group, though for identification and distribution of resources purposes, they have been clumped into a single racial category. Asian Americans also tend to be overidentified with East Asian Americans. Therefore, I recommend disaggregating Asian American identities to include a broader representation of Asian American ethnic backgrounds. In particular, future studies should intentionally include Desi American and Southeast Asian American women. Since East Asian Americans tend to dominate images of

what is considered to be Asian American, I have reason to believe, while there may still be shared experiences, a study of female Desi American and Southeast Asian administrators will yield unique findings. I also recognize that this study did not include representatives from community colleges. A majority of the Asian American presidents can be found at doctorate-granting four-year public institutions and two-year community colleges so it may prove to be significant to include female Asian American administrators found at two-year institutions.

I also recommend exploring further the individual themes found in each participant's unique experiences. As I listened to each participant I found that there were a number of accounts and descriptions that I wanted to explore further in depth. Given the limited time for each interview, however, I decided to only pursue those that I believed were relevant to the research question and the sub-questions. For example, I wanted to further explore participants' career paths and career decisions. While understanding the motivations and circumstances around how participants moved through their career may be relevant to their leadership, I made the decision that it was not central to the four research sub-questions. Also, during the focus group interview, the participants appeared to be particularly interested themselves in exploring the relationship between female Asian American administrators and their White female counterparts. The impact of having a female Asian American mentor is another area that is worth pursuing. Finally, I recommend extended investigation into the specific impact that cultural upbringing may have on participants' leadership styles.

Reflections and Insight

Since I am myself an aspiring female Asian American administrator, this study has been both an educational and personal process. Selfishly, I know that I have benefitted immensely from being steeped in the experiences of other female Asian American administrators. I

resonated with the sense of loneliness that these participants expressed and yet also felt some of that loneliness lift when they shared their stories with me. I hope that the findings will have a similar effect for other aspiring female Asian American professionals in higher education.

The critical component of the methodology also became more important to the study the further I went in the process. The question "who is this study for?" repeatedly came up and became a guide for the various decisions I needed to make as a researcher. It also served as a foundation that guided my analysis as well as the writing of the findings and discussion. The participants' stories revealed that they consistently experience their leadership in the context of systems and structures as well as who holds power within those systems. It would have been a disservice to their experiences to conduct a study that did not name and recognize that power differential.

Finally, this study has inspired me to be more intentional with my own story and leadership. I see the need for mentorship of younger professionals. I also see the need to continue elevating the voices of other female Asian American administrators. The fear of sharing their experiences that some of the participants demonstrated indicated a need to confront the powers and misperceptions that do not allow them to bring their full selves to the table. Though I do not know the platform for how I will engage this endeavor, I am convinced of its importance.

Conclusion

This study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of female Asian American administrators in higher education. The findings illuminated the strength and resiliency demonstrated by the participants as they navigated systems of power at their predominately White campuses. It also highlighted the challenges and barriers that these women face in spite of their successes.

Asian Americans currently represent roughly 5.7% of undergraduate students across higher education institutions, mirroring their population percentage in the broader U.S. society, and are the second fastest growing racial demographic, second to Hispanic students (Espinosa et al., 2019). They also have the highest rate of enrollment for students who attend a four-year institution immediately after high school graduation. Administrators should pay attention to these numbers as many schools face declining enrollment. It is equally important to pay attention to the experiences of Asian American students once they are on our campuses. Evidence in literature suggests that their experiences are in part tied to the representation of Asian Americans in key faculty and administrative roles (Fincher et al., 2010; Maramba, 2011; Pak et al., 2014). Therefore, recognizing that female Asian Americans represent less than 2% of administrators in higher education proves to be problematic.

Yet, while this study can provide insight into how institutions can better themselves and their students' experiences, simply elevating the voices of the five participants remained the ultimate objective (Seidman, 2006). In keeping with critical research methodologies, I set out to conduct this study for the community represented by the participants. I wanted to create access for other aspiring female Asian American leaders to hear the voices of the women in this study. I wanted them to have a platform to share their lived experiences. I invite those who do not identify as part of the female Asian American community to listen and to glean what they can from these stories. The findings of this study, however, have the deepest implications for those of us who do identify as female Asian American leaders in higher education. May these stories give us courage and assurance that we are not alone, and give us permission to bring our full selves to the leadership table.

References

Aguirre, A., & Martinez, R. (2003). The postcolonial university. *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies*, *4*(3), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/17533170300104301

Ancis, J. R., Sedlacek, W. E., & Mohr, J. J. (2000). Student perceptions of campus cultural climate by race. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *78*(2), 180–185.

Andichie, C. (2009, July). *Danger of a single story* [Video]. TED. https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

Arday, J. (2018). Understanding race and educational leadership in higher education: Exploring the black and ethnic minority (BME) experience. *Management in Education*, *32*(4), 192–200. https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020618791002

Bornstein, R. (2008). Women and the college presidency. In J. Glazer-Raymo (Ed.), *Unfinished Agendas: New and Continuing Gender Challenges in Higher Education* (pp. 162–184). John Hopkins University Press.

Braun, S., Stegmann, S., Hernandez Bark, A. S., Junker, N. M., & van Dick, R. (2017). Think manager—think male, think follower—think female: Gender bias in implicit followership theories. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *47*(7), 377–388. https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12445

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (Third). SAGE Publications.

Chang, H., Longman, K. A., & Franco, M. A. (2014). Leadership development through mentoring in higher education: A collaborative autoethnography of leaders of color. *Mentoring and Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, *22*(4), 373–389. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2014.945734

Chung, J. Y. (2014). Racism and Asian American student leadership. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, *47*(2), 117–132. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2014.900392

Crenshaw, K. (1998). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. In A. Phillips (Ed.), *Feminism and Politics* (pp. 314–343). Oxford University Press.

Cress, C. M., & Ikeda, E. K. (2011). Distress under duress: The relationship between campus climate and depression in Asian American college students. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, *40*(2), 74–97. https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.1224

Davies, P. G., Steele, C. M., & Spencer, S. J. (2005). Clearing the air: Identity safety moderates the effects of stereotype threat on women's leadership aspirations. *Journal of Personality*

and Social Psychology, *88*(2), 276–287. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.2.276

DeCuir, J., & Dixson, A. (2004). So when it comes out, they aren't that surprised that it's there: Using critical race theory as a tool of analysis of race and racism in education. *Educational Researcher*, *33*(5), 26–31. https://search-proquest-com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/docview/216907380?rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprimo

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, *109*(3), 573–598. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.109.3.573

Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed., pp. 119–161). Macmillan.

Espenshade, T. J., & Chung, C. Y. (2005). The opportunity cost of admission preferences at elite universities. *Social Science Quarterly*, *86*(2), 293–305. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0038-4941.2005.00303.x

Espenshade, T. J., & Radford, A. W. (2009). *No longer separate, not yet equal: Race and class in elite college admission and campus life*. Princeton University Press. https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/lib/georgefox/detail.action?docID=537644

Espinosa, L. L., Turk, J. M., Taylor, M., & Chessman, H. M. (2019). *Race and ethnicity in higher education: A status report*. https://1xfsu31b52d33idlp13twtos-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Race-and-Ethnicity-in-Higher-Education.pdf

Fincher, M., Katsinas, S., & Bush, V. B. (2010). Executive management team demography and minority student retention: Does executive team diversity influence the retention of minority students? *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *11*(4), 459–481. https://doi.org/10.2190/cs.11.4.b

Flowers, L. A., & Moore III, J. L. (2008). Unraveling the composition of academic leadership in higher education: Exploring administrative diversity at 2-year and 4-year institutions. *Journal of Thought*, *43*(3), 71–81. http://web.a.ebscohost.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=7&sid=e3b897e4-24c6-4c16-93ef-ef232802afe7%40sdc-v-sessmgr05

Gasman, M., Abiola, U., & Travers, C. (2015). Diversity and senior leadership at elite institutions of higher education. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *8*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038872

Gin, D. H. C. (2013). Off limits to Asian Americans? Predicting the pursuit of higher education administration. *Multicultural Education Review*, *5*(1), 26–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615X.2013.11102897

Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (Third). Pearson Education, Inc.

Grant, C. M., & Ghee, S. (2015). Mentoring 101: Advancing African-American women faculty and doctoral student success in predominantly White institutions. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *28*(7), 759–785. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2015.1036951

Guenther, L. (2020). Critical Phenomenology. In G. Weiss, A. V. Murphy, & G. Salamon (Eds.), *50 concepts for a critical phenomenologyhenomenology* (pp. 11–16). Northwestern University Press.

Gündemir, S., Homan, A. C., De Dreu, C. K. W., & Van Vugt, M. (2014). Think leader, think white? Capturing and weakening an implicit pro-White leadership bias. *PLoS ONE*, *9*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0083915

Harper, S. R. (2010). An anti-deficit achievement framework for research on students of color in STEM. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, *148*, 63–74. https://doi.org/10.1002/ir

Haslam, S. A., & Ryan, M. K. (2008). The road to the glass cliff: Differences in the perceived suitability of men and women for leadership positions in succeeding and failing organizations. *Leadership Quarterly*, *19*(5), 530–546. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2008.07.011

Hill, L., & Wheat, C. (2017). The influence of mentorship and role models in university women leaders' career paths to university presidency. *The Qualitative Report*, *22*(8), 2090–2111. http://link.galegroup.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A507012506/AONE?u=newb64238&sid=AONE&xid=9e90990f

Hohamad Karkouti, I. (2016). Professional leadership practices and diversity issues in the U.S. higher education system: A research synthesis. *Education*, *136*(4), 405–412. http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=116218127&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Hoyt, C. L., & Burnette, J. L. (2013). Gender bias in leader evaluations: Merging implicit theories and role congruity perspectives. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *39*(10), 1306–1319. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213493643

Hune, S. (2010). What's changed and what hasn't? Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander women in higher education, 1998-2010. *On Campus With Women*, *39*(3), 11. https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=69818499&scope=site

Hune, S. (2011). Asian American women faculty and the contested space of the classroom: Navigating student resistance and (re)claiming authority and their rightful place. In B. Lloyd-Jones & G. Jean-Marie (Eds.), *Women of Color in Higher Education: Turbulent Past, Promising Future* (1st ed., pp. 307–335). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3644(2011)0000009019

Jackson, S., & Harris, S. (2005). African American female college and universiy presidents: Career path to the presidency. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*, *3*(4), 7–25. http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/jwel/165

Johnson, B. E., & Howard-Baptiste, S. D. (2017). Done well or not done at all: Increasing minority women's representation in leadership. *Advances in Educational Administration*, *25*, 167–184. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-366020160000025010

Joslyn, E. (2018). Distributed leadership in HE: A scaffold for cultural cloning and implications for BME academic leaders. *Management in Education*, *32*(4), 185–191. https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020618798670

Kaibara, H. (2014). The transpacific origins of the "model minority" myth of Japanese Americans. *Studies on Asia*, *4*(2), 5–35. https://search-proquest-com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/docview/1628222534?rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprimo

Kamassah, S. (2010). Factors that enable women of South Asian and African descent to succeed in leadership positions in higher education. *College Quarterly*, *13*(3), 1–17.

Kincheloe, J. L., McLaren, P., Steinberg, S. R., & Monzó, L. D. (2018). Critical pedagogy and qualitative research: Advancing the bricolage. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 235–206). SAGE Publications.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2017). *The leadership challenge: How to make extraordinary things happen in organizations* (6th ed.). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Ladson-billings, G., & Tate, W. I. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, *97*(1), 47–68. https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580701850413

Lee, S. M. (2002). Do Asian American faculty face a glass ceiling in higher education? *American Educational Research Journal*, *39*(3), 695–724. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312039003695

Lee, S. S. (2006). Over-represented and de-minoritized: The racialization of Asian Americans in higher education. *Interactions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, *2*(2). https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4r7161b2 Journal

Longman, K. A., & Lafreniere, S. L. (2012). Moving beyond the stained glass ceiling: Preparing women for leadership in faith-based higher education. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, *14*(1), 45–61. https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422311427429

Lord, R. G., Brown, D. J., & Harvey, J. L. (2002). System constraints on leadership perceptions, behavior, and influence: An example of connectionist level processes. In M. A. Hogg & S. Tindale (Eds.), *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes* (pp. 283–310).

https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470998458.ch12

Madden, M. (2011). Four gender stereotypes of leaders: Do they influence leadership in higher education. *Wagadu*, *9*, 55–88. https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/docview/1892987764?accountid=11085

Manzano, L., Bishundat, D., Byrd, A., Furr, S., Kodama, C., Chan, J., Squire, D., & Poon, O. (2016). A critical review of the model minority myth in selected literature on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in higher education. *Review of Educational Research*, *86*(2), 469–502. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315612205

Maramba, D. C. (2011). Few and far between: Exploring the experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander women in student affairs administration. In G. Jean-Marie & B. Lloyd-Jones (Eds.), *Women of Color in Higher Education: Turbulent Past, Promising Future* (pp. 337–359). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3644(2011)0000009020

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (Second). SAGE Publications.

McGee, E. (2018). "Black genius, Asian fail": The detriment of stereotype lift and stereotype threat in high-achieving Asian and Black STEM students. *AERA Open*, *4*(4), 233285841881665. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858418816658

Mena, J. A., & Vaccaro, A. (2017). "I've struggled, I've battled": Invisibility microaggressions experienced by women of color at a predominantly White institution. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education*, *10*(3), 301–318. https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2017.1347047

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (Fourth). Jossey-Bass.

Miller, P. (2016). "White sanction", institutional, group & individual interaction in the promotion, progression of BME academics and teachers in England. *Power and Education*, *8*(3), 205–221.

Museus, S. D., & Kiang, P. N. (2009). *Deconstructing the model minority myth and how it contributes to the invisible minority reality in higher education research*. *142*, 5–15. https://doi.org/10.1002/ir

Neilson, P., & Suyemoto, K. (2009). Using culturally sensitive frameworks to study Asian American leaders in higher education. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, *142*, 83–93. https://doi.org/10.1002/ir

Ng, J. C., Lee, S. S., & Pak, Y. K. (2007). Contesting the model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes: A critical review of literature on Asian Americans in education. *Review of*

Research in Education, *31*(1), 95–130. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732x07300046095

Oikelome, G. (2017). Pathway to the presidency: The perceived impact of identity structures on the journey experiences of women college presidents. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, *19*(3), 23–40.

Pak, Y. K., Maramba, D. C., & Hernandez, Xavier, J. (2014). Asian Americans in higher education: Charting new realities. In *ASHE Higher Education Report* (Vol. 40, Issue 1). https://doi.org/10.1002/aehe.20013

Pang, V. O., Han, P. P., & Pang, J. M. (2011). Asian American and Pacific Islander students. *Educational Researcher*, *40*(8), 378–389. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x11424222

Park, J. J., & Liu, A. (2014). Interest convergence or divergence?: A critical race analysis of Asian Americans, meritocracy, and critical mass in the affirmative action debate. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *85*(1), 36–64. https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2014.0001

Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity--one ’s own. *Educational Researcher*, *17*(7), 17–21. https://doi.org/10.2307/1174381

Petersen, W. (1966, January 9). Success story, Japanese-American style. *New York Times*.

Pittman, C. T. (2010). Race and gender oppression in the classroom: The experiences of women faculty of color with White male students. *Teaching Sociology*, *38*(3), 183–196. https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X10370120

Pyke, J. (2013). Women, choice and promotion or why women are still a minority in the professoriate. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, *35*(4), 444–454. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2013.812179

Rosette, A. S., Koval, C. Z., Ma, A., & Livingston, R. (2016). Race matters for women leaders: Intersectional effects on agentic deficiencies and penalties. *Leadership Quarterly*, *27*(3), 429–445. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.01.008

Sagaria, M. A. D. (2002). An exploratory model of filtering In administrative searches: Toward counter-hegemonic discourses. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *73*(6), 677–710. https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2002.0055

Sakamoto, A., Takei, I., & Woo, H. (2012). The myth of the model minority myth. *Sociological Spectrum*, *32*(4), 309–321. https://doi.org/10.1080/02732173.2012.664042

Saldaña, J., & Omasta, M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Analyzing life* (VitalSourc). SAGE Publications.

Salmons, J. (2015). *Qualitative online interviews: Strategies, design, and skills* (Second). SAGE Publications.

Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., Burroughs, H., & Jinks, C. (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: Exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality and Quantity*, *52*(4), 1893–1907. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8

Schmader, T. (2010). Stereotype threat deconstructed. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *19*(1), 14–18. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721409359292

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (Third). Teachers College Press.

Shepherd, S. (2017). Why are there so few female leaders in higher education. *Management in Education*, *31*(2), 82–87. https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020617696631

Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *69*(5), 797–811. https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.69.5.797

Suzuki, B. H. (2002). Revisiting the model minority stereotype: Implications for student affairs practice and higher education. *New Directions for Student Services*, *Spring 200*(97), 21–32. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.36

Sy, T., Shore, L. M., Strauss, J., Shore, T. H., Tram, S., Whiteley, P., & Ikeda-Muromachi, K. (2010). Leadership perceptions as a function of race-occupation fit: The case of Asian Americans. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *95*(5), 902–919. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019501

Teranishi, R. T. (2012). AAPI and the institutions that serve them. *Change*, *44*(2), 16–22. https://doi-org.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/00091383.2012.655233

Teranishi, R. T., & Nguyen, T.-L. K. (2012). Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders: The changing demography of the United States and implications for education policy. *Harvard Journal of Asian American Policy Review*, *22*, 17–27. http://link.galegroup.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A306598126/AONE?u=newb64238&sid=AONE&xid=f4913be4%0A

Tran, N. A. (2014). The role of mentoring in the success of women leaders of color in higher education. *Mentoring and Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, *22*(4), 302–315. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2014.945740

Turner, C. S. V. (2002). Women of color in academe: Living with multiple marginality. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *73*(1), 74–93. https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2002.0013

Turner, C. S. V. (2007). Pathways to the presidency: Biographical sketches of women of color firsts. *Harvard Educational Review*, *77*(1), 1–38.

https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.77.1.p831667187v7514w

van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. State University of New York Press.

van Manen, M. (2016). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Routledge.

White, B. J., & Hollingsworth, K. (2005). Developing professionals of color : Going beyond the traditional leadership skill set. *Journal of Leadership Education*, *4*(1), 90–103.

Wolfe, B. L., & Dilworth, P. P. (2015). Transitioning normalcy: Organizational culture, African American administrators, and diversity leadership in higher education. *Review of Educational Research*, *85*(4), 667–697. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654314565667

Wolfe, B. L., & Freeman, S. J. (2013). A case for administrators of color: Insights and policy implications for higher education's predominately White institutions. *EJournal of Educational Policy*, 1–11. https://in.nau.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/135/2018/08/WolfeandFreeman-ek.pdf

Yamagata-Noji, A., & Gee, H. (2012). Asian American and Pacific Islanders in leadership: Pipeline or pipe dream? In D. Ching & A. Agbayani (Eds.), *Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Higher Education: Research and Perspectives on Identity, Leadership, and Successs* (pp. 173–192). NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Interview #1: Personal and Professional History

1. How do you racially and ethnically identify yourself?
2. How do you identify your gender?
3. What is your current title and role?
4. How long have you been working at your current institution?
5. How long have you been working in higher education?
6. How did you decide to work in higher education?
7. Can you tell me about a time when you first experienced yourself as being a leader?
8. Can you take me through your path to your current leadership position?
9. Can you describe the experiences of when you first transitioned into your current institution and role? What did you feel? What did you think about?
10. How did you know/decide to pursue leadership within higher education?
11. How did you choose to work for your current institution?
12. Can you tell me about an experience early on in your leadership journey where you became conscious of your racial and ethnic identity?
13. Can you tell me about an experience early on in your leadership journey where you became conscious of your gender?
14. What factors do you believe are/were important to your success as a leader?
15. Who has been instrumental in your success as a leader?
16. How does your family (parents, grandparents, aunt and uncles, etc.) view your leadership role?

Interview #2: Details of Experience

1. What does leadership development look like at your institution? What is considered "good leadership?"
2. Who holds power in your institution? How is that evident?
3. Can you share a story about how you have navigated the systems and power structures at your institution?
4. Has there been a time where you were perceived to step outside of what is considered "good leadership" at your institution? Can you share a story about it?
5. How do you understand/define your leadership in light of your environment?
6. How has your leadership been misunderstood?
7. Are there stories that you can share that capture your experience as an Asian American female leader?
8. Can you tell me about the community that surrounds your institution/where you live? How does this impact your identity and work at your institution?
9. What does the tension between representation and personal identity look like for you?

Interview #3: Meaning of Experience (Focus Group)

1. Could you pick a story from our last interview to share with the group?
2. Do you have any insights or stories risen for you since we last spoke? If so, would you mind sharing them with us?
3. How do you believe your identity as an Asian American woman has shaped your understanding of leadership?
4. How important is it for you to connect with other Asian American women in higher education?

5. Why do you think people gravitate to you as a leader?
6. What do you make of the tension points that you have to sit in (in regards to representation vs. personal identity, authoritative vs. effective, etc.)?
7. What have you learned about your leadership as you navigated the systems of power at your institution(s)?
8. What impact do you think your identities have had on your view of leadership and power?
9. What has felt most meaningful to you in regards to participation in this study? Anything else you would like to share with us?

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INVITATION EMAIL

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

Study Title: Critical Phenomenological Study of Female Asian American Leadership at Predominantly White Institutions

Greetings:

My name is Jenny Elsey. I am a doctoral student in George Fox's Doctorate of Educational Leadership program. I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in a qualitative research study exploring the lived experiences of female Asian American administrators who lead within predominantly White institutions. I have designed this study under the guidance of my chair, Dr. Susanna Thornhill, who, along with my committee, are confident this study could provide important insights into an understudied area. I believe that this study matters because we need to hear the voices of female Asian American leaders. I also believe that the students I work with need to hear your stories.

I am reaching out to you as a potential participant for the study based on the following criteria:

- You self-identify as a female Asian American.
- You work on a campus that would be considered a predominately White institution (one whose composite makeup is majority White or whose administrative leadership, policies, systems and structures still reflect a predominantly White culture).
- You currently occupy a leadership role identified as a dean or higher.

If you agree to participate, it would involve a total time commitment of between 4-5 hours from mid-November to mid-January. Your time commitment will generally be devoted to interviews, two 1:1 interviews with and a third and final interview will be a focus group with other study participants. The final interview may last between 60-90 minutes.

I will conduct interviews virtually using the Zoom platform. If you prefer a different platform, I will work with you to identify a format that you are comfortable using. For analysis purposes, I intend to record these interviews for later transcription. I would not show these videos publicly, nor use excerpts for any presentation purposes. All recordings will be destroyed within five years of the conclusion of this study.

Participation is voluntary and all responses will be kept as confidential as possible, through the use of pseudonyms for you/those you know and obscuring any identifying details. I will also use member checks to ensure your comfort with the analytic process This study will be published in the form of a dissertation in the fulfillment of program requirements. It is also my hope that I can take the themes in the findings and use them in future blog posts designed to inspire the next generation of female Asian American leaders.

If you choose to participate, you may decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering and/or terminate your participation in the study at any time. An Informed Consent will be provided to you for your review and a signed copy will be offered to you for your own records.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate in the study, have further questions, or would like to suggest another name of a potential participant based on the above criteria, please email me at jelsey@georgefox.edu. If you are interested in participating in the study, I will contact you regarding scheduling your first interview. Your time is deeply appreciated.

Thank you,

Jenny Elsey, Doctoral Student and Principal Researcher
jelsey@georgefox.edu

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Critical Phenomenological Study of Female Asian American Leadership at Predominantly White Institutions

Principal Researcher: Jenny Elsey
Dissertation Chair: Dr. Susanna Thornhill, Assistant Professor, George Fox University

Prospective Research Participant: The purpose of this form is to provide you (as a research participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit the criteria for the study and hold lived experiences that are valuable to it. Please ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate. You are also free to ask questions at any time during or after your participation in this research.

PURPOSE
The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of female Asian American administrators in order to better understand how they make meaning of their leadership journeys at predominantly White institutions of higher education. The researcher's goal is to elevate the voice of each participant. These stories will ultimately contribute to a more robust understanding of how leadership is experienced in higher education.

PROCEDURES
Consenting to be a voluntary participant in this study, means you can expect to participate in three separate interviews, each lasting between 60-90 minutes. The third and final interview will be a focus group with other study participants. Interviews will be conducted virtually on the Zoom platform. Unless otherwise indicated, these interviews will be audio- and video-recorded.

POSSIBLE RISKS AND BENEFITS
It is expected that participation in this study will provide you with no more than minimal risk or discomfort which means that you should not experience it as any more troubling than your normal daily life. However, there is a chance of unexpected risks. Due to the small overall available sample size, it is difficult to guarantee complete confidentiality. It may be possible that others may recognize your experience. Another foreseeable risk is that you may experience discomfort while answering a question that discloses personal information and/or may trigger unpleasant memories. If you feel uncomfortable or distressed, please tell the researcher and she will ask if you want to continue. Finally, the third interview conducted will be a focus group, which will mean that participants may know the identities of the other participants from interactions outside of the study.

You will not receive any financial compensation due to the unfunded nature of this study. You will not receive any other direct benefits from the study. However, your participation in the study will help improve the knowledge of how Asian American women lead in predominantly White spaces in higher education. Your participation may also benefit other Asian American women who find themselves either desiring greater leadership or who are currently navigating their way.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Due to the qualitative nature of this study, it is difficult to guarantee complete confidentiality.

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

However, the investigator will work diligently to take the necessary steps to keep your personal information collected for the study as protected and confidential as possible.

- Your identity will be kept confidential by using pseudonyms for participants and institutions
- Electronic files and hard copy files will not have names but pseudonym identifiers. In addition, the researcher will provide you with an opportunity to review pre-publication transcripts so that you can to delete any unintended or unwanted markers of identity.
- Electronic files will receive password protection.
- Hard copy files will be stored in a locked, private, residential space.
- The researcher will also aggregate institutional data and composite narratives in order to further remove any identifying information.
- All recordings will be destroyed within five years of the completion of the study.

WITHDRAWAL FROM THE STUDY

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the ability to withdraw from the study at any point. Even if you consent now, you are free to withdraw consent later, and withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with George Fox University or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. If you choose to withdraw from the study, the researcher will discuss your preferences for any data in which you were a part.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

This document explains your rights as a research participant. If you have questions regarding your participation in this research study or have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Jenny Elsey using the information listed at the bottom of this form

Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in the above study. By signing below, you are indicating the following:

- You understand that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
- You understand the procedures described above, and you understand fully the rights of a potential subject in a research study involving people as subjects.
- Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction.
- You agree knowingly to assume any risks involved in the study.
- You agree to maintain confidentiality of the identities and stories of other participants in the focus group portion of the study.
- You agree to participate in this study.

☐ I agree to be recorded ☐ I do not agree to be recorded

_____	_____	_____
Participant Name Printed	Participant Name Signed	Date

Principal Researcher:
Jenny Elsey
414 N. Meridian St. Newberg, OR 97132 : jelsey@georgefox.edu : 503.554.2318

APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY HSRC INITIAL REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE **Page 6**

2191065

Title: A Critical Phenomenological Study of Femal Asian American Leadership at Predominately White Institutions

Principal Researcher(s): Jenny Elsey

Date application completed: November 1, 2019

(The researcher needs to complete the above information on this page)

COMMITTEE FINDING: For Committee Use Only

☑ (1) The proposed research makes adequate provision for safeguarding the health and dignity of the subjects and is therefore approved.

☐ (2) Due to the assessment of risk being questionable or being subject to change, the research must be periodically reviewed by the **HSRC** on a basis throughout the course of the research or until otherwise notified. This requires resubmission of this form, with updated information, for each periodic review.

☐ (3) The proposed research evidences some unnecessary risk to participants and therefore must be revised to remedy the following specific area(s) on non-compliance:

☐ (4) The proposed research contains serious and potentially damaging risks to subjects and is therefore not approved.

Chair or designated member

11/1/19

Date