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Amplify Our Voices: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Women Senior Leaders at a California Higher Education Research (R1) University System

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Publication Date

2024

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

Amplify Our Voices:

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Women

Senior Leaders at a California Higher Education Research (R1) University System

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for
the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

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2024

The dissertation of Rosemarie Jeanette Mirano-Del Mar is approved,

and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

California State University, San Marcos

2024

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of **Luz B. Perez** (April 30, 1936 – October 2, 1980), my beloved aunt who was a cherished public school teacher in the Philippines. Tita Luz was admired and adored by her students, colleagues, and everyone who knew her. Our time together, though brief, left an indelible mark on my life and continues to fuel my passion for education and learning.

EPIGRAPH

"Dream with ambition, lead with conviction, and see yourself in a way
that others might not see you, simply because they've never seen it before."

– Kamala Harris,
American Politician, Attorney, and the 49th Vice President of the United States

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Amplify Our Voices:
Exploring the Lived Experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Women
Senior Leaders at a California Higher Education Research (R1) University System

by

Rosemarie Jeanette Mirano-Del Mar
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California San Diego, 2024
California State University, San Marcos, 2024

Professor Brooke Soles, Chair

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) play a vital role in the American cultural landscape, embodying a rich diversity of approximately 50 ethnic groups and over 100 languages. This diverse population encompasses heritage from Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, Hawaiian, and other Asian and Pacific Islander ancestries. AAPIs have the fastest growth rate among all racial and ethnic groups in the U.S., with an increase from 10.5 million to 18.9 million—an impressive 81%—between 2000 and 2019 (U.S. Census). However, this population growth does not translate into proportional representation in leadership. A significant gap exists, particularly affecting AAPI women, who face compounded disparities as they navigate their dual minority status. The pressing issue is the lack of AAPI women in higher education leadership positions, where they account for less than one percent of leadership roles

and experience the largest gender gap of any racial or ethnic group in the education sector. This dissertation explores the experiences of AAPI women in senior leadership roles within a large public research university system (R1) in California. It investigates how the intersection of race, culture, and gender identities shapes AAPI women's career pursuits, the organizational and social barriers they face, and the support they receive. The study seeks to understand why these women choose to pursue careers in higher education, identify factors contributing to their success, define their unique leadership styles, and how they make sense of their leadership journeys relative to their racial, cultural, and gender identities. Intersectionality and the Asian Critical (AsianCrit) Theory comprised the conceptual framework for this study, using a qualitative approach and phenomenological research design aimed to shed light on the lived experiences that have influenced the career mobility and leadership of the AAPI women. Ultimately, this dissertation aspires to contribute to the existing body of scholarship on AAPI women leaders.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Use your light to make sure that others feel seen."

- *Michelle Obama, <u>The Light We Carry</u>*

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) constitute an essential part of the American cultural landscape, representing a wide range of diversity that consists of approximately 50 ethnic groups speaking over 100 languages, with links to Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, Hawaiian, and other Asian and Pacific Islander ancestries (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2022). The 2021 U.S. Census Bureau shows Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders hold the fastest population growth rate among all racial and ethnic groups in the United States, between the years 2000 and 2019. According to a Pew Research Center analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau population estimates, the AAPI population grew 81% between 2000 through 2019, from roughly 10.5 million to a record 18.9 million, (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). This number is expected to continue its rise.

However, the growth of the Asian American and Pacific Islander population in the U.S. is not in alignment with the AAPI population's representation in leadership positions. A notable gap exists signifying a lack of representation in these key leadership roles. For example, AAPIs are well-represented at top institutions and hold the highest median income of all racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Yet, AAPIs remain underrepresented at the upper echelon of the corporate hierarchy (Johnson & Sy, 2016). Goldman Sachs reported that AAPIs comprised 27% of its U.S. professional workforce, but only represented 11% of senior managers and 0% at the executive officer levels (Gee & Peck, 2018).   Within Fortune 500

Companies, AAPIs represent less than 2% of executives (Lee, 2019). These issues are not restricted to the business sector. The AAPI community is well represented in the field of law with approximately 11% at the associate level, yet only 3% of AAPIs achieve the law-firm partner level (Lee, 2019). This is also the case in the federal government sector, as AAPIs represent nearly 20% of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) workforce but makeup only 6% of senior leadership (Goon et al., 2022). These results of underrepresentation in leadership roles are prevalent across the country, with the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) workforce data citing AAPI professionals are the least likely race to be promoted into management roles (Gee & Peck, 2018). While this imbalance cuts across various industries, the purpose of this paper will focus on the disparity within the field of higher education.

Like their growth in population within the United States, the AAPI student population in higher education has also expanded. As a group, AAPI students exhibited some of the highest persistence and completion rates of all racial and ethnic groups (The American Council on Education, 2017). AAPIs hold 7% of full-time tenure track faculty positions (more than any other racial minority group), however, AAPIs represent only 3% of deans, 2% of chief academic officers, and 1.5% of college presidents (Davis & Huang, 2013). According to a study by the Asian Pacific American Women's Leadership Institute (APAWLI), AAPI women hold less than one percent of the senior leadership positions (such as executive directors or upper management) at colleges and universities, designating the largest gender gap of any racial or ethnic group.

Regardless of field or industry, representation matters. It matters for people belonging to marginalized groups, as a source of validation and hope. On an individual level, there lies great power in seeing relatable role models in positions of influence. Civil Rights Activist Marian

Wright Edelman stated, "You can't be what you can't see," implying that it is difficult to have the confidence to pursue professional goals, more so have an awareness of the goals that are available to pursue, when one doesn't see individuals that share their same identities and experiences in leader roles (Edelman, 2015). Thus, it is so important to see role models that share one's identities. Studies have shown that people's career aspirations are highly influenced by who they see in their lives (Bastian, n.d.). People who hold identities that aren't represented in positions of leadership have a more difficult time climbing professional ladders. This is evident across industries. It is easier to believe in something one can see. With that vision, dreams and aspirations become attainable.

From an organizational standpoint, having a diverse faculty, staff, and student base is fundamental to building a diverse knowledge base and generating institutional change, as faculty, staff, and students are the cornerstone of the higher education institution's research, teaching, and public service mission. The composition of faculty and staff who reach senior leadership levels reveals the extent to which an institution's mission, core values, and vision are truly committed to diversity and inclusion (Kim & Cooc, 2021). Thus, on an organizational level, representation is of critical importance in the quest to ensure access and arrival at the long, winding road toward achieving equity and social justice in the workplace.

Problem Statement

The central problem addressed in the literature review and research study is the lack of representation of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women in higher education leadership positions. The purpose of this dissertation is to offer an examination of the circumstances surrounding this disparity and to delve deep into the phenomenon that is AAPI

women in higher education senior leadership. This can be achieved by specifically posing the following questions:

RQ1: In what ways have the racial/cultural and gender identities informed AAPI women's pursuit of their career goals?

RQ1-A: What educational experiences have AAPI women had that influenced their career choices, professional growth, and pursuit of leadership?

RQ1-B: What societal experiences have AAPI women had that influenced their career choices, professional growth, and pursuit of leadership?

RQ2: What organizational barriers and supports did AAPI women experience in their paths to striving for, achieving, and maintaining their senior leadership position(s)?

Does higher education provide a space for a work climate and culture that values diversity, creates opportunities and proactively extends support for marginalized and under-represented groups, namely AAPI women, in their pursuit of professional development, career growth, promotion, and inclusion? The AAPI cultural values and stereotypes; the intersections of gender, race, and leadership; and the higher education organizational structure, policies, and practices are topics that underlie this study. Along these lines, the conceptual framework for this research applies the concept of Intersectionality (Race/Culture, Gender, and Leadership) and the Asian Critical (AsianCrit) theoretical framework. Intersectionality and AsianCrit Theory will be further examined in this paper, to address this critical inquiry.

Researcher's Positionality

I have worked at the University of California in San Diego (UC San Diego) for 25 years. This topic is especially meaningful to me as it reflects my own journey as an AAPI woman

seeking leadership opportunities and making contributions in higher education. I am eager to explore research data and study findings, as well as to hear the stories and lived experiences of other AAPI women on their career and leadership paths. Are their cultural, familial, educational, and professional backgrounds similar to mine? Do their personal and professional experiences resonate with my own? With a background in human resources, continuous improvement, change management, and organization effectiveness, I aim to better understand the role of organizations and identify the gaps that hinder the promotion of an inclusive and equitable work environment. I hope this study will generate data that supports the development of programs, initiatives, tools, and resources to help AAPI women create clear pathways to leadership. Women of color, particularly AAPI women, deserve to be seen, empowered, and valued for their contributions to the educational and professional landscape.

Definitions

In the context of this research study, the following definitions are offered. For a full list of definitions, please see Appendix A.

Asian American and Pacific Islander: The United States Census Bureau offers the following definitions for Asian American and Pacific Islander populations. (US Census Bureau, 2018)

> *Asian* – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.

> *Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander* – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

Asian Critical Race (AsianCrit) Theory: The Asian Critical Race (AsianCrit) perspective, a theoretical branch extending from Critical Race Theory, serves as a tool for understanding the

racial realities and racialized experiences of Asian Americans, as well as a conceptual lens through which the experiences of Asian Americans can be interpreted. (Museus & Iftikar, 2013)

Intersectionality: In the context of this study, intersectionality provides a framework to analyze the experiences of AAPI women, looking at the intersection between multiple categories of socially constructed identities (such as race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and class) and considers their effects on the everyday lives of people who are at the crossroads of these multiple intersections. (Li, 2014)

Chapter 1 Summary

Despite the continued growth of the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) population in the United States and the presence of AAPI women in many professional fields, there is a significant gap in research on their lived experiences and challenges as leaders, particularly in higher education. AAPI women in senior leadership bring unique perspectives shaped by complex cultural, social, and professional identities that remain unexplored. Understanding the journeys, obstacles, accomplishments, and insights of AAPI women leaders is essential. Expanding research in this area enriches the leadership narrative in academia and paves the way for more equitable pathways for future generations of AAPI women leaders.

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"You change the world by being yourself."
-Yoko Ono, artist, singer, songwriter, and activist

This literature review encompasses research articles related to Asian American and Pacific Islander women in higher education leadership.   The studies address the topic of AAPI and/or women's lack of representation in leadership positions. Each source attempts to explore the issue(s), in relation to organizational structures, support systems, leadership development, identities and stereotypes, participant journeys and lived experiences, the intersectionality of race and gender, and introduction to various theories, models and frameworks for leadership. Studies encompassed a wide range of methodologies such as the use of regression data analysis, quantitative and qualitative studies, mix-methods approaches, case studies, storytelling and lived experiences, workforce analytics, employment practices, electronic surveys, semi-structured interviews, and document reviews.

This literature review is organized by three main themes. The first theme centers on the AAPI culture, values and stereotypes and implications for professional growth and leadership development. The second theme identified is the existence and struggle of the *dual minority* label(s), the distinctive combination of race and gender, of being AAPI and a woman. It is this intersectionality that results in AAPI women bumping up against the double-paned glass ceiling. A *double bind* for this *dual minority*, AAPI women are identified as the least likely demographic group to be promoted from non-manager professionals to executives (Kramer, 2020). Lastly, the third theme of this paper centers on the need to dissect and analyze current organizational structures in higher education, including its values, policies, and practices.   The lack of AAPI women representation in higher education leadership requires an assessment of the higher

education organization, an identification of the barriers that exist to prevent women of color from achieving leadership positions, and an evaluation of leadership models that foster mentorship and support non-traditional career mobility. Women do not feel they are set up for success to assume executive leadership positions, compared to the entitled, traditional leadership roles offered to and occupied by their male counterparts (Arriaga et al, 2020).

Theme 1: Asian Cultural Values, Stereotypes, and The Bamboo Ceiling

Research on cross-cultural differences has shown that Eastern cultures with Asian origins have proven to possess collectivistic traits, compared to Western culture(s). Studies in the United States have further discovered AAPIs as the sole ethnic group most focused on the collective and less focused on the individual, compared to White Americans (Gundemir, Carlton & Homan, 2019; Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001; Cox, Lobel & McLeod, 1991; Hofstede, 1994; Oyeserman, Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990; Yum, 1994). This collectivistic orientation is best expressed in a cultural value system demonstrated through self-sacrifice, putting the needs of the group before one's own individual interests and desires.

Cultural Values

There are broad generalizations about Asian cultural values that hold true, but it is important to note differences exist between United States and foreign-born Asians, as well as between country of origin and demographic groups. However, one generalization can be made that Asians Americans and Pacific Islanders collectively agree family comes first in the hierarchy of cultural values. Family is followed by education, financial success, and respect for elders, all of which lie within the agreed perception of Asian values, among other cultural values (Kokoyachuk, 2019).

Yee et al., in their study of AAPI families' resiliency and socialization, point to two challenges commonly faced by AAPI families, minority status and acculturation. Minority status "confers a subordinate position and restricted range of opportunities for mobility and success… AAPIs must master the stress of 'being different'… or 'not belonging.' Another ecological challenge for AAPI families is the tension associated with acculturation" (Yee et al., 2007). The study highlights that AAPI families must navigate two often conflicting challenges, balancing their cultural values with varying degrees of assimilation. "Some family members (typically children and adolescents) acculturate more quickly than others" (Yee et al., 2007).

Asian cultural norms and values have served as a double-edge sword in the pursuit of professional growth. Kawahara and colleague's (2013) research study, which focuses on the career pathways of AAPI, similarly highlights the well-known Asian values of possessing a hard work ethic with strong attention to excellence. These values, though commendable and a contributor toward achieving professional and financial security, have also perpetuated stereotypes that hinder career advancement to higher-level leadership positions.

Stereotypes: Nerds, Foreigners, and the Model Minority

AAPI cultural stereotypes in American society have perennially shaped public perceptions, reducing a richly diverse community to simplistic and very damaging labels. The "nerd" stereotype casts Asians as innately intelligent but socially awkward, emphasizing academic prowess while diminishing individuality and creativity. As the "perpetual foreigner," AAPI are often seen as outsiders regardless of how long they (or their families) have been part of this country, always viewed as "other." The "model minority" stereotype depicts AAPI as universally successful, hard-working, and compliant, creating unrealistic expectations while

masking real struggles and diversity within AAPI communities. These stereotypes create limiting narratives that obscure the full spectrum of AAPI identities and lived experiences.

The "Nerd"

The Asian cultural values of a hard work ethic, quality, and excellence contribute to AAPI employees' high degree of technical competence, further contributing to the Asian *Nerd* stereotype (Kibria, 2003). This stereotype, which focuses on the *Nerd* with exceptional technical knowledge and capabilities, also alludes to AAPI employees lacking social competence and charisma. Thus, studies suggest that AAPI people prove to be an excellent fit for jobs in technology or engineering, but unfit for positions requiring social skills, in fields such as communications, public relations, or retail (Lai & Barbcock, 2013; Leong, 2014; Sy, et al, 2010). Stereotypes of AAPIs as unsocial, therefore, undermine perceptions of them as strong, effective leaders (Sy, Tram & Leung, 2017; Woo, 2000). When expectations associated with leadership are not in alignment with group stereotypes associated with AAPIs, the AAPI individuals are less (or not) considered for positions of leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001).

In order to maximize the likelihood of advancing into leadership positions, advocacy groups have advised AAPI employees to exaggerate their sociability and downplay their technical competence; to act in ways that are inconsistent with the AAPI stereotypes (Gee, Peck, & Wong, 2015; Lai & Babcock, 2013). In response to this advice, other research shows AAPI participants were reluctant to promote their own work and achievement, noting that self-promotion would be viewed to be in poor taste, displaying arrogance (Liang, et al, 2018). The AAPI participants noted a discomfort in playing politics entailed in higher level positions, as this requires behaviors of assertiveness; typically viewed unfavorably in Asian cultures (Liang &

Peters, 2017). This is where the *double-edge sword* exists. AAPI values and stereotypes do not appear to be in alignment with the U.S. values that contribute to growth in leadership.

The "Foreigner"

Compared to other ethnic groups, Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) are more likely to be perceived as immigrants (Lee, 2019). This dominant trope, also labeled the *Perpetual Foreigner*, positions AAPIs as non-American. It discounts the AAPI history and experiences in the United States, categorizing the AAPI community as unassimilable and different from Americans. Despite where they were born, how long they have lived in the United States (U.S.) or what generation they represent, AAPIs have been, and continue to be, regarded as foreigners (Takaki, 1989; Wu, 2002). In America, to look Asian means to be a foreigner forever. Because of this, members of the AAPI community are perceived to be less familiar with U.S. cultural norms. This further invokes the unspoken inquiry of whether AAPIs are more American or more Asian (Ching & Agbayani, 2012). Such perceptions pose a threat to the AAPI's full acceptance and ultimately their ability to achieve positions of leadership in U.S. organizations (Lee, 2019).

The "Model Minority"

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are considered the most educated racial group in America (Pew Research Center, 2013), yet this categorization may imply AAPIs do not encounter challenges regarding career success. As a result, AAPIs have been dubbed with the reputation of the *Model Minority*.   The myth of the Model Minority has long dominated racial framing and perceptions of AAPIs in educational research, policy, and practice (Hune, 2002; Suzuki, 1977, 2002). This racial stereotype generally defines AAPIs as a hardworking, universally successful racial group whose high achievement undercuts claims of systemic racism

made by other minority populations (Osajima, 2000). A tool of racial wedge politics, with intentions to polarize and cause division across groups, the stereotype has assisted in the advancement of a color-blind racist ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Kumashiro, 2008).

In response to the myth's pervasiveness and persistence, several researchers with an interest in AAPIs have engaged in debunking the Model Minority Myth (MMM). Studies have described how the MMM has evolved and been deployed to reinforce White supremacy through numerous means to harm AAPIs. The MMM is depicted to hide inequities that exist within the AAPI communities. Furthermore, the myth feeds the misconstruction that the AAPI communities do not face racial challenges and, hence, do not require support, which justifies their exclusion from racial discourse (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Lee, 2006; Museus, 2014; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ngo, 2006).

Li (2014) argues that the model minority myth creates both positive and negative stereotypes about the AAPI community in her examination of the barriers faced by AAPI women. For instance, AAPIs are often seen as passive, lacking social skills, apolitical, submissive, and not aggressive enough for high-level managerial roles. While they may be viewed as hardworking, intelligent, ambitious, and achievement-oriented, these positive attributes are overshadowed by negative perceptions of AAPIs as shy, quiet, polite, and cold. Such stereotypes hinder their ability to break the bamboo ceiling and advance into executive positions (Li, 2014).

These racist social constructs have impacted the AAPI communities' response, as well. In response to the MMM, several research findings have called for an affirmative model for diversity leadership development (Chin, 2014). Poon and colleagues state the need to reframe how research on AAPIs in higher education is justified and presented. A new agenda for

research on AAPIs is necessary; one that is both humanizing and in alignment with the project of critical deconstructions of dominant racist ideologies in higher education (Poon et al., 2016).

The *Nerd*, *Foreigner* and *Model Minority* stereotypes, according to Ng et al. (2007),

> obscure the tremendous diversity among Asian Americans, flatten Asian American identities and experiences into individual merit or cultural alone, perpetuate the invisibility of Asian Americans in the larger racial discourse, and desensitize the public about the deep-rooted racism in the United States (p. 99).

Research has neglected to completely address the complex racial dimensions associated with these AAPI stereotypes. These stereotypes ultimately lend themselves to generating and upholding what is known as *The Bamboo Ceiling*, a barrier to professional growth for the AAPI communities.

The Bamboo Ceiling

The Bamboo Ceiling is a term used to describe the difficulty and challenges Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the corporate world face in attempting to break through to upper management. Historically, it has been used to refer to the limitations and discrimination AAPIs encounter in the workforce. It is a play on the phrase *glass ceiling*, which refers to the limitations and discrimination women and minorities face in the workforce (Kubota, 2021).

The Bamboo Ceiling can be attributed to Confucian and collectivist values endorsed by many Asian cultures that encourage blending in with others, while forgoing standing out (Akutagawa, 2013; Hyun, 2005; Zane et al., 1991). The Bamboo Ceiling can be observed in multiple domains. This literature review specifically addresses the gap resulting from the Bamboo Ceiling that exists within the realm of higher education. Research shows AAPIs hold 7% of full-time tenure track faculty positions, more than any other racial minority group. However, AAPI's embody only 3% of deans, 2% of chief academic officers, and 1.5% of college

presidents (Davis & Huang, 2013). Several studies point to evidence of barriers causing *leaks* in AAPI's pathways to leadership. The barriers include prejudice and stereotypes related to gender, race, and culture; unjust treatment of institutions in hiring, evaluation, and promotion practices; and personal difficulties such as disadvantaged socioeconomic status and heavy home/work responsibilities (Nguyen, 2020).

Theme 2: An Intersectionality of Race, Gender, and Leadership

Race alone should not serve as the sole point of consideration when examining the lack of representation of AAPI women in leadership roles. It is crucial to tackle these topics from the framework of intersectionality, considering race, gender and implications with leadership. An intersectional approach in studying the lived experiences of women of color, particularly AAPI women, offer a more holistic assessment and understanding, compared to mainstream analysis of women of color's societal setbacks and disadvantages imposed by White males (Mirza, 2009).

Gender Considerations and Barriers to Leadership

Women comprise almost half of the U.S. labor force, as they exceed the number of men in earning bachelor's and master's degrees and are vastly approaching the number of men with medical and legal degrees. Yet, men are far more likely than women to attain the highest paying and most prestigious leadership roles (American Association of University Women, 2020). Much research has been conducted around women in the workforce, shining light on women's lack of representation in leadership positions; a common issue reflected across a variety of industries. Conclusions have been presented from the research and the findings are categorized into three distinct domains: the Personal, the Professional, and the Organizational.

The Personal

Personal reasons such as lifestyle choice, individual circumstances, home situation, family responsibilities, and establishing a healthy work/life balance have played a role and served as key themes influencing a woman's aspiration to leadership position(s). Choices about lifestyles often influence women's decision-making about career planning (Airini et al., 2011). For example, women may consider responsibilities, such as raising a family (White, 1995), and their physical and mental health to take priority over climbing the corporate ladder (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). To further underscore this point, interviews studying female leaders show successful women reported placing a priority on career often equates to fitting home responsibilities around their work schedules and/or making the concerted choice not to have children (White et al., 1995).

Specific circumstances have a significant impact on a woman's leadership advancement, including work hour(s) restrictions, the ability to travel, and managing parental responsibilities and family life (Airini et al., 2011). With the latter, female study participants indicate that family is regarded as the priority, and life is managed with this priority at the forefront of all decisions, thus impacting their career mobility and growth. These participants conveyed a realization of what matters in life; that life is short and needs to be balanced with reduced stress. These realizations were seen to play a part in shaping one's approach to undertaking leadership roles. Recognizing the importance of career advancement that honors the accommodation of parental and familial responsibilities and maintaining work–life balance were outcomes of this realization (Airini et al., 2011). Women must find a balance between their jobs and family life, despite the competing responsibilities both at home and at work. Exactitude, perseverance, and the sensitivity of women to do their jobs have made them successful at doing their duties well

(Shahtalebi et al., 2011). Ultimately, balancing work and home life can be the challenge that limits women from seeking leadership roles.

The Professional

Several professional reasons exist that impact a woman's career trajectory and executive development. Themes emerging from studies on women and leadership are appropriately framed from a professional lens and focus on topics such as management style, leadership identity, experiencing a *double bind* (and in the case of AAPI women leaders, a *dual minority*), missing initiative and the lack of exposure to role models and mentors.

Regarding management style, the need to negotiate traditional authoritarianism has been identified in research on women in management (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). This traditional management style model involves expectations of heroism, possessing a physical and emotional toughness, and being self-reliant. According to such research, many women still attempt to conform to this traditional model of career success (White, 1995) but may regret the perceived need to be tougher for their own protection and the hardening that results (Marshall, 1995). Thus, the qualities of a leader, and the path to achieving leadership roles, are still largely based on an outdated male-dominated management style model that shuts women out.

Additional research on women and leadership derived specific conclusions that pose a hindrance in establishing a leadership identity. Findings included the following rationale:

(1) leadership positions are less attractive to women than to men; (2) women already in leadership roles are not as recognized as their male colleagues within their organizations; and (3) women are often excluded from informal leadership networks (Dominici et al., 2009). Ultimately, the paths to leadership were much slower for women and were, oftentimes, blocked from access and recognition. Since men have been leaders much longer, the traits associated

with leadership are historically viewed as masculine and not seen favorably when exhibited by women (American Association of University Women, 2020).

Studies also reveal that women must deal with a *Double Bind* when in positions of leadership. For example, women are expected to exert authority to appear competent and leader-like, however they are judged as socially deficient if perceived to be too dominant (Tinkler et al., 2019). Tinker et al. also found that AAPI women, in addition to this double bind, also possess a *Dual Minority* complex – being a double subordinate from their race and gender identities. Study results show that participants viewed the AAPI woman as the least fit for leadership. Accordingly, AAPI women may experience less favorable evaluations than AAPI men and White women due to their double identity with groups stereotyped as non-dominant, AAPI and women (Rosette et al., 2016). Hence, perceptions of AAPI women as non-dominant and unassertive further hurt others' views of AAPI women's leadership abilities (Kim et al., 2022).

Research has shown that the *Dual Minority* labels of being a woman and an Asian American and Pacific Islander were prevalent throughout an AAPI woman's career and leadership journey. Several research participants shared that they accepted a given position rather than seeking one. Participants were also reluctant to showcase their own work and achievement, deeming self-promotion as pompous and in poor taste; and expressing their discomfort in playing the politics expected of higher-level positions. Playing politics and self-promotion are traits viewed unfavorably by the Asian culture (Liang et al., 2018). These viewpoints and findings call to the criticality of utilizing a framework of intersections, assessing the effect that culture, gender and stereotypes have on inequities in the workplace.

A woman's missing initiative was also cited as a reason for their underrepresentation in leadership (Shahtalebi et al., 2011). Shahtalebi and colleagues, studying senior leader

recruitment practices within higher education, indicated that a missing intervention may be related to a lack of self-confidence, with more women opting out of applying for senior leader roles. Additionally, many senior female academics forgo applying for management roles without the encouragement or endorsement from others, or due to a self-preservation strategy – to avoid rejection for the belief they are unlikely to achieve the leader role (Morley, 2014). In line with the topic of recruitment, it is essential that leaders of a university assume the important role of change agents, charged to help diversify the university community by increasing its leader representation with women of color. This can be achieved by advocating, designing, and implementing equity-based approaches to recruitment, promotion, and tenure (Latu et al., 2013).

A theme emerging from studies of women and leadership highlights the critical need for, and lack of exposure to, more female role models and mentors. Women have few mentor connections, while men still surpass women in having the networks to learn about opportunities. Men find mentors and sponsors to champion their advancement more readily. These networks are key to one's access, growth, and eventual promotion. Exposure to successful female leaders is critical, as they inspire women's behaviors, self-awareness, and self-esteem when tackling higher-level, leadership responsibilities (Latu et al., 2013).

> However, it is important to note that it is unlikely that the problem of women's lack of power solves itself by merely exposing women to existing female role models, given that men continue to occupy most top leadership positions… Active steps should be taken in order to increase the number of women (of color) in leadership positions, which would consequently increase their visibility and empower other women (of color) on their path to leadership (Dominici et al., 2009).

Again, representation matters.

Intersectionality as a Framework for Scholarship

Intersectionality offers a lens to examine how an organization's structure, policies, processes, and work behaviors impact women experiencing inequities because of their intersecting identities. The intersectionality approach also demonstrates that social identities operate on several levels, resulting in distinctive experiences for every individual. A study examining AAPI faculty representation over more than two decades, based on data of all four-year postsecondary institutions and focused on the intersection of race and gender across the tenure pipeline, indicated a persistent underrepresentation of AAPI women as full professors (Kim & Cooc, 2021). These results echo the need for research that examines issues specific to faculty and staff of minority groups and women of color (Turner et al., 2008), especially as intersectional approaches for studying the experiences of AAPI women offer a more holistic understanding than a mainstream analysis of women's societal disadvantages (Mirza, 2009).

In another study that sought to understand the meanings AAPI women school administrators have developed from their professional experiences, given the intersection of gender, race-ethnicity, and leadership, findings exhibited that AAPI women's paths to leadership were to a large degree emergent and personal. The women in this study embraced a lifetime mission to make a difference and uplift the marginalized groups personified in their identities (Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017). The women also struggled with gender, racial-ethnic, and cultural discrimination. Similar research demonstrates the AAPI women's career trajectories were manifestations of their intersecting experiences of gender, race, ethnicity, and age, situated in a particular time and place. Specifically, AAPI women had to negotiate their leadership ambitions and advancement through race and gendered expectations (Liang et al., 2018).

The intersectionality of race, gender and its implication on leadership is an essential and critical framework to understanding the aspirations, motivations, achievements and struggles of AAPI women. As this intersection of race, gender and leadership come into play, this unique combination will better illustrate the AAPI women's struggles, hurdles and barriers to career advancement. The intersectionality framework is necessary to effectively study the experiences of AAPI women, to achieve an integrated knowledge (versus a mainstream analysis) of women's societal disadvantages.

Theme 3: The Higher Education Organization and the AsianCrit Framework

While intersectionality is an essential framework to better comprehend the plight of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women and to glean an understanding into their lack of leadership representation within the higher education space, this can only be complemented with a deep dive into the higher education organization's environment. The organization's culture, with its policies, procedures, and work behaviors, are oftentimes the mechanisms that serve as barriers to attaining accurate demographic representation of the communities it serves and, therefore, prevents the achievement of truly positive change. Several case studies focused on the academic pathways of AAPI women in U.S. higher education institutions have implied that organizational cultures were strongest influencers, interplaying with other identities (that are gender, race, culture) to pave the way for AAPI women's path to leadership (Nguyen, 2020). Additionally, incorporating an Asian Critical theoretical framework, alongside an examination of the organization, will illuminate the systemic racism that continues to persist within our higher education structures and, thus, stifles the advancement of the marginalized group that is AAPI women.

Analyzing the Higher Education Institution

Because society is in a constant state of flux, leadership models are needed that are diverse and include perspectives of those that are not the mainstream, prototypical Western White males (Chin, 2014). The criterion for effective leadership is constantly evolving. Societal issues require emphasis on diverse systemic policies, practices and programs that tackle matters of access, inclusion and equity in the organization's recruitment, retention, and leadership development efforts (Bennis & Goldsmith, 2003). Research of women leaders in higher education has recommended organizations act in identifying measures and creating plans addressing gender inequities. The research suggests strategic recruitment and succession planning must include of women of color in the conversations, developing mentorship programs for women seeking leadership development and committing to a family-friendly work environment (Hannum et al., 2014).

Pipeline Issues

Pipeline issues impacting people of color exist in higher education. Though the number of faculty of color may be on the rise, there are notable leaks in the diversity pipeline (Kim & Cooc, 2021). A focus on representation early in the pipeline is not necessarily a strong indicator of diversity at the tenured or senior level (Chen & Hune, 2011). Examining the composition of tenured faculty or senior leadership is essential as these individuals compose departmental committees that make hiring and promotion decisions affecting workplace diversity. A focus on full professors, tenured faculty and senior level administrators is critical; they compose the pool of candidates for the leadership who further shapes discourses and policies related to campus diversity, equity and inclusion (Kulp et al., 2019). This type of examination is also essential for leaders on the staff side of higher education. Intersectional analyses of race, gender, and

leadership rank are necessary for discerning and addressing areas in the pipeline where disparities in representation exist. Additionally, assessing whether the diversity among professional level staff/administrators is similarly reflected to the senior management leadership requires an examination of representation over time. Such comparison covering a period of time can provide a fuller picture of an organization's progress.

Nakanishi, in 1993, first called attention to AAPI faculty encounters with discriminatory employment practices in higher education, dubbed the *Academic Pyramid* which follows the pattern for other minority groups. Since this time, studies on AAPIs in higher education have documented lower representation of AAPIs within the senior ranks (Teranishi, 2010), the concentration of AAPI women at the junior level, AAPI men outnumbering women at all ranks (Hune, 1998, 2006, 2011), and AAPI women were underrepresented through the academic pipeline relative to the number of AAPI women who enter the professoriate (Chen & Hune, 2011). These studies further highlight the importance of examining race and gender together throughout the leadership pipeline(s).

Several research studies have suggested approaches to increase representation of women of color at senior levels of universities. However, increasing representation is just the first step; women of color need to be equipped with the required skills and capacities to competently perform in their leadership roles. The strategies for increasing representation and building skills need to occur in an integrated fashion (Shepherd, 2017).

Leadership Development and Mentorship

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders' representation in the professional workforce is confirmation that organizations are finding qualified AAPIs to recruit and hire. Yet, the imbalance and incongruity between lower/middle ranks and senior/executive levels suggests

organizations have not done a sufficient job developing AAPI's talent in preparation for leadership opportunities (Gee & Peck, 2018).

Studies on mentorships with women of color validate the importance of establishing programs to support professional growth and leadership skills. Findings show participants preferred informal mentoring relationships and felt women were good mentors, but they may not have the same level of influence as men. However, it was expressed that the women were easier to talk to, attempted to have more discussions, and tried to find out more about the mentee. The men tended to be more business-focused in their approach to mentoring. Overall, study participants believed mentoring has had a positive impact on their career development and found mentors provided support in the form of counseling and advice, protection, sponsorship, and friendship. The analysis further revealed study participants were looking for psychosocial functions (role modeling, counseling, and friendship) in the mentoring relationships, but they also placed emphasis on career advice and guidance from their mentors more frequently (Farrow, 2008).

Encouragement and mentoring from others were key to the women's professional development and demystification of the leadership process. Having other minority women as mentors can be helpful for AAPI women to deal with issues and challenges related to gender, race, and ethnicity (Liang et al., 2018). Similar studies advocate for proactive mentoring of junior female staff, as well as increasing support for family-friendly policies in the workplace. These recommendations provide the foundation(s) for reflective teaching, research, and practice around the topic of women and leadership (Madsen, 2012).

While women do advance to university leadership roles, the gender imbalance among senior university academics is an acknowledged problem, with slow progress being made

towards equity (Davidson & Burke, 2004). As long as women continue to be underrepresented as role models in teaching, research and administration at the higher levels of academia, higher education institutions will risk losing women from the sector. Thus, there is a need for new perspectives on leadership and management in higher education (Harley, 2003; Thomas & Davies, 2002).

Culturally responsive assessments are essential to understanding how implicit stereotypes, unspoken expectations and behavioral norms in western cultures could hinder upward mobility for AAPIs. Dismantling structural and institutional racism requires us to question the assumptions of our current methods assessing group differences. Through the critical lens of our current practices, we can break the cycle of systemic inequities. Rethinking the current assessment framework and approaches to diversity, equity, access, and inclusion not only benefits the AAPI community, but all communities (Goon et al., 2022).

An Asian Critical Theoretical Framework

The unique positioning of AAPIs across diversity topics has been conceptualized through Asian Critical (AsianCrit) theories. An outgrowth and adaptation of Critical Race Theory (CRT), AsianCrit seeks to foreground the unique experiences of AAPIs and understand the inequities that AAPIs face by applying CRT's tenet of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) to focus on AAPIs' racial and other social identities within systems of White supremacy (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). These racist social constructions have impacted the AAPI communities' reactions and responses. Membership within the AAPI communities continues to be shaped by systems of racial oppression and resistance to them. The labels associated with AAPI are symbolic of the reality that racialization processes immensely impact these communities (Iftikar, J. & Museus, S., 2018). With the belief that race and racism are endemic to the United States, and with a

commitment to the fight for social justice, AsianCrit explores how racism affects the daily lives of AAPIs in America, both personally and institutionally (Ji Hyun Hong, 2022).

AsianCrit's intersectional lens in the examination of AAPI faculty promotion by race and gender helps to shine a light on the experiences of other communities of color, as well as how multiple forms of discrimination may combine or overlap in education (Chang, 1993; Han, 2019; Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Museus, 2014). More importantly, intersectionality as a framework emphasizes how marginalization is sometimes due to race or gender, the effects of discriminatory practices related to race and gender, or a separate category of marginalization unique to the combined identity (Crenshaw, 1991).

Kim and Cooc (2021) build on earlier advocacy for the inclusion of AAPI women in discussions of women of color and faculty diversity in higher education (Hune, 1998, 2006, 2011; Li & Beckett, 2006; TuSmith, 2002), especially as their representation at the senior levels has not improved much in the past two decades. As greater faculty of color representation can lead to better outcomes for students of color (Price, 2010), the absence of AAPI women leaders from such research raises questions. What barriers and buffers may be found in the rank and promotion of AAPI women in higher education? To what extent do racial discourses undermine the knowledge and authority of AAPI women (Mayuzumi, 2008)? What needs of AAPI women in higher education may be going unmet? Are AAPIs missing from studies of diversity in higher education due to the achievement of AAPI students? What AAPI women perspectives are absent in higher education leadership? How does overlooking the experiences of AAPI women in discussions of higher education diversity impede solidarity and the collective commitment to social justice? (Kim & Cooc, 2021).

Higher Education Institution's Commitment to Diversity

A diverse faculty and staff are fundamental for building a diverse knowledge base and generating institutional change, as they are the cornerstone of an institution's research, teaching, and public service mission. The composition of faculty and staff who attain senior levels in rank and leadership positions discloses the extent to which the institution's mission and perspectives are truly diverse (Kim & Cooc, 2021). Further research is necessary to develop continued progress in diversifying higher education faculty and staff at all levels of the pipeline through recruitment and retention. Increasing the representation of women of color up to the senior ranks is key to an institution's quest to address systems of oppression that allow underrepresentation and inequities to persist (Kim & Cooc, 2021).

Conceptual Framework: Intersectionality and Asian Critical Theory

Humans possess several characteristics and traits that help to "define the essence of who they are and how they navigate the world" (Arriaga et al., 2020), which leads to the utilization of the term "identity". Black Feminist Kimberle Crenshaw proposed the theory of Intersectionality, which views gender as intertwined "in an external structuralist frame that includes race/ethnicity, class, and sex/gender" (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Marecek, 2016), creating social agreements and circumstances that lead to a systemized hierarchy of inequitable experiences, disproportionately impacting women of color (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality offers a lens to examine how an organization's structure, policies, processes, and work behaviors impact women experiencing inequities because of their intersecting identities. The intersectionality approach also demonstrates that social identities operate on several levels, resulting in distinctive experiences for each individual.

Women are not monocultural. The Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) demographic is not a monolith. Women of color hold many identities. This research study looks at how intersectionality can impede "the attainment and success of women of color and all women in executive leadership roles due to intersectionality of race and gender…A singular focus on one identity takes away from solving the broader systemic problem" (Arriaga et al., 2020). As previously stated in the literature review, intersectional approaches to studying the experiences of AAPI women offer a more holistic understanding than a mainstream analysis of women's societal disadvantages (Mirza, 2009). Intentionally applying the lens of intersectionality further helps to facilitate an "in-depth, insightful, complex, multi-layered analysis of how social structures, political processes, and identities intersect to create certain conditions, realities, and experiences" (Museus & Iftikar, 2013).

The unique positioning of AAPIs across diversity topics has been conceptualized through Asian Critical (AsianCrit) theories. An adaptation of Critical Race Theory (CRT), AsianCrit foregrounds the unique experiences of AAPIs and understands the inequities that AAPIs face by applying CRT's tenet of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) to focus on AAPIs' racial and other social identities within systems of White supremacy (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). The AsianCrit perspective can be viewed as a tool for understanding the racial constructions, reality, and experiences of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and as a conceptual lens through which their experiences can be interpreted.   These racist constructions play a significant role in the lived experiences of AAPI women, so it is crucial that higher education scholars, policymakers, and practitioners well understand these racial constructions (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). For example, as Museus and Iftikar (2013) share, researchers have utilized AsianCrit to shine a light on how neutral higher education policies, practices, and procedures contribute to "the oppression

27

of people of color and utilized this framework to provide a space for the excavation and centering of the voices of people of color" (Museus & Iftikar, 2013).

The diagram below best illustrates the conceptual framework applied to the literature review and this research study. This framework incorporated the concepts of Intersectionality (of Race/Culture, Gender, and its implications on Leadership) and Asian Critical (AsianCrit) Theory, with the endeavor to understand the unique phenomena that are AAPI women senior leaders in higher education.
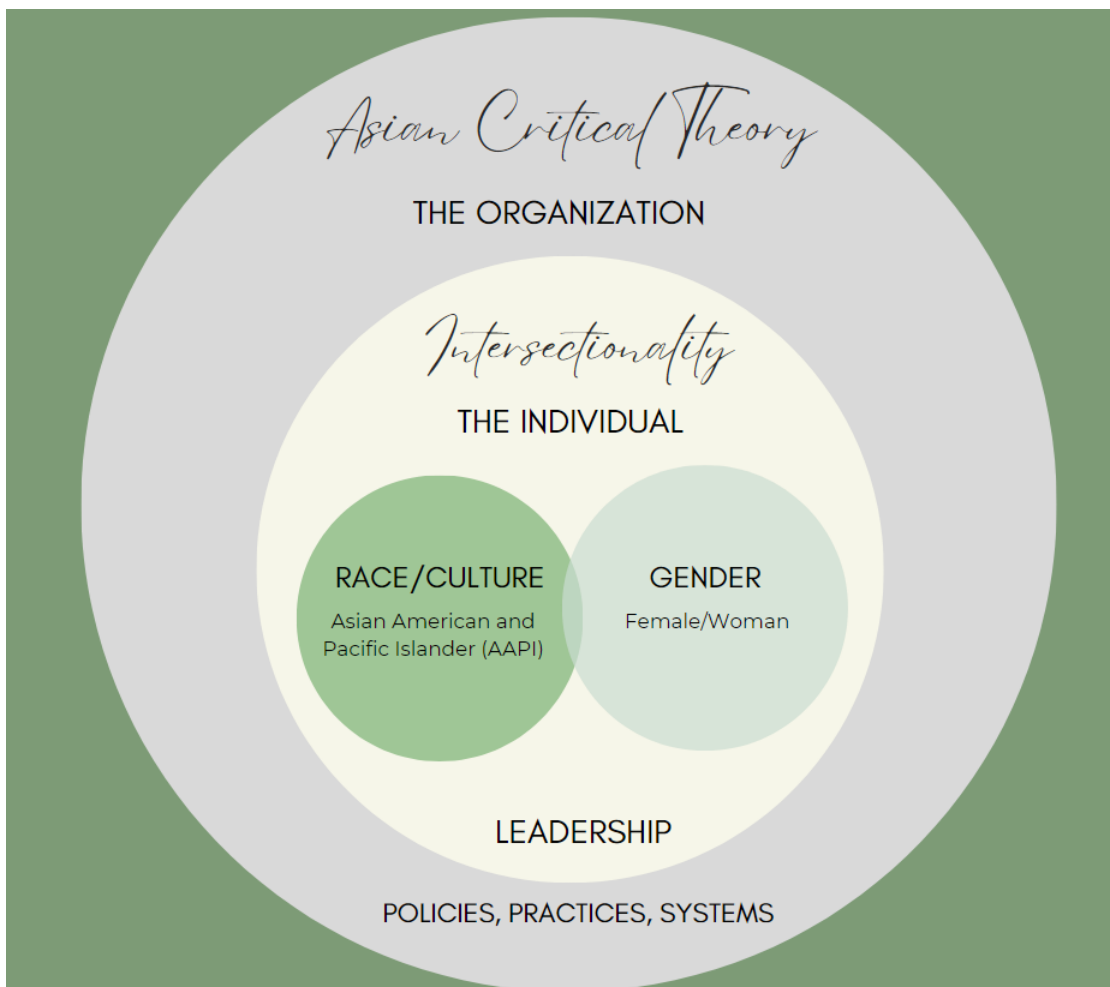
Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework: Intersectionality and AsianCrit Theory*
Note. Diagram themes of Intersectionality and AsianCrit Theory as Conceptual Framework to proposed research study. Own work.

I created the diagram as a visual to demonstrate the AAPI woman's shared, yet distinctive, experiences based on their intersecting identities; and the effect that intersectionality has on their leader journey. The diagram also illustrates the outer layer of AsianCrit Theory, offering a bird's eye view of how elements of an organization (for example, its policies, practices, and systems) have a significant impact, both positive and negative, on the AAPI women's career trajectory and leadership growth. Therefore, Intersectionality and Asian theory function as lenses that coincide with each other, comprising the Conceptual Framework utilized for this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

"Our ultimate objective in learning about anything is to try to create and develop a more just society."
– Yuri Kochiyama, Japanese American Civil Rights Activist

Scholarly research highlights the disadvantages and discrimination faced by Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women attempting to achieve leadership roles across various fields and industries. The limited number of studies in existence identify the themes, barriers, and concerns that influence the AAPI women's leadership trajectories. These include Asian cultural values, stereotypes, and profiling that result in *The Bamboo Ceiling* phenomenon; the implications on leadership derived from the intersectionality of race and gender; and the need for a thorough analysis of the higher education organization and its mechanisms that serve as opportunities and/or barriers toward appropriate representation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to offer an examination of the circumstances surrounding the phenomena that are Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women in senior leadership positions within a 4-year higher education public research institution(s) in the state of California. Underlying this purpose is the desire to learn about the lived experiences of AAPI women in senior leadership positions, specifically why they decided to pursue careers in higher education; understand the success factors of AAPI women leaders; how they define their leadership style; how they make meaning of their leadership journey(s) in light of their race, culture and gender identities; and uncover the sociocultural and institutional/organizational challenges, barriers, and support mechanisms encountered in pursuit of these leadership positions.

A qualitative approach utilizing a phenomenological research design was the method employed to wholly understand the events and experiences in study participants' lives that have impacted and contributed to their career mobility and professional growth. This involved an in-

depth look into the upbringing, cultural background, education, life experiences, and career path(s) of an AAPI woman in higher education senior leadership. In this study, I aimed to examine and critically analyze both internal and external factors that influence their leadership journey(s), addressed through the power of storytelling, with a particular focus on the intersectionality of race/culture, gender, and leadership, as well as the culture, norms, policies, and procedures of their respective institution/organization.

In the book, Leading While Female: *A Culturally Proficient Response for Gender Equity*, Arriaga et al. underscore the power of storytelling, citing certain essential patterns that make up a story, namely a "beginning, setting, characters, conflict, resolution, the ending, and universal themes. Our brains are wired for stories" (Arriaga et al., 2020), as we seek a need for clarity, understanding, and sense of completion. However, the completion of a story does not necessarily reside in truth, specifically when others tell our story for us. Thus, it is crucial, particularly for women of color and marginalized individuals, to be able to tell our own stories, and not have others speak to or write them for us. The stories written for women of color "illustrate the power of stereotypes, myths, biases, and low expectations" (Arriaga et al., 2020). "As educational leaders, we must write, live, and tell our counternarratives" (Yanow, 2011), because such counternarratives more accurately portray the brave female main characters that are these influential women leaders.

Research Questions

The following research questions served as a guide to the phenomenological research study:

RQ1: In what ways have the racial, cultural, and gender identities informed AAPI women's pursuit of their career goals?

RQ1-A: What educational experiences have AAPI women had that influenced their career choices, professional growth, and pursuit of leadership?

RQ1-B: What societal experiences have AAPI women had that influenced their career choices, professional growth, and pursuit of leadership?

RQ2: What organizational barriers and supports did AAPI women experience in their career paths to striving for, achieving, and maintaining their senior leadership position(s)?

This chapter outlines the methods used for this phenomenological research study, detailing the research design, participant selection, institutional profiles, position classifications, study site demographics, interview processes, data collection, data analysis, and coding. Additionally, it highlights data methods specific to phenomenological research, as well as ethical considerations, informed consent, validity, and limitations.

Research Design and Methodology

This study utilized a semi-structured interview protocol in keeping with the intent of the phenomenological study: to understand the meaning participants make of their lived experience (van Manen, 2016), which allows for the flexibility for participants to steer a degree of direction in the interviews. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, planned for approximately 60 to 90 minutes, with questions about the lived experiences, circumstances, situations, intersectionality, the organization, and the impact on their leadership journeys. Interviews were conducted online, via Zoom, the cloud-based video conferencing platform/application. Interviews were then recorded as video and audio files, transcribed via the Zoom application, the Otter.Ai transcription software, and cross-referenced by this researcher for accuracy, consistency, and increased understanding.

Participant Selection

Participants for this research were identified through purposeful and snowball selection, utilizing criterion sampling of gender, ethnicity, position, and organization. This involved identifying and selecting individuals uniquely knowledgeable about and/or experienced with the phenomenon (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011) of being an AAPI woman senior leader in higher education. The research participants were identified by the following characteristics: they are Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI) who self-identify as female (inclusive of both transgender and cisgender identities), are U.S.-based (non-international), and hold non-faculty, senior management roles at large research (R1) institutions within California's public, 4-year university system. Each participant has at least ten years of progressive leadership experience, has been in their current role for a minimum of one year, and expressed a willingness to participate in this study.

This research study proposed including "up to ten" participants to allow for in-depth interviews. Upon review of newly published dissertation studies on Asian American leaders in higher education, research participants in such studies varied in participation numbers, ranging from a minimum of seven participants (Wenzler, 2022) to a maximum of fifteen participants (Liu, 2019).

Outreach and recruitment efforts (Appendix F) for the study were made to various Asian American and Pacific Islander and/or Higher Education associations, such as the Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education (APAHE), Asian American Pacific Islander Trustees and Administrators Caucus (AAPITA), Leadership Education for Asian Pacific's (LEAP), California colleges and universities Faculty/Staff Associations listservs, and through social media avenues

such as LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook, which have professional, affinity and interest group spaces.

Institutional Profiles and Position Classifications

This research study focused on higher education public research universities within the state of California due to its large Asian and Pacific Islander population. According to the 2022 U.S. Census, AAPI residents make up 15.5% of California's total population. Additionally, California's AAPI community is "better educated and wealthier than any other major racial or ethnic group" (California's AAPI Community, n.d.). Fifty-three percent of AAPI Californians possess a bachelor's or graduate degree, compared to 31% of all other Californians. The AAPI homeownership rate is 62% and the median household income among AAPI residents is $100,000, well above the median of other Californians (at $75,000) or any individual racial or ethnic group (California's AAPI Community, n.d.).

I selected California as a location site to study AAPI women leaders in higher education because the state serves as a microcosm of the complex societal dynamics that influence the experiences of AAPI women. California's mosaic of ethnicities and cultures provides a unique backdrop to explore how many factors intersect in shaping one's leadership experiences. Several prestigious higher education institutions are based in California, offering various leadership opportunities. This research study examines the systemic barriers and the support networks that AAPI women leaders encounter in their career journeys. The state's diversity and its role as a leader in education make it a critical site for understanding the intersectionality of race and gender in higher education leadership.

Five large, public California Higher Education Research (R1) institutions served as sites for this study. To maintain anonymity, each institution has been assigned the following

pseudonyms: "University 1", "University 2", "University 3", "University 4", and "University 5".

The study sites are part of a public land-grant research university system in California, with

headquarters in the Bay Area, several campuses, research and medical centers, and academic

centers abroad. This university system has been ranked as having some of the best universities in

the world.

The research study focused on AAPI women leaders in "Senior Leadership." This

specific designation pertains to non-academic, staff employees whose positions are in the "Senior

Management Group" and "Managers and Senior Professionals – Management" classifications.

Senior Management Group

The Senior Management Group (SMG) is a personnel program that includes certain leadership

positions in the university system. Senior Management Group leadership within the university

system consists of job classifications with the following criteria and responsibilities:

- In Executive or Upper Management.

- Possesses high-level leadership and direction for an organization's operations.

- Steers core initiatives.

- Establishes organization-wide policies and standards.

- Leads strategic planning and critical decision-making.

- Direct reports are typically directors and other upper-tier administrators.

Managers and Senior Professionals - Management

The Managers and Senior Professionals - Management (MSP-M) is the next level of the

universities' staff hierarchy, after the Senior Management Group, and is described as a personnel

program that provides leadership and professional expertise at the highest levels to major

university units, departments, programs or fields of work. Individuals in the MSP-M

classifications are accountable for their areas of responsibility. Furthermore, positions at this level are responsible for identifying objectives, formulating strategy, directing programs/units/departments, managing resources, and functioning with the highest degree of autonomy.

Examples of job classification titles in the "Senior Management Group" and "Managers and Senior Professionals – Management" grade structures within these higher education institutions include Assistant/Associate Dean, Assistant/Associate Provost, Assistant/Associate Vice Chancellor, Chief Operating Officer, Chief of Staff, Dean, Department Head, (Executive) Director, Provost, University Librarian, Vice Chancellor, Vice President and above.

Study Sites Demographics

The university sites included in the study represent diversity in race, ethnicity, and gender. Table 1 provides an at-a-glance view of the five university sites that are a part of this research study, including relevant demographics and workforce diversity. The details in the table below showcase each university's (1) total staff employee (non-academic) headcount, (1A) the percentage representation of Asian American and Pacific Islander staff for all staff (non-academic) employees, and (1B) the percentage of all women staff employees; (2) the headcount for staff in the SMG grade classification, the percentage of (2A) AAPI staff employees and (2B) women staff employees in the SMG grade classification; and (3) the headcount of staff in the MSP-M grade classification, (3A) the percentage of AAPI and (3B) women staff employees in the MSP-M grade classification.

Table 1. *University Employee Headcount and Staff (Non-Academic) Workforce Diversity*

UNIVERSITY PSEUDONYM	EMPLOYEE HEADCOUNT	AAPI (ALL)	WOMEN (ALL)	SMG COUNT	AAPI (SMG)	WOMEN (SMG)	MSP-M COUNT	AAPI (MSP-M)	WOMEN (MSP-M)
UNIV1	28,112	27.8%	68.0%	16	7.1%	42.9%	1056	13.6%	60.6%
UNIV2	36,591	25.8%	64.7%	17	12.5%	35.7%	1264	25.0%	61.4%
UNIV3	2,089	26.0%	64.1%	38	11.1%	50.0%	310	21.2%	61.5%
UNIV4	5,528	22.6%	59.9%	14	7.1%	50.0%	238	15.5%	55.6%
UNIV5	28,878	27.2%	66.4%	18	5.9%	58.8%	880	15.2%	59.1%

NOTE: October 2023 Data; Employee Headcount Includes Staff (Non-Academic) and Student Employees

LEGEND
ALL: Represents All Staff (Non-Academic) Categories, including Student Employees
AAPI: Asian American and Pacific Islander
SMG: Senior Management Group
MSP-M: Manager Senior Professional - Management

The information in Table 1 contains snapshot data from October 2023, highlighting the current state and patterns reflecting the gender and ethnic diversity of the universities in the study. The table also provides a comparative view of the diversity and representation across the university system study sites. Additionally, this snapshot allows the reader the opportunity to formulate impressions of the strides and achievement gaps that exist within the universities represented in the study.

The Interviews

Interviews served as the primary data source for this study. Lareau (2021) states, "By providing vivid portraits of daily life, interviews… deepen our knowledge" (p.260). The participant interviews consisted of questions that inquired about their background, upbringing, personal circumstances, education, career, organizational barriers, supports, and lived experiences (Appendix K). I specifically delved into the study participants' intersectional identities as AAPI and Female, seeking their interpretation of how this intersectionality impacted their career progression and advancement to senior leadership, to answer my research questions. In advance of the interview, participants were given the option to skip any question(s) that they

were uncomfortable with and/or did not want to answer. As a gesture of appreciation, each study participant received a $50.00 Amazon electronic gift card upon completion of the interview.

Supporting Documentation and Journal Prompt

The study participants were invited to optionally share any supporting documentation, such as a resume, LinkedIn profile, job description, and current organizational chart. These supporting documents helped this researcher to gain additional knowledge about the career steps that eventually led up to their senior leadership role, as well as glean a deeper understanding of the breadth and scope of their leadership responsibilities. Participants were also invited to provide additional reflections on their career trajectory, through a journal prompt conducted via a Google survey (See Appendix L). The supporting documents and survey responses offered another layer, more context, and an enhanced understanding of the study participants' perspectives, leadership growth, and personal and professional achievements.

Data Collection and Analysis

Over the course of four months, from March to June 2024, ten individuals who self-identified as Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women and were in senior leadership positions in a large, public research (R1) higher education institution in California were invited to participate in the research study and agreed to share their lived experiences that have impacted their journey(s) to leadership. Each study participant engaged in a one-on-one, 60 to 90-minute, semi-structured interview.

An introduction and representation of this phenomenological study initially involved the researcher's sharing of their personal experience and motivation to understand the phenomena with the interview participant(s). This researcher later journaled with reflective notes, typically within 24 hours after each participant interview, based on observations made during the study

participants' interview(s). Artifacts from documentation such as participants' resumes, job descriptions, organizational chart(s), and organizational procedures and policies were accepted as an additional reference point, as study participants deemed insightful for sharing.

Data Collection

Data was collected through one-on-one interviews and document reviews. The interviews took place via Zoom, an online video-conferencing software program, which offered virtual face-to-face interaction, video recording, and transcription capabilities. The interviews were recorded on a secure device with the consent and permission of the study participants. Recordings were transcribed multiple times; first using the Zoom transcribing feature and a second transcription utilizing the Otter.ai transcription software, via an upload of the interview audio files. Finally, the transcription documents generated by the Zoom and Otter.ai software programs were compared and reviewed by this researcher, in conjunction with re-reviewing the recorded video interviews, to capture the data's completeness, accuracy, and validity.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with developing a list of significant statements made by interview participants, and then grouping these statements into themes or meaning units. The researcher captured textural descriptions of the participants' lived experiences, noting verbatim comments and responses to the interview questions, as well as structural descriptions that reflect on the setting and context of these lived experiences. Lastly, this researcher developed a composite description of the phenomena that is AAPI women senior leaders in higher education, by incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions, with the intent of encapsulating the essence of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2007).

The data was collected and analyzed in the following manner:

- Interviews were audio and video recorded, transcribed verbatim, coded, categorized, and analyzed continually as a source for the emergence of themes, as well as ultimately organizing response patterns across categories and individuals.

- Artifacts served as the basis of discussion in interviews according to themes, providing a source to compare beliefs, behaviors, thinking, and identity.

- This researcher's reflective notes served as a basis for discussion, coding, categorizing, reflection, and member-checking.

- Interview transcripts were coded according to theoretical categorizations emerging from the conceptual framework.

- Categorization and interpretation of documentation and transcripts into common themes ensued, across all data that was collected.

Coding

"A code in qualitative analysis is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldana, 2021). A code is "a researcher-generated interpretation that symbolizes or 'translates' data" (Vogt et al., 2014), and thus attributes meaning to each datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theme, assertion or proposition development, theory building, and other analytic processes (Saldana & Miles, 2013). In my research study, the following types of coding were conducted.

The first coding type, known as in-vivo coding, utilizes "words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data record as codes" (Saldana & Miles, 2013). This coding practice helped to establish sets of commonalities across the interview data. Meaningful quotes

were highlighted to provide context and insight into each person's individual lived experience(s). Each study participant's transcript was reviewed multiple times, highlighting words, phrases, and sentences important to, frequently noted, and inspired by the participant (Saldana, 2013).

An additional method of coding I used was values coding. "Values Coding is the application of codes to qualitative data that reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview" (Saldana, 2013). Saldana (2013) states that values coding is appropriate in qualitative studies, specifically research that explores cultural values, belief systems, identity, and interpersonal participant experiences.

Thirdly, I utilized pattern coding. Pattern coding assists in organizing the shared experiences of the AAPI women leaders into specified themes (Saldaña, 2013). These themes began to emerge with the third study participant. For example, several study participants depicted the challenges they faced as a child of an immigrant family, reflecting on its impact on their motivation for achieving career success.

Utilizing in-vivo, values, and pattern coding, with an iterative process, allowed me to focus on each study participant's common and unique experiences. Additionally, I took journal notes after the participants' interview sessions. This reflective journaling offered increased clarity when (re)reviewing my notes and allowed for conducting a cross-analysis to ensure data were interpreted correctly across study participants. The data was coded through two separate modes; first, I coded by hand and then by employing the MAXQDA software coding application. Hand-coding helped to categorize, understand, and interpret data, while the MAXQDA software allowed for easy set-up and visual organization of codes and themes.

The individual experience(s) are critical to understand, but there is more to the story when conducting phenomenological research. "Phenomenologists focus on

describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon…"

(Creswell, 2007). Patton (2002) describes the importance of the shared experience that arises

because of analyzing a phenomenon. The ongoing creation of categories continued until

saturation occurred, which is the point where the data did not yield any new codes or categories

(Dick, 2005).

Phenomenological Research Data Methods

Utilizing specific data methods in phenomenological research is crucial for capturing the

essence of participants' lived experiences. The in-depth interviews allowed me to delve deeply

into the perspectives and meanings that the AAPI women attributed to their lived experiences.

My after-interview practice of reflective journaling enabled me to uncover insights and patterns

across the participants' sharing.

In phenomenological research, the combination of in vivo, values, and pattern coding was

pivotal to capturing and comprehending the essence of the study participants' lived experiences.

The in vivo coding preserved the authenticity of the AAPI women's voices, allowing this

researcher to stay true to the phenomena being studied. Values coding highlighted the

participants' beliefs and values that further shaped their lived experiences, thus providing a

deeper insight into the participants' motivations. Finally, pattern coding helped to identify

recurring elements and categorization within and across the data, solidifying a comprehensive

understanding of the AAPI women senior leader's phenomenon. Employed together, these three

coding practices enriched the phenomenological research by ensuring that the complexity and

depth of human experiences were well analyzed and accurately represented.

Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent

Throughout the phases of the qualitative study, this researcher exercised sensitivity to ethical considerations, specifically when inviting and involving participants in the study; in gathering personal and emotional data that revealed the details of their lives; and in requesting study participants to provide a considerable amount of their time to engage in the in-depth interview (Creswell, 2007). These ethical considerations meant that this researcher shared an information sheet and obtained informed consent from the research study participants; minimized the risk of harm to participants; protected their anonymity and confidentiality; and provided participants the option to withdraw from the study. This researcher exercised transparency in all communications, from the outreach and recruitment of study participants through data collection and analysis. Once an individual agreed to participate in the study, an information sheet/informed consent form was shared that outlined the purpose of the research study, the requested commitment level of participants, the estimated duration for the study, access to the Zoom video conferencing technology and link for the interviews and detailed how data will be stored. Finally, prior to the start of each interview, this researcher reviewed the informed consent form as a means of confirming understanding and addressed study participants' questions and/or concerns.

Validity

Validity is the outcome goal of research and is based on trustworthiness and external reviews (Creswell, 2007). The following were identified as important threats to validity in the study.

- Researcher Bias, wherein the selection of data fits this researcher's theory, goals, preconception, involving the subjectivity of the researcher.

- Reflexivity, where this researcher is a part of the world (s)he studies and thus, what the informant says is influenced by the interview and interview situation.

In response to the issue of validity, several verification techniques were employed. Participant semi-structured interviews consisted of an open-ended script that minimizes indication of researcher biases.

Respondent validation occurred via member checks. Member checks were an important part of the data analysis and ensured validity for the study. This further helped achieve confirmation of perspective and points made by study participants. If discrepancies exist from member checks, this researcher allowed for follow-up via written correspondence or follow-up interviews with participants to clarify their points. Additionally, this researcher offered to share chapter drafts and the final dissertation to the study participants.

Triangulation serves as another means of verification. To some degree, there is diversity in the types of higher education institutions in which this researcher recruited participants. Likewise, to a certain degree, there exists diversity in the specific AAPI background/race that participants belong to. This researcher documented these types of diversity (See Appendix N). Verification via comparison will involve a comparative assessment of AAPI women leaders across the California public, higher education, research institutions.

Lastly, there is Discrepant Data. This researcher allowed colleagues to review and provide feedback on their hypotheses and conclusions.

Limitations: Generalizability

This interdisciplinary study is not intended to be generalizable, although some themes may resonate in related contexts. It is critical to note that the Asian American and Pacific Islander demographic population is not a monolith. Behind each person who identifies as a

member of the AAPI demographic, there exists vastly different cultures, languages, upbringings, circumstances, and histories that make up their identity. Thus, the study findings are intended to provide descriptions and insights for practitioners in the fields of education, organizational design and development, human resource management, diversity/equity/inclusion (DEI), and cultural psychology, rather than to identify a generalizable phenomenon.

Chapter 3 Summary

Despite the perceptions and stereotypes that portray the AAPI community as models of success and achievement, they are predominantly underrepresented, misunderstood, and underserved in higher education. Even with AAPIs attending colleges and universities at higher participation rates, AAPIs are scarcely found at the highest levels of academia (Yamagata-Noji & Gee, 2012). Yamagata-Noji and Gee further shared that the overall rate of AAPI appointments to higher education Chief Executive Officer (CEO) positions was far from impressive; rather, the numbers "indicates a serious flaw in higher education… the AAPI pipeline to presidencies is not a topic of scholarly research in higher education" (Yamagata-Noji & Gee, 2012). The outlook is worse for AAPI women.

Understanding the lived experiences of AAPI women in higher education leadership positions provides further illumination on the array of racial and gender stereotypes, biases, and cultural differences that continue to exist and serve as hurdles and (invisible) barriers to upward career mobility. Hearing their experiences and success stories can lead to discoveries and the potential creation(s) of unique career pathways that focus on access, inclusion, assets, strengths, diversity, and equity. Dissecting the current organizational structure will continue to identify the gaps that persist in the higher education workspace. An evaluation of these gaps will help to determine appropriate leadership models, improve operational procedures, create programmatic

initiatives, and define work behaviors that contribute to the organization's best practices and continuous improvement. Such enhancements would promote a more inclusive work environment where women of color, particularly Asian American and Pacific Islander women, are seen, empowered, and valued for the contributions they exceedingly put forth.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

"No experience is ever wasted. Everything has meaning."
– Oprah Winfrey, American television host, producer, author, and media proprietor

"Life is not what you alone make it. Life is the input of everyone who touched your life
and every experience that entered it. We are all part of one another."
- Yuri Kochiyama, Japanese American Civil Rights Activist

The nature and purpose of this study is to examine the circumstances surrounding the
phenomena of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women in senior leadership positions
within a large, public research university system in California. Specifically, the research study
examined the intersectionality of race, culture, and gender identities in AAPI women's pursuit of
their career goals, the organizational and societal barriers they encountered, and the support they
experienced in pursuing their leadership goals.

Underlying this purpose is the desire to understand the lived experiences of AAPI women
in leadership positions and why they decided to pursue careers in higher education. This includes
delving into the following: 1) success factors of AAPI women leaders; 2) how they define their
leadership style; 3) how they make meaning of their leadership journey(s) considering their race,
culture, and gender identities; and 4) the sociocultural and organizational challenges and barriers,
along with the support mechanisms, the women encountered in pursuit of their leadership
positions.

Study Participant Profiles

There were ten study participants in total. All participants self-identified as Asian
American and/or Pacific Islander (AAPI), female (inclusive of transgender and cisgender
identification), and non-international. The selection criteria for the study participants included
being in a senior leadership position at a non-faculty, "Senior Management Group" or "Manager

and Senior Professional – Management" level classification. Participants possessed at least 10 years of progressive, professional experience and were in their current senior-level position for at least one year.

Research study participants work at large, public, research 1 (R1) higher education institutions in California. The individual university campuses are not disclosed to provide anonymity of identities for the study participants, since there is very little representation of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women in such senior leadership roles in the higher education space. Thus, each study participant was given a pseudonym; a name closely aligned to her ethnicity.

All ten study participants self-identified as an Asian American and/or Pacific Islander (AAPI) female, with five identifying as Filipina Americans, two as Southeast Asian Americans (one Indian and one Pakistani), one as Korean American, one as Chinese American, and one identified as mixed-race Filipino/Chinese descent. Six of the participants are in their 50's, three AAPI women participants are in their 40's, and one participant is in her late 30's. Of the ten AAPI women, six are married and four are single (two of which have stated to be with a partner). Additionally, six of the study participants are parents to (two to three) children and four of the women do not have any children.

The study participants ranged from 18 to 29 years of professional experience, with specialties across different sectors (e.g., Academic Affairs, Administration, Advancement, Diversity/Equity/Inclusion, and Student Affairs) of the higher education landscape. Of the ten study participants, three individuals are in positions at the Senior Management Group (SMG) classification tier and seven of the AAPI women leaders are in the Manager & Senior Professional – Management (MSP-M) hierarchical tier. All of the study participants hold a

master's degree, with four AAPI women leaders having further obtained their doctoral degrees.

Table 2 below provides an at-a-glance view of the study participants and relevant demographic

data.

Table 2. *Demographic Data on Research Study Participants*

Pseudonym	Race/ Ethnicity	Age Range	Position Class Level	Functional Area	University Site	Highest Degree Earned	Years in Current Position	Years in Higher Ed	Marital Status, Children
Linda	Filipino	35-39	MSP-M	Student Affairs	University 1	Doctorate (Ed.D.)	2	20	Single No Children
Ensha	Southeast Asian (Pakistani)	45-49	MSP-M	Academic Affairs	University 1	Master's (MBA)	4	22	Married 2 Children
Hoon	Korean	50-54	SMG	Student Affairs	University 3	Master's (MA)	1	27	Married 2 Children
Jacqueline	Filipino	40-44	MSP-M	Student Affairs	University 2	Doctorate (Ed.D.)	3	19	Married 2 Children
Vida	Filipino/ Chinese	50-54	MSP-M	Student Affairs	University 5	Master's (MBA)	1	25	Married 3 Children
Elaine	Filipino	50-54	MSP-M	Academic Affairs	University 5	Master's (MA)	2	26	Married 2 Children
Roselyn	Filipino	50-54	SMG	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI)	University 5	Doctorate (Ed.D.)	3	29	Single No Children
Maile	Filipino	50-54	MSP-M	Advancement	University 4	Master's (MA)	1.5	18	Married 2 Children
Joyce	Chinese	50-54	SMG	Administration	University 3	Master's (MA)	1	28	Single (w/ Partner) No Children
Padma	Southeast Asian (Indian)	40-44	MSP-M	Student Affairs	University 5	Doctorate (Ph.D.)	2	20	Single (w/ Partner) No Children

Each participant shared their individual stories, lived experiences, and unique

circumstances that contributed to their career path toward leadership in higher education. There

were some shared identities and similar experiences among the ten study participants, yet the

women differed in family circumstances, educational background, and societal experiences. The

AAPI women leaders also differed in how they endured and interpreted their lived experiences,

constituting their distinctive journeys toward higher education leadership. The following section offers a brief, summative overview of each study participant.

Participant Overview: "Linda"

Linda is a Filipina American, born in Chicago, Illinois. Her mother immigrated to the United States before she was born. Linda moved to and lived in the Philippines for the initial part of her childhood. She was raised by her maternal grandmother, while her mother stayed in the U.S. to focus on making a living for herself and supporting her family. At the age of 9, Linda, along with her younger sister, moved to Arizona, to be raised by her single mother. Linda expressed feelings of loneliness without the Filipino community that she was accustomed to in the Philippines. She grew up in Arizona, in an environment of mostly Latino and Caucasian friends, eventually finding identity and validation through an Asian American Studies Certificate Program, offered and taught by a Filipino American professor at her college.

As one of her early professional roles, Linda landed a position as a TRIO[1] Student Support Services Program Coordinator, where she fell in love with student success work. Her interests center on the resilience capital of first-generation college students. Her career progression eventually led to her current role as Chief of Staff, where she emphasized the importance of public service, learning, and giving back in one's journey to success. Linda credits the strong females in her life, especially her grandmother and mother, with having a large impact on her career pursuits. She has never met her father. Linda holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Work, a master's degree in public administration (MPA), and a doctorate degree in Education.

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[1] The Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) are Federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Participant Overview: "Ensha"

Ensha identifies as a South Asian woman, Pakistani American, and Muslim American, emphasizing this important intersectional identity. She was born in Doha, Qatar, moved to the United States at the age of one, when her father pursued his doctoral studies. Her family initially lived in Boulder, Colorado, yet endured multiple moves during Ensha's high school and college years. Ensha attended a British private school in Saudi Arabia and attended three universities prior to graduation.

Ensha started her career in investment banking, becoming a management consultant at a prestigious financial institution, but did not enjoy the work-life balance this profession entailed. Driven by the necessity to continue providing for her young family (consisting of her husband and child), she sought employment in higher education (as recommended by a friend), which offered an excellent benefits package and the work-life balance she craved to have in order to take care of her young family. Ensha's career in higher education began in an administrative support staff position, eventually taking on different roles and responsibilities. Her leadership journey involved multiple moves across various higher education institutions. Accepting a staff position with a prestigious, Ivy League institution on the East Coast proved to be a significant experience, where Ensha learned a lot and endured feelings of marginalization, being treated as "the help below the stairs." She recounts instances where an Ivy League faculty member corrected the tone and grammar of her emails, highlighting the classism and power dynamics that are at play at such Ivy League institutions. It was this "culture of perfectionism" that pushed her efforts to become a more polished, seasoned professional, and forged a non-linear career path that has led to her current position as Executive Director and Assistant Dean.

Ensha credits garnering these promotional opportunities due to her proactivity in requesting and negotiating salary increases with her supervisor(s) on multiple occasions; all with the intent to support her growing family. She underscores the importance of being open and transparent about one's intentions. Ensha holds a bachelor's degree in finance and a master's in business administration (MBA).

Participant Overview: "Hoon"

Hoon is a Korean American woman born in Seoul, Korea. Her family immigrated to the United States when she was 3 months old, and she grew up in a small, racially homogeneous town in Nevada. Hoon recalls early experiences with food insecurity, language barriers, social hierarchy, discrimination, multiple moves during elementary school and eventually reuniting with childhood friends in high school. Her quiet nature during her elementary years was due to her limited English skills. Hoon grew up largely in an affluent community comprised of mostly professional families but considered herself an "outsider" due to her parents' work in the casinos.

Hoon describes her latch-key childhood of being home alone after school due to their parents' long work schedules. However, she later participated in several extracurricular activities with the help of school friends who provided transportation. She recalls the social hierarchy that existed in her high school, largely based on race and ethnicity. Her high school friend group was established through chance encounters and shared experiences.

Hoon depicts her college experience as her opportunity for reinvention, explaining how she wanted to break away from her past high school life and forge a new path. She studied finance at a university in the Midwest, where she joined various clubs and a sorority to take advantage of the college social scene. Hoon also received a master's degree at a prestigious private university in California, where she found identity and belonging among the Asian

American student population. She later pursued a doctoral degree at a private research university

in the Midwest but struggled in her studies, feeling unsupported by the faculty and academic

services administration. She did not get to complete her doctoral dissertation. Attending to

family needs, Hoon's career path brought her back to California, taking a position in university

admissions, later segueing into information technology project management. Her current

position is in a Senior Management Group role overseeing undergraduate admissions.

Participant Overview: "Jacqueline"

Jacqueline, a Filipina American, was born and raised in Los Angeles, California, to

lower-middle class parents. Her parents immigrated to the United States, from the Philippines,

in the 1970's. Growing up in North Hollywood, Jacqueline attended private, Catholic school

during her elementary, middle, and high school years.

Jacqueline credits her college experience in helping to understand and appreciate her

Asian American and Pacific Islander identity. She received a bachelor's degree in English, yet

didn't know what to do after graduation until a mentor suggested student affairs as a career path

after graduation. Jacqueline's motivations for becoming a leader in higher education are a result

of her personal, lived experiences with navigating obstacles during her undergraduate years. Her

desire to support students led to new roles and responsibilities, stretching her growth and

demonstrating her adaptability. Jacqueline specifically reflects on her leadership experience

during the COVID-19 worldwide, pandemic, highlighting the importance of work-life balance

and prioritizing her team's well-being.

In addition to her BA degree, Jacqueline holds master's and doctorate degrees in

Education. She is currently serving as an Assistant Dean, overseeing student services.

Participant Overview: "Vida"

Vida self-identifies as a Filipina American, with a mix of both Filipino and Chinese heritage. Born in the United States, her father served in the United States Navy, and the family endured multiple moves and living in military housing throughout her childhood. This included stints in the Philippines, Japan, Long Beach, and finally San Diego. Vida has a strong connection to the Philippines and speaks of a sense of family obligation. At home, Vida's mother spoke to the children in Tagalog, while her father spoke to them in English, creating a balance between both languages.

From these frequent moves throughout childhood, Vida experienced racist name-calling from classmates and teachers' mispronunciation of her name, often feeling embarrassed and largely relying on her family for emotional support. Vida further shared that these multiple moves helped her to develop skills in "quiet observation" and adaptability to new situations and change. She felt a sense of belonging with the large Filipino community that existed when her family later permanently moved to San Diego.

Vida credits both her grandfather and father for encouraging her involvement in school and extracurricular leadership activities, despite her natural introverted nature. Her experience in Japan transformed her career path, as she learned lessons about the importance of diplomacy. This ultimately led to her career in higher education, specifically working with international students. Vida acknowledges her "imposter syndrome", admitting to struggles with confidence in meetings and committees due to the lack of minority representation at the higher echelons of the organization.

Vida holds a bachelor's degree in Japanese studies and a master's in business administration (MBA). She is currently serving as a Senior Director overseeing a student services department.

Participant Overview: "Elaine"

Elaine identifies as a Filipina American, born and raised in San Diego, California. Her parents immigrated to the United States from the Philippines in the late 1960s. She grew up in a multigenerational household, with a tight-knit extended family and a large cultural community that honored Filipino traditions and language through cultural events, Philippine township associations, family parties, and dance lessons.

Elaine's paternal grandparents lived with her family for 20 years. Her father took care of the grandparents until they needed assisted living, due to increased signs of dementia. Family and culture have long played a significant role in Elaine's life decisions and career path.

Elaine's family were devout Catholics. Her parents wanted their children to have a Catholic education, so Elaine attended private Catholic schools from elementary through high school. She immediately found community with the Filipino friends she made in high school and was nicknamed "Doc" due to her intelligent and strait-laced persona. This circle of friends still keeps in touch to this day.

Elaine attended a university in her hometown, largely due to her mother's influence to stay local and the goals she had set for her daughter. Originally interested in scientific research, Elaine switched to a behavioral science major when realizing that she wanted to pursue counseling from her own experiences during college. She loved working with the undergraduate student population, and this began her career in higher education.

Elaine has a bachelor's degree in psychology, as well as a master's degree in College Counseling and Student Development. She serves as a dean overseeing Academic Advising, with a 26-year career in higher education.

Participant Overview: "Roselyn"

Roselyn is a Filipina American born and raised in Los Angeles, California. She grew up in a multi-generational household with many extended family members. Her family home was the hub of many immigrant relatives who needed a first place to live and get started with life in America. Roselyn's father died when she was 13, prompting her family to move from an upper-middle-class neighborhood to a working-class neighborhood in inner city Los Angeles. This is where she attended a diverse, under-resourced high school consisting of predominantly Latina and Black students, and a few Asian American students who were mostly taught by Caucasian teachers.

For Roselyn, college provided opportunities to expand her social circles, develop some professional skills, and engage in student activism. Roselyn switched her majors 5 times, eventually graduating with a degree in Ethnic Studies. She enjoyed their time at the university, finding it a place that helped her find identity through student organizations and leadership roles. One particularly notable role was serving as a Resident Assistant (RA) at the university; a role she credits as eventually leading to paving the path to becoming a leader in higher education.

Roselyn's career journey began as a residence hall coordinator to serving as Director of a faculty, staff, and student resource center at an Ivy League university, highlighting such opportunities that materialized through chance events. She holds a bachelor's degree in Ethnic Studies, a master's degree in postsecondary education, and a doctoral degree in Education

Leadership. She has been in higher education for 29 years, most recently assuming a senior management group role specializing in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts.

Participant Overview: "Maile"

Maile is a first-generation Filipino American, born and raised in Los Angeles, California. During the interview, she shared her experiences growing up in a multi-generational, devout Catholic home with college-educated parents who held a high value for education. She is the middle child, with an older brother and younger sister. Her childhood home was in a predominantly white neighborhood. Her family was the first and only Filipino family in their neighborhood for a long while. Maile attended a private Catholic school and later transferred to a public magnet school in the San Fernando Valley. She describes her elementary school as being very progressive, highlighting its diverse student population and guest speakers, which included an openly gay couple and a former member of the Black Panthers. Maile also experienced racial tensions and gang violence in high school, noting conflicts between different ethnic groups and the use of derogatory terms like "FOBS" (an acronym for Fresh Off the Boat) and "American-born Filipino." At the age of 13, Maile's father died. His death brought forth a big shift in Maile's life, where she became responsible for the household, specifically the cooking and cleaning, and raising her younger sister, while her mother continued to work to financially support the family.

During college, Maile was initially focused on bioethics and STEM fields as a choice of major. This changed twice during her college experience, where she switched majors, first to International Relations, and eventually to Fine Arts. Originally attending a university in a different city, Maile transferred to a public university closer to home to tend to her 10-year-old sister.

Maile's career path evolved, by accident, due to a layoff. She started her career at various high-profile private companies and the dot com industry, to later experience layoffs during tumultuous times. It was during a period of unemployment that Maile volunteered at a nonprofit organization, out of interest in learning more about the organization. This non-profit volunteer internship led to other opportunities and then ultimately to higher education administration. Maile holds a bachelor's degree in fine arts and a master's degree in education. She has worked in the higher education space for approximately 18 years and currently serves as a Senior Executive Director, with oversight of Advancement and Foundation Relations.

Participant Overview: "Joyce"

Joyce was born in Taiwan and identifies, interchangeably, as Asian American and/or Chinese American. Her family immigrated to the United States when she was four years old. She grew up in Northern California's Bay Area, primarily in San Francisco. She describes her upbringing as "low-income working class", categorizing herself as a "Latch Key" kid.

Joyce shared that she didn't feel like an underrepresented minority in her public schools, largely because of the diverse communities and large Asian population that existed in the Bay Area. She attended elementary school in San Francisco and high school in the East Bay. Joyce described her desire, in her formative years, to assimilate into mainstream culture, however her parents had varying attitudes towards assimilation. She describes her father as progressive and her mother as traditional, honoring the family's Chinese culture.

Joyce later realized her AAPI identity during her college years and shared her start from an engineering focus, later switching to a history major. Her undergraduate and graduate activities included taking on student employment as a tutor and administrative assistant. She attended a prestigious, Ivy League university on the East Coast, for her graduate studies in Public

Affairs. It was during this time, that Joyce became keenly aware of her minority status, describing feelings of isolation due to the social hierarchy and wealth disparities among students. This experience allowed Joyce to see the distinctions that exist among students of color and white students, as well as the cultural differences between the West Coast and East Coast, specifically concerning diversity, social connections, and friendship.

From these experiences, Joyce elected to take a job in public higher education. She is a strong advocate for issues like the reconsideration of financial aid packages based on family circumstances, affirmative action in higher education and its impact on society, and enjoys working in higher education public policy. She holds a bachelor's degree in history, and a master's degree in public affairs, and has taken courses toward a doctoral degree. Currently, Joyce serves in a senior management group position, overseeing university administration at its highest levels.

Participant Overview: "Padma"

Padma identifies as a South Asian Indian, born in Miami, Florida, to immigrant parents, who (against their own parents' rules) decided to elope and immigrate to the United States to start their life together. Her parents' immigration to the United States, without extended family around, resulted in the creation of a new extended family with their neighbors and friends. In sharing her parents' decision to elope, an act against the Indian tradition of arranged marriages, Padma attributes and compares their sense of rebellion to her own experiences as a rebel teenager. Padma's childhood involved multiple moves (Florida, Michigan, and Delaware), growing up in diverse areas that had Indian communities, and still honoring its cultural influences. However, Padma's parents prioritized learning the English language and focus on cultural assimilation to succeed in the United States.

Padma attended private Catholic school in Florida before moving to Delaware for public school, emphasizing the value of education in their Indian American culture. She attended an academically recognized high school, graduating with 93 classmates, all earning International Baccalaureate degrees. She and her classmates created their school's identity, developed leadership skills, and went on to attend college. Padma's interest in technology led her to minor in Science Technology and Society at a selective, private liberal arts college, where she also studied French and macroeconomics. Her college memories included staying on campus, "eating cheap food", and "drinking too much beer". She got into trouble with the Dean of Students, which led to her taking on work with the Residence Life Office, where she learned about Student Affairs and Housing. Padma considered becoming a lawyer or journalist before discovering her passion for Student Affairs and higher education administration. She achieved financial independence through on-campus living and became a homeowner early in her career.

Padma holds a bachelor's degree in technology and Macroeconomics, a master's degree and a doctorate in Education. She has worked in higher education for 20 years, and currently serves in the role of Assistant Vice Chancellor, overseeing student affairs.

Study Findings

The study findings are represented through four primary interconnected themes, most of which also include sub-themes. Primary themes are ones that seven to ten of the study participants discussed, while sub-themes are ones that three to six of the AAPI women discussed. The four primary themes that were revealed are 1.) The Immigrant Family (Sub-Themes: Collectivism, Care, and Community; and Survival Mentality); 2.) Pivotal Moments (Sub-Themes: In Upbringing, In College, In Career, and Recognition and Validation from Others); 3.) Role Models, Mentors, and Sponsorship (Sub-Themes: Personal, Professional, Informal, and

Multiple; Beyond Mentorship…to Sponsorship; and "Pay It Forward"); and 4.) Authentic

Servant Leadership. These themes are not linear or sequential.

Analysis revealed that the AAPI women senior leaders' experiences were, largely and

universally, influenced by their immigrant family upbringing, certain pivotal moments, and the

role models who served as mentors and sponsors in their lives, ultimately effecting their

leadership style and professional journey. The intersectionality of race/culture/gender and the

AsianCrit theory were concepts evident in the study participants' lived experiences and counter-

storytelling, further highlighted by the details that were shared by the AAPI women in their

narratives. The following data and analysis, drawn from participant interviews, tell the stories of

the Asian American and Pacific Islander women's quest for higher education senior leadership.

The table below provides an overview of themes and sub-themes, in relation to the conceptual

framework and each research question.

Table 3. *Primary Themes and Sub-Themes*

PURPOSE OF STUDY	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	PRIMARY THEMES AND SUB-THEMES
To understand the lived experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Women Senior Leaders within a large, public research (R1) University (system) in California.	Intersectionality (Race/Culture, Gender, and Leadership)	**RQ1:** In what ways have the racial, cultural, and gender identities informed AAPI women's pursuit of their career goals?	**Primary Theme 1:** <mark>**The Immigrant Family**</mark> **Sub-Themes:** • Collectivism, Care, and Community • Survival Mindset
		RQ1-A: What educational experiences have AAPI women had that influenced their career choices, professional growth, and pursuit of leadership? **RQ1-B:** What societal experiences have AAPI women had that influenced their career choices, professional growth, and pursuit of leadership?	**Primary Theme 2:** <mark>**Pivotal Moments**</mark> **Sub-Themes:** • Upbringing • College • Career • Recognition and Validation from Others
	Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit)	**RQ2:** What organizational barriers and supports did AAPI women experience in their paths toward striving for, achieving, and maintaining their senior leadership positions?	**Primary Theme 3:** <mark>**Role Models, Mentors, and Sponsorship**</mark> **Sub-Themes:** • Personal, Professional, Informal, and Multiple • Beyond… to Sponsorship • "Pay It Forward" **Primary Theme 4:** <mark>**Authentic Servant Leadership**</mark>

Theme 1: The Immigrant Family

The first emerging theme that became evident in the participant interviews is that of the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) immigrant family. This common theme underpins the story shared by each research study participant. Each woman was the product of an immigrant family. Seven of the study participants were born in the United States with their parent(s) having immigrated to the U.S. before the (daughter's) birth. Three of the participants were foreign-born and immigrated to the U.S., alongside their parent(s), as a young child.

The experience of being in an immigrant family highlighted both common and unique circumstances among the study participants. These circumstances included having lived in a multi-generational home with extended family members (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins), endured multiple moves based on familial needs, made decisions about the language(s) spoken inside and outside of the home (and how that decision point played part in the participant's degree of assimilation into American society), been impressed with the AAPI cultural values of hard work and education, and undergone targeted discrimination and situations of racism. These circumstances, part and parcel of the culture of the AAPI immigrant family, impacted the participants' upbringing, and are foundational to how they see the world today.

AAPI immigrant families face notable struggles navigating life in the United States. Many AAPI immigrant families encounter challenges such as language barriers, economic instability, and racial and systemic discrimination. These challenges further impede their integration into American society. Yet, AAPI immigrant families have largely found strength and resolve in their culture, with a focus on values such as collectivism, relational orientation, familism, and family obligation (Yee et. al., 2007). I coined these immigrant family values into the subtheme of, "Collectivism, Care, and Community". These values have served as the

foundation for overcoming adversity and creating a sense of belonging within their new environments. Thus, it is essential to understand the diverse narratives and cultural values of the AAPI immigrant family, to truly appreciate their contributions to American society.

The AAPI immigrant family encapsulates a complex history of resilience, determination, cultural integration, and adaptability. There is a struggle to balance their cultural heritage and identities with the demands of assimilation and integration into American society. As such, the immigrant family is forced to face complicated challenges in this land of opportunities. The following illustrates the theme of the immigrant family and its connection to the sub-themes of collectivism, care, and community and developing an essential survival mindset.

Sub-Theme: Collectivism, Care, and Community

A sub-theme derived from the theme of the Immigrant Family is the spirit of collectivism, care, and community that runs course through the AAPI culture. This sub-theme is espoused in various ways, from the stories of participants' first homes that housed multiple generations and extended relatives, the cultural beliefs and values that were taught and shared amongst family, to the familial responsibilities expected of and assumed by these AAPI daughters.

Multi-Generational Households

Multigenerational households are a bedrock of the AAPI culture, stressing the importance of family unity, cultural traditions, and mutual support. These households foster respect for elders, honor cultural values, and provide an essential support system focused on the well-being of the members of the family. Yee et al. (2007) state that, with the importance of family obligations and "filial piety, family interdependence is a core issue for AAPI families. A strong kinship system with high levels of mutual obligation provides family members with a clearly defined group that can be counted on to provide assistance and aid" (Tseng & Hsu, 1991).

In the following interview excerpt, Joyce speaks about the early days of her family

immigrating to the United States, and later to Canada, indicating their desire for community and

collectivism:

> When we first came here, we had family who lived here. So, we stayed with my
> aunt and uncle for a little while in Chinatown. And then quickly, we ended up
> moving to Canada… in Toronto. I had my grandmother and my paternal
> grandmother, my dad's brother and his wife lived there. So, we all moved into one
> house together. And it was a difficult time… they had to learn English, had to
> learn to drive in the snow. All those kinds of things were a real shock, I think, to
> the system. You know… immigrants come to this country, and a lot of times, at
> least back then, it was about where's your nearest family. So, we went to where
> our nearest family was.

Similarly, Maile describes early memories of her upbringing, taking note of the multi-

generational household she grew up in, as well as the family value for religion and its role in the

home:

> So, the environment had my mom and my dad, a dozen relatives living in the
> house, an older brother - who's four years older than me, and then a younger sister
> - who's eight years younger. And the environment was Catholic. So, it was a very
> religious home. Probably more religious than even other Catholic homes…
> because it was regular rosary praying. It was more than just going to church on
> Sundays.

Likewise, Filipina American Roselyn, in her interview, depicts a similarly situated

multigenerational household set-up:

> So, in our house were aunts and uncles who lived with us. Mom, Dad, aunts,
> uncles, and cousins. So, we have like a five-bedroom house with like, I think a
> den that was converted into a bedroom as well, so it was a multigenerational,
> multifamily house. And at some point in my growing up, my grandparents lived
> with us and cycled in and out. Right? As new immigration happened… so, my
> family was the anchor in the United States. And as new folks came from the
> Philippines, they lived with us for a while until they, you know, were able to go
> off on their own. So, our house was like the Wait Station. We're immigrants,
> right?

Vida, another Filipina American study participant, shared the following:

> In the early years, we didn't have a lot of family members here. But once they were able to be petitioned, you know, our house is kind of that first stop for everyone. And I'm sure this is a story that many Filipino Americans share, and probably can relate to. So, there's still this really strong connection to the Philippines and being able to contribute right… sending money. So, there's always this kind of sense of obligation, not only to family back home, but you know, kind of here also with our own kind of immediate family.

The multigenerational AAPI household embodies the spirit of collectivism, care, and a deep sense of community. By nurturing family bonds, upholding cultural values and traditions, and contributing to the family collective, the multi-generational household creates a resilient, committed sense of community where family members are connected and mutually supported.

Hard Work, Good Behavior, and Education

The majority of the study participants also talked about the important values and beliefs that they were taught and raised with. The cultural values that participants gleaned from their immigrant family upbringing called for hard work, good behavior, and the importance of an education.

Joyce, in her interview, shares the ingrained values of having an education and exercising good behaviors as paramount to her learning and growth. She states that, "Education was huge in my family, as it probably is for a lot of Asian families. That was always family, education, and then behaving well. You know, those were the kinds of things that we strove for."

Along these same lines, Jacqueline shares the values she learned in her upbringing, in the following passage:

> As a Filipina, and also as an Asian American, I was always told, like, let your work speak for itself. So, if you're a hard worker, you know, you will reap the benefits of your hard work. And… to kind of just stay diligent and stay up, you know, stay a hard worker. So, I think that has really applied to my leadership… is just, you know, keep going, keep at it, and even if it's hard, just like, you know, try to maintain and persist. That humility part is just more of… I think it's kind of a

survival tool, like not making waves and not ruffling any feathers. I think I was taught that because, you know, they've seen how it is, when you are, too much, or front and center, right? You become a target.

As conveyed by the study participants, the AAPI communities richly value hard work, good behavior, and the importance of education. The emphasis on hard work was noted at nine separate points and conveyed across four of the ten AAPI women leaders during their participant interviews. Demonstrating good behaviors are points also highlighted by four of the study participants. Finally, the importance of education is stressed 215 times throughout the interviews across all ten study participants, as key values and life lessons taught in their families. These cultural values are deemed essential to one's success and (personal/professional) growth, guiding the AAPI individual's actions and reinforcing the community's collective identity and resilience.

Gender Roles. Dutiful Daughters, and Familial Responsibilities

In alignment with the hard work, good behavior, and education that are values of the AAPI culture, and woven into the sub-theme of Collectivism, Care, and Community, is the acknowledgment and understanding of the daughters' role in the AAPI immigrant family. AAPI families played a central role in "the socialization of gender identity and gender roles" (Yee et al., 2007). In discussing their upbringing, several study participants talked of the duties and tasks they had to assume as contributions to the family collective, highlighting the familial responsibilities expected of them. These expectations permeated through adulthood, into their lives and leadership journeys. For example, Linda shares:

> When I was in high school, there was definitely an expectation of…you know, you go to school, and you come back home, right? Like, you help with the house, you babysit your cousins, you do those kinds of things. So, I remember asking for permission to get a job when I was in high school, and the response was "no". Like…Who's gonna take care of your cousin? Right? Who's gonna help grandma? Who's gonna do this? So, there were definitely family expectations of me and my sister… that was about helping the family and keep going, whether

that was childcare duties, or helping out with cleaning, or that kind of stuff. Then, when I moved to college, I was pretty much on my own."

As a strategy for "maintaining traditional patriarchal family structures, AAPI families often socialize their children toward gender roles" (Yee et al., 2007). In the interview excerpt below, Elaine, describes early familial expectations and her current family responsibilities, resulting from the gendered expectations and her role(s) as daughter/mother of the family. She has a resolve of acceptance, yet seeds of frustration are documented in the following interview passage:

> As a woman, you're supposed to take care of the children, you're supposed to take care of the finances, you're supposed to do the cooking and the cleaning. The uncles were saying, "A woman's place is inside the house. Everything on the outside belongs to the man." I'm a lot of the caretaker in the family. I take care of the family; I take care of my parents. And even though my brother does that, as well… there's something… but, I don't know if it's how I do it, or how I approach it. That's just been ingrained in me, right? I think my parents, in a way, see me as like… Elaine will take care of it. Right? And so, a lot of that happens in the background to life. But thinking about it from that perspective and how I am at home now, again, with my family. It's like… "Mom will take care of it". You know? Mom will do it. And my husband is like, "Yep. Ask Mom. Mom will take care of it". Right? In fact, my husband says, "Yeah, I just give her the paycheck. And she manages". So… you know, on the one hand, there's, again, responsibility there. And… on the other hand, it's like, gosh, I feel like I'm taking care of everything!"

As shared in Elaine's interview excerpt above, AAPI daughters "often resent the gender inequality in their families, as daughters recognize that they have less autonomy and mobility" (Espiritu, 2001). In response to this perception of gender oppression, AAPI daughters have expressed a preference for mainstream culture, "which is perceived to be more egalitarian in gender roles than in their own families" (Yee et al., 2007; Pyke & Johnson, 2003). Thus, this attempt to honor the AAPI immigrant family values and expectations and the desire to take on mainstream, egalitarian roles in American society often results in a continued discourse of cultures and their identities.

Sub-Theme: A Survival Mindset

A second sub-theme that materialized from the core theme of the AAPI Immigrant

Family is the idea of survival. The topic of survival was discussed and coded 23 times across

nine study participants. These participants had to develop a survival mentality, specifically

regarding their motivation and quest for personal independence and professional advancement.

This survival mindset can be an outcome of challenging situations, as shared by the AAPI

women's stories of their immigrant family upbringing, parents working long hours to overcome

financial struggles to make ends meet, and being a latch-key kid. For example, Linda assumed a

survival mindset, having witnessed the struggles her mother went through, as shared in the

interview excerpt below:

> My mom always had to work. So, I think my sister and I sort of internalized that
> the best way we could be of help to our mom is to not be a burden, not make
> worry… those kinds of things. So, I think it was more of a function that led to us
> being really focused in school. And, since my family was not wealthy, they
> essentially told me, "If you want to go to college, you have to find a way to pay
> for it yourself." And, because of that … I worked really hard to get scholarships,
> and, and I was always on time with my FAFSA.

Maile, similarly, shared the need to build a survival mindset, mainly due to the lack of agency

and (awareness of) resources for immigrant families.

> Because my parents were immigrants, I don't feel like I had the guidance that I
> would have wanted in terms of college preparation, you know? Or like, we didn't
> do college tours and things like that.

Joyce describes her childhood and upbringing as a latch-key kid, returning after school to an

empty house, without parental supervisions, because of her parents work schedules. Joyce said:

> My parents were not the current Tiger parents… I was a latchkey kid. They didn't
> really have time to hover over us. Yeah… I mean, my parents always worked
> hard. They never ever gave up. So… this is an overused word… but their
> resilience really impacted my own resilience.

69

The survival mentality depicted in the study participant interviews is demonstrated by a strong focus on gaining one's independence, improving upon and building one's self-reliance, and a deep-seated desire to overcome the adversity she experiences, to succeed.

Theme 2: Pivotal Moments

Pivotal moments played a crucial role in shaping the course of the AAPI women leaders' lives in this study. These defining events serve as catalysts for change, leading to growth. Such pivotal moments enhanced the study participant's trajectory and/or helped to (re)define their goals. Pivotal moments, coded 66 times across the ten participants, build the foundation within which the AAPI woman's story unfolds, leading to progress and change across extents of human undertaking.

This theme examines how the study participants viewed the pivotal moments of their lives, whether in their early upbringing, the formulation and awareness of identity in their college years, early careers, or through recognition and validation from others. The theme of pivotal moments connects back to Research Questions 1A and 1B, which asks the following respectively,

> **RQ1-A.** What educational experiences have AAPI women had that influenced their career choices, professional growth, and pursuit of leadership?

> **RQ1-B.** What societal experiences have AAPI women had that influenced their career choices, professional growth, and pursuit of leadership?

Sub-Theme: In Upbringing

Arriaga et al. states, "As we reflect on the disappointing data regarding female educational leaders, we cannot deny the impact of our experiences, particularly in our formative

years" (2013, p. 55). Participant Maile experienced two pivotal moments; one that took place in her childhood and another during her teenage years, as described in the interview passage below:

> Um… so, when I was nine, I was at a donut shop… and I was attacked by four white boys. Oh, yeah… So, I would say that that's like, a critical core memory, where that really impacted so many things after that, you know? Where it was the way I carried myself; the way I felt; the way making sure that I know, "How do you defend yourself against (these) boys?"… There was like pushing and, you know, yelling like, "Ching Chong Chang" at me, you know? … So, because of the work I do now, I am often the only female, the only Asian female in that space. And so, I feel like I need to take up space.

For Maile, experiencing this racially motivated attack during her childhood left emotional scars, impacting her sense of (physical and psychological) safety, as well as her sense of belonging. As she shares in the passage, the trauma of this pivotal moment impacted her self-perception, fostering feelings of isolation or mistrust. Such an early encounter with prejudice led to her heightened self-awareness and resilience, ultimately influencing her career aspirations as she navigated a world that had, from an early age, labeled her as "other."

Maile later shares the loss of a parent as another pivotal moment in her life. "My dad died when I was 13. So, that changed a lot of things, where then I became responsible for the household and I became responsible for the cooking, cleaning and raising my sister... That definitely was important." Losing her father as a young teen was a pivotal moment for Maile, leaving a lasting impact that shaped her in profound ways. This loss forced her to take on adult responsibilities at a young age, strengthening her resilience but also affecting her sense of psychological safety.

Similarly, Joyce recalls a pivotal memory from her youth, reflecting on the conflicting emotions of feeling victimized while also feeling the pressure to behave well. She shares details of the moment in the interview excerpt below:

Now, reflecting back, if I experienced some of the covert or overt racism, sexism, back then it's just hard to know, because, I think when you're growing up, you also are taking in so much and going through so much yourself…I do remember, my family went to Houston, one summer, to visit my relatives there. And we decided to rent a big van and drove it to New Orleans just for the day for fun. And the minute we got out of the car, we were sort of bombarded with, you know, racist, stereotypical, like, "Oh, Ching Chong, Jack!" You know, those kinds of things, like just literally … coming out of the car in the French Quarter. And that was the reason why I still remember it so many years later… is because I felt my face go flush, and I didn't feel ashamed, I just felt really angry for my parents, my grandmother, my aunts, and uncles, you know, because I just felt like… I don't know, it just felt really hurtful to immediately be sort of assaulted with those stereotypical things. You know, really ugly things. We hadn't done anything, we weren't blocking the streets or anything. I just always knew that I had to behave well.

For Joyce, as a young AAPI girl facing racism, experiencing the repercussions of prejudice also came with the expectation of staying composed and "behaving well", an Asian cultural value. This pressure to keep calm and well-behaved proved overwhelming. Navigating this pivotal moment helped develop Joyce's inner strength, but it also stifled her voice at an early age. She learned to deal with the invisible wounds of racism, with quiet resilience.

Hoon shares an experience in her early elementary school years, when her father had registered her in another school across town. This school was comprised largely of students who were children of "professional families". It was this pivotal moment of a school transition, where Hoon realized the social class(es) and hierarchy that existed in her world. Upon her self-reflection, it was also during this pivotal time of her life that Hoon acknowledged the beginning of her "Imposter Syndrome". She illustrates the details below.

In third grade, I changed schools. I think it was actually very lucky. My friends, my peer group, was almost entirely other kids from like, professional families. And so, you had the professionals from the town doctors, lawyers, people who worked in the government. And then you had people who worked in the casinos. And I didn't have any friends that I recall, whose families worked in the casino. And, so it was, I grew up in an environment that was very affluent for the community. And, you know, it's like, I kind of faked my way through. You

know… I didn't ever feel out of place, but I didn't do a lot of the things that they were doing. Like… they would go on family vacations. Our family didn't really go on family vacations. We did like 24-hour road trips, you know, coming to San Francisco like early in the morning, doing some shopping and then coming back because we couldn't afford like a hotel or motel… but my friends were, like, going to Hawaii, going to Mexico, going to a cruise to the Bahamas. They did summer camp.

I did some things … or some of the activities I participated in… was really because my friends were doing that and I was able to, just sort of, tag along. A lot of my limitations were due to my parents working. Because they worked in the casinos, they worked at night; 7pm until 3am… that was their shift. It was a swing shift, because… that's when the casinos are most, you know, active…So, I would come home, and they would be leaving. You know, they'd leave dinner, but then, you know, they were gone. And so… um, yeah, that started probably when I was about nine or ten. So, we were home alone, throughout the evenings, doing homework by ourselves and stuff like that.

Additionally, Hoon grew up as a "Latch-Key Kid", which meant she had to learn about independence and self-reliance early on in her life. As she shared during her interview, she came home to an oftentimes empty house and had to figure many things out on her own. Undoubtedly, this lived experience built on Hoon's resilience, inner strength, and adaptability.

Sub-Theme: In College

Many of the study participants reflected on pivotal moments that took place during their undergraduate college years. Such moments include experiencing changes in their living environment, meeting new individuals from different backgrounds, and getting involved in student leadership activities. For several participants, the college years introduced them to social justice-rooted causes, student activism, and an acknowledgment of their multiple, intersectional identities. This pivotal time of experiences was, as Hoon describes, "eye-opening".

During her undergraduate years, Linda joined a multicultural sorority that was social justice oriented, sharing that it "was really nice, being surrounded by all of these different,

essentially women of color with progressive identities related to social justice and social change. That was good."

Roselyn shares how her college experience exposed her to leadership opportunities and ultimately, a long, illustrious career in higher education. She coins these pivotal moments of her life as "planned happenstance", as she describes below:

> So, you know, becoming a leader in my field was… by accident… Call it planned happenstance. I got into higher ed, because I was an Resident Assistant (RA). And I became an RA because I had gotten into a roommate conflict with the folks I was living with off-campus. And I needed to not live with them anymore. And a friend of mine said, "Why don't you become an RA?" So, I applied to be an RA. And, the person who interviewed me … slotted me into that role. And I became an RA. And then, in my senior year, when I had this existential crisis about law school and, "Do I really want to go to law school?" I had a meeting with her. I said, "I wish I could be an RA forever". And she said to me, "What do you think I do for a living?" This is when she introduced me to the field.

Like Roselyn, Padma shares a very similar pivotal moment, as a student employee during her undergraduate years, who parlayed "getting into trouble", a behavior uncharacteristic for an AAPI young woman, into an opportunity for learning, growth, and eventual career direction. She shares her experience, as detailed below.

> So, the Dean of Students got mad at me and hired me. And he basically was like, "If you stay in my office, you can't get into trouble". That's how I started working in the housing office and the Residence Life office with the dean of students because I was in trouble. My friends and I were troublemakers. And they wanted to make sure that I graduated right and so I worked for them 20 hours a week. It's how I learned about Student Affairs and Housing. One of the professionals in the office one day in my senior year said, "Hey, have you ever thought about going into this as a career?" And I said, "You can do that?" And her response to me was, "What the hell do you think I'm doing?" Oh, it's the truth, right? Working in that office 100% impacted and influenced my career choice!

For Joyce, attending an Ivy League university on the East Coast for her undergraduate degree, proved to be a life-defining experience; a jump-start to seeking a career in higher

education that focused on helping marginalized populations. She shares her undergraduate

experience below.

> So that's when I first realized there is this half. And then there's the other half, you know, how the 1% lives and works. And if so, you know, I have honestly nothing but the most positive things to say about Ivy League University 1[2] because it opened my eyes up to just so many things. And it gave me opportunity. The thing that I appreciate most is that because they gave me a full ride to everything…Ivy League University 1 makes it really possible for their students coming out of public policy to actually take the job that you feel is most impactful or that aligns with your interests and passions most, as opposed to the highest paying job. So, I took the lowest paying job offer I got. I was a higher education policy analyst. I knew I wanted to come back to California. I could barely pay the bills. But, I knew that I wanted … a career in public higher education.

Most of the AAPI women leaders in this study attributed their college years as ones filled

with pivotal moments, resulting in personal growth, academic and social achievements,

important connections, and the forging of a career-building pathway. Their lived experiences

during college included facing and overcoming unique challenges, discovering identity, and

developing a foundation for their professional future. "The biggest piece about college is, like,

learning more about yourself," Jacqueline summarizes. The study participants acknowledged the

college experience as a uniquely transformative journey that shaped their resilience, ambitions,

and preparation for making meaningful contributions to their career(s) in higher education.

Sub-Theme: In Career

The AAPI women leaders also experienced many pivotal moments throughout their

careers that shaped their paths to success. These moments often include experiencing political

and societal issues that seep into their workplace, breaking through cultural, gender, and

organizational barriers, and leading with resilience with the intent of inspiring future generations

of women of color leaders For example, Joyce shares her reflections on the societal landscape

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[2] A pseudonym for Ivy League university attended by study participant(s).

that prevailed early into her higher education career, and how this time was a pivotal moment, in the interview excerpt below.

> What really motivated me to be in higher education and public policy, in particular, is when I worked as an administrative assistant at University A[3] in the admissions and enrollment office. One of the regents on the board led this campaign to get rid of race-based race-conscious admissions policies and hiring policies. And he eventually took it to the ballot. And that became Proposition 209. When you say Prop 209, people realize, "Oh, that's what got rid of affirmative action in California!" So, we were in the thick of that at the University A campus… I saw it firsthand. And so that's really what sparked my interest. Higher education isn't just about teaching students… but it's also all these other things that affect people's lives.

Pivotal moments also continue to happen even very recently, as shared by Ensha, in the interview comments below:

> So, I achieved this level of career success without wearing the headscarf and being able to. If I wanted to assimilate and hide my Muslim identity, I took off the headscarf. Last year in February, it's been one year while in this senior leadership role. So, I am very openly Muslim now. I think I'm the highest leader non-faculty at University 1 who wears the headscarf. I know that that is true. I may actually be one of the highest levels of leaders across the system that wears the headscarf and I'm not in executive leadership. I'm in senior leadership. So, even if I wanted to hide that identity and my otherness last February, I made the decision I could never do that again.

> For Ensha, achieving a senior leadership role gave her a chance to outwardly embrace her

intersectional identities, thus providing genuine representation.

> The pivotal moments in our life journeys create the impetus for change and growth.

Vida, in a reflective moment during her interview, calls to the (organizational) barriers that continue to stand in the way, despite pivotal moments, as well as the incremental steps to progress, when she reflects on the following:

> I think some of the barriers are that universities, like ours, pride ourselves in being inclusive, and that kind of thing. But it still really is an elitist kind of institution… you know, very hierarchical. So, oftentimes, to get on a committee, you gotta be

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[3] A pseudonym for a California university attended by study participant(s).

recommended by someone. Who do they recommend? It's the people that probably are close to them or on their leadership team. So, we're kind of perpetuating the cycle of who gets the seat at the table. So rather than changing the table, or adding seats to it, it's like we keep perpetuating the same table and the same people that are making these decisions. I think it really does. I can still see it now in some places that I'm in. And what I really appreciate, again, is there are a lot of leaders on our campus … where they'll ask, like, "Who's not at the table? Whose voices aren't heard?" And some will intentionally say, Okay… they're even mindful about the representation, you know, like, either gender or race, or even like, age, or even, like, just a simple, "Okay, we don't have any students on this committee". Or, "We don't have any staff members on this committee, we need to get some staff people on here, or this department representative". So, I've seen that more. But I think that's how the institution perpetuates it. It's the decision-making tables that get recommended for leadership positions. If it's the same type of leader, it's perpetuating this elitist type of group. And I'm glad to see that there are some changes to that happening now.

Sub-Theme: Recognition and Validation from Others

Pivotal moments also come from our interactions with others, such as family, friends, teachers, colleagues, and leaders. A prevalent theme across several of the study participants' interviews depicts the shared experience of being acknowledged by others for their hard work, professionalism, and excellence; in receiving recognition and validation from colleagues, supervisors, professors/teachers, peers, friends, and family.

Linda shares, "My first Filipina-American professor was transformative. She taught me so many things that helped me validate and understand my identity, as someone who was bicultural. And it was just so cool to see, like, a Pinay with a doctorate."

Jacqueline acknowledges the recognition and accolades she received from colleagues and management, that reinforced, validated, and gave her the "push" to pursue greater, higher goals. She shares,

I also was blessed to be surrounded by colleagues and mentors, who also, you know, kind of kept pushing me and asked me like, "Okay, what's next?" So, I wasn't really considering the doctorate program, but it was something that my

colleagues were asking and wondering like, "When are you going to do it?" So, I eventually decided to do a doctorate program.

In another unique account, Padma shared a pivotal moment in her career, which involved a peer colleague, who acknowledged the marginalization she witnessed in a team interaction with an executive leader at the university. This pivotal moment proved a challenging, though all too familiar, occurrence that underscored the disparate treatment Padma continually encountered from key leadership.

> I was doing a project with a white woman, and this white woman and I had to go talk to our Vice President of Student Affairs, who is a white man. And he wouldn't talk to me or look at me or address me, he would only talk to the white woman, right? And it was so telling ,,. I thought about this. And I was like, I wasn't even in the room. And we left the room and this white woman looks at me and she goes, "Does that happen to you a lot? That was weird." I was like, "Yeah, it happens to me. He acknowledged you and not me." And she was like, "That was really wrong." And I was like, "But you didn't stop it." And she was like, "You're right. I didn't." And so I mean, and I wish I could say that was the last time I dealt with that. But, that's not right….I'm required to prove myself, right? I'm not accepted as being competent from the get-go. I have to prove myself. And so that always impacted my pursuit. And I think all those things have just made me fight harder.

In sum, for the AAPI women leaders in this study, pivotal moments were a necessary part of their journeys, reinforcing continued growth and purposeful direction, as well as a commitment, drive and dedication to paving the way for greater diversity and inclusion in leadership roles.

Theme 3: Role Models, Mentors and Sponsorship

This theme explores the various kinds of support that the study participants received throughout their career and leadership journeys. In response to Research Question 2, the AAPI women leaders detailed organizational barriers that have stood in the way of their pursuit of leadership opportunities. Such barriers include being subjected to others' (leaders and peers) implicit biases, microaggressions, unconscious and overt racism in the workplace, sexism, as well as experiencing a lack of agency in support of (the AAPI community's) professional growth

and development in the organization; this all stemming from misconceived perceptions. Author

Jane Hyun, in her book, Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling: *Career Strategies for Asians*, states that,

"In workplace scenarios particularly, perception is often reality. As a result, what they don't

know can hurt you. An assessment of your character and how you perform is based not solely on

the quality of your 'work deliverables'" (Hyun, 2005).

However, one prevalent sentiment that all study participants emphasized was the

invaluable contributions that role models and mentors have provided in their lives, as an

encouraging, uplifting, and empowering source of support. Arriaga et al. (2020) stated the

following regarding role models and mentors:

> Women are less likely than men to receive targeted mentoring that promotes advancement
> in their careers and opens professional doors for them. Valuable relationships are
> instrumental to the success of women in leadership. Women who seek positions of
> influence need experienced mentors from the top of the organization, particularly in
> positions where women are in the minority.

Role models and mentors were discussed 41 times across the ten participants' interviews,

echoing their integral piece to one's leadership development. Role models demonstrate effective

leadership practices, by modeling the values and actions that new leaders can learn from.

Mentorship can guide necessary skill development and offer suggestions for navigating

leadership challenges. "Mentors often support mentees through high-quality networking in

organizations that provide interview skills to prepare female candidates" (Arriaga et al, 2020).

Role models, mentors, and sponsors have been instrumental in bridging knowledge gaps,

building confidence, providing unique insights into career strategies, and inspiring personal and

professional growth. This critical theme of role models, mentors, and sponsorship applies to all

ten study participants, with specific insights below.

Sub-Theme: Personal, Professional, Informal and Multiple

This sub-theme demonstrates how mentors and role models come in various forms for the study participants. Mentorship came from family members, friends, supervisors, churches, communities, peers, and colleagues, inside and outside the participant's work organization. Chang et al. (2014) noted that women of color often sought role models and mentorship outside of the workplace because "women of color in higher levels of leadership who can serve as mentors are few and far between" (Aros, 2022; Chang et al., 2014).

Personal Role Models

The women in Linda's family were influential and inspiring. Her role models are her mother and grandmother. Linda's mother was a single parent, whose focus was to take care of her two daughters and teach them the importance of being strong and independent. Linda illustrates her mother's (and grandmother's) impact in the interview passage below:

> And my mom would always tell my sister and I… I remember when I was little, always have your own money; always have your own mind; always have your own friends. And she gave us a lot of grace. And my grandmother, actually… same thing… because my grandma -- she also got married really young; she was separated from my grandpa for years. But, you know, they weren't allowed to divorce for a long time, in the Philippines. And she would also tell my sister and I, these are pretty feminist ideals, right? Like, find your own path. Discover who you are, you know? Like… yes, still help a family but, you know, find your own path be successful. Those were the messages that I got. It wasn't, find a husband, about those kinds of things. And I'm really grateful for that. Honestly, I think that even though my mom didn't go to college, she's super intelligent. She's super smart. She's extremely hardworking. So, there were elements about just how they modeled for my sister and I, like… how to show up decisively; how to show up assertively; and I'm really grateful for that. I've never felt like I didn't grow up in a setting in which women were viewed as subservient or less than or need to listen to a man. It was actually the opposite. I was told, "Do your own thing."

> By that same token, Padma also credits the older women in her family as her role models.

They served as examples to Padma, on the importance of speaking your mind, as she says,

"Turns out I come from a long line of rebellious women. Oh, wow! That's kind of awesome!

When I think of it like that, I'm like… alright, my mom wasn't just annoying when I was a teenager. She was also a rebel."

On the other hand, Joyce credits a male family member as her role model – her father. Her father's influence had a critical impact on her career and life choices. Joyce shares that having a male family figure who practiced and encouraged activism was instrumental to her personal and professional development. She shares the following in her interview:

> My dad's kind of a rebel. He grew up reading books by Malcolm X. and Karl Marx, They were like, stolen books… he wasn't allowed to read them, but he would somehow get his hands on them and read them secretly. So, he was more of a… not a radical… but just more progressive, My dad was a little more secure, more comfortable in his skin… I would say. And we were very active. They were very active in the Chinese community, especially in San Francisco. I remember some of my earliest memories being marching and protests, you know, with my dad. That's a definite role model there.

Professional Mentors

For many of the AAPI women leaders interviewed, the organizations in which they worked fostered an environment that helped forge many mentor-mentee relationships. For example, in her interview, Elaine identified her first supervisor at University 5 as her decades-long mentor. This supervisor shared knowledge, giving insightful words of advice like "Think like a Dean", and guiding Elaine's professional growth across the university, going as far as helping her to initiate salary negotiations with each promotion she obtains. Their relationship spans the course of Elaine's 26-year career, having evolved from supervisor, teacher, and now, to a supportive peer. As Elaine shares,

> She was my role model like… I see what steps she's taking. And, you know, she talked about how she navigates different spaces. And that was me learning from her, you know? And so, seeing her from where she started to where she is now… it's cool. And now our conversations have changed. Whereas, before, it was me asking her like, "What would you do?" Or, "Can you tell me how to do something like this?" Our conversations now… they're more in-depth in a way that goes beyond her being in her role and me being in my role. It's more of

support now, right? It was before she was like… a teacher. Now it's like, we're supporting each other. And so, I appreciate that a lot. Because, I mean, she knew me when I was a student (worker), right? So, she's like, my all around, like, "Go To". There's a connection.

Likewise, Padma, during her interview, acknowledged the importance of having professional mentors because they can provide no-nonsense, salient career advice.

When I was very early in my career, I had a mentor who told me… and I'm grateful that I internalized this early on… whether or not it's right that I had to, is a different story. But I did, and it has helped me move my career forward. He told me all the research shows, and I double-checked the research, and he was right, that women and people of color, so especially women of color, have the least opportunities to advance their career within one organization. And that is true, not just in education! That's true across industries! And so, he said, "Look… he was like, Padma, you're ambitious. And if you want your career to move up, and you want to meet your ambitions, you have to be ready to move campuses." And so, I've worked at several different campuses.

In her interview, Ensha alluded to how the allowance and creation of spaces for mentorship were indicative of an organization's norms and values. For example, during her time at Ivy League University 1[4], the environment did not encourage mentors. Returning back to California, and in her new role at University 1, she finally found the necessary support, encouragement, and mentorship she desired. She shares the following:

Another difference between my time in University 1 and my time at Ivy League University 1… I had no mentors in Ivy League University 1. I had a ton of mentors at University 1. And I had mentors that were people of color at University 1. And they're like, "You need to do this! You need to start learning how high-level executive job searches work, how high-level executives talk!" Blah, blah, blah. They convinced me to apply, while simultaneously telling me, "You probably won't get it yet. But to try it anyway!" And so, I did, and then I got it. So that's the position I have now.

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[4] Ivy League University 1 serves as a pseudonym for the name of an Ivy League University attended by a research study participant. This university is designated as one of the Ivy League colleges located on the East Coast.

Kochan's study (2013) explores the relationship between organizational culture and mentorships, postulating that "the context of mentoring includes the cultural mores of the individuals involved and the cultural aspects within the organization and society" (p. 412). During her interview, Maile states that the lack of representation in key professional leadership roles results in a lack of awareness of the potential opportunities available to an individual belonging to an underrepresented group. She shares, "I've never reported directly to an AAPI person.... And so, I didn't know that I needed or that I wanted that kind of mentorship."

Informal Mentors

Informal mentor-mentee relationships, happen organically, and are "generally considered to be more accessible, meaningful, comfortable, individualized, effective, and long-lasting" (Maccombs & Bhat, 2020). Jacqueline gives credit to the informal mentor(s) in her life, particularly colleagues/co-workers in her organization. She is particularly grateful to her peer, a staff colleague within her unit, as well as a doctoral student in her program. This informal mentor was instrumental because…

> She would really challenge me. And I trusted her enough and she trusted me enough to know, it's not out of harm or trying to sabotage me in any way. But she knew that I needed to come out of my shell in that way. Yeah, we would present at conferences, and she would write papers… and she would say, "Oh, you want to co-author this with me?" And, you know, she pulled me into opportunities that I thought I was like… I'm not good enough for this. And then she's like, "No, no, no. You need to do this with me." So again, she was the one pushing me towards the front.

Multiple Role Models and Mentors

Ensha underscores the importance of having multiple sources of role models and mentors throughout her life, from childhood to her current role. Sometimes these role models did not necessarily warrant a personal connection, but rather served as role models from afar. She shares the following reflection below about role models and mentorship. The initial part of the passage

is somewhat contradictory to Linda's, Padma's, and Joyce's honoring of their parents as role

models in their respective leadership journeys. Nevertheless, role models and mentors were key

to her leadership development.

> I think this is the first gen immigrant experience. You don't get to learn how to be successful in American culture through your parents. Because they themselves are fresh immigrants and trying to figure out how to survive; it's a foreign culture to them. They're coming home and trying to tell you this happened at work today. You're like 13 years old, and your dad's unpacking with you…because he's a foreigner in this land. And so, you learn to code-switch identities. And to code-switch, not just language, but also identity and to be truly bicultural. You have to teach yourself a lot of that "Americanness" and culture and climate and the right way to be in society. So, from a very young age, I would look towards the television shows that were my mentors. Books were my mentors… I try to model the behavior that I would see with white Americans. Because assimilation is very important back then, especially in the 80s, and 90s. You needed to look like them, talk like them, be like them, so I would learn from them…And then, just pick up all that stuff and develop my toolkit. And just make my toolkit better. It wasn't until I got to University 1 that I even realized what I had was mentorship or executive sponsorship, until people started to explicitly call it that and say, "Who are your mentors? Who are your executive sponsors? Who has helped you in your career? Who has not?" And I think the University system, the women's collaborative, the women's initiative was huge for me! Understanding all of that system-wide is amazing! And then once I started to do that, then I started seeking people out. And I started being like, "Will you be my mentor?" And people would go, "Yes! Absolutely!"

Ensha emphasizes her appreciation of University 1 and the system-wide efforts that have been

instrumental in promoting the continued need for mentor-mentee opportunities and partnerships.

Sub-Theme: Sponsorship

Several study participants explained that the AAPI woman's need for agency, particularly

in response to receiving encouragement and advice in seeking leadership and professional

development opportunities, extends beyond the idea of role models and mentors. Rather, there is

a critical need for a type of champion and/or sponsor.

According to the Harvard Business Review, a champion and/or sponsor is an individual in a senior level or executive role in the organization who is invested in one's growth and career progression. Their positional power "gives them access to rooms where big decisions are made: who's promoted, who leads the next big project, or who gets a raise. In these spaces, a sponsor has the authority to put your name on the table." Research shows that having a champion or sponsor, who can vouch for one's reputation and abilities, can boost their career growth (*Turn Your Boss into a Sponsor*, 2023).

Arriaga et al. also defined a sponsor as, "one who actively uses positional power to partner with hiring authorities within their networks to advocate for the promotion of women leaders into high-leverage, decision-making positions" (Arriaga et al., 2020). Some examples of sponsorship in higher education include creating opportunities for emerging leaders to be involved in high-profile projects, offering promotions, acknowledging young leaders among influential senior-level key leaders, and forging networking connections. This concept of sponsorship is critical to the higher education space, where the sponsorship of emerging women of color leaders carries a profound impact on the university's organizational culture and environment. Furthermore, the sponsorship of emerging women leaders from marginalized, underrepresented backgrounds makes definitive strides toward an inclusive workplace, by ensuring that various perspectives are represented and cultivating a pipeline of diverse talent, ultimately promoting the representation and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the higher education institution.

Roselyn had champions and sponsors in key influential roles, promoting her skillset and abilities, and uplifting her to more growth opportunities, as she shares below…

> I've had a lot of champions in my career. And always in a time when I wasn't looking for a job, right? Oh, look, I wasn't looking… At this point in my career, I

was on the Rolodex of multiple search firms. So, I get a call from a search firm, maybe once a month and say, "Hey, would you be interested in this role? Or can you nominate someone for it?" And so, you know, a search firm contacted me about American Private University 1[5]. And, I ended up in this search for the vice president role, my first vice president cabinet role. She (Search Firm Recruiter/Mentor) is such a champion of other people. And she likes to call people, "Riders on her Freedom Train", right? Her mentees are part of her Freedom Train. So, again, it was a woman, a woman who floated my name to somebody and said, go check this person out.

Linda echoes gratitude for having sponsors throughout her career, who have paved the way and shared their journeys to foster their mentees' growth. She says,

So, I think that being sponsored in a way, right, like that concept of sponsorship, when someone sees something in you that sometimes you don't see in yourselves, I'm very grateful to those that did that. And I think the fact that they also were trying to figure out how to ascend in higher education as people of color in a predominantly white institution, like, I had been fortunate to have had their mentorship, their sponsorship, their support, their encouragement.

Vida illustrates this same sense of championship that occurs in the everyday work meetings. She expresses her appreciation of championships from women of color when highlighting Vida's abilities to new audiences, as demonstrated in the interview excerpt below:

You know, when I would be in a room with, say, Vice Chancellors, or Dean's, I really appreciate it when there would be women of color in high positions that would say, "Vida, come here sit next to me"… like that. Sometimes you'd kind of like walk into an event early on, I'd walk into a room and go, "Okay, I don't know anybody in this room. I don't know what their roles are. Where do I sit?" Right? And sometimes you just kind of sit in the first place available, but oftentimes, it's kind of in the perimeter. But oftentimes, if I saw someone that I knew, and they knew who I was, they knew what I was capable of, or they knew what my expertise as a consultant, say, "Come sit next to me." Or, they'll say, "Vida can speak to that!" So, there were a lot of people that were like looking out for me, and who, especially women of color that were in those spaces.

Along the lines of Roselyn's impactful champions, Linda's appreciation of sponsors, and Vida's reflections on championing at meetings, Jacqueline calls for the concepts and practices of

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champions and sponsors to be woven into the fabric of the organization, such as the creation of

practices and policies that aim at developing pipelines for leadership opportunities for women of

color, namely AAPI women.

> To be confronted with people in those positions, and saying, "Yes, you can do
> this, we actually need you to do this". It was kind of really eye-opening, and
> really motivating, because oftentimes, I saw leadership, and even now, they're all
> white men, you know? And so, my mind goes to like, oh, that's the norm, that's
> the default. And I've had to actively challenge that thought and say, "No, it doesn't
> have to be! You know? Women of color can be in those roles as well!" And so,
> how do we get there? And I think it all starts with having that pipeline.

Sub-Theme: Pay It Forward

Study participants all acknowledged the critical importance of paying it forward, in

reflection and honor of the mentorship and sponsorship they received in their careers.

Joyce discusses paying it forward by mentoring other AAPI women and shares,

> I couldn't do this work without my colleagues around the table. That, to me, is the
> most rewarding and the fact that I get to do things like mentor other women…
> that's really rewarding to me, too, because I wouldn't have made it without my
> mentors… I don't have a lot of Asian American women colleagues at my level or
> at a leadership level, so that's lacking a little bit with affinity groups or employee
> resource groups. And so, I'm getting more involved… I think it's incumbent on me
> to provide some of these opportunities, tools and supports. I try to give back …
> championing and mentoring other women.

Maile, who commented earlier about the lack of AAPI mentors in her organization, chose

to pay it forward by informally reaching out to the AAPI women in her division when the

shutdown occurred across industries during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Maile was

propelled to build a community with the AAPI women at University 4. She describes her

motivation in the excerpt below:

> I didn't have any AAPI mentors. So, I didn't even know that… you know, I didn't
> know that I needed a community at my two other institutions, before University 4.
> They didn't have AAPI faculty or staff groups, either. …. And it was really in
> 2020, when like a lot of AAPI hate stuff was going on, that I reached out to the
> AAPI women in my division, and there were maybe like, 15 of us. Everyone

from directors to assistants… I just sent out an email saying, "How's everyone doing?" You know? And, it was just through this email thread where we everyone started to shame sharing… "I'm pretty scared, I'm avoiding going places, I bought my parents pepper spray, you know?" And I think that's when I really felt like I need that kind of community to have these conversations. And so, you know, I'm hoping that by building this group … in some ways, this is a legacy that I could leave; that this is something that I helped build that will help other faculty and staff who come after me.

Padma also reflected on her desire for legacy building, in paying it forward. Along with two other colleagues, Padma created and developed a women's leadership program, to continue her mission of developing women of color leaders prepared for university administration. Padma echoes Jacqueline's earlier statement about the need to develop leadership pipelines for AAPI women. After three years of creation and stabilization of the program,

We handed it off to new people so that it could grow and continue to be cultivated. I saw that as an opportunity for women who want to do this, but they don't know how to. And we've … teach each other. We got to learn from each other, right? So, we did this and it's still thriving. It's one of my favorite things I've ever done. I love that we've handed it off, right? Like we got to create something, and now younger people have taken it on and made it bigger, better… I want there to be better pipelines for women to leadership.

Theme 4: Authentic Servant Leadership

How has the AAPI immigrant family upbringing, pivotal life moments, and the existence of role models/mentors impacted the AAPI woman's career trajectory and approach to leadership? As conveyed in the study participant interviews, the professional journeys of these AAPI women senior leaders have been profoundly shaped by the unique experiences of their immigrant families, the pivotal moments of life, and the presence of influential role models, mentors, and sponsors. The AAPI immigrant families provided a foundation of strong cultural values and the necessary fortitude to empower these women to pursue their professional goals. The pivotal moments serve as catalysts for their identity awareness, continued personal growth, and professional development. Role models, mentors, and sponsors offered inspiration and

leadership examples to aspire to and learn from, forging a solid career path to leadership. The culmination of these core themes subscribes to a leadership style that can best be delineated as Authentic Servant Leadership.

Authentic Servant Leadership is a combined leadership style firmly rooted in self-awareness, purpose, and a fervent belief in serving others. An authentic leader "strives to create a meaningful relationship with their team as they work toward goals related to their organization's mission and purpose—not just its bottom line" (Gavin, 2019). Authentic leadership is focused on transparency and the alignment of one's behaviors with their values. Servant leadership "prioritizes the growth, well-being, and empowerment of employees. It aims to foster an inclusive environment that enables everyone in the organization to thrive as their authentic self" (White, 2022). Nine study participants shared that empowering team members and prioritizing their professional development and well-being was essential to their leadership approach. Each study participant highlighted that recognizing and embracing their own identities was crucial for cultivating their effective leadership style.

When discussing their specific leadership style(s), the participants reflected on a myriad of issues such as the mainstream misperceptions of the AAPI demographic, culture, and associated attributes; their desire and commitment to honoring valued cultural traits, such as collectivism and generosity, in their leadership approach to work; the importance of seeking strategic opportunities for "allyship" with a hyper-focus on relationship and community building and the bigger objective of creating a lasting legacy for women of color, namely AAPI, leaders. As the study participants share, this all begins with searching for and calling up the strength and courage to amplify their voice(s). When the Asian American and Pacific Islander women's voices are heard, it means we progress a step forward toward the goal of representation.

Joyce shares the following, during her interview, about her AAPI culture, its impact on her higher education leadership journey, and finding and using her voice.

> I'm fiercely proud of my ethnicity, my race, my heritage, and my family roots. On the other hand, I do think that from a really early age, earlier than I can remember, you don't interrupt… you don't…you know? You're in Chinese culture, at least I don't know about other Asian ethnicities. You don't show your worth by talking the most. … I realized that a lot of what happens in American leadership circles or elite circles, I'll say, is about what you say, and how you present yourself. And so again, I've worked for decades on self-presentation, you know? On sitting up straight and not cowering. Or, you know, not being the quiet mouse. But that only comes with confidence, which comes with experience, which comes with validation, which comes with being a leader.

> I would say that some of the more traditional traits that we stereotypically associate with Asian women, I would say are true for me. And it took me a really long time, like I said, to find my voice in in a group setting…I think, having been the Chief of Staff, you have to tell the truth to someone who is at the top of the food chain and clearly, there's a power dynamic. But if you don't tell the truth or deliver bad news at times, then you're not doing your job well. So having to do that has helped me. It's like any muscle, you'd have to strengthen it for it to be exercised and utilized appropriately. So, I've had to strengthen that muscle of getting over myself and not being so self-conscious and editing everything I say. And that is a lesson for leadership as well, as you know, don't be so self-conscious, don't be so doubting of yourself.

For Joyce, as well as for many AAPI women, stepping beyond the cultural values that encourage quiet strength is essential to developing powerful leadership skills. Embracing their voices and sharing their perspectives allows them to lead with authenticity, inspiring others while staying true to their roots. In breaking this silence, they pave the way for future generations to lead boldly and confidently.

Maile discusses being small in stature—a common physical trait shared by many AAPI women—which resonates with facing mainstream preconceived biases and misperceptions related to her appearance. She embraces her physical traits and shares her strategies for addressing these biases to lead and serve authentically.

I'm petite. I'm like, five foot nothing. And so, I recognize that I am petite. And then I look younger than I am as well, you know, so no one suspects that I'm closer to 50 than I am to, you know, to 30. And so, I recognize that, because of how I look, I carry myself a different way. You know, it's like, I have a really firm strong handshake on purpose. So that whoever I'm working with, that's their first impression of me, isn't that I'm you know, meek or weak or passive. My volume and tone are a certain way so that people take me seriously… I am generous with my time and my advice. That concept of generosity also extends in the way that I lead. You know, and that's definitely a core Filipino value. And I'm so glad we're talking about this because I don't know that I had thought about or actually verbalized it, in terms of seeing how hospitality, generosity, family first, people first … how that connects directly to my leadership style.

Similarly, Vida comments on her appearance and the need to combat colleagues' biases. As she states in the interview excerpt below, it requires a mindful shift in her thought process to assert her knowledge and a struggle to ensure that her voice is heard.

I think as an AAPI woman, there's these three "isms", that I have to work through. It's racism. It's, you know, sexism. And I know this isn't a word, but it's also height ism… Because when you fill a room, right, I mean, society doesn't see us as that kind of, you know, leader that walks in, right, it has its commanding presence, like executive presence. So, I think there's probably an intentionality of why I dress the way I do. And I always wear a jacket, you know, I don't wear flats. I don't wear jeans. And again, I've been on campus for 20 years. And the people that I work with know who I am, they know what I'm capable of. Right? They know that. But, if I get into circles where they don't know who I am… the faculty member will not look at me, they will talk to the other people. They will talk to the other people to get the answer that they all know, I have the answer to…In my role, I'm good at uplifting my colleagues… I can brag about them all the time. But when it comes to like, what I've been able to do, or what, you know, what I have accomplished, I still struggle with that. And I realized, though, I have to change my mindset where I'm not bragging, … Rather than holding back, I have to think about it as this… I need to share my gifts with people. I have gifts that I've nurtured and developed over the years and if I don't contribute, or if I don't chime in, or if I don't share my talent, then what a waste! So now, I try not to stay silent in too many places. Because I feel like I should share my perspective. I should share the successes of my team because it benefits them.

As Vida poignantly describes in the interview excerpt above, AAPI women often face misperceptions and stereotypes that can hold them back. However, Vida further shares that exercising that mindset shift to face and overcome these misconceptions is key to unlocking her

leadership potential, as she models the strength and determination it takes to lead authentically in the face of bias and in service to others.

Ensha's self-reflection revealed how her early pursuit of leadership success drove her to distance herself from her South Asian culture, in a bid to fit in as more "American." This quest for perfection took a toll on her emotional well-being, resulting in significant stress and mental strain. Ultimately, her journey to overcome this pressure led her to recognize that the authenticity of her intersectional identities is a valuable asset to share with her team and her wider community.

> It really caused me a lot of anxiety and stress, and I think also played a huge part in my inability to take pride in what I did, for over a decade, because my South Asian community and my Muslim community didn't value what I did. They didn't value what that work meant, they didn't understand it. And we lived in a culture where, you know, if you weren't a certain type of profession, you were not successful. So, it didn't matter what I did. And that played a large part in me feeling very inferior all the time. It didn't matter what promotions I got, it didn't matter how much the general community, the university community could see me as an example of success. I never thought I was, and it was because of my South Asian identity. And so, I would say it probably hit me in a negative way. Until recently, I would say in the last seven to six years, when I went through that transformation, I started to realize that identity was an asset. That being bilingual is an asset, having moved around as much as I did was an asset. And I started to own it in a way where I started to not only be proud of my bicultural identity, but I started to advertise, so that those who thought less than of it were the ones that were wrong.

For Ensha, choosing what is considered by her Southeast Asian Immigrant Family as an unconventional career path felt like navigating uncharted waters, especially since her (immigrant) family's expectations didn't align with her evolving career ambitions. Because of their lack of support and understanding, Ensha found herself facing immense stress and anxiety. Reflecting on her leadership journey, Ensha acknowledged that this experience taught her lessons in courage, resilience, and the power of forging her own path. Her career success today is a

testament to the gift of authenticity and the strength it takes to pursue one's true calling, even against the odds.

Linda's self-prescribed authentic, service-oriented leadership style can be traced back to her upbringing and the cultural values instilled by her immigrant family, particularly her mother and grandmother. Both of these influential women in Linda's life valued community and connections, and the spirit of generously serving others. She specifically refers to the Tagalog word "kasama," which means being together, highlighting the importance of unity and collective effort in her leadership approach. Linda expresses the following:

> I think one thing that's unique about senior leadership roles is oftentimes you're not accomplishing something by yourself. You have to work with other departments, you have to work with faculty, you have to work with different parties that sometimes don't report to you, right? And one of the things that I've really seen is my ability to build relationships, my ability to sort of be harmonious has been actually really wonderful in accomplishing things… Yeah. I don't know if you know, this concept, right? Like, you know, the word **"*kasama*"?** Like, let's all go together. That is very much my leadership style, right? Like… let's all try to figure it out. Let's all go together. Right? That's very cultural…I actually think that comes from being Filipino, like my relationship-building ability. My desire to just be in relationship with people. I grew up… like I remember at my grandma's house in Manila, anyone could stop by, anyone can come to the house. There's always coffee. Like, that's something that I think I learned culturally, and I learned from my mom, and I learned from my grandma that people matter. Relationships with people matter, you should always open your door for others. The other thing that I think my mom and my grandma and my culture taught me, in particular, is your successes are not yours. Your successes are because of the sacrifices that people have made. It's also something that you share with others. So, I think that's the other piece that I'm really grateful to have access to… is this body of knowledge that is about community that is about being in connection and being in relationship with other people. There are leaders who are selfish, and you can see. That's not how I am. And, I'm okay with that. And that is very true to my upbringing and, like, my cultural connection. There's generosity that's there. And so, I bring a lot of that into how I am as a leader.

For Roselyn, in alignment with the spirit of "kasama", is the concept of "allyship". As depicted below, Roselyn is aware that she must be strategic in building allyship with colleagues, to progress forward. This is captured in the interview excerpt below:

> I'm seeking allyship. I've already decided, in my mind, this is what I want to do. But I can't lead in that way. Because, you know, again, as a woman, sometimes my authority is questioned, my competence is questioned. In the spaces that I occupy, I often feel like even my place, my seat at the table is questioned. And so, I have to be more strategic in terms of how I navigate my expertise in this field. I've been doing this for 30 years, right? And then I have to balance, I have to manage that very carefully. There is that fine line… and so I always have to be consultative and get buy-in from folks. Get allyship from folks before I can move forward with a decision that I probably already knew is the direction I want to go.

In alignment with the concepts of "kasama" and "allyship", Padma echoes that there is strength in numbers and the power of multiple voices when she says, "We are stronger together. The more voices we have at the table, the more perspectives, and the more diversity. We have embodied experiences. As a community, we're always going to achieve and accomplish more than we would as individuals."

Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter presents the findings from interviews with ten Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women who serve as senior leaders in a large research university system in California, highlighting the key themes that emerged from their stories. The AAPI women shared their lived experiences throughout their interviews and in the data collection process. Responses from one-on-one interviews were video recorded, transcribed, and reviewed, in several iterations, to gain a thorough, in-depth understanding of the experiences these AAPI women leaders encountered and faced.

The study participants had their own very distinctive stories, circumstances, and lived experiences; however, emerging themes such as the immigrant family experience, pivotal

moments that helped define their career journeys, and the indelible mark of role models, mentors, and sponsors, were influential in realizing and defining their leadership style, thus charting their career trajectory. This leadership style and approach is a unique blend, best described as Authentic Servant Leadership.

Findings also echo that Asian American and Pacific Islanders are not a monolithic group. There were shared experiences among the ten study participants, across the five different California-based research university institutions. Yet, the participants varied in their perceptions, analyses, interpretations, and responses to their lived experiences. Each study participant's journey was unique. Furthermore, their stories and lived experiences highlight the complex intersectionality (of race/culture and gender) that remains at play, ultimately affecting and altering the lens through which participants navigate their leadership paths.

The next chapter will discuss the study's findings and their connections to the literature review, research questions, and conceptual framework. Chapter Five will conclude by emphasizing the significance of this study for leadership and social justice, and will also offer recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

"A true leadership career will prove to you the nobility of work and dedication to the human race."
- *Carmencita M. David-Padilla, Chancellor, University of the Philippines*

"Success isn't about the end result, it's about what you learn along the way."
-*Vera Wang, Chinese American Fashion Designer*

This chapter will review the statement of the problem, study goals, conceptual framework, research questions, and methodology employed for the study. The findings of the study are revisited within the existing literature outlined in Chapter Two while recognizing the implications, limitations, future considerations, recommendations, and concluding points.

Statement of the Problem and Study Goals

The central problem and primary issue of focus is the underrepresentation of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women in leadership positions within higher education. This phenomenological study examines the factors contributing to this disparity. It explores, discovers, and gains a deeper understanding of the perceptions and unique, lived experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women senior leaders in a large, higher education, research institution based in California.

Conceptual Framework

Intersectionality and Asian Critical Race (AsianCrit) Theory formed the conceptual framework to design, navigate, and interpret this study. The study centered on the AAPI women senior leaders' experiences and voices as a way of integrating counter-storytelling, color commentary, and women of color narratives into the scholarly literature affecting AAPI women (Lindsey et al., 2018; Soles et al., 2020; Welborn, 2019; Yosso, 2005).

Intersectionality offers a lens to examine how an organization's structure, policies, processes, and work behaviors impact women experiencing inequities because of their

intersecting identities. The intersectionality approach also demonstrates that social identities operate on several levels, resulting in distinctive experiences for every individual. Intersectional approaches to studying the experiences of AAPI women offer a more holistic understanding than a mainstream analysis of women's societal disadvantages (Mirza, 2009).

The unique positioning of AAPIs across diversity topics has been conceptualized through Asian Critical (AsianCrit) theories. AsianCrit seeks to foreground the unique experiences of AAPIs and understand the inequities that AAPIs face by applying CRT's tenet of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) to focus on AAPIs' racial and other social identities within systems of White supremacy (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). The AsianCrit perspective can be viewed as a tool for "understanding the racial realities and racialized experiences of Asian Americans, as well as a conceptual lens through which the experiences… can be interpreted". (Museus, 2014) It is important to note that the lens of Asian Critical Race Theory can be widely applied on a personal, professional, societal, and institutional level.

Intersecting identities refers to how different aspects of an individual's identity, including race, culture, and gender (as well as sexual orientation, religion, and ability), interact to shape their experiences and perspectives. These identities do not exist in isolation but intersect to create context-dependent dynamics of privilege and oppression. Particularly, in a higher education environment, where patriarchy and white male privilege have historically dominated leadership, culture, and decision-making, the concept of intersecting identities provides a critical framework for understanding how individuals experience inclusion and exclusion differently. Additionally, as shared by the AAPI female participants' story-telling of their lived experiences, certain identities may often overshadow others, and the needs of particular groups overlooked,

97

depending on the situation. This reinforces organizational inequities, creating barriers to belonging for many members of the higher education institutional community.

To address these challenges, it is imperative to adopt an intersectional approach that critically examines how institutional policies, practices, and cultures perpetuate privilege and exclusion. By intentionally centering voices from historically marginalized groups such as AAPI women, and promoting a culture of inclusivity, higher education institutions can move toward a more representative community where all identities are valued and empowered.

The Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions and sub-questions:

1.   In what ways have the racial, cultural, and gender identities informed AAPI women's pursuit of their career goals?

     a) What educational experiences have AAPI women had that influenced their career choices, professional growth, and pursuit of leadership?

     b) What societal experiences have AAPI women had that influenced their career choices, professional growth, and pursuit of leadership?

2.   What organizational supports and barriers did AAPI women experience in their paths to striving for, achieving, and maintaining their senior leadership position(s)?

Summary of Methodology

A qualitative approach to this study allowed this researcher to focus on the rich storytelling from ten AAPI women senior management leaders' lived experiences to accurately describe the phenomenon. The participants in this research study represented five different California public universities; all of which are part of a bigger public university system. Each of the ten participants was very willing to confide in this researcher and conveyed their appreciation

for allowing their stories to be heard. The participants engaged in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews that took place over the course of four months. The interviews were transcribed, via Zoom and Otter.AI software programs. The interview transcriptions were further cross-referenced by this researcher for increased understanding and consistency. Additionally, this researcher engaged in reflective journal notes after each interview, highlighting thoughts and impressions resulting from the participant sharing. To identify emerging themes, in vivo and values pattern coding were conducted both manually and by utilizing the MAXQDA coding software program. Then, pattern coding was conducted to identify patterns and categories within the themes, and across all study participants.

Overview of Findings

As detailed in Chapter Four, I used several methods to report the data, findings, and analysis. This included a summary of the demographic data on the research participants, university headcount and demographic data on senior leadership categories, study participants' narratives, categorized and patterned themes across participants' interviews, and commentary in response to the research questions. An exploration of the participants' lived experiences revealed the following themes:

1. **The Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Immigrant Family.** The first emerging theme is the experience of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) immigrant families. These families often encounter significant challenges while navigating life in the United States, including language barriers, economic instability, and discrimination, which can hinder their integration into American society. Despite these obstacles, AAPI immigrant families draw strength and resilience from their cultural

values, emphasizing collectivism, familism, and a strong sense of family obligation (Yee et al., 2007).

2. **Pivotal Moments.** Pivotal moments were instrumental in shaping the lives of the AAPI women leaders in this study. These defining events acted as catalysts for change, fostering personal and professional growth. Such experiences not only enhanced the participants' trajectories but also helped them (re)define their goals.

3. **Role Models, Mentors, and Sponsorship.** Role models, mentors, and sponsors have played a crucial role in bridging knowledge gaps, boosting confidence, offering unique insights into career strategies, paving the way for connections, and inspiring both personal and professional growth. These key individuals helped to facilitate essential skill development and provided valuable guidance to the AAPI women leaders in navigating leadership challenges.

4. **Authentic Servant Leadership.** Authentic Servant Leadership is a leadership style described and shared across the AAPI women leaders in this study. This leadership style combines self-awareness, purpose, and a deep commitment to serving others. An authentic leader "strives to build meaningful relationships with their team while working toward goals that align with the organization's mission and purpose—not just its bottom line" (Gavin, 2019). This style emphasizes transparency and the alignment of one's actions with their core values. Servant leadership, in turn, "prioritizes the growth, well-being, and empowerment of employees, aiming to create an inclusive environment where everyone can thrive as their authentic selves" (White, 2022).

These themes formed a basis for understanding the phenomenon of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women senior leaders in a California public, higher education, research

institution, as studied. This chapter expands on the findings and themes relative to the Conceptual Framework and follows the literature review in Chapter Two. The findings reflect the synthesized outcomes of the examined and analyzed data. This chapter posits how these key findings can inform leadership theory, development, and practices; and concludes with recommendations for future research avenues regarding this topic, as well as this researcher's final thoughts.

The Impact of Racial, Cultural, and Gender Identities on Career Goals

My first research question (RQ1) asks, "In what ways have the racial, cultural, and gender identities shaped AAPI women's pursuit of their career goals?" Participant narratives confirm that the racial, cultural, and gender identities of AAPI women leaders significantly influenced their career aspirations. Through sharing their rich stories, participants highlighted how the cultural values, gender roles, and expectations learned within AAPI immigrant families fostered key principles such as togetherness and a sense of obligation to family (collectivism), caring for others within their family (and community), a hard work ethic (sacrifice and drive), and resilience (survival mindset). These values deeply impact AAPI women's approaches to both life and career, further shaping their leadership styles and embodying the principles of Servant Leadership. Participants noted that prioritizing the team and the "collective good" was essential to their leadership approach and decision-making processes.

Previous research describes how AAPI culture emphasizes family interdependence, highlighting a "resiliency model that calls attention to the central role that family strengths, ethnicity, and culture play" (Yeet et al., 2007). This resiliency framework, which well aligns with the survival mindset that is depicted 23 times by nine study participants, is particularly relevant as AAPI immigrant families navigate life in an unfamiliar environment, adapt to change, and overcome adversity. The study also notes the prevalence of multigenerational and

multifamily households within AAPI communities, as well as the socialization of identity and gender roles among younger family members. These themes were also echoed by the study participants during their interviews, as they shared insights about their home environments and upbringing.

The Influence of Educational and Societal Lived Experiences

The follow-up questions (RQ1A, RQ1B) to my Research Question 1 explored the educational and societal experiences that influenced AAPI women's career choices, professional growth, and pursuit of leadership. The lived experiences shared by the AAPI women participants revealed several key reflections and insights, including the following:

- Experienced tension and conflicting messages between American values of individualism and AAPI cultural values of collectivism, humility, and good behavior.

- An awareness of social class and hierarchies.

- A recognition of the (degrees of) assimilation required to succeed in career and life.

- An unconscious need for recognition and validation from others to facilitate progress.

- Experiences of "Imposter Syndrome" at various stages of life.

- An introduction and entry into the field of higher education.

- An introduction to social justice issues and (student) activism.

- An exploration of their multiple, intersectional identities.

In their stories, the AAPI women leaders recounted their experiences with implicit bias, discrimination, unconscious, systemic, and overt racism, as well as feelings of "otherness" and invisibility throughout their lives. These pivotal moments led to heightened awareness, a clearer sense of purpose, and a commitment to ongoing learning, professional development, and advocacy for representation, diversity, and inclusion in their areas of leadership influence.

As participants reflected on the educational and societal experiences that served as pivotal moments in their lives, a notable theme emerged: many AAPI women shared a common experience of unconsciously waiting for others to recognize and validate their worth in the workplace. These particular narratives echo findings from the research discussed in the literature review, which indicated that AAPI individuals often hesitate to promote their work and achievements, fearing that self-promotion might be perceived as arrogant (Liang et al., 2018). Participants from the earlier research expressed discomfort with the political dynamics of higher-level positions, where assertiveness—often viewed negatively in Asian cultures—is necessary (Liang & Peters, 2017). This highlights the double-edged sword at play: AAPI values seem to conflict with U.S. values that foster leadership growth.

Responses to RQ1A and RQ1B highlight the importance of using intersectionality as a lens to acknowledge and understand the lived experiences of AAPI women leaders. "We must look at how race, gender, and national origin interact to create unique obstacles, stereotypes, and stigmas" (Li, 2014) for AAPI women. Intersectionality challenges the idea that socially constructed identities are mutually exclusive, recognizing that these identities often intersect to restrict access to essential social goods like employment, healthcare, and education. As noted in the literature review, women of color are frequently the result of "intersecting patterns of racism and sexism… Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both" (Li, 2014).

Organizational Barriers

My second (and final) research question (RQ2) asks, "What organizational barriers and supports did AAPI women encounter on their journeys to strive for, achieve, and maintain senior

leadership positions?" The participants identified several organizational barriers, including

facing misperceptions, implicit biases, microaggressions, unconscious, systemic, and overt

racism, as well as a lack of agency that hinders professional growth and career advancement,

specifically for AAPI women.

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two, the Asian Critical (AsianCrit)

theory serves as a valuable conceptual lens for understanding how race and racism impact the

lives of AAPIs. Mainstream frameworks often position AAPIs as the least in need of academic,

financial, social, or psychological support, which is both unfair and incorrect. By employing the

AsianCrit framework to examine key issues within higher education policies and practices, we

can draw important conclusions and gain a deeper understanding of AAPIs in the higher

education landscape (Teranish et al., 2009). AsianCrit suggests that the voices and work of AAPI

"intellectuals can and should inform theory, and that knowledge in all of these forms can and

should inform practice" (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). The Center for Critical Race Studies at the

University of California, Los Angeles noted the importance of AsianCrit in "critically

historicizing the racialized experiences of Asian Americans and the significant role advocacy can

play in strategic organizing and movement-building" (Curammeng et al., 2017).

Organizational Support

In terms of organizational support, the AAPI women leaders emphasized the importance

of role models, mentors, and sponsors in their leadership journeys. Through these relationships,

they received crucial messages about independence, the criticality of speaking up, having

permission to challenge the status quo (e.g., Padma's mantra of "Be a Rebel", Elaine's

declaration of "Sometimes you have to go rogue!"), and the significance of progressive activism.

They learned vital lessons about mobility, including Elaine's learned mindset of "Think like a

Dean", the desire for AAPI mentors, the need for multiple mentors, and the importance of having peers who challenge them. Furthermore, they highlighted that mentorship should extend beyond guidance to include sponsorship, with sponsor practices and work behaviors becoming an integral part of the organizational culture, and the significance of their responsibility to "Pay it Forward."

The concept of the dual minority was introduced in the literature review. The "double jeopardy of being a woman of color significantly impacts an individual's self-esteem as a leader" (Enomoto et al., 2000). Thus, role models, mentors, and sponsors are essential in advancing the careers of women of color. Many women of color in faculty and staff roles have shared their need for mentorship when entering the field as new professionals, facing challenges, or dealing with discouragement, and/or a lack of support from their organizations or even a lack of support at home. These role models and mentor figures provide crucial guidance in striving for and achieving professional goals, navigating the maze of networking, and learning career advancement opportunities (Chang et al., 2014).

Unexpected Findings

One interesting and unexpected finding from this research was the distinction between East Asian American and Southeast Asian American women leaders in their motivations for aspiring to leadership positions. Of the ten participants, two identified as Southeast Asian. When reflecting on their decision to pursue a career in higher education, these Southeast Asian American leaders emphasized a business-oriented motivation. In contrast, the other participants' motivations were more student-centered and deeply rooted in their experiences as undergraduate students belonging to a minority group. Notably, both Southeast Asian American leaders, Ensha and Padma, shared their views on the meaning and cultural significance of success as defined by

their families. For them, a business career represented success, while a career in higher education was often not considered a viable path.

For example, Ensha's original career goal was to obtain a high-paying position in the Finance industry. She made a career transition into higher education to have a work/life balance as a new mother and to help support her young family, while her husband pursued doctoral studies. She explains further that:

> My South Asian community and my Muslim community didn't value what I did. They didn't value what that work meant, they didn't understand it. And we lived in a culture where, you know, if you weren't a certain type of profession, you were not successful.

Along these lines, Padma explains her familial cultural values about pursuing the field of education, in the interview passage below:

> A deep irony that I will tell you is that as a culture and a people that value education so much, we don't encourage our community to become educators as much. And I'm not a traditional educator, right? When people think of teachers, they are educators, they think of teachers and faculty in a classroom. And I do consider myself an educator. I'm an educator outside the classroom.

This unexpected finding supports the need for scholarly research specifically focused on the lived experiences of Southeast Asian American women leaders in higher education. Additional recommendations for further research are outlined and explained in the study limitations discussed below.

Study Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study produced significant findings and valuable insights that could enhance the experiences of Asian Americans and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women in higher education. However, there remains a vast opportunity for further research to elevate the visibility and importance of AAPI women leaders in this field. The discussion of limitations in qualitative

research addresses aspects of the study wherein the researcher "has no control, but that could affect either ability to conduct the study or ultimate findings of the study" (Mertler, 2022). Below, I outline the study's limitations, along with my recommendations for future research and new policies and/or practices at the institutional level.

Higher Education System

This study had some limitations that are important to note. First, study participants were staff employees of large, public, four-year, research (R1) universities in California. These universities were part of a highly selective university system, with a distinctive institutional culture. Looking across different colleges or university systems would further expand the study's scope. For example, soliciting research participants from community colleges, private colleges and universities, and other public state universities within California, could assist in determining how AAPI women senior leaders' lived experiences were similar and unique, across different higher education sectors.

Geographic Location

Another limitation of this study is that all participating universities were located in California and were part of the same university system. California is home to the second-largest population of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States (World Population Review, 2023). As a result, participants may experience a greater representation of their race and culture among both employees and students compared to universities in states with lower AAPI populations. This raises the question of how the lived experiences of AAPI women leaders might differ if they were working in a state with a smaller AAPI demographic. Including a broader range of geographic locations (e.g., a comparative review of AAPI women leaders in higher

education institutions located in the East Coast, Midwest, Southern, and West Coast states) could significantly enhance the scope of the study.

Participants

The participants in this research study represented a diverse range of identities. Among the ten participants, six identified as Filipino American, two as Southeast Asian American (one of Indian descent and the other as Pakistani and Muslim American), one as Korean American, one as Chinese American, and one as mixed-race Filipino and Chinese American. Notably, there were no participants who identified as Pacific Islanders. According to the Office of Management and Budget's Directive on race and ethnic standards for federal statistics and reporting, Pacific Islanders are defined as individuals with origins in the Pacific Islands, including Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia (OIA Blogs: Who Are Pacific Islanders? 2021). Consequently, this study does not provide insight into the unique experiences of Pacific Islander women leaders.

While solidarity among communities of color holds significant power, it's important to recognize that the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community is not monolithic. Often grouped together, there are considerable differences between Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, as well as within these groups. The AAPI populations exhibit considerable heterogeneity. As a future research topic, studying specific race and cultural groups (e.g., Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Hawaiian, Hmong, Indian, Japanese, Pakistani, Vietnamese, etc.) of AAPI women leaders would be valuable. Literature and scholarly research are lacking in these areas.

Furthermore, focusing solely on Asian American and Pacific Islander women in senior leadership roles in higher education also limited the scope of the study. AAPI women leaders in middle and upper management positions may share similar or very different lived experiences

than senior leaders. A study of AAPI women leaders in middle and/or upper management could lend additional insights and broaden the findings and implications of this research.

Familial Insights

This study examined the lived experiences of AAPI women leaders in higher education, focusing on their childhoods, upbringing, and pivotal moments in their lives. A prominent theme that emerged from the participant interviews was the concept of the AAPI Immigrant Family, highlighting cultural values, family structures, and lessons learned during their early years. Among the ten participants, three were the oldest child, three were the middle child, three were the youngest (two of whom were the only daughters), and one participant's birth order is unknown. Future research is recommended to further investigate the family's role in the lives of AAPI women leaders. This could include studies on the correlation between birth order and leadership among AAPI women, the impact of cultural expectations and gender roles, generational studies exploring how family cultural values affect younger leaders or those in new or middle management positions, and research into the work-life balance of AAPI women leaders and their boundary-setting practices.

Positionality

It's important to acknowledge my positionality in relation to this study. I have spent over 25 years as a higher education professional, specializing in human resources, business optimization, continuous improvement, change management, and organization effectiveness. My employer and the graduate program I am enrolled in are part of a large public Research 1 university system in California. Given my personal and professional background within this university system, I was already familiar with the organizational structure, vision, mission, and objectives of the institutions where the study participants worked.

While I made a concerted effort to remain as unbiased as possible during the research, it's essential to recognize that my experiences as an Asian American and Pacific Islander (specifically a Filipina American) woman leader in higher education may have introduced some bias, potentially limiting my analysis. Additionally, as previously noted, over half of the study participants were Filipina-American women, leading me to wonder if my shared racial and ethnic background influenced their decision to participate in my research.

Generalizability

This was a phenomenological study that used qualitative methods to collect the AAPI women leaders' lived experiences, therefore this study is not generalizable. An individual's lived experience does not apply to and does not represent what is true for all individuals with similar identities. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to capture the unique voices of individuals and understand their lived experiences as they related to their careers and leadership journeys. Although this study offered validating insights into a small faction of women leaders, it does not necessarily dictate the findings as applicable to all AAPI women.

Implications of Study on Policies and Practices

The findings and emerging themes from this study suggest several recommended actions regarding policy-making and updates to organizational practices.

- **Desegregate Data**, such as demographic data on race, ethnicity, and gender, to better see and understand where true equity gaps lie, across the many AAPI communities. By further breaking down the data, there lies the ability to see gaps which will help to identify more research/studies needed and ultimately influence policy decisions and practices.

- **Customized Mentorship.** Survey how AAPI women best experience mentorship, to better understand the appropriate framework that is unique and specific to the institutional culture, as well as the culture and needs of mentors and mentees involved.

- **Professional/Leadership Development focused on AAPI values**, topics like imposter syndrome (and how to shed it), and the toxicity and impact of misperceptions. As Filipina American participant Linda declares, "Misperceptions lead to a lack of investment in the community."

Significance of Study on Social Justice and Leadership

The underrepresentation of AAPI women in senior leadership roles presents a significant issue that warrants closer examination. In many universities, particularly in states like California with high concentrations of AAPI students, there is a noticeable lack of AAPI leaders, which reduces the chances for these students to envision themselves in leadership positions. This absence of AAPI leadership often leads to insufficient attention being paid to the unique challenges faced by the AAPI student population, especially among high-level administrators who shape institutional priorities and address emerging trends in the broader higher education landscape (Teranishi et al., 2009).

Representation issues are systemic, and studies indicate that very few AAPI graduate students are pursuing advanced degrees that could lead to careers in higher education administration. To enhance the educational and career pathways for AAPI women aspiring to leadership roles in higher education, it's crucial to raise awareness of the challenges faced by AAPI female students. This awareness can serve as a catalyst for increasing the presence of AAPI female educators and policymakers in leadership positions (Committee of 100, 2005; Ong, 2008).

Including AAPI women leaders in higher education is vital for addressing the broader issues that impact the participation, experiences, and outcomes of AAPI students. These leaders are crucial in shaping a renewed public vision for policies and practices informed by accurate data about AAPI students. Increasing the representation of AAPI women in senior leadership roles will drive the changes necessary to better support AAPI female students and improve the educational system as a whole.

Examining the lived experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women leaders in higher education is crucial to advancing social justice because it sheds light on the unique challenges and organizational barriers faced by this overlooked demographic. By highlighting their narratives, we challenge the pervasive stereotypes and systemic inequities that have historically marginalized AAPI women in leadership roles. This exploration into the AAPI women's stories highlights their histories, upbringing, contributions, and resilience. It encourages a deeper understanding of the intersectionality of race, culture, gender, and its impact on leadership. In dissecting the complexities of the AAPI woman's lived experiences, we begin to create spaces for greater understanding which can pave the way for more inclusive policies and practices within higher education that promote equity and appropriate representation. I hope that this study aids in enriching the academic discourse and existing scholarly research but, more importantly, helps to empower AAPI women to claim their rightful place in leadership. Through their lived experiences and unique contributions, AAPI women leaders can drive for meaningful change and inspire future generations to continue amplifying their voices as advocates for their own empowerment and much-deserved representation.

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

Representation of AAPI women in senior leadership roles is critical because the AAPI women offer diverse perspectives and lived experiences that can promote inclusive and equity-based policy and decision-making. The presence of AAPI women in executive-level roles challenges existing biases. It paves the way for creating policies that address the unique barriers faced by marginalized communities and ultimately leads to the promotion and fostering of a socially just institutional culture.

As conveyed by the study participants through their storytelling, seeing AAPI women in higher education leadership positions is crucial for AAPI students, because it creates a sense of belonging and representation in environments where they often feel underrepresented or misrepresented. In her interview, Elaine, a Filipina American Dean overseeing Academic Advising, declares that she takes great pride in being an AAPI woman leader, calling it a "badge of honor". Like the other AAPI women leaders in this study, Elaine underscores the collective need for AAPI female representation in (higher education) leadership so that "students who identify as AAPI will see that. That's really important to be able to be in a position that is seen."

In a moment of self-reflection, Linda, a Filipina American study participant who serves in the role of Chief of Staff, conveys this important life lesson:

> And I tell students this all the time… you can be who you are, you can be authentically connected to family, you can be authentically exploring, and you don't always have to have a destination. But you have to be really true to who you are along your journey. And I think for me, I didn't know that I wanted to be a chief of staff. I didn't know that I wanted to be an assistant vice president, right? Like those opportunities came my way. But what I've always been really interested in is being focused on the concept of public service, the concept of giving back, the concept of learning, researching, and understanding. And I think because I was honing in on those talents, in a journey, like that, I think, is what's led to success.

Jacqueline, a Filipina American holding the position of an Assistant Dean, in sharing her career insights, reflects upon her contributions to social justice when she states the following:

> I owe it to the AAPI communities to be in spaces where I can make a difference. So, it was … thinking more about the greater the larger community. And so, that's kind of how it shaped the way I look at leadership in general. It's not necessarily about my individual pursuit, but it's more about how can I make it better for everyone else.

These strong, resilient Asian American and Pacific Islander women senior leaders are powerful role models, inspiring students to pursue their professional goals and aspirations with confidence, especially in a (higher education) field where AAPI women have found some degree of success but may not be viewed as viable career options.

The presence of the AAPI woman senior leader, in sharing her stories, challenges existing stereotypes, demystifies and expands perceptions of leadership, highlighting the importance of diverse voices and experiences in driving creativity, innovation, excellence, and progress. Through their authentic servant leadership style, the participants demonstrate how AAPI women in leadership cultivate a caring, supportive atmosphere where future generations are empowered to embrace their unique identities and make meaningful contributions to their communities and to the field of higher education.

LIST OF APPENDICES

A. List of Definitions
B. Conceptual Framework Diagram
C. Conceptual Framework Logic Map
D. Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Letter
E. Participant Recruitment – Direct Email Message
F. Participant Recruitment Letter to Professional Associations
G. Research Poster A
H. Research Poster B
I.   Information Sheet/Informed Consent Form
J.   Interview Protocol
K. Interview Questions – Extended
L. Journal Prompts
M. Research Study Site Demographics
N. Research Study Participant Demographics
O. Connecting Themes

APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS

Asian American and Pacific Islander: The United States Census Bureau offers the following definitions for Asian American and Pacific Islander populations.

> *Asian* – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.

> *Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander* – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands. (US Census Bureau, 2018)

Asian Critical Race (AsianCrit) Theory: The Asian Critical Race (AsianCrit) perspective, a theoretical branch extending from Critical Race Theory, serves as a tool for understanding the racial realities and racialized experiences of Asian Americans, as well as a conceptual lens through which the experiences of Asian Americans can be interpreted. (Museus & Iftikar, 2013)

(The) Bamboo Ceiling: The term "bamboo ceiling" refers to the barriers many Asian Americans encounter in the professional world, including stereotypes and racism, particularly when trying to reach top executive and leadership roles. This concept encompasses a mix of individual, cultural, and organizational factors that hinder the career advancement of Asian Americans within organizations. (Hyun, 2005)

Imposter Syndrome: Impostor syndrome (also known as impostor phenomenon, fraud syndrome, perceived fraudulence, or impostor experience) describes high-achieving individuals who, despite their objective successes, fail to internalize their accomplishments and have persistent self-doubt and fear of being exposed as a fraud or impostor.1 People with impostor syndrome struggle with accurately attributing their performance to their actual competence. (Kolligian et al., 1991)

Intersectionality: In the context of this study, intersectional provides a framework to analyze the experiences of AAPI women, looking at the intersection between multiple categories of socially constructed identities, such as race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and class, and considers their effectives on the everyday lives of people who are at the crossroads of these multiple intersections. (Li, 2014)

Model Minority Myth: The Model Minority Myth characterizes the AAPI population as a polite, law-abiding group who have achieved a higher level of success than the general population through some combination of innate talent and immigrant striving. (Blackburn, 2019) The MMM "privileges generalizations based on surface-level analysis at the expense of more-refined and nuanced investigation" (*The Model Minority Myth*, 2018).

APPENDIX B: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK DIAGRAM

Asian Critical Theory

THE ORGANIZATION

RQ2: What organizational barriers and supports did AAPI women experience in their paths to striving for, achieving, and maintaining their senior leadership position(s)?

Intersectionality

THE INDIVIDUAL

RQ1: In what ways have the racial, cultural, and gender identities informed AAPI women's pursuit of their career goals?

RACE/CULTURE

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)

GENDER

Female/Woman

LEADERSHIP

POLICIES, PRACTICES, SYSTEMS

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH STUDY LOGIC MAP

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER (AAPI) WOMEN LEADERS

PURPOSE: Understand the Lived Experiences of AAPI Women in Senior Leadership within a large, California public, research university system.

Situation

AAPI women make up less than 1 percent of the leadership positions within Colleges and Universities; they face the largest gender gap of any racial/ethnic group within the field of education.

The problem to address is the lack of representation of AAPI women in higher education leadership positions.

Inputs

Resources:

- Time commitment (Researcher and Study Participants)

- Technology (Video Conferencing, Calendaring, Data software programs for transcription, coding, project management)

- Office Supplies

- Funding/seed money for "Thank You" to study participants

Outputs

Activities:
- Purposeful/Snowball Sampling
- Semi-structured Interviews
- Observations
- Reflective Memo, Transcribing, Coding

Outputs

Participation:

Up to **10** Study Participants
Criteria:

University System in California Senior Management Group (SMG) Management Senior Professional (MSP) level/classification
- Executive/Upper Management
- Organizational Direction
- Steers Core Initiatives
- Strategic Planning

Outcomes & Impacts

Short Term:

Learning, Awareness, Knowledge, Story-telling, Themes, Messages, Results, Findings

Medium Term:

Action, (Work) Behaviors, Decision-Making, Policies, Practices, Procedures, Systems, Social Action

Long Term:

Appropriate Representation, Bridging the Achievement and Equity Gap, Diversity, Inclusion, Changes in Organization, Cultural Climate, Conditions, Civic, Environmental Good, Social Justice

ASSUMPTIONS

Lack of scholarly research of this topic and current circumstances warrants the need for further study.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Competing priorities, time commitment, bandwidth

APPENDIX D: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL LETTER

California State University
SAN MARCOS

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB)
California State University San Marcos   San Marcos, CA 92096-0001
Tel: 760.750.4029.   **Fax:** 760.750.3150   irb@csusm.edu   www.csusm.edu/irb

DATE:	March 11, 2024
TO:	Rosemarie Mirano-Del Mar, MPA, BA
FROM:	California State University, San Marcos Institutional Review Board
PROJECT TITLE:	[2142693-2] Amplify Our Voices: A Phenomenological Study of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Women Senior Leaders at the University of California System
REFERENCE #:	
SUBMISSION TYPE:	Amendment/Modification
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	March 11, 2024
EXPIRATION DATE:	N/A
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review

This letter certifies that the above referenced project was reviewed and APPROVED by the CSUSM Institutional Review Board (IRB) in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Federal Regulations on Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46), including its relevant subparts. Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If applicable, all approved forms and materials (consent forms, information forms, flyers etc.) have been uploaded to IRBNet under "Board" documents. Only approved consent forms may be used to obtain participant consent.

Modifications to Research Protocol
Changes to this protocol (procedures, populations, locations, personnel, etc.) must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation using the "Minor Modification" application form available on IRBNet.

Unanticipated Outcomes/Events
All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this committee. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this committee.

Continuing Review
Continuing reviews for limited/expedited protocols are no longer required as part of the IRB process, per the partial early implementation of the federal Common Rule policy retroactive from July 19th, 2018. Should any changes to your study occur, please submit a minor modification using the application form

available on IRBNet. If this is a full review, please submit a continuing review at least 30 days before the annual expiration date.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at CSUSM by calling (760) 750-4029 or by email to irb@csusm.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Wishing you well with your research,

CSUSM IRB

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT DIRECT MESSAGE

SUBJECT: Invitation to Participate: Research Study on
AAPI Women Senior Leaders in Higher Education

Dear,

My name is Rosemarie Mirano-Del Mar, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Joint Doctoral Program (JDP) in Educational Leadership at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM). I am conducting a qualitative research study designed to explore the lived experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Women Senior Leaders within a large, higher education institution in California. The purpose of my study is to gain a deeper understanding of the AAPI woman's journey in pursuing their career path toward higher education leadership. As an AAPI (Filipina American) professional in higher education, I would like to learn about the lived experiences of AAPI women in senior leadership positions, specifically why they decided to pursue careers in higher education, their success factors, and how they make meaning of their leadership journey(s) considering their race, culture, and gender identities.

I'm reaching out to invite you to participate in this research study because you have been identified as an AAPI woman who is in a senior leadership role within your higher education institution. Your participation in the study will include a commitment to engage in a 60 to 90-minute, semi-structured interview. You will be asked to provide supporting documentation, such as a current resume and/or curriculum vitae (CV), and to complete a short, follow-up journal prompt. As a token of appreciation, you will be gifted a $50.00 Amazon gift card at the conclusion of the interview.

Participation is strictly voluntary. Please see the attached flier (or visit the following link: https://forms.gle/auCv7Axgjh2jKXL28) for more information; and please share it with your friends and colleagues! If you (or someone you know) fit the criteria or have questions about the study, please reach out to me at rjmirano@ucsd.edu. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you so much for your assistance!

With Gratitude and Best Regards,
Rosemarie Mirano-Del Mar, MPA, PMP, LSSBB

APPENDIX F: RECRUITMENT LETTER TO PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Hello Everyone!

I hope this email finds you well and off to a great start in 2024!

My name is Rosemarie Mirano-Del Mar and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of California, San Diego, and California State University, San Marcos' joint doctoral (Ed.D.) program in Educational Leadership.

I am conducting a research study to examine the phenomena of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women in senior leadership positions within a higher education institution in California. Some senior-level job titles within a higher education institution include Assistant/Associate Dean, Dean, Assistant/Associate Vice Chancellor, Chief of Staff, Chief Operating Officer, (Executive) Director, University Librarian, Vice Chancellor, etc.

As an AAPI (Filipina American) professional in higher education, I would like to learn about the lived experiences of AAPI women in senior leadership positions, specifically why they decided to pursue careers in higher education, their success factors, and how they make meaning of their leadership journey(s) considering their race, culture, and gender identities. I am reaching out to see if you would be interested in participating in my research study and/or if you know of someone who would be great for this study.

Study participants will receive a $50 Amazon gift card to engage in a Zoom interview, which would last approximately 60-90 minutes. Please see the attached flier (or visit the link: https://forms.gle/auCv7Axgjh2jKXL28) for more information; and please share it with your friends and colleagues!

If you (or someone you know) fit the criteria or have questions about the study, please reach out to me at rjmirano@ucsd.edu.

Thank you so much for your assistance!

With Gratitude and Best Regards,

Rosemarie Mirano-Del Mar, MPA, PMP, LSSBB

APPENDIX I: INFORMATION SHEET/INFORMED CONSENT FORM

California State University
SAN MARCOS

Amplify Our Voices:
A Phenomenological Study of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Women
Senior Leaders at a California Higher Education Research (R1) Institution

Information Sheet/Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Rosemarie Mirano-Del Mar and I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Studies department at California State University, San Marcos, and the University of California, San Diego. I am conducting a research study to examine the circumstances surrounding the phenomena of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women in senior leadership positions within a large, higher education research (R1) institution in California. I would like to learn about the lived experiences of AAPI women in senior leadership positions, specifically why they decided to pursue careers in higher education. I would like to understand the success factors of AAPI women leaders: how they define their leadership style; and how they make meaning of their leadership journey(s) considering their race, culture, and gender identities. Lastly, I would like to understand the sociocultural and institutional/ organizational barriers, challenges, and support mechanisms AAPI women leaders have encountered in pursuit of these leadership positions. The purpose of this form is to inform you about the study.

Why am I being invited to take part in this study?

You are invited to take part in this study because you are an Asian American and/or Pacific Islander (AAPI) who self-identifies as female (inclusive of transgender and cisgender identification) and non-international. Inclusion criteria for study participants include being in a senior leadership position at a non-faculty, senior management level classification. Participants will have at least 10 years of progressive, professional experience and be in their current position (designated in a senior management level classification) for at least one year at their California higher education, research institution. With your willingness and generous consent to participate in this research study, you will answer personal interview questions related to background, upbringing, education, career, leadership path, and their workplace organization.

What will I do if I agree to participate?

If you agree and consent to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview for approximately 60 to 90 minutes, which will be video recorded with your permission. The interview will consist of questions about your background, upbringing,

education, career, personal circumstances and situations, the organization(s) and lived experiences that have impacted your leadership journey. The interview will be conducted online, via Zoom, the cloud-based video conferencing platform. Your interview will be recorded as video files to be transcribed.

You will be asked to provide supporting documentation, such as a current resume and/or curriculum vitae (CV), and to complete a follow-up journal prompt. As a token of appreciation, you will be gifted a $50.00 Amazon gift card at the conclusion of the interview, provided to you electronically via email.

Your confidentiality will be protected throughout this process. Pseudonyms will be used to minimize the risk of identification. Participants will be allowed to review the interview transcripts for accuracy once they are completed. You may opt out of being recorded, select to skip any question(s) that you do not want to answer, opt out of completing the follow-up journal prompt, and/or may decide not to continue the study. There will be no penalty for loss of benefits if the participant decides not to take part in the research study or quit later.

It is the expectation that you will be in this research study for approximately 6 to 9 months.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate at any time, even after the study has started. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study, there will be no penalty, and you will be able to keep any incentives you have earned up to the point at which you withdraw.

What are the benefits to me for being in this study?
There are no direct benefits to participation in this study, however, your participation will help contribute to our knowledge and understanding of the profiles of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Women Leaders in Higher Education. Your contributions may offer essential career advancement advice, as well as offer increased understanding of AAPI women leaders based on their perspectives, identities, and areas of intersectionality. This gained knowledge and understanding may help other AAPI women who seek leadership opportunities within higher education, as well as across other industries.

What happens to the information collected for the study?
Your responses and information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. I will use a pseudonym in place of your name in the study documents. No published results will identify you, and your name will not be associated with the findings. The data for this study will be kept

2

on a password-protected computer. My research advisor, Dr. Brooke Soles, and I will be the only individuals with access to review the study data.

The results of this study may be used in reports, publications and/or presentations at professional meetings. The data for this study will be kept indefinitely, for future educational use, presentations, and publications. Data will be kept ensuring the accuracy of future analysis.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me? Is there any risk to me by being in this study? If so, how will these risks be minimized?
There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study. Examples of possible risks and/or inconveniences may include:

- Discomfort in answering some interview questions.
- Concerns related to effects on one's job, if study participant is identified with critical responses about their current position and/or organization.
- Time spent participating in the research study might be considered an inconvenience.

To minimize these risks and inconveniences, the following measures will be taken:

- One-on-one interviews will be held at the participant's convenience.
- In preparation for the one-on-one interview, the interview questionnaire will be sent to participants in advance, via email.
- Pseudonyms will be used to protect and ensure the confidentiality of participants' identity and minimize the risk of identification.
- Participant may choose to skip specific interview questions that they feel uncomfortable answering.
- Participant may stop the one-on-one interview at any time.
- Participants will be allowed to review their interview transcript for accuracy once completed.
- Participant may choose to skip specific questions from the follow-up journal prompt.
- Participant may opt out of completing the follow-up journal prompt.
- Participation in the study is completely voluntary.

You can stop your participation at any time, without any penalty. Should you decide to stop participation, please inform me of your decision to withdraw from the study.

Who should I contact for questions?
If you have questions about the study, please call me at (858) 395-4088 or e-mail me at rjmirano@ucsd.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor/dissertation chair, Dr. Brooke Soles, at bsoles@csusm.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this

3

California State University
SAN MARCOS

research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at irb@csusm.edu or (760) 750-4029.

PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUR RECORDS

APPENDIX J: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

California State University
SAN MARCOS

Introduction:
Welcome and thank you for your participation in this research study. My name is Rosemarie Mirano-Del Mar and I will be your interviewer. This interview is meant to explore your experience as an Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) woman in a senior leadership position within higher education, specifically within a large, research (R1) university system in California.

About the Study:
The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women in senior leadership positions within a large Research 1 (R1) university system. Specifically, the study examines the intersectionality of race, culture, and gender identities in AAPI women's pursuit of their career goals, the organizational and social barriers, as well as the supports that they experienced in the pursuit of their leadership positions. The location of the research study and all study participants will be made anonymous in the writing of the research study report. All data collected, including this interview, will be kept in a password protected file and computer. This interview will take approximately 90 minutes. You will have an opportunity to review all the information gathered during this interview to help ensure that the information you have shared has been noted correctly.

Procedures:
Next, I will review the consent form that you agreed to and signed [review consent form]. [Turn on and test recording device]

General Information:
I will start by confirming your eligibility. [Interviewee information sheet]

Interview:
I would now like to begin the interview about your experience as an AAPI woman in a senior leadership role within large, research (R1) university system in California. [Proceed with interview questions]

Closure:
Thank you so much for participating in this interview. This interview will be transcribed and saved on a password-protected computer.

At this time, I would like to request the following supporting documents:
- Resume, Curriculum Vitae (CV) OR a link to their LinkedIn profile.
- Current Job Description (optional, if available)
- Current Organizational Chart (optional, if available)

Lastly, I would like to provide you with a $50 Amazon gift card as a token of my appreciation for your participation in this study. [If it is an In-person interview, hand the participant a gift card. If it is a virtual interview, send them the gift card via email]

I am extremely grateful for your time, participating in this research study and most importantly, in sharing your story. [Turn off recording device].

AMPLIFY OUR VOICES:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER (AAPI)
WOMEN SENIOR LEADERS AT A CALIFORNIA HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERSECTIONALITY

Tell me about yourself...
1. How do you identify yourself ethnically, racially, and culturally?
2. Where did you grow up, and how would you describe the environment where you grew up?
3. What were your experiences growing up as an AAPI woman?
4. In what ways do you think your experience growing up as an AAPI woman are different or similar to women with different racial and cultural backgrounds in senior position in higher education?
5. In what ways do you think your experience growing up as an AAPI woman are different or similar to men with different racial and cultural backgrounds in senior position in higher education?
6. How has your racial and cultural upbringing influenced your career choice and professional progression?

Tell me about your educational experiences…
1. Tell me about your educational experiences starting with elementary school?
2. Where did you go to college?
    a. What did you study in college?
    b. What degree(s) have you earned?
3. In what ways do you think your educational experiences as an AAPI woman are different or similar to women with different racial and cultural backgrounds in senior position in higher education?
4. In what ways do you think your educational experiences as an AAPI woman are different or similar to men with different racial and cultural backgrounds in senior position in higher education?
5. How have your educational experiences influenced your career choice and professional progression?

Tell me about your career path…
1. What motivated you to enter the field of education?
    a. Why did you decide to pursue a career in higher education?
    b. What were some factors that influenced your decision to pursue a career in higher education *(e.g., family, peers, teachers, mentors, colleagues, etc.)* and your career progression?
2. How did you actively pursue leadership positions?
3. What motivated you to pursue the role you are currently holding?
4. How did you become a leader in your field?
5. What does it mean to you to be a leader in the field of (higher) education?
6. What would you say are the most rewarding and the most challenging aspects of being a leader?
7. How has your identity as an AAPI woman affected your pursuit of professional advancement?

Tell me about your leadership…
1. What were the messages you received about being a leader or a role model?
    a. Were these message(s) you received congruent to the messages received at home?
    b. Or were they opposite or different message(s) from the ones received at home?

2. What experiences helped you the most in preparing for leadership roles?
    a. Are there any specific events, experiences, or people that serve as key to open the doors of leadership for you or inspired you to pursue leadership in higher education?
    b. What other key factors contributed to your successful ascension?
3. How would you describe your leadership style?
4. What elements of the AAPI cultural beliefs and values contributed to your leadership style and practice?
5. Please share an example of a leadership experience, incident, or event that you have had that would uniquely describe your experience as an AAPI woman.
6. How do you showcase your leadership styles and traits?
    a. How have people reacted to your leadership styles and traits?
    b. How have your gender, racial and cultural identities played a role in shaping the leadership style and traits that you have?

ORGANIZATIONAL BARRIERS AND SUPPORTS
1. What are some of the **organizational barriers** you experienced in your current position?
    a. (If the participant held multiple positions at their current organization.) What were/are some of the organizational barriers, if any, that you experienced on your path to be promoted to your current position?
    b. (If the participant held different/multiple positions at other institutions/organizations.) What were/are some of the organizational barriers, if any, that you experienced (or run into) until you attained your current position?
2. In what ways has the **organization supported** you in your current position?
3. In what ways have your organization(s) provided opportunities, tools, support, resources, and guidance to help facilitate your career progression?
4. What kind of strategies have you used to overcome the challenges and barriers during your journey to leadership roles?

Tell me about mentors and/or role models…
1. Describe your experiences, if any, with mentorship.
    a. Did you have mentors or role models that have influenced your career path and leadership journey?
    b. Did you use mentoring or networking as strategies to advance to leadership positions?
    c. If yes, describe how you used networking or mentoring to support your ascendancy to leadership positions.
2. Who encouraged you to pursue leadership positions and how did their encouragement influence your decision?
3. How do you help AAPI women pursue leadership positions or network with other administrators?
4. Tell me more about how you assist other AAPI women in pursuing leadership positions.

In closing…
1. What would you recommend other AAPI women following in your footsteps to do to succeed?
2. What else have we not yet discussed about your lived experiences that you can tell before we conclude this interview?

APPENDIX L: JOURNAL PROMPTS

AMPLIFY OUR VOICES:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER (AAPI)
WOMEN SENIOR LEADERS AT A CALIFORNIA HIGHER EDUCATION, PUBLIC RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

JOURNAL PROMPTS

Regarding AAPI representation in higher education leadership…

1. Why do you think there is continued under-representation of AAPI women in higher education leadership?

2. In what ways can higher education institutions support AAPI women who are considering pursuing senior-level positions?

3. What do you think are the most important contributing factors that help AAPI women ascend to leadership positions?

4. What advice do you have for other AAPI women seeking advancement into leadership positions in higher education?

APPENDIX M: RESEARCH STUDY SITE(S) DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1. University Employee Headcount and Staff (Non-Academic) Workforce Diversity

UNIVERSITY PSEUDONYM	EMPLOYEE HEADCOUNT	AAPI (ALL)	WOMEN (ALL)	SMG COUNT	AAPI (SMG)	WOMEN (SMG)	MSP-M COUNT	AAPI (MSP-M)	WOMEN (MSP-M)
UNIV1	28,112	27.8%	68.0%	16	7.1%	42.9%	1056	13.6%	60.6%
UNIV2	36,591	25.8%	64.7%	17	12.5%	35.7%	1264	25.0%	61.4%
UNIV3	2,089	26.0%	64.1%	38	11.1%	50.0%	310	21.2%	61.5%
UNIV4	5,528	22.6%	59.9%	14	7.1%	50.0%	238	15.5%	55.6%
UNIV5	28,878	27.2%	66.4%	18	5.9%	58.8%	880	15.2%	59.1%

NOTE: October 2023 Data; Employee Headcount Includes Staff (Non-Academic) and Student Employees

LEGEND

ALL: Represents All Staff (Non-Academic) Categories, including Student Employees
AAPI: Asian American and Pacific Islander
SMG: Senior Management Group
MSP-M: Manager Senior Professional - Management

APPENDIX N: RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 2. Demographic Data on Research Participants

Pseudonym	Race/ Ethnicity	Age Range	Position Class Level	Functional Area	University Site	Highest Degree Earned	Years in Current Position	Years in Higher Ed	Marital Status, Children
Linda	Filipino	35-39	MSP-M	Student Affairs	University 1	Doctorate (Ed.D.)	2	20	Single No Children
Ensha	Southeast Asian (Pakistani)	45-49	MSP-M	Academic Affairs	University 1	Master's (MBA)	4	22	Married 2 Children
Hoon	Korean	50-54	SMG	Student Affairs	University 3	Master's (MA)	1	27	Married 2 Children
Jacqueline	Filipino	40-44	MSP-M	Student Affairs	University 2	Doctorate (Ed.D.)	3	19	Married 2 Children
Vida	Filipino/ Chinese	50-54	MSP-M	Student Affairs	University 5	Master's (MBA)	1	25	Married 3 Children
Elaine	Filipino	50-54	MSP-M	Academic Affairs	University 5	Master's (MA)	2	26	Married 2 Children
Roselyn	Filipino	50-54	SMG	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI)	University 5	Doctorate (Ed.D.)	3	29	Single No Children
Maile	Filipino	50-54	MSP-M	Advancement	University 4	Master's (MA)	1.5	18	Married 2 Children
Joyce	Chinese	50-54	SMG	Administration	University 3	Master's (MA)	1	28	Single (w/ Partner) No Children
Padma	Southeast Asian (Indian)	40-44	MSP-M	Student Affairs	University 5	Doctorate (Ph.D.)	2	20	Single (w/ Partner) No Children

APPENDIX O: DIAGRAM OF CONNECTING THEMES

Table 3. Primary Themes and Sub-Themes

PURPOSE OF STUDY	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	PRIMARY THEMES AND SUB-THEMES
To understand the lived experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Women Senior Leaders within a large, public research (R1) University (system) in California.	**Intersectionality** (Race/Culture, Gender, and Leadership)	**RQ1:** In what ways have the racial, cultural, and gender identities informed AAPI women's pursuit of their career goals?	**Primary Theme 1:** <mark>**The Immigrant Family**</mark> **Sub-Themes:** • Collectivism, Care, and Community • Survival Mindset
		RQ1-A: What educational experiences have AAPI women had that influenced their career choices, professional growth, and pursuit of leadership? **RQ1-B:** What societal experiences have AAPI women had that influenced their career choices, professional growth, and pursuit of leadership?	**Primary Theme 2:** <mark>**Pivotal Moments**</mark> **Sub-Themes:** • Upbringing • College • Career • Recognition and Validation from Others
	Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit)	**RQ2:** What organizational barriers and supports did AAPI women experience in their paths toward striving for, achieving, and maintaining their senior leadership positions?	**Primary Theme 3:** <mark>**Role Models, Mentors, and Sponsorship**</mark> **Sub-Themes:** • Personal, Professional, Informal, and Multiple • Beyond… to Sponsorship • "Pay It Forward" **Primary Theme 4:** <mark>**Authentic Servant Leadership**</mark>

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