ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES:
THE SUCCESS AND THE CHALLENGES AS PUBLIC-SCHOOL
ADMINISTRATORS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

A Dissertation

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

In

Educational Leadership

By

May Yin Melody Isabela

2018
SIGNATURE PAGE

DISSERTATION:  ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES:
THE SUCCESS AND THE CHALLENGES AS PUBLIC-SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

AUTHOR:  May Yin Melody Isabela

DATE SUBMITTED:

Department of Education

Betty Alford, Ph. D.
Dissertation Committee Chair
Department of Education

Eligio Martinez Jr., Ph.D.
Dissertation Committee
Department of Education

OiYan Poon, Ph. D.
Assistant Professor
Higher Education Leadership
Colorado State University
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my participants in my study who exemplified tenacity and perseverance in their great leadership building a better education for our students. I learned so much from these amazing female leaders which has motivated me to pursue administrative position in the future.

Secondly, I would like to acknowledge California State Polytechnic University, Pomona doctoral professors for their knowledge, scholarship, and support throughout this journey. Thank you to my cohort, the 4th Dimension, for their friendship and kindness during our years together.

Third, I also want to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Betty Alford, who demonstrated the true meaning of teaching. I can only hope to mimic a tenth of her charisma and style in my own journey as a leader.

I am especially indebted to my parents, Zonlin Yang and Tai-Ping Wang, who have always supported me in pursuing my goals and dreams. I owe it all to you, mom and dad. I am also grateful to my brothers, Kevin and Steven Yang, who have encouraged me to find the positive in every challenging situation and my friends Linda and Michelle Sheppard, Melinda SooHoo, and Nancy Adams who provided emotional and moral support throughout the completion of this dissertation. You guys are my village. I would also like to thank my administrators, Dr. Klatt, Mr. Rod, and Dr. Issa who have been my teachers, mentors, and life-coaches. They are the ultimate role models.

Finally, and most importantly, I wish to thank my late husband, Eric Isabela, and my two wonderful children, Jada and Kaden. You are my unending inspiration. I love you all very much.
ABSTRACT

Asian American school leaders are underrepresented in the K-12 public school system. In comparison with other racial and ethnic groups, Asian American female administrators are largely underrepresented in the executive positions in the workplace of today even in school districts where many Asian students are served. The intent of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding success, challenges, and aspirations of Asian Americans in obtaining administrative positions in K-12 public school system with the focus on female leaders. This study explored the leadership experiences of eight Asian American female public-school principals and assistant principals. Snowball sampling was used to identify eight administrators who have identified themselves as Asian American women. The study utilized the conceptual framework of Critical Race Theory, components of Critical Race Feminism, components of AsianCrit, and the Multiple Mentoring framework. Interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and the findings grouped into ten themes. Using counter-narrative inquiry methods, the participants identified issues such as 1) family expectations and views on education; 2) a strong sense of responsibility and obligation toward the leadership role; 3) strong work ethic and professionalism; 4) self-doubts; 5) Asian values/mentality; 6) servant leadership style 7) gender inequality 8) establishing networks and relationships; 9) professional traits of mentors; and 10) interpersonal functions. They also suggested valuable strategies and suggestions for aspiring Asian American female educational leaders to overcome barriers they face personally and professionally and overall to reverse the stereotypic view of Asian American female educational leaders.
The study found that intentional intervention is needed to address the underrepresentation of Asian American women as educational leaders. Institutions and the public school educational system need to support future Asian American female leaders to better reflect the communities that they serve. Pathways to the administrative positions need to be reexamined by changing persistent stereotyping of Asian American female leaders. The ultimate goal for this study is to illuminate the importance of establishing a diverse leadership platform for our K-12 educational system and increase awareness of gender and racial inequalities for our students.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

SIGNATURE PAGE ........................................................................................................... ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................... iii

ABSTRACT ....................................................................................................................... iv

LIST OF FIGURES .......................................................................................................... xii

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................... xiii

Chapter 1: Introduction ....................................................................................................... 1

Background to the Problem ............................................................................................ 3

The Invisible Minority ...................................................................................................... 7

The Model Minority Myth (MMM) .................................................................................. 9

Western Gender Stereotypes ......................................................................................... 12

Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................................... 14

Research Questions ....................................................................................................... 14

Definition of Key Terms ............................................................................................... 15

Significance of the Study .............................................................................................. 17

Summary and Organization of the Study ...................................................................... 17

Chapter 2: Review of Literature ..................................................................................... 18

Who are Asian Americans? ......................................................................................... 19

History of Asian Americans ......................................................................................... 22
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Chinese Exclusion Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>Korean, Filipino, and Japanese Immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>The National Origin Act (The Immigration Act)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Southeast Asians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Affirmative Action and its Impact on Asian Americans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Asian Americans in Southern California and Education Mobility

Asian American History Curriculum in K-12 and Higher Education

Model Minority Images and Stereotypes

Gender and Leadership

Asian American Women in U.S. History

Conceptual Framework

Critical Race Theory

Social constructionism

Racism as normal

Revisionist history

Differential racialization

Interest convergence

Anti-Essentialism

Critical Race Feminism

Critical Race Theory Education
Role of the Researcher ................................................................. 75
Researcher’s Positionality ............................................................ 75
Summary .................................................................................... 76
Chapter 4: Research Findings ..................................................... 78
Description of the Participants .................................................. 79
Overview of Participants ............................................................ 80
The Counter-Narratives .............................................................. 81
Background: Assimilation v. Acculturation ................................. 82
Analysis of the Counter-Narratives .......................................... 89
Research Question One: Success, Challenges, Aspirations .......... 89
Success .................................................................................. 92
  Theme 1: Family Expectations and Views on Education: “It’s not an option! It’s a must!” ................................................................. 92
  Theme 2: A Strong Sense of Responsibility and Obligation Toward Leadership Role: “My School; My Community; My Students” ......................................................... 95
Challenges .............................................................................. 100
  Theme 3: A Strong Work Ethic and Professionalism: “I Must Prove Myself!” ... 100
  Theme 4: Self-Doubts: “I Don’t Think I am a Leader!” ...................... 102
Aspirations ........................................................................... 106
  Theme 5: Asian Values and Mentality: “Humility v. Assertiveness” ........... 106
Theme 6: Servant Leadership: “Take the Ownership at the Blame and Share the Glory with Others.” ................................................................. 112

Research Question Two: Intersectionality .......................................................... 117

Theme 7: Gender Inequality: “I am Tiny but Mighty!” ........................................ 118

Research Question Three: Mentorship................................................................. 127

Theme 8: Establishing Networks and Relationships: Building an Infrastructure of Support System ................................................................. 128

Research Question Four: Characteristics of Effective Mentors: Professional and Interpersonal ................................................................. 140

Theme 9: Professional traits of mentors “Cultivating Leadership and Allow Me to be Who I am” ................................................................. 141

Theme 10: Interpersonal Functions “Empower and Inspire” .............................. 142

Summary ............................................................................................................... 142

Chapter 5: Conclusion........................................................................................... 144

Discussion ............................................................................................................. 146

Family Expectation on Education and Model Minority Myth (MMM) .......... 146

Intercentricity of Race and Racism and Asian Values/Views/Mentality......... 148

Asianization and a Strong Sense of Responsibility and Obligation toward the Leadership Role ................................................................. 151

Interest Convergence and a Strong Work Ethic and Professionalism .......... 153

Multiple Mentoring Frameworks and Establishing Networks and Relationships . 154
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of public school principals by race/ethnicity. .................. 5
Figure 2. Percentage distribution of postsecondary degrees by race/ethnicity and sex. .... 7
Figure 3. Asian American Racial Groups. ........................................................................ 19
Figure 4. Percentage Distribution of the Asian in Combination Population: 2010 ........ 22
Figure 5. Intergenerational mobility among Asians in the U.S. and in Asia. ............... 30
Figure 6. Visual representation of the conceptual framework ........................................ 47
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: The Demographics of the Participants................................................................. 80
Table 2 Research Question 1: Success, Challenges, and Aspirations......................... 91
Table 3 Research Question 2: Gender Inequality ............................................................ 117
Table 4 Research Question 3: Mentorship................................................................. 128
Table 5 Research Question 4: Characteristics of Mentors........................................ 141
Chapter 1: Introduction

“Never be afraid to stand with the minority when the minority is right, for the minority which is right will one day be the majority.”

-William Jennings Bryan

According to the Pew Research Center (2012), the group referred to as Asian American encompass more than 50 distinct racial/ethnicity groups. The label of *Asian American* does not fully describe the complexity of their identities. The authors (2012) stated, “Only about one-in-five (19%) say they most often describe themselves as Asian American or Asian. A majority (62%) say they most often describe themselves by their country of origin, while just 14% say they most often simply call themselves American” (p. 15). The panethnic view on Asian Americans as defined by Espiritu (1992) is stated as “Pan-Asian American ethnicity is the development of bridging organization and solidarities among several ethics and immigrant groups of Asian ancestry” (p. 14). However, Espiritu (1992) stated that Asians in the U.S. rarely considered themselves as one uniform ethnicity.

In the perception of success, this minority group appears to be overrepresented in gifted programs and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields due to the societal panethnic view through the lumping together of the racial groups that are classified of Asian Americans (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Yoon & Gentry, 2009; Wu & Jing, 2011). Asian Americans also have the highest rates of advanced degrees in education, of percentages employed in professional occupations, and of the number of families with above average incomes (Wilf & Ridley-Kerr, 2012). As a result of these types of success, Asian Americans have been defined as a group of individuals who are
strongly motivated and successful at achieving high social standing and economic success (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Siegel, 2012; Walker-Moffat, 1995). The societal expectations of excellence that affect all Asian American populations, including women and children who are suffering from socio-economic disadvantages, lacking a postsecondary education, living in poverty, or lacking significant job-related skills and experiences; result in a deep misunderstanding and misconception of Asian Americans who are underrepresented in many fields, including educational leadership (Fong, 1997; Hune, 1998; Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017; Morita-Mullaney & Greene, n.d.). Thus, it is significant in this study to separate the holistic view of Asian Americans as well as purposefully separate and understand the meaning of the description that “Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are not interchangeable” (Poon et al., 2016, p. 471).

Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) also elaborate on a similar idea, which states that behind the mask of all Asian Americans achieving high standards, “Asian women who try to act in a manner consistent with the American values of self-promotion and self-assertion are likely to be perceived more negatively than White women of European ancestry” (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010. p. 175). This explains the importance of providing support for Asian American women in the imbalance that exists in the educational leadership field.

This study focused on understanding the factors that impact Asian American female school leaders who are underrepresented in the American K–12 public school system. The researcher sought to understand their success, challenges, and aspirations on the path to obtaining administrative positions. Along these lines, another purpose was to
provide a different perspective on this group of minority women’s experiences with mentoring on the path of career advancement in administration positions. The expectation was that these results would assist in establishing a diverse leadership platform for future Asian American female educators in the K–12 educational system and promote global awareness and understanding.

**Background to the Problem**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), our nation is projected to be more racially diverse in the coming century. More specifically, the projected Asian population will more than double, growing from 15.9 million in 2012 to a projected 34.4 million in 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Even so, the current diversity of teachers and leaders in education is not proportional to the student population. When he was the U.S. Education Secretary, John B. King Jr. elaborated on this during his speech on the importance of teacher diversity on March 8, 2016 at Howard University,

Without question, when the majority of students in public schools are students of color and only 18 percent of our teachers are teachers of color, we have an urgent need to act. We’ve got to understand that all students benefit from teacher diversity. We have strong evidence that students of color benefit from having teachers and leaders who look like them as role models and also benefit from the classroom dynamics that diversity creates. But it is also important for our white students to see teachers of color in leadership roles in their classrooms and communities. (Albert Shanker Institute, n.d.)

As the Asian American student population continues to grow, according to the California Department of Education statistic in 2016–2017, Asian American students in
K–12 public schools (not including Pacific Islanders) reached 8.98% of the total student population, while the number of Asian American teachers and administrators in California is below 6% (see Figure 1), which is significantly low compared to the Asian student population; they also belong to the category of “other” as a result of underrepresentation (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The U.S. Census Bureau indicated in its 2015 publication that, in the State of California, where the Asian population alone constitutes 13% of the overall population, only 5.6% of education workers in the K–12 schools are Asian Americans (Data Access and Dissemination Systems (DADS), 2015). This crisis of the underrepresentation of Asian American educators underlines a problem regarding how Asian Americans are viewed in the eyes of the dominant Western culture.
NOTE: The 2007–08 data for the Other category include estimates in which the coefficient of variation (CV) is between 30 and 50 percent of estimates. The Other category represents the sum of Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Two or more races.

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of public school principals by race/ethnicity. U.S. Source: Adapted from Department of Education, 2014.

Historically, in the field of education, female Asian American leaders have been particularly rare. According to the Trends in Public and Private School Principal Demographics and Qualifications: 1987–88 to 2011–12, “Because principals are often drawn from the pool of teachers, [the system of recruiting process of public school administrators] should consider how changing teacher demographics—such as sex, race and ethnicity, and salary which may affect changing principal demographics” (Hill, Ottem, DeRoche, and International, 2016, p. 2). Further, Chang et al. (2010) also echoed the importance of educators who reflect the demographic of students in school. They
stated, “Research shows that professional educators who share students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds bring ‘culturally responsive instruction and caring-centered pedagogy, together with high expectations and careful alignment with district and state standards” (p. 5). Additionally, Aronson and Laughter (2016) believed:

Culturally responsive teachers validate every student’s culture, bridging gaps between school and home through diversified instructional strategies and multicultural curricula…. [They] are socially, emotionally, and politically comprehensive as they seek to educate the whole child. (p. 165)

Framing this study within the location of California raises significant concern regarding the disproportion between the number of the Asian American student population and representation of Asian American female education leaders who hold an important role in participating in the educational policy decision-making process. Furthermore, regardless of female Asian American students’ high college graduation rate and the advanced degrees they hold, they are not rising to obtain leadership roles in education (see Figure 2).
In social science research, many refer to Asian American women as an *invisible minority* (Hune & Nomura, 2003; Wagner, 2016; Wu, 2015; Wu & Jing, 2011). In other words, they belong to a group of minorities whose experiences were often compared to Asian men or White women that have been underrepresented in fields other than the academic ones, or to those of women of color who struggle with their identities and images while living in a White dominant society in the U.S (Beasley & Fischer, 2012). Vogt’s (2005) research further elaborates, “Asian American women with different experiences and unique stories are part of the same power hierarchy of race and gender”
Stereotypes surrounding Asian American women have not changed much over the past twenty years. Nash (2000) pointed out the following in the White dominant society that treats male and female leaders differently,

In a society that presumes white advantaged males are competent, those with other characteristics must prove their fitness for the job against a presumption of incompetence. Men are assumed leaders. Women are not. Asian Americans in leadership roles must battle against stereotypes of foreignness, inarticulateness and lack of assertiveness… Asian American women, then, must not only do as well as other leaders, they must do better. They must overcome stereotypes, as well as real cultural and family lessons that taught them to stay in the background. They must battle men who are threatened by having a female boss. (para. 2)

Fong (1997) claims that the intersectionality of Asian American women is unique among other women and minorities in general, “Asian American women develop their identification, self-esteem, and personality differently from either Asian or American women” (p. 92). Societal expectations, gender differences, and strong beliefs regarding fitting into the White dominant culture affect Asian American women and their motivation in their manner of pursuing leadership positions. Fuller (2004) says that the media portrays the images of Asian men as feminine and Asian women as hyperfeminine, implying that Asian women are supposed to be submissive, obedient, and dedicated to pleasing their husbands. This is incongruent with the typical dominant White view of the traits leaders should possess.
The Model Minority Myth (MMM)

While investigating and researching the factors that assist and support Asian American women in pursuing their dreams, one should not overlook the past and current stereotypes such as the model minority myth (MMM); these inevitably add layers of restriction upon other images affecting Asian American women and girls. The concept of MMM appears in many different areas of the literature. In Poon et al. (2016), the MMM literatures were carefully examined and reviewed along with the project of countering the model minority myth (MMM). According to this research, “The original purpose of the MMM—was to maintain anti-Black racism and White supremacy” (p. 469). They claim that the idea of MMM was used as a political tool to isolate Asian Americans as a “middleman minority” in order to emphasize and compare them with other minorities. This positioning drastically overlooked the needs of Asian Americans. Without using a critical view to understand the original purpose and intention of this myth, the deficit thinking model of the Asian American population will continue (Kumashiro, 2008; Poon et al., 2016).

Chou and Feagin (2015) reported the severity of the Model Minority stereotype and their impact on Asian American children at schools as well as adults in their workplace and claim that they continue to increase in use. Chou and Feagin’s research demonstrates that dominant racial groups discriminate against Asian American students, and their self-esteem issues coupled with the high expectations from teachers and others place a disproportionate amount of pressure on these students. Indeed, such pressure can be fatal—this pressure for the student to be optimal caused a significant tragedy in 2010. Reported by Grimaldi (2016), a young Chinese-Vietnamese girl named Jennifer attacked
her parents, which she claims to have done because she was unable to fulfill her parents’ expectations. Jennifer had failed to graduate from high school but feared angering her parents (refugees who worked hard for her success) with the truth. The tragedy climaxed with her killing one parent and severely wounding the other. Jennifer’s story shared the burden that was hidden within the model student image and the reality of how Asian immigrants try to assimilate with the American culture and pursuit of the American dream. Grimaldi (2016) wrote about Jennifer Pan’s story in his book, sharing his idea regarding the new immigrants coming to the land of freedom and how they tried to build a better life for their children. He stated, “For countless refugees, the goal was simple: to join the middle class” (Grimaldi, 2016, p. 170). For their children, this family adapted the strategies that are often referred to as “tiger parenting” to ensure their children’s academic success. He explained,

Traditional forms of Asian parenting often result in children learning vital characteristics for success including self-control, tolerance of frustration, and the ability to engage hard-work…. Traditional Asian families tend to be culturally collectivistic, emphasizing interdependence, conformity, emotional, self-control, and humility. These cultural values produce deeply ingrained family values, such as a strong sense of obligation and orientation to the family and respect for an obedience to parents and elders. (p. 175)

Gym (n.d.) also echoed the concept of tiger mom style of education means that Asian youths will only be successful academically when they are pushed by family with high expectation and demand of academic excellence along with relentless effort and nonstop tutoring (p. 273).
Many untold stories of Asian American women exhibit similar struggles. If Jennifer Pan were born into another ethnic group (or even were male), would this tragedy have occurred? Or, was the tragedy triggered by the false expectations of the dominant Western culture that generally assume that female Asian American student’s academic achievement intersecting with the stereotypic view of Asian females equates to the dream of success? Pyke and Johnson (2003) explained,

Examining the ways that such individuals mediate conflicting expectations would address several unanswered questions. Do marginalized women shift their gender performances across mainstream and subcultural settings in response to different gender norms? If so, how do they experience and negotiate such transitions? Do racially subordinated women experience their production of femininity as inferior to those forms engaged by privileged white women and glorified in the dominant culture? (p. 34)

Furthermore, Li (2013) echoed the perception of success created more obstacles for Asian American women “since the discrimination faced by Asian American women is wholly different from and more than the sum of the discrimination faced by white women and Asian American men” (p.142).

The impact of these misconceptions has a long lasting effect on Asian American women who desire to pursue leadership positions. Thus, these questions indicate a need to investigate the challenges these women face as school leaders and what helped them in achieving their goals to become leaders as well as to continue to act in that capacity.

Fong (1997) wrote, “The Asian traditional family contains a hierarchy of authority based on sex, generation, and age. Young women are at the lowest level, subordinate to
the dominant father-husband-brother-son and are restricted to well-defined sex roles” (p. 95). Fong further explained that, although many Asian Americans have assimilated into the dominant Western culture, Asian values still impact many families. She further reported, “Androgyny was associated with a high level of occupational attainment” (p. 96). In this way, it is important to understand the entrenched gender roles and the way they have limited (and continue to limit) Asian American women in pursuing equality as well as self-worth and self-esteem.

**Western Gender Stereotypes**

Comparing gender differences in Western society, Marshall and Andre-Bechely (2008) said,

Patriarchy was the foundation for the politics, policies, and goals of schooling, underwriting the long-observed practice of educating girls differently from boys. So feminism challenges the power of patriarchy and feminist and critical scholars challenge the politics and policies that patriarchy supports. (p. 283)

The struggle for women to attend school and receive the same education as men has historically been a long battle in the traditional Asian male hierarchical family view and the dominant Western culture alike. These types of struggle are also reflected in Jennifer Pan’s story as Grimaldi (2016) shared,

The ancient philosophy could be described through five essential and authoritative relationships: the subordination of subject to ruler, father to son, wife to husband, younger brother to elder brother, and mutual respect among friends. Authoritarianism remained the cornerstone of such hierarchies. (p. 171)
During a recent study at New York University, researchers Bian, Leslie, and Cimpian (2017) found that gender stereotypes felt as early as the age of 6 can have a long-term impact on a child’s life. Bian et al. (2017) indicated that American society relates brilliance more often with men than with women. The problem is that, as a society, the model minority myth, which promotes the deficit thinking model and inaccurately portrays as well as generalizes the image of Asian Americans while using it as a political tool to punish other minorities in order to balance the White superior ideology hierarchy, has blinded Americans, resulting in people applying, along with taking for granted, the stereotypes and gender biases.

According to Heatherington, Townsend, and Burroughs (2001), women tend to have low self-esteem compared to men when performing the same task, and more specifically, “Women’s relative modesty and men’s relative immodesty reflect conformity with sex role stereotypes or a desire to be consistent with one’s own gender schema, and not solely a matter of lower self-confidence” (p. 162). Byars and Hackett (1998) hypothesized that Asian American women tend to choose careers that best assure future income, steadiness, and respect in the eyes of society and (perhaps most importantly) their families, rather than making this choice based on personal interests or self-fulfillment. While these results were evident twenty years ago, they appear to remain true even today. Moreover, this may not be too different from other women. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) confirmed twelve years later that similar difficulties for women remain unsolved; they explain this further as follows, “Women can achieve leadership positions but only by carefully traversing complex paths as they confront issues associated with child care needs, racism, sexism, and discrimination on the basis of identity” (p. 173).
However, according to Pyke and Johnson (2003), the research has not fully examined and identified typically-subordinated women, especially Asian American women, as they mediate the pressures and conflicts in the production of femininity while moving between mainstream and ethnic arenas, such as family, work, and school. Chin, Lott, Rice, and Sanchez-Hucles (2008) shared the importance of female leadership by stating, “Feminism leadership values people, relationships, absolute fairness and equity, honesty, collaboration, and communal goals and achievement” (p. 85). This study fills the gap by adding what is so far left out by the body of literature surrounding this subject; it does so by examining the factors that contribute to the success, challenges, and aspirations on their paths to obtaining school administrative positions.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study’s purpose was to understand the factors that contribute to Asian American women’s success, challenges, and aspirations in pursuing administrative leadership positions in public schools. In terms of methodology, the researcher adopted a counter narrative approach by using in-depth personal interviews to understand each participant’s story and her struggles on the path to becoming an education leader.

**Research Questions**

The following were the research questions for this study:

1) What success, challenges, and aspirations did Asian American women say they experienced while pursuing administrative leadership positions as principals and assistant principals at public schools?

2) How did their intersectionality, such as race, gender, and class differences, contribute to their views of being a leader?
3) What forms of training and mentoring activities did these Asian American women receive, if any?

4) What were the primary characteristics of mentors that benefited their career advancement and aspirations as identified by the participants?

Definition of Key Terms

**Asian American:** Suro et al. (2007) define Asian Americans as individuals with origins in “any of the original people of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent” (p. 1) so that Asian groups are not limited to nationalities but also include ethnicities such as the Hmong.

**Model Minority:** The model minority stereotype is the preexisting notion that all Asian Americans achieve universal and unparalleled academic and occupational success (Museus & Kiang, 2009). It is used as a political tool wedge among minorities in order to promote a color-blind ideologist society and a deficit thinking model in opposition to the Asian American population (Poon et al., 2016).

**Critical Race Theory:** According to Delgado and Stefancic’s definition (2012), critical race theory is a radical legal movement that seeks to transform the interrelationships among race, racism, and power.

**Critical Race Feminism:** Critical race feminism is the application of critical race theory, as it pertains to the construction of male norms in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Carter (2012) explained,

> Critical race feminist theory emphasizes the multiplicity of voices of women of color unlike the constructs before it. Therefore, critical race
feminist theory, if used in an educational context, can potentially center educational discourse on the lives of young, female students of color just as it has done within in law. (p. 3)

**AsianCrit:** AsianCrit is a branch of study derived from critical race theory that focuses on Asian Americans’ racial realities, diverse backgrounds, and legal issues (An, 2017; Museus & Iftikar, 2013).

**Mentor:** A mentor is a person who provides guidance, support, knowledge, and opportunities to the protégé who deems this help necessary (Burlew, 1991).

**Multiple Mentoring Framework:** This study uses Kram’s mentoring framework as a conceptual guide. Kram’s multiple mentoring framework introduces the phases of mentoring such as initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition (Kram, 1983).

**Participants:** This study defined Asian American women as those women of Asian descent living in America legally, who identified themselves as Asian American and were not limited to their naturalization status. Also, the researcher assumed that the personnel whose responsibilities as administrators at K–12 schools are principals and assistant principals.

**Assumptions**

This assumption of this study was that having a diverse leadership and teaching force would positively impact future Asian American women who wished to pursue leadership roles in the field of education. This would provide students with positive role models, contributing to the development of the global citizenship culture.
Significance of the Study

Research related to Asian American women is still quite limited, but this is especially the case regarding the studies focused on those who are in leadership positions. This study illuminated the Asian American women’s motivation and resilience as a means of understanding what may encourage more Asian American women to pursue leadership positions. Their positions were in direct contrast to the subordinate, passive character of Asian American women often misleadingly portrayed by the media and other outlets.

Summary and Organization of the Study

Asian American women found themselves facing challenges as individuals who are overrepresented in academia and teaching staff in the field of education while they are severely underrepresented at the highest levels of administration. Their experiences warrant further discussion, as they continue to strive in order to find their place in educational leadership positions while simultaneously following the traditional role expectations of wives, mothers, and caregivers.

Chapter 2 presents a holistic view of Asian Americans as immigrants through the lens of AsianCrit and Critical Race Feminism as well as the multi-mentoring framework. It also confronts how intersectionality of gender, class, and ethnicity has shaped the identities of Asian American women. Chapter 3 is the methodology to investigate Asian American women administrators’ success, challenges, and aspirations that have resulted from being educational leaders. Chapter 4 discusses the findings, and Chapter 5 presents the conclusion, discussion, implications, and recommendations for the research.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

“There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.”

-Arundhati Roy

The content of this study draws from literature that examines the success and challenges Asian American women experience in educational administration. It also considers the strategies and training that help this group overcome any barriers in their career paths. Much of the literature focuses on Critical Race Theory (Buenavista, Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante, 2009; R. S. Chang, 1993; Liu, 2009) and the Multiple Mentoring framework (Fletcher, 2012; Mullen & Fletcher, 2012; Sugimoto, 2012), which each relate to factors influencing Asian American women’s career paths and opportunities as educational administrators. The purpose of the study was to examine factors that contribute to Asian American women’s success, challenges, and aspirations in pursuing administrative leadership positions at public schools.

This chapter begins its discussion by examining the diversity within the Asian American ethnicity groups as well as the model minority myth and its impacts, and struggles experienced by Asian Americans in the U.S. By considering the issue through the lens of Critical Race Theory, the paper reveals the development of the inequity Asian Americans have suffered in the past in pursuit of better understanding of the experiences of Asian American women. Following that is a discussion meant to contribute to understanding the cultural and societal hierarchy of Asian American women (Almandrez, 2010; Fong, 1997). The literature review will further examine women of color in educational administration and their relationships with the conceptual framework of
mentoring. Finally, the literature review will help reveal Asian American women’s career aspirations as school administrators to help empower future Asian American women leaders in education.

**Who are Asian Americans?**

When you think of the simple adjective or noun “Asian American,” what images come to your mind? How many racial groups call themselves “Asian Americans?” According to (López, Ruiz, & Patten, 2017), Asian refers to people whose ancestors originated from the regions of Far East, Southeast Asian, or Indian subcontinent (see Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Asian American Racial Groups. Source: Reprinted from Data Disaggregation Resources | White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (n.d.).](image)

As explained by Reeves and Bennett (2004), “Asian groups are not limited to nationalities but include ethnic terms as well, such as Hmong” (p. 2). Asian Americans are “Asian Indian, Korean, Cambodian, Laotian, Chinese, Pakistani, Filipino, Thai,
Hmong, Vietnamese, and Japanese. Asian Americans also included people who are mixed race, or more than one race such as Asian and Mexican, or Asian and Blacks” (Reeves & Bennett, 2004, p. 2). Because Asian Americans are extremely diverse, there is no single “Asian experience.” According to Lott (1998), Immigrant and U.S born respondents spoke of the need to preserve an ethnic identity and not blend into an Asian and Pacific American identity, let alone a purely American one….A bicultural identity was found within two groups….That is, their primary identification is being an American with Asian heritage….Then, the “half and half” generation, which describes persona who grew up in Asian but came to and resided in the U.S. for a good portion of their adulthood. They are familiar with both Asian and American identities and culture…where some identify themselves as Americans and others who identify more as Asians. There are also the interracial unions where these individuals are truly pan-Asian. (p. 92-93)

Because the Asian American category includes a huge socioeconomic range of populations from middle-upper class to refugees, microaggressions and racial discrimination can be widely experienced. Racial microaggression toward people of color has subsided to more discreet and indirect ways in more recent times (Tran & Lee, 2014), but the topic of race and ethnicity remains an elephant in the room across America. The images associated with “Asian American” are often positive, with such accompanying assumptions that those who are Asian American are strong in areas like mathematics and kung-fu. According to Tran and Lee (2014), “This characterization of Asian Americans, though ostensibly “positive,” has the potential to contribute to stereotypes and mask or
invalid the current and historical racial hardships experienced by Asian Americans” (p. 485). “Asian American” is a broad term composed of many different ethnicities, cultures, and languages.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2018), the definition of race reflects a social definition of race recognized in this country and not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically. In addition, it is recognized that the categories of the race item include racial and national origin or sociocultural groups. People may choose to report more than one race to indicate their racial mixture. (para. 10)

“Asian” is defined as more than just someone of Asian descent, but also includes people who identify themselves as Asian and people who have multiple origins and identify themselves as Asian. López,, Ruiz, and Patten (2017) reported that 59% of U.S. Asian were foreign born, with reasons for immigration varying among different origin groups. By 2055, it is projected that the total Asian population will surpass the Hispanic population to become the fastest growing minority group in the United States (López, Ruiz, & Pattern, 2017). According to Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, and Shahid (2012), “There are about 15 percent of the Asian population who reported multiple races, and Asians who reported multiple races grew at a faster rate than the Asian alone population” (p. 4).

Therefore, the panethnic view on Asian American is not only inaccurate, which explained by the U.S. Census Bureau (2018), “People may choose to report more than one race to indicate their racial mixture, such as “American Indian” and “White” (para. 10), but also inconsiderate for the cultures and backgrounds of many who identify as such (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012). (see figure 4).
Note: Changes in specific race combinations not involving Some Other Race, such as Asian and White or Asian and Black or African American, generally should be more comparable. Percentages may not add to 100.0 due to rounding. Sources: Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid (2012). Table P1.

Figure 4. Percentage Distribution of the Asian in Combination Population: 2010 Source: Adapted from Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid (2012).

History of Asian Americans

Historically, the panethnic view of Asians did not come from the similarity of biological or genetic features. Workers formed a group to fight for their unfair wages and terrible living conditions. Thus, panethnic identities sustained several generations of immigrants in Hawaii. Although there were only a few larger groups of Asian immigrants from 18th to 19th century, each group’s struggles to survive on this “land of freedom and opportunities” were different from each other.

1880: Chinese Exclusion Act

Racial discrimination against Asian Americans is documented by the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. The Exclusion Act of 1882 was an official U.S. government policy prohibiting Chinese people from immigrating to the United States, marking the
first time U.S. legislation openly banned an ethnic group from entering the country – it was also the last time it happened until the Trump administration of 2017.

Before the Chinese Exclusion Act, railroads hired large numbers of Chinese immigrants. Many were considered unskilled young men who were unmarried, though a few had families. As Mickelson (2009) further explained,

Asian Americans immigrated to the west coastal states of California, Oregon, and Washington during the 19th and 20th centuries. They were relegated to low-paying jobs (such as building the transcontinental railroad, agriculture labor) and suffered legal, cultural, and social marginalization. (p. 242)

According to Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), these laborers did not receive citizenship; courts could deport them even after the expiration of the Exclusion Act. Assistant New York district attorney Kohler (1901) pointed out,

The Chinese exclusion acts proceed, first of all, on the theory that our country and its laborers should be protected against the cheap labor of China….General legislation, not alone applicable to Chinese persons, would be here more properly in order, and the result would be that we would not then run counter to such fundamental principles of democratic government as find express in our Declaration of Independence in asserting the quality of all men, and in our existing statutes in proclaiming the inherent right of all men and races to come to reside here and become American citizens….Nor can anyone explain why the black men should enjoy all the “rights of men” and the man whose skin is yellow be treated by the law as an outcast because of such difference of shade. (p. 14)
As stated in Liang and Peters-Hawkins (2017), “…laws have targeted Asian American women and denied their admission into…” the U.S. over the course of its history (p. 45). Discrimination against Asian American laborers regarding their right to education, and particularly Chinese Americans, was rampant. The case of Tape v. Hurley in 1884 is an indication of the entrenched methods of how Chinese Americans, even when born in the United States as lawful, legal citizens, have been excluded from pursuing education based on their ethnicity. Mary McGladery Tape was an orphan raised in Shanghai, China; she moved to the U.S when she turned 11. She married Joseph Tape, who was a Chinese immigrant himself, and together they then had four children. When her daughter was eight, Mary decided she wanted to enroll her in the local public school. The principal, Jennie Hurley, barred Mary’s daughter from entering by standing in front of the school house. Mary Tape sued the principal and won, but the case caused the San Francisco school board to urge legislators to add a special provision that would begin officially segregating Chinese and Mongolian children into separate schools (“Tape v. Hurley,” 1885). Mary Tape later wrote a letter to the Alta California News, saying “…I will let the world see, sir, what justice is when it is governed by a Race of prejudiced men!” (Thompson, 2004, para. 15). Tape’s case gave a voice to Asian American immigrants on education equity. The Tape case brought Asian Americans a step toward gaining political power, although it is rarely mentioned during teaching on U.S. history and civil rights.

1895: Korean, Filipino, and Japanese Immigrants

After 1895, Chinese laborers began to ask for a better living condition and wages to continue working on plantations at Hawaii’s sugar cane farms. Plantation managers
started to recruit Japanese laborers to replace the Chinese. Due to the work on the farm, Japanese laborers were welcomed to bring their families, which created a different minority dynamic compared to the Chinese immigrants who were mainly functioning as railroad workers who needed to travel across the U.S.

Around the 1800s, Korea and Japan signed an unfair Treaty of the Kanghwa, causing the Korean government to seek help from the U.S. The U.S. provided protection and promised friendship between the President of the United States and the King of Korea with the Treaty of Chemulpo. Lee (2015) explained this process has “…established diplomatic relations between Korea and the United States, opening the way for Korean immigration to Hawaii at the turn of the century that was fueled by Japanese colonization” (p. 106). As time went on, Korean and Filipino workers later were introduced to replace Japanese who demanded the same rights as the Chinese. Nonetheless, no minority groups at that time were able to make significant changes of their own harsh living conditions even through Asian workers constituted more than 70% of all the workforce (Chang, 2004; Lee, 2015). Just like Chinese and Japanese, legislation did not protect Korean immigrants; the Naturalization Act of 1790 allowed U.S. citizenship rights only to the whites. The Alien Land Act of 1913 stated clearly that aliens were not eligible for owning land (Lee, 2015).

Filipinos, on other hand, came to the U.S. before any other minorities. According to Lee (2015), the landmark at Coleman Park documents that in 1587, the first Filipino arrived in California on board the ship Nuestra Senora de Esperanza. By 1898, after the Spanish-American war, the first wave of Filipino immigrants began to migrate to the U.S., replacing Chinese, Japanese, and Korean plantation workers. Filipinos were
recruited to Hawaii. They were treated differently from other Asian Americans due to the relation between Philippine government and the U.S. As stated by Lee (2015), “Filipinos were the only Asian ethnic group to serve in the U.S. military without U.S. citizenship” (p. 106). According to Lee, many Filipinos without education and skills were able to afford living in the U.S. and were more respected by the society unlike their Asian counter partners. Lee (2015) described differential treatment of Filipino Americans. On July 2, 1946, Congress passed the Luce-Celler Bill (also known as the Filipino Naturalization Act and the Indian Immigration and Naturalization Act) that permitted the naturalization of all remaining Filipinos in the United States. According to Melendy (2014),

The first wave of Filipino immigrants came to the United States seeking higher education. Governor-General Taft's administration prepared an educational plan, the Pensionado Act, to send promising young Filipinos to institutions of higher learning in the United States….Contracted workers called the “1946 boys,” or sakadas, were a major component of the second wave. Plantation owners brought them in an effort to break up the first interracial and territory-wide strike organized by the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU). By the 1970s more than 20,000 Filipinos had entered the United States through work with the navy. (p. 123)

With the help from the U.S. government from 1891-1941, many Filipinos were able to fit into the mainstream society without too much of difficulties in comparison of their Asian counterparts.
1924: The National Origin Act (The Immigration Act)

The second wave of legislation to ban Asian immigrants from entering the United States was the National Origin Act, which prohibited entry to most people born in the Asiatic Barred Zone (Office of the Historian, n.d.). The Act permitted the government to heavily tax new immigrants, but it also initiated a test on basic English comprehension skills for anyone over the age 16. It explicitly excluded Asians from immigrating to the U.S.

1950: Southeast Asians

Around 1950, a massive departure of people occurred from North Vietnam to the South. For the political standpoint and military benefit, Vietnam’s location and freedom from becoming a communist country was extremely important for the U.S. government. A second large wave of Vietnamese refugees fled the country mostly by boat to the neighboring countries in Southeast Asia in 1978. By 1980, the Refugee Act turned into law signed by President Carter which allowed many Southeast Asian refugees to enter the United States (Chang, 2004; Lee, 2015).

1960: Affirmative Action and its Impact on Asian Americans

President John F. Kennedy first used the term *affirmative action* in an executive order intended to raise awareness about inequity and injustice Black people were facing (Le, 2017). Affirmative action policies typically set a quota of minorities often overlooked in terms of education recruitment, career employment, and other benefits – the quota enacts employers or institutions to employ specific ethnicities in certain numbers. Pak, Hernandez, and Maramba (2014) explained that affirmative action helped to remedy racism and discrimination in higher education and in the recruiting process,
while later Presidents-Initiated orders to further ensure institutions acknowledged minorities’ rights.

While affirmative action was meant to provide minorities equal access to higher education, it also negatively impacted certain ethnicities, as does any racial profiling for college enrollment (Chin, 2016). Asian Americans’ overrepresentation in academic success has cost them the “equal” opportunity and the fair chance offered to other minorities. However, Chin’s findings (2016) illustrated this negative impact on Asian Americans.

Asian Americans, in particular, feel the stigma of diversity programs. Jim, a college graduate of the early 2000s said that he did not want to be associated with the negative impression that he might have gotten a leg up because of affirmative action or diversity initiatives. His comment reflects a wider sentiment that you might not be qualified if you had “that kind of help. (p. 73)

However, the impact of affirmative action for Asian Americans is more complicated. The action is taken by many scholars who are aware of this issue that was stated by Park and Liu (2014), “…we argue that Asian Americans are not just passively affected by affirmative action but that they actually affect the policy itself by challenging traditional conceptions of meritocracy and critical mass and offering support for more holistic measures of both” (p. 56).

**Asian Americans in Southern California and Education Mobility**

According to the Migration Policy Institute (2018), from the year 2011-2015, California had the highest number of immigrants from Asia. There were almost 4 million immigrants moving to California, and Los Angeles has the most with approximately 1
million Asian immigrants. Rumbaut (2008) pointed out, “Most of the largest immigrant nationalities that have settled in the United States over the past few decades have established their primary enclaves in Greater Los Angeles” (p. 197). Henceforth, understanding the development of how Asian Americans experienced education in Southern California is a major indicator to forecast the Asian American experience (Rumbaut, 2008). The term “majority-minority” can truly describe the situation of a high percentage of immigrants and their second-generations in Southern California.

Results from the Pew Research Center’s global survey in 2012 analyzed and compared Asian Americans’ living conditions with their counterpart groups in Asia ("Rise of Asian Americans," 2012). The survey interviewed 3,511 Asians ages 18 or older who lived in the United States. The survey sampled the six groups of Asian Americans that have the largest populations such as Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese across 50 states. The results demonstrated that adults living in China were happier in their country than Chinese Americans. However, on the other hand, Indian Americans and Japanese Americans were more satisfied with their current living conditions in the United States. U.S. Asians believed their standards of living were higher and exceeded their parents at a similar age ("Rise of Asian Americans," 2012). The data indicated that more Asian Americans believe that hard work will lead to a better life than Asians (see Figure 5).
As more children who were born as second generation of immigrants grow into adults, their impact on our society is immense. Looking through the lens of the newcomers, Hirschman (2013) shared,

Immigrants and their children are overrepresented in a broad range of rare achievements, including as Nobel Prize winners, leading scientists, and top performing and creative artists. They have broadened our cultural outlook and have sometimes even defined American culture through literature, music, and art. They can navigate multiple languages and understand how people from different backgrounds think and respond…. The presence of immigrants and their offspring
has helped “push” American institutions in the direction of increasing openness and meritocracy. (p. 15)

Branton, Cassese, Jones, and Westerland (2011) found, “Perceptions of immigration have become inexorably linked to the Latino community, a community implicitly connected to a symbolic threat” (p. 677). According to Reece (2017), the Trump administration is re-examining the purpose of affirmative action. The administration believes in “the idea that people of color in higher education don’t deserve to be there — that they got there through a government handout, taking spots that are rightfully owed to white people” (para. 6). Despite the history and contributions Asian Americans have made for this country, the country they call home, Asian Americans are labeled by some as outsiders.

Rumbaut (2008) has broken down the factors that impact educational mobility for second generation immigrants from different origins as followed:

- Parent’s educational level: The parents of Hispanic descent in average obtained less than a high school education in comparison to Asian parents such as Chinese and Koreans who have high percentages in attaining college degrees. However, within the Asian populations, Vietnamese parents reflect in a similar pattern as Hispanic parents with less than a high school degree, while Filipino parents have a higher proportion than Vietnamese parents in obtaining college degrees. (p. 210)
- Differences in English fluency, legal status, and the length of time among immigrants also impact their children’s education mobility. (p. 213)
• Family structures and immigrants’ socioeconomic status affect the stability of their children’ education needs which indirectly impacts their education level attainment. (p. 215)

The situation of Asian Americans’ future heavily falls on the shoulders of the next generations who are familiar with both cultures and fluent in both languages. However, until the stereotypes of Asian Americans reduce the influence on other’s viewpoints, stereotypes still determine the fate of people of color (Zhang, 2010).

**Asian American History Curriculum in K-12 and Higher Education**

In U.S. K-12 history classes as students seldom read about Asian Americans and their contributions to the country. According to the “2016 History-Social Science Framework - Curriculum Frameworks” (California Department of Education, 2016), Asian Americans and their marks in our history are briefly mentioned at the 4th grade level. In the framework titled “California-A Changing State,” Asian Americans are mentioned from the guiding questions, “Why did different groups of immigrants decide to move to California? What were their experiences like when they settled? How were they treated when they arrived in California?” In this 2016 social science framework, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and the South Asians and their contributions were in the middle of the conversations between the Spanish explorers and the Americans who settled in the West. In 11th grade history, the framework brought back the topic of “changes in racial, ethnic, and gender dynamics in American society; the movements toward equal rights for racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities and women” (California Department of Education, 2016, p. 391). It is important for our future generations to understand how each ethnic group struggles, suffers, and supports politics,
economics, agriculture, transportation, and social structures that build the United States that we are living now. It is important to teach our children to become the future global citizens by understanding how different races and ethnic are intertwined tightly together (Myers, 2006).

On the other hand, in the U.S. higher educational forum, Asian American studies are becoming a valuable subject. According to the directory from the Association of Asian American Studies (AAAS), which was formed in 1991 at Cornell University, there are nearly 70 institutions in the higher education devoted to promoting Asian American studies. The mission of AAAS is to “(a) Institutionalize Asian American studies; (b) to develop regional specific research and publications; and (c) to provide mutual support to individuals and programs” (“East of California,” n.d. para. 1). Bridging the gap of helping students to understand multiple aspects of our U.S. history in K-12 schools by emphasizing Asian Americans and their existence in higher education, Asian American studies is a key reason why the U.S. needs more Asian American representations in K-12 educational leadership (Ramanathan, 2006).

**Model Minority Images and Stereotypes**

In 1966, the term “model minority” first emerged in *The New York Times*, reflecting the type of mind-set and hidden meanings that distinguish Asian Americans from other minorities. David and Lin (1997) explained,

Various factors affect the civil rights problems currently facing Asian Americans … chief among them, are the general public stereotypes … that foster prejudice against them and deprive them of their individuality and humanity. The “model minority” stereotype that portrays Asian Americans as an exceptionally successful
minority group has led federal, state, and local agencies to overlook and sometimes ignore the problems encountered by Asian Americans and has often caused resentment of Asian Americans in the external communities. (p. 11)

Despite the changing image of Asian Americans from *yellow perils* to *whiz kids*, and regardless of this narrow and panethnic view through which this group of diverse people is viewed, Asian Americans have carried a significant burden over the years. An extensive body of literature describes Asian Americans as quiet, hardworking, determined, and socially passive (Pak et al., 2014; Vega, 2015; Zhang, 2010). Seldom do researchers make a connection between these terms and the Asian belief in education. The source and foundation of these beliefs in education, as they relate to one’s social status, originates in Confucius, a great Chinese educator and philosopher. His teachings have impacted countless generations and remain a great cultural presence in Chinese thought. When he said, it is necessary to give “education without distinction,” Confucius was illustrating his thoughts about educating everyone, regardless of social status or wealth (Rainey, 2010). In ancient China, education and passing national examinations were primary means of social mobility and the ability to work for the government. Education was a means to enter positions of great distinction. This is a practice that many countries still follow today. According to Pacis (2005), “It is noteworthy that Asian culture venerates an education and Asian countries such as the Philippines admire educators” (p. 53).

In part, it is these expectations that have led them to try to prove their self-worth by excelling in academics and claiming a presence in that sphere (Lee, 1994). Maddux, Galinsky, Cuddy, and Polifroni (2008) summed up the model minority myth,
… the perception that Asian Americans or other groups have certain model minority traits—including being hardworking, intelligent, and ambitious—leads to a sense that such groups pose a threat to other groups in terms of educational, economic, and political opportunities, and that such a sense of realistic threat may lead to negative attitudes and emotions. (p. 86)

According to the study conducted by Lee and Zhou (2015), the Asian American population growth has surpassed that of many other minorities, and the group still maintained generally high socioeconomic status and college attainment rates. The authors specified possible reasons for the model minority myth through the following perspectives,

(a) Asian Americans believe hard work represents the path to success. They value effort more than ability, and exert strong discipline to obtain a high socioeconomic status; (b) After the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, only select foreign-born Asians could immigrate to the United States – in other words, Asians who could afford it and had significant educational qualifications, skills, and even independent wealth. Hence, second-generation Asian Americans adapted most easily to the host culture; and (c) Asian culture framed the mind-set of post-1965 Asian immigrants who influenced the mobility of new generations of Asian Americans into the new society. (p. 6)

Lee and Zhou (2015) found that teachers and counselors also expect Asian American students to be hard-working, highly disciplined, and committed to all aspects of academic achievement – this is largely due to the model minority myth. An “A minus” means the threat of exposure to an Asian: it minimizes the impact that other high-
achieving non-Asians might otherwise have, creating a deeper stereotypic threat. Lee (1994) stated, “Scholars and the popular press have contrasted the success of Asian American students to the underachievement of other minorities” (p. 413). This image also influences Asian Americans in how and what they choose in terms of selecting universities and college majors.

Although the model minority myth perpetuates the assumption that all Asian Americans are strong academics, the negative impact of the assumption could prevent Asian Americans from feeling adequate at the most basic level, convincing them that their best should always be better (Dang & Kline, 2015). Arguably, student achievement could be a result of high expectation. This is certainly a form of pressure, but particularly to be perpetually optimal or excellent. To achieve the best at the price of sacrificing everything is well illustrated from the letter of an Asian student who finally broke the silence,

…Unlike what the stereotypes may suggest, I was not the valedictorian. I was not even the salutatorian… For every A that I did get, I had at least one panic attack in the process of getting it, and for every A that I didn’t get (and there were quite a few), I had many more. I’ve had the urge to jump, and even more often, I’ve felt too down to even take that modicum of effort…It’s so easy to glorify it: I could say that I was motivated, that I was ambitious, that I managed to balance, in admissions-speak, a “rigorous course load” with “meaningful extracurricular activities” — and there’s certainly a kernel of truth in all of those statements. But it is even more truthful to say that for almost all of high school, I was consistently on the brink of collapse, both academically and personally. (Zhao, 2017)
These words described the consistent pressure some Asian American students experience while meeting the expectation necessary for the term “model minority.” Henfield et al. (2014) describe,

This study’s participants were found to be keenly aware of others’ high expectations of them and responded, in turn, with high academic and career aspirations of their own. On the surface, this appears to be a wonderful attribute; however, these students also failed to establish strong relationships with peers of similar backgrounds. (p. 146)

A simple rationale of model minority does not explain it all (Lee, 1994). Others misperceive that Asian Americans are monoracial and monocultural. As stated in Lott (1998),

The significance of Asian Americans are neither White nor Black….They have been associated with Blacks and other racial/ethnic minorities as a member of historically disadvantaged groups in the U.S….In recent decades, they have come to be associated with Whites due to similar socioeconomic and educational attainment and similar residential patterns. (p. 16)

Model Minority is not necessarily an encouragement for Asian American students. Instead, it can be a political tool that ignores the needs of students with Asian descent. Steele (1997) pointed out,

…for the domain [education] identified students, stereotype threat may interfere with their domain-related intellectual performance. The argument here is that for those who identify with the domain enough to experience this threat, the pressure it causes may undermine their domain performance. (p. 171)
Peng and Wright (1994) confirmed this in their study of 24,599 eighth-grade students, 6% of whom were Asian American. The researchers examined all the external factors affecting student achievement. The Asian American participant sample was small, but its proportionality represented the demographic’s overall population in the United States. Based on a combination of mathematics and reading scores, Asian American students exhibited higher academic scores than other minorities, but there appeared to be no difference between them and their White counterparts. Some examination of the major factors revealed that Asian American students primarily lived with two parents who often each possessed professional careers, advanced college degrees, and high incomes. Asian American students also repeatedly spent more hours doing homework and participated in more educational extracurricular activities than other minorities. However, Peng and Wright (1994) found that despite controlling for factors of parental income and educational levels, white students had higher achievement scores. Asian American students underperformed in Peng and Wright’s (1994) samples compared to White students of similar socioeconomic and educational environments. This study provided an exemplary method for unveiling the problems surrounding the conception of the model minority. In this study, home environment and parental expectations were primary contributing factors in students’ academic achievement regardless of ethnicity.

Another study conducted by Henfield, Woo, Lin and Rausch (2014) analyzed high-achieving Asian American students’ perceptions of their experiences in a collegiate honors programs. The results indicated parental influences is strong on all participants’ career choices. Participants in the study indicated, “Their parents made clear goals of excelling in colleges and/or pursuing lucrative occupations” (Henfield et al., 2014,
In this dichotomous view of minorities who are non-White, Asian American students often experience difficulty establishing a sense of belonging in social and educational environments. As stated in the findings of Henfield et al. (2014), researchers argued, “Despite voiced benefits associated with participation in the collegiate honors programs, as well as gifted education programs in K-12 settings, some participants also viewed their experiences as discouraging with respect to the lack of diversity and individuality” (p. 144).

According to Takagi (1998), admissions policies and decisions at large colleges emphasize “merits and diversity” to construct arguments about Asian Americans overrepresentation in the higher education forum. Takagi (1998) stated the interpretation of overrepresentation came from three notions. The notions were 1) Asian American students population in college campus exceeds the overall Asian population ratio; 2) Asian students were qualified students but lack diversity in different college majors, predominantly science and math; 3) Asian students who excelled academically still linked as a threat to other minorities’ college enrollment. As a direct result, it is common for Asian Americans to feel like outliers.

It is difficult to explain if all believe the panethnic perspective of Asian Americans. However, Lott (1998) explained,

It is like a sword with double blades which can be used to interpret when it is convenient. Racial and ethnic categories have been used in the United States to distinguish groups in reaction to a White majority. The differential treatment has been used for purpose of both exclusion and inclusion. (p. 17)
The statement explains the frustrating aspect of being the “one-size-fits-all” Asian Americans (Bread for the World Institute, 2010).

A publication of CARE (National Commission on Asian American Pacific Islander Research in Education) titled “Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Facts, Not Fiction: Setting the Record Straight” isolated the problem of “Model Minority” and the negative impact the label has had. The report found that teachers and administrators still believe their “model minority” students will excel in the class and require no recognition as a minority. CARE’S research also indicated that (a) Asian American students are often mismatched in their classes with their cognitive levels; (b) The panethnic view prevents policymakers from identifying Asian American students’ needs, so that official programs and services have often neglected them; (c) Hawaiian schools with a high Asian student population still struggle with academic achievement, low graduation rate, absenteeism and overrepresentation in the special education student population due to lack of funding for being a one state district; and (d) Many Asian Americans are still living in poverty and experiencing academic barriers, and yet they are masked under the label of high achievers and assumed to have above average income (CARE, 2008, p. 3).

**Gender and Leadership**

According Johnson and Sy (2016), in the fields other than education, Asian American women and men are not viewed as leader prototypes. The authors stated, “…at the five big tech firms, Asians and Asian Americans were well represented in lower-level positions but underrepresented at management and executive levels” (p. 2). This glass ceiling effect is worsening for women. Asian American men “comprise 13.5 % of executive positions while Asian American women only take 3.1% of the total executive
role” (p. 3). The statistics explained the phenomenon of the leader prototypes. The leader prototypes demonstrate what leaders need to have other than competence and intelligence, but charisma and confidence are the characteristics that represent how the dominant Western culture views leaders. Asian Americans are considered to be highly successful but low on social intelligence (Johnson & Sy, 2016). Furthermore, as Asian American women leaders who dare to challenge this type of stereotypes, the penalty could be severe with a backlash against them. Echoed by Berdahl and Min (2012), their findings indicated, “Negative reactions and consequences to stereotype violators function to maintain existing social roles and power structures, as stereotypes stem from and reinforce these roles and inequalities” (p. 149.) This negative effect of violating the stereotypes also affects Asian American woman leaders’ motivation and confidence that are vital for their leadership. Therefore, by taking away their motivation and confidence further reinforces Asian American women leader’ image of incapability to lead.

**Asian American Women in U.S. History**

To better understand Asian American women and their challenges and success in pursuing administrative roles at public schools, critical race feminist theory guides this study. Childers-McKee and Hytten (2015) explain,

Both Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Feminism originated in the field of legal studies, yet they have increasingly been used by educators to look at the myriad ways in which schools reproduce marginalization and inequality, despite the rhetoric of equality of opportunity…CRF draws upon both CRT and feminism in exploring social phenomena from the perspective of people doubly marginalized by both race and gender. (p. 394)
Ancient Chinese literature makes it painfully evident that women were subclass citizens – Confucius is no exception. In Confucius’ *Analect*, a tome of quotes, it is difficult to find any mention of women. One of his famous quotes, in which he compares women with servants, shines some light on a prominent mindset of ancient Chinese society. As Rainey (2010) stated,

Confucius rarely had anything to say about women in the *Analects*.…. The one time he says anything about women, he says, “It is always difficult to deal with women and servants; if you are too close to them, they become insolent; if you keep them at too great of distance, they complain.” (p. 57)

Liu and Iwamoto (2007) explained that Asian American men are often expected to adhere to a model minority myth by leading and supporting the family through performance in school and in other contexts. The authors found that these men typically used and abused substances more than Asian American women, and they used at or above national averages for college men. Conversely, few studies focused on Asian American women. Pyke and Johnson (2003) studied second-generation Asian American women, finding that,

Respondents dichotomized the interactional settings they occupy as ethnic, involving their immigrant family and other co-ethnics, and mainstream, involving non-Asian Americans in peer groups and at work and school. They grew up juggling different cultural expectations as they moved from home to school and often felt a pressure to behave differently when among Asian Americans and non-Asian Americans. (p. 37)
According to Chow (1987), “Because approximately half of Asian American women are foreign-born, their lack of familiarity with the women's movement in the United States and their preoccupation with economic survival limit their feminist involvement” (p. 287). Therefore, traditional Asian culture in the 1980s that rigidly defines each role in a family: women’s roles are to serve as caregivers and homemakers while men act as breadwinners, still deeply impacts Asian American women (Chow, 1987). In the 21st century, according to Pyke and Johnson (2003), Asian American women still have very little power in the family decision-making process, if they have any at all. Their key role is to simply serve the male members of the family; more importantly, the pressure to fulfil that role is immense (Pyke & Johnson, 2003).

Pyke and Johnson (2003) further elaborate,

Immigrant women tend to stay committed to the ethnic patriarchal structure as it provides resources for maintaining their parental authority and resisting the economic insecurities…but the gender hierarchy is evident in parenting practices. Daughters are typically required to be home and performing household chores when not in school, while sons are given greater freedom. (p. 38)

Twenty years ago, Fong (1997) wrote, “The Asian family contains a hierarchy of authority based on sex, generation, and age. Young women are at the lowest level, subordinate to the dominant father-husband-brother-son and are restricted to well-defined sex roles” (p. 95). The author further explained that, though most Asian Americans have assimilated into Western culture, Asian values continue to impact many families. She further reported, “Androgyny was associated with a high level of occupational attainment” (Fong, 1997, p. 96). Rigid gender roles and the way they have limited Asian
American women in pursuing equality, as well as fulfilling self-worth and self-esteem, heavily impact this phenomenon (Almandrez, 2010).

In their study comparing gender differences in Western society, Marshall and Andre-Bechely (2008) said,

Patriarchy was the foundation for the politics, policies, and goals of schooling, underwriting the long-observed practice of educating girls differently from boys. So, feminism challenges the power of patriarchy and feminist and critical scholars challenge the politics and policies that patriarchy supports. (p. 283)

For women to attend school and receive the same education as men has been a long struggle in Asian cultures across the world – including in America. As confirmed by Liang and Peters-Hawkins (2017), “In the history of Asians in the United States, discriminatory laws have targeted Asian American women and denied their admission into this country” (p. 45). During a recent study at New York University, researchers Bian et al. (2017) found that children who feel gender stereotypes as early as age 6 can experience long-term negative impacts. Their findings in Science indicated that American society relates brilliance to men more often than women (Bian et al., 2017). According to their study, girls at age 6 already associate being smart with their own gender less than girls at age 5. This trend was similar among girls across all ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. The study additionally related brilliance to mathematics and mathematics-related subjects. Findings also indicated that these gender stereotypes influenced girls as they became adult women, so that they are less likely to choose careers requiring brilliance; moreover, such thinking starts at a very early age.
There is indeed a gender gap faced by Asian American women, in that many of them find themselves possessing intelligence and education equal to men but find similar positions in the job market of STEM and education fields unreachable (Vogt, 2005). This gap remains shrouded, and it is necessary to explore it more fully.

According to Irey (2013), “Stereotypes, multiple marginalities, and microaggressions rooted in white privilege contribute to Asian American women being frequently misunderstood and disfranchised” (p. 31). As stated by Steele (1997),

The theory [Stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance] begins with an assumption: that to sustain school success one must be identified with school achievement in the sense of its being a part of one’s self-definition, a personal identity to which one is self-evaluatively accountable…. [When one experiences the stereotype threat] the event of a negative stereotype about a group to which one belongs becoming self-relevant, usually as a plausible interpretation for something one is doing. (p. 168)

Steele (1997) further explained that the member of the group which is prejudiced against by the negative stereotype often begins to internalize the false image and believe oneself is inadequate. The following story helps validate the theory and the impact of negative stereotype such as the “Model Minority.”

On June 6, 2015, a young Asian girl made national headlines by (presumably) succumbing to academic stress and running away from her California home, avoiding taking her Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) (Parvini & Shyong, 2015). At the time, the young Asian teen was a junior at San Marino High School, which is an institution that is
widely known for student academic achievement. Parvini and Shyong (2015) reported, “In the class of 2014, 90 of 279 students surveyed had a GPA of 4.0 or higher, according to the school’s website. The class’ average SAT score was 1880 out of 2400” (para. 8). Parvini and Shyong (2015) also gathered students’ views on pressure to perform well, as well as their sensitivity to the presumption that Asian students are smart. Parvini and Shyong (2015) explained, “Most of the students are taking five AP classes, said Marina Hashimoto, who graduated from the school this year. The tests are hard. There’s a lot of Asians, and they’re all smart” (para. 9) …. “We don’t have time to relax’” (para. 14).

Asians are overrepresented within the overall population in certain categories, including families with high incomes, high educational attainment rates, and possession of professional occupations.

Chou and Feagin (2015) provided another example of an Asian American student who fulfilled all academic requirements, was her high school class’ valedictorian, and attended an Ivy League university. Characterized by friends and family as quiet, she demonstrated great ability in music and excellence in academic success. Unfortunately, she was unable to cope with her college program. Her mental illness went unrecognized and untreated, but it eventually surfaced; ultimately, she strangled her mother to death. This tragedy received minimal media coverage. An outsider’s perspective on Asian Americans often regards the whole population as one unit – this is a powerful form of discrimination.

Conceptual Framework

To understand the construct and structure of this study, and the uniqueness of Asian American women leaders, my conceptual framework is built from the Critical Race
Theory, which is the foundation of the Critical Race Feminism and the AsianCrit. Also, by adding another layer of how Asian American women form networks and support systems through mentorship drives the purpose of my research (see Figure 6), that is, through counter-narratives methods, the factors reveal different aspirations, motivations, challenges and success of Asian American women educational leaders experienced.

![Critical Race Theory Diagram](image)

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory began with a group of legal scholars whose goal was to eliminate racism and all forms of subordination in relation to race, ethnicity, gender and class differences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Delgado, Stefancic, and Harris (2017) isolated several important tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in 2017 with the intent to...
give voice to people of color in a system where racism is a norm that remains unchallenged within the dominant culture. According to Delgado et al. (2017),

After the first decade, critical race theory began to splinter and now includes a well-developed Asian American jurisprudence, a forceful Latino-critical (LatCrit) contingent, a feisty LGBT interest group, and now a Muslim and Arab caucus. Although the group continue to maintain good relations under the umbrella of critical race theory, each has developed its own body of literature and set of priorities. (p. 29)

The following core tenets in CRT contributed greatly to the birth of Critical Race Feminism (CRF) and AsianCrit by adding different perspectives toward specific group of minorities. The core tenets are closed related to the development of CRF and AsianCrit are: (a) Social Constructionism; (b) Racism as Normal; (c) Revisionist History; (d) Differential Racialization; (e) Interest Convergence; and (f) Anti-Essentialism. Each term is discussed as follows,

Social constructionism. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) explained that social construction does not define race through biology or genetics, but as “products of social thought and relations” (p. 8). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) further commented that there is no set of higher order genes, traits, personalities or intelligences possessed by certain racial or ethnic groups. Instead, societies have constructed these ideas to form orders and controls. As stated by Squire (2015),

Society and self are intertwined and affect each other through power domination and control; they are not separate. Social divisions and power imbalances exist
normally, and actors have conflicting and competing agendas as well as have agency to create. (p. 120)

**Racism as normal.** According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), “Racism is normal and often experienced by people of color. White privilege is ingrained into the fiber of our society make-up, thus it is difficult to “address or cure” (p. 8). Espiritu (2008) further echoed the concept of *ideology* that is defined by the *elite White men* as the foundation of certain perceptions and concepts that “brand subordinate groups as alternatively deviant, inferior, or overachieving- and, in so doing, naturalize and normalize sexism, racism, and poverty” (p. 14).

True equality is not ignoring difference but understanding that “Color-Blind or “formal” conception of equality… can only remedy the most blatant form of discrimination” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 8). As the founder of Critical Race theory, Du Bois once coined the term “double consciousness” in reference to looking purposefully at oneself through the lens of others (Bornstein, 2006).

**Revisionist history.** It is defined as a “view of history or an event that challenges the accepted one” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 172). History can be skewed based on the perspective of the dominant culture and racial group. The event and history should be viewed and re-analyzed through the CRT lens to find balance (Delgado, 2001). Asian American women and their contributions have been absent from our history. Hune and Nomura (2003) argued that scholars should take the perspective of Asian American women and their lives through their eyes. They stated, “A number of scholars have noted the limited scholarship on Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s history, and some have offered alternative proposals to address women’s absence and misrepresentation”
(Hune & Nomura, 2003, p. 4). Using a CRT tenet of revisionist history, Asian American women’s struggles, challenges, and contributions can then be seen and better understood.

**Differential racialization.** Delgado and Stefancic (2012) explained differential racialization is the process by which dominant society categorizes different racial groups according to different times and needs at the moment. Additionally, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) articulated that popular images and stereotypes of minority groups often shift over time based on the needs of the dominant race at any given time. American society once considered the Chinese “yellow perils” because they were only wanted as labor workers on the transcontinental railway. Once they were no longer needed, the federal government signed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, wherein Theodore Roosevelt sought to eliminate the number of Chinese people entering the country due to the fear of another ethnicity endangering American society (Chang, 2004; Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, n.d.).

**Interest convergence.** Interest convergence is where marginalized people and cultures are only as important as how much they can benefit the dominant race (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2016; Wing 1997).

**Anti-Essentialism.** The principle of Anti-Essentialism states that there is no single racial experience. The idea of intersectionality plays a key role in this core tenet. Intersectionality is “the belief that individuals and classes often have shared or overlapping interests or traits” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 165). For Asian Americans, racism is not one simple concept, but pertains to a system that involves multiple factors including class, gender, and sexual orientation. Intersectionality allows scholars to examine racism from various angles and perspectives, including time, place,
people, and environment (Museus, 2014; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) explained that a racial experience is a combination of multiple factors and attributes from a variety of people – not one person, one experience or one identity.

**Critical Race Feminism**

Critical Race Feminism (CRF) originally came out of Critical Race theory, having developed as a branch to address the legal needs for a particular group of people who are both racial/ethnic minorities and women – those disproportionally in the low social economic status of American society (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). Although both CRT and CRF originated from the field of legal studies, Ladson-Billings and Tate’s (1995)’s article “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education” revolutionized how CRT is usable as a means of understanding the inequality issues in the education system towards minority children. CRF and CRT have a commonality in their shared belief of racism as deep rooted in American society. Moreover, there are many ways to share experiences by using narratives and storytelling methods, but scholars who do not value perspectives and viewpoints outside of numbers and statistics often neglect them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

These commonalities can also describe Asian American women who suffer from microaggressions in their daily lives by adding different perspectives regarding the uniqueness of Asian American women’s intersectionality and cultural differences to CRT (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). A CRF perspective on Asian American women leaders highlights their often-marginalized voices, talents, and perspectives in the discussion of career advancement and other existing problems of gender and race inequalities in the American public-school system (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015).
Espiritu (2008) further elaborated the image of Asian American women under the Western culture of Whiteness. In the history of media portrays of Asian women, from the *Dragon Lady* to the *China Doll*, Espiritu (2008) stated, “Interchangeable in appearance and name, these women have no voice…. These stereotypes of Asian women as submissive and dainty sex objects have impeded women’s economic mobility…” (p. 107). Espiritu also stated that Asian women are viewed as “one-dimensional in Western representation” where their differences are condensed into type of “exotic others” which resulted in social injustice of different oppressions. Also, through this process, sexism and racism have blended together to achieve the “sexualization of white racism” (Espiritu, 2008, p. 105).

**Critical Race Theory Education**

CRT has benefits for students of color. Yosso et al. 2009 identified the following five tenets focusing on the experiences and education inequalities of students of color. In the field of education, it is often difficult to pinpoint and articulate during which phase of the teachers’ training, teachers were taught to challenge the misconceptions of the mainstream beliefs which would help them to build the awareness of the negative stereotypes and racist practices in the classrooms.

According to Taylor’s (2009) concept of CRT in education, CRT holds understanding to challenge assumptions,

CRT scholars believe that racial analysis can be used to deepen understanding of the educational barriers for people of color, as well as exploring how these barriers are resisted and overcome. CRT also focus on the intersectionality of subordination, including gender, class, and other forms of oppression.
Challenging Eurocentric epistemology and questioning dominant notions of meritocracy, objectivity and knowledge have particular application to the field of education, and offer a liberatory pedagogy that encourages inquiry, dialogue and participation from a wide variety of stakeholders. (p. 9)

CRT includes the concept of intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination which defines that race and racism is not the only factor that determine the experience people of color, but also includes other variables such as class and gender (Crenshaw, 1995). In the field of education, the set hierarchy of teacher and students as well as administrators and staff are often overlooked during discussions of racism.

The centrality of experiential knowledge is a tenet of CRT. The knowledge and experience of minority groups are valuable to analyze and understand oppression, discrimination and subordination (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The transdisciplinary perspective of CRT, such as the term “Weathering theory,” which came from Geronimus (2006) and indicates the negative impact of racism on the physical and mental health of black Americans.

Commitment to social justice is the concept of CRT, described in Matsuda’s 1987 article as “Looking to the Bottom,” people in power will abuse the laws to achieve the benefit. Scholars of CRT were facing challenge in “the development of new norms and new laws that will achieve and maintain their utopian vision” (Matsuda, 1987, p. 67). A new system is not going to come easily since bias and stereotypes are ingrained in American society, so CRT scholars will face struggle throughout the process to eradicate racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Matsuda, 1987). The challenge to dominant ideology
is the root of the theory in CRT, where scholars challenge how colorblindness and neutral
standpoints affect equal opportunity (Crenshaw, 1995).

These core tenets gave birth to a new branch of study that focuses on a particular
ethnic group whose experiences of racism and microaggression differ from other
minorities: AsianCrit. AsianCrit is another branch of CRT that Museus (2014) clarified,
“scholars take multiple approaches to applying critical race frameworks to the analysis of
Asian American experiences” (p. 22).

**AsianCrit**

The CRT lens has helped many scholars understand race, racism, and the
experiences of minorities, but some argue that there are needs that cannot be addressed
with CRT’s general concepts. Asian Americans are one of these groups of minorities that
suffer from racial oppression differently. The reason CRT and AsianCrit scholars
challenge the idea of race neutralism is due to the negative impact being far greater than
the positive. Gilens (1995) explained that race neutral strategy would not work with the
African American population simply because, “Poor blacks suffer not only from the
problems common to all poor people, but also from the burden of racial discrimination
and stereotyping” (p. 2). Asian Americans also suffer from discrimination, but most
people believe Asians are the “model” minority. One of the pioneer scholars of
AsianCrit, Chang (1993), pointed out, “Asians do face prejudice and discrimination and
do face significant barriers to equal opportunity in education and employment” (p. 1247).
The pseudo-image of Asians as doing far better than any other racial group is false (Pak
et al., 2014; Wilf & Ridley-Kerr, 2012). There is a deep-rooted belief that Whites
“allowed” minorities to thrive (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).
AsianCrit certainly does not replace the core values of CRT, but it adds a different layer of perspective to help scholars analyze the Asian American experience in a society that thinks they have *everything*. The following core tenets set the framework for AsianCrit (An, 2017; Chang, 1993; S. Museus, 2014):

(a) Asianization; (b) Transnational Context; (c) Reconstructive History; (d) Intersectionality; and (e) Story, Theory, Praxis.

**Asianization**

Asianization defines how society categorizes Asian Americans and how Asians are viewed as one group having the image of the model minority, hard workers, two-parent family with great emphasis on education and forming solid networks. In this paradigm, Asian women are supposed to be submissive and obedient, while Asian men are feminine and weak compared to their White counterparts (Bian et al. 2017; Ford, 1996). This lens has contributed substantially to legislation and policies that directly impact Asian Americans. The binary and polarized view of Asian Americans, from a model minority to the yellow peril, and gendered racialization of Asian American men as emasculated to hyper masculine have influenced and skewed the image of who Asian Americans really are.

**Transnational Context**

Transnational context is a concept to help understand the Asian experience. According to Brown (2014),

The growth in the Asian American population has been fueled primarily by immigration. Fully 74% of Asian adults in 2012 were foreign born according to Pew Research Center analysis of Census data…. California also has the largest
Asian population (6.1 million)…. California was also home to the largest numeric increase between 2012 and 2013, with a net increase of 142,000 Asians. (Brown, 2014, para. 6)

To understand Asian Americans requires understanding multiple cultures, backgrounds, languages, and experiences. To understand how racism shaped Asian American experiences is to understand the current economic, political, and social conditions within the U.S. The policies that first prohibited Asians to enter the United States and later allowed only highly educated Asian professionals changed the U.S. history and the country’s economic situation. Understanding the transnational concept will help scholars understand how Asian Americans have contributed greatly to economic policy, despite being only glazed over in U.S. history.

Reconstructive History

Reconstructive history concepts in AsianCrit are similar to CRT’s revisionist history of other groups. Conducting reconstructive history to properly reflect Asian American contributions to American history is the only means of building a stronger identity and consciousness for and about Asian Americans in the country.

Intersectionality

According to Brah and Phoenix (2004),

In particular recognition that “race,” social class and sexuality differentiated women’s experiences has disrupted notions of a homogeneous category “women” with its attendant assumptions of universality that served to maintain the status quo in relation to “race,” social class and sexuality, while challenging gendered assumption. (p. 254)
Asian American women experiences cannot be simplistically categorized as Asian American experiences or women experiences. Therefore, the concept of intersectionality impelled CRT scholars a new way of thinking about the complex identities of women of color, especially Asian American women.

**Story, Theory, Praxis**

CRT scholars often use methods such as stories to understand minorities, their realities, and experiences through storytelling (Yosso et al., 2009). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) explained, “Critical race theorists have built on everyday experiences with perspective, viewpoints, and the power of stories and persuasion to come to a deeper understanding of how Americans see race” (p. 44). Storytelling is perhaps the most human means of delivering messages, warning others, sharing ideas, building relationships, and establishing identities. History is a sequel of stories about people changing, adapting, and developing. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) also shared the example of legal storytellers such as Derrick Bell and Patricia William, who examined ancient documents, novels, diaries, and poems to shed light on the perspective of people of color. AsianCrit scholars center the voice of Asian Americans through stories and documents as a means of identifying and seeing into the “blind-spots” left by statistics, numbers, and the official record (An, 2017; Museus & Iftikar, 2013).

**Educational Leadership and Asian American Women Leaders**

In the 21st century, school leaders need more than just promoting curricular based knowledge, but also need to establish a safe and positive school environment, support district vision and implementations, balance school budget and school plans, encourage collaboration, adapt and embrace the shift in student learning in the new technological
era, and prepare students to become global citizens in the future. According to Brooks (2018), ten areas of leadership focus on different aspects of current school leadership. Those aspects include: political, economic, cultural, moral, pedagogical, informational, organizational, spiritual, temporal, health, and holistic leadership.

According to Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, and Ristikari (2011), “The characteristics that people commonly ascribe to women, men, and leaders contribute to the challenges that women face in obtaining leadership roles and performing well in them. Cultural stereotypes can make it seem that women do not have what it takes for important leadership roles” (p. 616). Asian American women’s culturally stereotype often pertain to a different image comparing to western views of leaders. As stated in Eagly and Karau (2002), “Although women have gained increased access to supervisory and middle management positions, they remain quite rare as elite leaders and top executives” (p. 573).

**Asian American Women Educational Leaders**

Liang and Peters-Hawkins’ (2017) findings indicated, Asian American women’s paths to leadership were to a large degree emergent and personal. The women embraced a lifetime mission as to make a difference on their students’ lives and uplift the social groups embodied in their identities. They struggled with gender, racial, ethnic, and cultural discrimination. (p. 40)

This statement illustrates the frustration of Asian American women who face their own unique barriers and struggles compared to women of other racial groups or Asian American men. Li (2013) also indicated, “The feminist movement presents a monolithic woman’s experience that is explained independent of race, class, sexual orientation, and
national origin. The agenda of the women’s rights movement has been shaped largely by white, middle-class women” (p. 147). Men continue to dominate the field of education, but Asian American women must conquer their current stereotypes (submissive and obedient), considering those stereotypes’ impact on their opportunities for leadership in a society where such assumptions are antithetical to leadership qualities. The general picture of being a women leader is difficult, sometimes disregarding their racial difference in order to blend in and to meet the expectations of being a leader in the society of Western culture. In Donaldson’s study (2006), the author stated,

Complicating the picture are issues of gender and overall administrative philosophy. Women leaders often find themselves advocating on behalf of their colleagues to a male principal or superintendent….These situations often place women leaders in unfamiliar and often hostile surroundings where they can find themselves arguing in pubic with their bosses. (p. 122-23)

This double bind perspective is also illustrated in Storberg-Walker and Haber-Curran (2017), where men use relationship to reinforce and build their hero-image while women leaders were facing the situation where they can neither benefit from the traditional Western cultural of the masculine image of leadership nor fulfill the idea of weak, ineffective, and subordinate expectations. Thus, it is important to offer a different perspective and pathway that encourages and invites a different thinking method about the meaning of leadership for these underrepresented Asian American female education leaders.

Labao (2017) further stressed, “If Asian American women are to be recruited, trained, and retained for school administration, then we must have a complete
understanding of the intersections of their racialized and gendered realities” (p. 5).

Understanding this group’s intersectionality as a minority battling critiques and resistance from traditional views of leaders in their professional lives can help others empathize with their perspectives as they suffer from oppression and injustice rooted in racial and gender-based discrimination (Li, 2013).

**Servant Leadership**

In 1970, Robert K. Greenleaf articulated the concept of servant leadership. The concept of *servant* and *leader* is a paradox where two systems do not seem to be compatible. As stated in Greenleaf (1991), the broad concept of servant leaders is those “who seek to involve others in decision making; one that is strongly based in ethical and caring behavior; and one that is attempting to enhance the personal growth of workers while at the same time improving the caring and quality of our many institutions” (p. 2).

The topic of servant leadership is significantly important for women leaders and the minority women leaders. Johanson (2008), also pointed out,

In contrast, most people would consider consideration behaviors to be feminine. These behaviors include showing concern for subordinates’ feelings, participation, satisfaction, and friendship. This suggests that the feminine aspects of leadership have been acknowledged for some time, but they have been commonly known as consideration behaviors. (p. 785)

The caring and nurturing qualities become the resistant forces for the servant leaders to stand up and lead. The study from Johanson (2008) further shared the findings in the research, “The results clearly demonstrate that the perceptions of the classic leadership components of consideration and structure correspond tightly with perceptions
of femininity and masculinity respectively” (p. 789). Iverson, Allan, and Gordon (2017) also echoed these qualities sometimes create “limited, conflicting and at times, unfavorable options” (p. 61).

Greenleaf (1991) stated, “The servant leader is servant-first…. It begins with nature feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (p. 6). Greenleaf (1991) also indicated that the natural servant leader wants to make sure that others’ needs are met by being a good listener, using his leap of imagination and fund of experiences to understand as well as the attitude of acceptance and empathy. Therefore, understand the importance and the mindset shift of the integration of gender and leadership among women is specifically significant for Asian American women leaders.

Building Capacity

Mentorship helps form future leaders by building learners’ capacity in that direction. Southern California has the highest Asian American student population. According to the U.S. Census (2016), California has 23% of the Asian American population under 18 years old (school age), but only 6% of teachers are Asian American. This figure not only fails to represent the demographics of the state of California but leaves the resources of this wealth of knowledge and rich culture diversity as mostly untapped, as indicated in Ramanathan’s study (2006) investigating the amount of impact Asian American teachers have on the curriculum. Ramanathan (2006) stated,

The result is that the voices of minority teachers have been silenced and many of them do not have a role as decision-makers beyond the everyday decisions that teachers make in the classroom... Asian Americans indicate a desire to assimilate
and to nullify their Asian roots. Their integration seems to depend on how mainstream they are, which argues for assimilation not accommodation. (p. 31)

In April, 2016, the U.S. Department of Education published *Stats in Brief* from the National Center for Education Statistics describing the trends of public and private school principal demographics. The study shows a noticeable increase in the number of female principals in public schools. As matter of fact, “During the 2011–12 school year, 54 % of new public-school principals were women” (Hill, Ottem, DeRoche, & International, 2016, p. 1). Unfortunately, Asian American principals belong to the “other” category – all together, Asian American principals were less than 2% of the total principal population in 2011-2012.

How do we build Asian American female principals’ capacity? There is no question that the majority of principals are drawn from the pool of teachers (Anderson, 2016). To teach students to be global citizens and understand the importance of diversity, the roles and responsibilities of educators have changed (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2009). Educators are responsible for teaching students to respect and appreciate others’ backgrounds and cultures (Myers, 2006).

Sanchez et al. (2009) stated,

Leadership that represents the cultural and ethnic groups that make up U.S. society is important for *all* students because the world students will join as adults is richly diverse. And minority principals can make unique contributions to students' levels of comfort, motivation, and achievement in schools with high populations of minorities. (para. 5)
Opportunity Gaps

What can we do? The more we understand the barriers facing Asian American women, the more we are able to isolate important factors that can inspire Asian American women’s leadership. According to studies published by Sanchez et al. (2009) and Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010), there are relatively few principals of color because of the following barriers:

(a) the pathway for minorities to graduate from high school; (b) the educational recruitment of minorities after graduating from college; (c) barriers within the education system such as biased testing or tracking systems; (d) the salary not matching the cost of living; (e) the leadership programs not addressing their influences about their own ethnic background; and (f) lacking an appropriate curriculum within leadership programs about diversity. (para 12)

In terms of the Asian American population, Asian American females have the highest college graduation rate among other minorities. Smith (2013) explained that, in 2012, Asian American women surpassed White women with a 49.4% of college graduation rate and earned 73% of their male counterparts’ wages. The first barrier mentioned does not fit this minority group due to Asian American females’ high graduation rate from college. The second and third barriers do not offer sufficient data to support the claims. There are clear problems with the statistics.

According to Boser (2014), “In California, 73% of students are nonwhite, but only about 29% of teachers are nonwhite” (para. 7). The percentage of minority teachers hired is unproportioned to the population of minority students in the state of California; also in general, women made less in salary than men in these jobs (“The Gender Wage
Gap by Occupation 2016; and by Race and Ethnicity,” n.d.). Even in the occupations that are dominated by women such as elementary and middle school teachers, registered nurses, and secretaries, women still earn less than men in equivalent positions. The last two barriers regarding leadership programs are more significant for Asian American women leaders than other minorities. In the case study of Morita-Mullaney and Greene (n.d.), it is easy to see the three Asian American educators’ frustration in differential treatments because of their ethnicities, background, language, and culture differences. The key findings show that there are preexisting notions of Asian Americans as smart, being uncomfortable receiving and giving praise, being eager to compete with self, exhibiting high loyalty to the mission of school district, and having somewhat honorary whiteness. Together, these notions all present another layer of barriers that other female minorities often do not face. Success, challenges and aspirations are my focus for investigating and parsing participant stories.

**Mentorship**

Mentorship is important for minority teachers (Mullen & Sarah J. Fletcher, 2012). The impact of a mentor was well discussed by (Sanchez et al., 2009) who stated, “Well-structured mentoring programs must be established in schools for minority teachers who want to pursue administrative positions and for new minority principals” (para. 22). The framework that benefits Asian American women leaders is the multiple mentoring framework, which, according to Burlew (1991) is similar to the Human Resource Development model of mentoring. This model trains, educates, and develops the skills, attitude, and knowledge necessary for career success. Hune, (1998) and Ronai, Zsembik, and Feagin (1997) suggested, “To develop a diverse faculty, higher education must adopt
a “pipeline approach,” whereby qualified students are admitted, mentored through doctoral programs, hired as faculty, and tenured and promoted” (p. 182). Over 20 years ago, Lee’s (1998) study also discussed mentoring and sponsoring frameworks; his findings indicated that mentors and role models play a vital role in women’s career advancement. Lee (1998) further indicated that “sponsorship by influential superiors is critical for women to gain access to opportunities, networks, and resources within the organization that are essential for advancement” (p. 18). Echoing Lee’s finding, Lockwood (2006) also discovered,

Female role models may be especially beneficial for women for a variety of reasons. Outstanding women can function as inspirational examples of success, illustrating the kinds of achievements that are possible for women around them. They demonstrate that it is possible to overcome traditional gender barriers, indicating to other women that high levels of success are indeed attainable. Female role models can also serve as proxies, guides to the potential accomplishments for which other women can strive. Finally, by demonstrating their competence in traditionally male occupations, highly successful women may undermine traditional gender stereotypes about women, thus reducing the damaging potential of stereotype threat effects. (p. 44)

Asian American women are not only treated as inferior because they are women, but because the media often portrays them as submissive, quiet, and obedient (Irey, 2013; Labao, 2017). These qualities are incongruent with Western societal ideas of leadership qualities and considering these are the ways many young Asian American girls are taught to behave, Asian American women are not common school leaders in the American
public-school system (Labao, 2017). Mentorship has been a critical component for developing and empowering the aspirations of Asian American women administrators (Hu, 2008). I focused on the operationalizing phases of mentoring relationships to understand how Asian American women leaders benefit from establishing mentor-mentee relationships. Schunk and Mullen (2013) pointed out that the phases of a mentoring relationship are initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. Professional development in mentoring is also an important indicator for linking aspirations of becoming future leaders. The mentoring framework indicates, “If these phases could be described qualitatively and defined behaviorally, they would provide a tangible platform for investigating related variables” (Mullen & Fletcher, 2012 p. 90).

Stereotypic views of Asian American women and western views on leaders are incongruent. As indicated by Liang and Peters-Hawkins (2017),

The limited studies on Asian American women in educational leadership suggest that, besides confronting challenges associated with gender, Asian American women leaders face the sociocultural barriers commonly shared by other minority women, such as racial and sex discrimination, tokenism, lack of role models, and lack of access to networks. (p. 53)

Mentorship helps overcome barriers by providing a positive impact on Asian American women. Bower (2012) explained that, in sports, women who advance to leadership positions agree that mentoring had a positive impact on them and their advancement. Bower (2012) pointed out that mentorship is a type of relationship that occurs when a senior employee preforms career-related functions such as coaching, protection, and
guidance, as well as “psychological functions” such as consulting, counseling, and role modeling in educating a junior employee. This typically involves showing acceptance and confirmation of tasks. A recent study described mentorship as sponsorship mentoring and developmental mentoring, where, according to Clutterbuck (2008), sponsorship mentoring is when the mentor has the power and decision making right as the driving force of the relationship. On the other hand, developmental mentoring is more of a mutual relationship where the mentor is guiding the protégé and focusing on the process of the protégé’s learning; the goal is generally aimed at generating the ability of mentees to stand alone and do things for themselves.

Coaching is like mentoring, but the main function of a coach is to lead the way and know how to solve problems. Mentors mostly help mentees to think for themselves without the mentors providing answers or fixing problems (Clutterbuck, 2008; Fletcher, 2012). Clutterbuck (2008) explained, “Coaching in most applications addresses performance in some aspect of an individual’s work or life; while mentoring is more often associated with much broader, holistic development and with career progress” (p. 9). The importance of mentoring for Asian American women leaders is immense, because it provides a one-to-one relationship that engages learning and networking. Fletcher (2012) also added, “Research, policy, and practice have focused on how leaders are prepared to engage in school reform and transformation. Among the more popular forms for the preparation and professional development of school leaders are mentoring and coaching” (p. 228).
My study therefore sought to fill the gap between understanding existing mentorship and training for Asian American women leaders and what more can be done to inspire them to pursue administrative positions in education.

Summary

The theoretical frameworks described here work together to explain how Asian American women struggle in attaining educational leadership roles. Without using CRT, it is difficult to recognize that such norms are unfair; moreover, victims often internalize racist attitudes and agree with the perpetrators. In cases of racism, victims sometimes absorb the doctrine of essential inferiority compared to white people and white culture. Although critics charge that the CRT research base incorporates simple stories rather than real data, they ignore the fact that storytelling is a powerful way to understand racism and sexism through victims’ perspectives and through an overall holistic viewpoint (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

In the following chapters, I employed the counter-narratives method, which was derived from Solórzano and Yosso (2002) who define it as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” (p. 26). It helped understand, expose, analyze, and challenge deeply-entrenched narratives and characterizations of racial privilege, gender, class, and sexual orientation (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that contributed to the success, challenges, and aspirations of Asian American women in their path of pursuing administrative roles in public schools, to view the subject of racism from their perspective as well as to understand the stereotypes they struggle with every day (Yee & Kuo, 2000). Chou and Feagin (2015) declared, “In everyday life, Asian Americans are still seen by a majority of whites as inferior in certain significant ways to whites, and thus frequently as appropriate targets for racial hostility and discrimination” (p. 215). Chou and Feagin (2015) presented the way one of the interviewees described her experiences as an Asian American woman and the related struggles. She stated,

If you don’t tell people you are a Jew, people cannot tell you are a Jew. You can pass. You can get by, and then when you get by, you get to the place where you can make policy. You will change it, and we cannot even do that! With this face? With these eyes? This nose? This cheekbone? (p. 219).

Chou and Feagin (2015) used interviews to offer compelling anecdotal evidence and demonstrate the tremendous impact of racism faced by Asian Americans. Additionally, their study rejected the idea that Asian Americans must discard their Asian culture in order to attain success in white-dominated institutions, which included educational leadership forums (Chou & Feagin, 2015). Furthermore, Chou and Feagin (2015) contend that Asian Americans are positioned in such a lose–lose circumstance that they either have to be compliant and present the “model minority” status academically and economically or risk being classified as “forever foreigners or geeks.”
This study sought to understand the position of Asian American women administrators by documenting and reflecting on their stories. In a stricter sense, I focused my study on the public-school sector and explored the uniqueness and intersectionality that Asian American women educational administrators meet. More specifically, I focused on issues of race, class, and gender, especially among the women who occupied or were trying to obtain leadership roles. Use of a narrative research design and storytelling methods that are typically sensitive to people’s experiences and perspectives facilitated forming a better understanding of the complexity of roles of Asian American women administrators in the educational setting, as well as securing a greater insight into their social struggle.

Employing critical race feminism and AsianCrit as my frameworks, I designed a qualitative narrative that involved eight Asian American women administrators who are currently working for public schools in Southern California with high Asian American student enrollment.

The following were the research questions in this study:

1. What success and challenges did the eight successful Asian American women claim to have experienced in their pursuit of administrative leadership positions as principals and assistant principals in public schools?

2. How did intersectionality, including their race, gender, and class differences, contribute to their views of being a leader?

3. What forms of training and mentoring activities did these Asian American women undergo, if any?
4. What were the primary characteristics in mentors that benefited their career advancement and aspirations, as identified by the participants?

**Rationale for Selection of the Method**

The study employed a counter-storytelling strategy to gain an understanding of eight Asian American women and the way in which they perceived their success and challenges in their pursuit and attainment of leadership positions in public schools.

According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002),

Majoritarian stories are not just stories of racial privilege, they are also stories of gender, class, and other forms of privilege. As such, they are stories that carry layers of assumptions that persons in positions of racialized privilege bring with them to discussions of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination. In other words, a majoritarian story is one that privileges Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference. (p. 22)

People of color are often presented with the “majoritarian” lines that places blame on themselves due to their race. Counter-storytelling challenges the norm by claiming it to be simply the view of the majority which has not undergone any questioning. Questioning unveils the motives and concealed persuasion that skews the views of others. Solórzano also pointed out that “…majoritarian stories are not often questioned because people do not see them as stories but as “natural” parts of everyday life” (p. 28). Using the counter-storytelling method, I uncovered the hidden beauty of each participant’s experience and investigated the aspects that may appear contradictory to popular beliefs.
of what Asian American women truly are. Aside from the hardworking, education-orientated, high-achieving attitudes attributed to Asian Americans, there is a lot more to them. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) emphasized that “it is important to recognize the power of White privilege in constructing stories about race.” (p. 29)

**Setting**

The criteria for the selection of participants for this study were straightforward: only full-time Asian American women administrators who worked in K-12 public schools could participate. Using snowball sampling and personal networks, the participants were recruited, and they recommended additional Asian American women administrator candidates for participation. As stated in Marshall (2016), “Snowball sampling by seeking interviews with people suggested from the first interview” (p. 115) was utilized. This method aided in determining information-rich cases, while enabling me to build trusting relationships and subsequently tackle sensitive questions that involved issues of race, class, and gender. Such a relationship helped ease the transition into sometimes difficult-to-discuss subjects.

The setting involved three in-depth, face-to-face interviews with the participants. These women generally also held leadership roles in addition to being administrators, including the positions of principals and assistant principals. Each interview lasted one hour approximately.

Sites were selected on the basis of the locations of the Southern California school districts, from data that was discoverable through public school records available online through the California education dashboard. Hu (2008) found that having Asian
American academic leaders as role models in the school environment has a direct positive impact on Asian American-students. The criteria of selection for this study and the associated results acknowledge the hidden value of the full participation of Asian American women leaders in being beneficial for Asian American students, while identifying the possible disadvantages that their absence might bring about for such students.

**Data Collection**

The researcher collected data through multiple interviews, all of which were audio-recorded. The interviews were semi-structured, with specific open-ended questions that facilitated a greater in-depth investigation and discovery of issues pertaining to the relative lack of Asian American women administrators in the public school system. Participants’ own words were used to explain their attitudes, motivations, and ideas and the participants were observed during the course of their habitual routines in order to understand the way they interact with others in order to better clarify the misconceptions related to Asian American women leaders.

**Data Analysis**

According to Wengraf (2001), semi-structured interviews contain questions that are prepared prior to the interview process; however, the questions are open, which leaves room for the researcher to improvise subsequent questions in a careful, well-thought-out manner. Using the snowball sampling method, I identified eight participants for interviews with questions that were designed in a thoughtful and structured way. The intention was to encourage participants to tell their stories regarding the way they attained their leadership positions, ultimately sharing their success and challenges.
throughout the process. After the interviews, I went through the process of identifying the four basic elements of the narrative analysis method: codes, categories, patterns and themes (Kim, 2016, p. 187). First, the audio-recordings of interview responses and participant discourse were transcribed into written dialogue for coding.

**Coding Process**

The transcription was followed by the data analysis process, as indicated in Mick and Tisdell (2015). The process began with the construction of categories following reading the transcripts, observation notes, and documents. Subsequently, it was necessary to assign codes to the notes and comments (known as open coding) before relating these open codes with each other (Strass & Corbin, 2015) through developed meanings and reflections, grouping them together in the form of axial codes. The next step was to identify emerging themes by grouping similar, repeating concepts into categories that ideally answer the questions posed by this study and its objective. The coding process ended after the researcher ensured the data was exhaustive, exclusive, sensitizing, and conceptually congruent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

**Provisions of Trustworthiness**

The study assigned its participants pseudonyms in order to protect their identities, which ensured the complete confidentiality of them and their information. All audio and video recordings as well as transcriptions of different participants’ conversations were stored under locked conditions. In addition, the study provided each interviewee with the opportunity to check the written transcripts for inaccuracies and review their statements, thereby promoting the trustworthiness and integrity of the data.
**Role of the Researcher**

My role as the researcher was to provide a judgment-free environment for the participants to recount their stories. Moreover, I conducted the interviews three times in order to promote a sense of openness and ensure the validity of the data. As an Asian immigrant and American educator in the public-school system, the journey I have undertaken would itself be a form of this study. As explained by Merriam and Tisdell (2015),

...participants in studies of marginalized groups (by race, gender, class, sexual orientation) are often suspicious of those who are members of the dominant culture doing research on people of oppressed groups. . . The point of critical research is generally to do research with people, not on people. (p. 64)

**Researcher’s Positionality**

Being an educator for the past 17 years, I have encountered many female students who not only look like me but also constantly engage in self-doubt and remain confused about their position in the American society. I know their concern, as I have experienced it myself. I once considered myself a woman without a country. I grew up in Taiwan and experienced a high of level of competitiveness throughout the K-12 education process. During the my early stages of my life, Taiwanese society ensured that I was trained to be quiet, follow directions, obey elders and teachers, and be generally agreeable. My parents told me that obtaining good grades was my job, as that was what I did all day. Of course, I told myself that I should simply put my entire being into this one simple task they gave me. During my high school years, we dressed in uniforms, and all the girls had the same haircut. Blending in was highly encouraged by the majority of authority figures in my life.
and formed a part of my everyday interactions. Gao (2003) described the early history of women in China as follows,

Women were victims of discrimination from the very moment of their births.
Because of this, an infant girl, especially in a poor family faced with desperate financial difficulties, could be smothered to death at birth or sold at a very early age. If they were fortunate enough to live, girls would experience a different process of upbringing from boys. (p. 119)

Although my parents ensured that my education was no different than the one my brother received, they stressed the fact that our future responsibilities would be different due to our genders. Being obedient and having no opinions of my own were characteristics that my parents and instructors taught me and praised me for; however, these socially engrained features swiftly turned into obstacles in the path of my pursuit of leadership roles in my adult life in the United States. Western society, historically, requires its leaders to be assertive, innovative, aggressive, and persistent. I hope my study can illuminate a path for immigrant girls or the girls that have immigrant parents with different perspectives on women leaders; I want them to believe in themselves and know that women can lead and create a difference.

Summary

This chapter addressed the manner in which the counter-storytelling method of critical race theory can help understand the success, challenges, and aspirations of Asian American women educators in obtaining administrative positions in the K-12 education system. Coding interview transcripts and stories challenged the majoritarian idea of Asian American women stereotypes, microaggressions, racism, along with other forms of
subordination, in order to highlight the aspirations that can motivate future Asian American women educators in K-12 public schools. In emphasizing the importance of counter-storytelling for the minority, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) pointed out, “…a critical race methodology provides a tool to ‘counter’ deficit storytelling. Specifically, a critical race methodology offers space to conduct and present research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of people of color” (p. 23). Chapter 4 discusses the findings.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that impact Asian American female school leaders who are underrepresented in the American K-12 public school system. My purpose was to understand the success, challenges and aspirations on the path to obtaining administrative positions. My other purpose was to provide a different perspective on Asian American women’s experiences in mentoring while on the path of career advancement in administration positions. The hope was that my study results will assist in establishing a diverse leadership platform for all future Asian American female educators in the K-12 educational system.

The data were obtained from a series of in-depth interviews of eight public school administrators in Southern California who agreed to participate in this research study. Counter narratives inquiry was the method used in order to highlight the significant differences and to share their experiences of this group of minority women administrators that may have seldom heard in the field of education leadership. Bamberg and Andrews (2004) stated that the main questions of counter narrative is to understand “what is the source of identity claims that resist dominant discourses, and how can such claims be recognized as well as how are these claims put to use?” (p. 362). Followed by the four research questions, participants were able to share their success, challenges, and aspirations that are often different from the general stereotypical ideas of what Asian American women leaders experienced.
The main research questions were:

1. What success, challenges, and aspirations do Asian American women say they experienced while pursuing administrative leadership positions as principals and assistant principals at public schools?

2. How did their intersectionality, such as race, gender and class differences, contribute to their views of being a leader?

3. What forms of training and mentoring activities did these Asian American women receive, if any?

4. What are the primary characteristics of mentors that benefited their career advancement and aspirations as identified by the participants?

Description of the Participants

All participants identified themselves as Asian American women who are currently working as principals or assistant principals in K-12 public school system in Southern California. Each participant entered this profession for varying reasons, but they all considered themselves as highly qualified educators. Some have multiple advanced degrees, and many have more than one credential (see Table 1).
Table 1: The Demographics of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Country of Birth</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years Working as Administrator</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
<th>Advanced Degree Obtained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nova</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Korean American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>High School Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>Swahili</td>
<td>Indian American</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Middle School Principal</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Korean American</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>K-8 School Principal</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lana</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Chinese American</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>High School Principal</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sayda</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Korean American</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>K-8 School Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jin</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Korean American</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>High School Principal</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakari</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Japanese American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>K-8 School Principal</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mei</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Chinese American</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>K-8 School Principal</td>
<td>Master</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overview of Participants

In this study, all eight participants identified themselves as Asian American women. A snow ball sampling method was conducted to identify participants for this study. Although the Asian population in California makes up 13% of the overall population, finding public school principals and assistant principals who identified themselves as Asian American women proved to be a difficult task. All participants in the study currently serve as public school administrators. They have served an average of nine years as public-school education leaders. Four participants were immigrants from other countries, and four participants were born in the U.S. Five have doctoral degrees and three have master’s degree. All participants started working in the educational field as teachers. None of them transitioned from teaching to their current position directly. Three identified themselves as Korean Americans, two as Chinese Americans, and the
remaining three as Japanese American, Indian American, and Korean Chinese American. All participants mentioned in their stories a lack of desire for being school leaders in various degrees. All participants discussed that the power of encouragement and infrastructure of professional and family support were their source of motivation. However, all but one participant received a formal mentoring process. Six participants indicated that they had not thought about advancing into leadership positions and were fine staying as classroom teachers. All participants shared that their focus and motivation to continue working as site administrators came from students and the desire to increase student achievement. The majority of the participants also indicated that they believe the purpose of leaders is to not be the ones standing in the spot light but people who facilitate teams and rally all members to move towards the common goal and vision.

The Counter-Narratives

The sample of Asian American women leaders is powerful in this study, and many unique character traits exhibited among these minority female leaders are very different from the general stereotypical view of Asian American women. Six participants could converse using another language. Even though some of them came to the U.S. at a very young age or were born and raised in the U.S., they still maintain the ability to communicate in their heritage languages.

According to Rosette et al. (2016), “the stereotypes of Asian American women as competent and hard-working, but passive and aloof” (p. 438). In this study, all participants took on various quasi-administrative positions and volunteer work for school events while working as teachers. Against the contrary view of being submissive or oppressive, they all showed courage to conquer their fear of being under the spot light.
and were able to fulfill the obligations bestowed upon their shoulders. All participants shared their experience of success from establishing a strong network and support from people and mentors. They all demonstrated strategies to balance family and school obligations, thus, altering the view about women as supposed to put their careers on hold in order to fulfill motherhood responsibilities.

**Background: Assimilation v. Acculturation**

Dr. Nova was a 23 year old immigrant from South Korea who attended college in the U.S. When she was little, she discovered the existence of “other” countries by first receiving an American flag from her uncle. Thus, the desire of moving to the “best country,” according to her father, was on her mind since her childhood. She first attended a junior college in central California then completed her master’s degree and later her doctorate in learning technology.

Mrs. Jin was born in South Korea. When she was 9 years old, the family migrated to Germany. At the time, even though Mrs. Jin’s parents were given the opportunities to apply for citizenship in Germany, they thought will forever be considered as the “foreigners” which blocked certain types of career opportunities. Therefore, during Ms. Jin’s senior year of high school, the family relocated again to Canada, then eventually resided in the U.S. Mrs. Jin attended California State University, Northridge and majored in English. Mrs. Jin explained her choice of college major came from her father’s advice. She said, “My husband said people like you should not really go into English, but my father told me that if I plan to live in the U.S., I should really learn English.” Therefore, she became the only Asian women in a class of 50 students who majored in English, and she felt “like a sore thumb.” The professor didn’t need to take attendance to know if she
was present or not. She explained, “I think no matter how long I lived in the U.S., I will always be considered like not part of the American culture, never fully as an American.”

Dr. Carmen was an Indian immigrant from East Africa forty-eight years ago. She came to the U.S. as a young child in Northern California from Tanzania in East Africa, where there was very small Indian population. In her town at Tanzania, she remembered the place was not racially divided. She was the third generation who had migrated to Tanzania, and they were living in a relatively comfortable environment with servants. Her mother worked for the American embassy and her father worked for a car company which later offered them the opportunity to migrate to the U.S.

Dr. Emma was a young immigrant to the U.S. from Korea. She came to the U.S. Her father gained the U.S. resident status first and moved to Southern California. After a year of working multiple jobs to earn enough money to apply for his wife and his daughter to migrate, Dr. Emma grew up in a community where many residents had similar background. Therefore, her first language in her formative years was not English. She recalled, “I grew up speaking Korean and knowing more about my heritage. So, I frequented Korea as a young child.” However, she expressed that she also has a lot of pride for being an American, so she identifies herself as both, Korean and American.

Dr. Lana was a young immigrant from Canada in the age of 14. She was born and raised in a small town on the western end of Ontario. When she was a sophomore in high school, her family decided to relocate to Southern California. Although this move was needed for her father’s career change, Dr. Lana was not happy with this decision. She recalled when she was in the Canadian school system, all public schools were similar to each other. However, when she moved to Los Angeles, her parents were recommended
by her family members to enroll Dr. Lana into a better school district. Dr. Lana shared her schooling experiences in Canada. She said:

In Canada, my parents put me in a French immersion school, so I was the only Asian in my entire school. In the Canadian school system, the science and math were integrated from the beginning, so when I entered the U.S. school system, they put me in the 9th grade math and science where I was bored out of my mind, and my peers were indirectly letting me know that I was behind. Now when I look back, I understand that it was not because I was lacking skills, but they didn’t know what to do with me.

Through understanding their backgrounds, each of them faced different type of obstacles assimilating into the Western culture of Whiteness. The other four participants who were born and raised in the U.S. also encountered the “culture shock” of feeling the sense of isolation and being different.

Mrs. Mei was born and raised in Southern California. Her parents were both immigrants from mainland China. Mrs. Mei’s mother escaped during Japan’s invasion and left everything behind and her father also immigrated during his teen, and was drafted for the Korean War during his young adulthood. In Mrs. Mei’s formative years, she was the only Asian student in her school. Mrs. Mei described her experiences of being the only Asian student in Kindergarten that made a huge impact of her life.

I had a really tough time in kindergarten. I often got a “sad face” on my kindergarten report card in social interaction because I didn’t want to play with others, and there came to a point where I didn’t say a word in the classroom. I honestly believe that people thought I didn’t speak English whereas English is my
only language. I don’t know Chinese. I don’t understand it. I don’t speak it. I was a selective mute.

Dr. Sakari is a Japanese American who was born and raised in Southern California. According to Dr. Sakari, there was not a large Asian population in her neighborhood forty years ago, so she can definitely relate to being the minority student in her school. That was also the very first time, she realized that she was different from the teasing of a group of Caucasian students. She recalled that experience,

I think my earlier memory of racism was like when I was in the first or second grade, I was walking down the hallways at the school and some older kids turned around and made a slanted eye face and also made Ching Chong sounds. I thought it was rude and thought to myself that I am not even Chinese. But that was my first recollection being different than others….. When I was growing up in the predominant White community, I knew I was different in the way I looked, and how my home life was compared to my peers. I spoke a different language at home, and I ate different foods at home. I think that’s why I was most comfortable with my closest friends who identified themselves as Asian Americans. Although the friends I met in the community center went to different schools and grew up in different cities, I felt close to the people that were the same race, the same background as me…..In my Japanese School, I was really comfortable, because I had friends who were similar, and I would relate to them on different levels.

Mrs. Sayda was born and raised in the U.S. Her father is half Korean and half Chinese, and her mother is full Korean. Mrs. Sayda has only been to Korea once in a
young age. She was born and raised in Orange, California. According to Mrs. Sayda, she was the only Asian in her elementary school. She shared her experience of being the minority.

I grew up in Orange California. I was literally the only Asian in the whole school in elementary. When I was growing up, I didn’t think of myself as an Asian, because I grew up with Whites and Hispanics, so I associated myself with them more than Asians. I didn’t identify myself as an Asian until I reached junior high school.

She experienced a culture shock, when she went to a high school where there were more than 60% of Asian student population. She shared,

In high school, there were so many Koreans. I actually had a culture shock from going to that high school. I had people bowing to me and calling me with a certain [respectful] title for being older than them. I was very shocked, and that’s when I realized how much I didn’t know about the Korean culture. It was like finding your own identity. I actually embraced a lot more about being Asian after getting out of high school.

Mrs. Sayda’s culture shock in her high school age actually caused her to move to Texas for a year. Her candid story really showed a different side of a stereotypic Asian American.

I got in trouble in high school. Because of that culture shock, there was a lot of me not sure who I was. I did go to school everyday, but I also came home at 6 a.m. in the morning everyday, too. So right after school, I went out with friends, and I took my mom’s car and came home in the morning, took a shower and went
to school again. I was trying to fit in with the new culture. It was a brand-new
culture for me the whole Asian/Korean culture. At the time, it was all about that
in my high school. I knew that I wanted to grow up helping kids. So, I thought I
could be a pediatrician, but because I got into so much trouble in high school. I
got shipped off to Texas for a year. My grades were not the best, so it was not
going to get me into a medical school. However, I thought I could still work with
kids, so I ended up in teaching. At that time, Cal State colleges accepted with a lot
less requirements than nowadays, so I got into teaching. I got to find the path that
was not going to be as stringent.

Among my participants, Mrs. Sayda is the only one who didn’t identify herself as
an Asian American until the age of 12 even when her mom worked as an Associate
Pastor in a church where many participants were Koreans. She recalled, “I didn’t really
associate myself with anybody. I didn’t think I was an Asian overall at that time.”

In a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions, each participant was
asked to identify her racial identity. All eight women identified themselves as Asian
American with different ethnic groups indicated as: Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and
Indian.

All participants started their educational career as teachers. Three of them took
the TOSA (Teacher on Special Assignment) or coach positions as their first entrance
point as quasi-administrators; one moved onto the program specialist position in the
district; four applied for assistant principal positions prior to their principalship.

After obtaining her teaching credential after graduating from college, Dr. Emma
worked as a kindergarten, second grade, and fourth grade teacher for 6 years. However,
when the layoff waves hit her school district, she was pink-slipped. One of her supervisors encouraged her to apply for the liaison district position and working as a teacher on special assignment (TOSA). For a year, Dr. Emma worked within her school district planning professional development projects and school wide literacy balancing projects, but she realized that she missed her classroom and her students. She shared her thoughts with her superior, “After a year, I really want to go back to the classroom. I missed being with the kids….I might come back one day to the district level, but I want more experiences with the kids.” She went back to a school that was less affluent than the school she worked before, but she welcomed the challenges. She was later recruited by her previous supervisor as a program specialist for two years.

Being a TOSA was Dr. Sakari’s first quasi-administrative position where she helped other teachers to brainstorm instructional strategies and learn how to support English language learners. She moved from a low performing school to an affluent school where she needed to face a different type of student challenges that she didn’t experience before.

Dr. Nova began to teach English and social studies in a high school in the year of 2002 and later stepped up as a technology coach in 2015. Dr. Nova was encouraged to become a school administrator by her superior, and she worked as an assistant dean in the dean’s office for a year. However, she didn’t want to be boxed in a set path. Rather, she preferred to gain some portable experiences by getting her doctorate in learning technology instead of educational leadership. She stated, “I didn’t want to be sort of cookie cutter administrator, so I wanted something that is different and diversified in a way that I could be a professor if I wanted to.” She further stressed the importance of
being different than everyone else by gaining her doctoral degree in learning technology in that one day if she ever serves as a superintendent, she doesn’t want to be a person whose knowledge is so narrow that she needs to rely on other people.

**Analysis of the Counter-Narratives**

The finding’s analysis will be presented and organized in the ten emergent themes of these Asian American females’ journeys towards obtaining their administrative role in education through each research question. The themes that emerged were: 1) Family expectations and views on education; 2) A strong sense of responsibility and obligation toward the leadership role; 3) Strong work ethic and professionalism; 4) Self-doubts; 5) Asian values/mentality; 6) Servant leadership style 7) Gender inequality 8) Establishing networks and relationships; 9) Professional traits of mentors; and 10) Interpersonal functions.

**Research Question One: Success, Challenges, Aspirations**

Many would think that the traditional views of the success of many Asian Americans are their ability to excel in the world of academia and to climb the ladder of social status. Although some participants in the study did express their desire to be promoted and becoming a program director or a superintendent of a district, their perspectives of success were quite different than the degrees and the titles they held. First, they believed that education is an important tool and a vehicle to move people out of their current socioeconomic status, but the success in their views as school leaders was determined by the success of their colleagues, staff, faculty, and students. They all considered themselves as lifelong learners, therefore, they were willingly seeking knowledge by going back to school to obtain a higher degree while embracing the heavy
responsibilities as school leaders. Secondly, their challenges as Asian American female leaders were the constant judgmental views of Asian American and women leaders which also included their inner critics about their own ability, competency, and confidence. Lastly, during the difficult times, these Asian American women leaders shared that they were inspired by being proud of who they are, how they are as leaders, and their abilities to see and accept different perspectives (see Table 2).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Success</strong></td>
<td>High advanced degrees obtained</td>
<td><strong>Family expectations</strong> and views on education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life-long learner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family first</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diverse experiences in leadership positions</td>
<td><strong>Strong sense of responsibility and obligations towards the leadership role</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Embracing challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strive to be the best</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students first</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desire to make a difference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges</strong></td>
<td>Constantly proving oneself</td>
<td><strong>Strong work ethic and professionalism</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blend in/Being overlooked</td>
<td><strong>Self-doubts</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of representation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling different than others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aspirations</strong></td>
<td>The ideal of American dream</td>
<td><strong>Asian values/mentality</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proving people wrong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bring different perspectives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on support and serving staff, community, and students</td>
<td><strong>Servant leadership style</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Success

Theme 1: Family Expectations and Views on Education: “It’s not an option! It’s a must!”

Although each participant’s story is unique, family’s view on education was a common thread that was woven through each participant’s journey. This value was also strongly encouraged and emphasized at a young age through adulthood, regardless of them being born and raised in the U.S. or another country. Mrs. Jin shared, “In my family, it was the perception that one needed a degree from a prestigious college to open the gate of success…. Education was not an option. It was a must. It was a mandatory expectation to pursue education.”

Half of the participants indicated that they were encouraged to choose education as their future career. The influence came from their youth experiences at school with a great teacher as their mentor or as a path out of their current situations. Dr. Emma said, “I’ve always wanted to be an education since I was a child. I was a Bible study teacher at my church and babysitter for all of my mom’s friends.” The thought of being a teacher was reinforced as she entered elementary school where teachers had a positive impact on increasing her confidence. The impact of a teacher shaped her view on how she could also influence others.

This unwritten statement about a respectful career, like teaching, was also illustrated in Dr. Carmen’s words, as she described education. She added,

My mother always told me that the best gift that anybody could ever have is the ability to teach, because they contribute so much to the society. Thus, I also want to do the best I can contribute to the society…. I’m in education for a reason. I could
have done a lot of different things, but it’s always been my passion since I was 17. I
knew I wanted to do something in education…. I think teaching for me was really
fulfilling, because I was affecting students in a positive way and giving them the
ability to see the potential they have in themselves. Whatever I do, I do it for
students…. My father was happy after I became an administrator, because old
school like him, climbing the ladder also means being successful. To me, my
success came from what I’m doing here, affecting more people, more kids.

Dr. Sakari also indicated that her family emphasized education in the hope for a
better life. She stated, “My family didn’t have the money, but they taught me the
importance of education which is the way to get people out of their socioeconomic level.”
She believes in education and credited her parents and her culture for instilling the
importance of education in her when she was young. She shared, “My parents didn’t
pressure us in anyway except for always instilling in us the importance of education.
They told us that education will get you far. It will get you somewhere.”

Five participants had obtained a doctorate degree and one had a double master’s
degree. All participants possessed more than one credential, while one had more than
three teaching credentials. Their success in obtaining leadership positions was also
viewed by their family as climbing the ladder. With a heavy emphasis on education as
part of the core value in these Asian American women, the sense of accomplishment also
came from reaching the highest degree in education. Dr. Lana elaborated, “It was not that
I wanted to be an administrator, but I knew that I had to get my master’s degree because
that was like an unwritten expectation in my family.” She also shared,
In my family, everybody gets their master’s degrees. It is almost like that you take 12th grade after you completed 11th grade. At that time, educational administration was really the only master’s degree offered. In my family, I have many cousins who are engineers, doctors, and there is me. My parents have never been pushy. They just told me to find a path that I will be happy and can support me.

Dr. Lana also pointed out, “For me, once I got my master’s degree, I realized that I worked really hard for this, so it would be ashamed not ever to use it.” Her own hard-working manner pushed her to move forward in her career path. She also stressed the fact that she is a lifelong learner at heart.” Mrs Mei’s journey to an administrative position was largely influenced by her parents who didn’t see the position as valuable or even equivalent to a medical doctor. She expressed this thought, “I went to get my second master’s degree and that was in educational leadership, and my mom just said, “Why are you going to school so much?” That was not what I expected. She told me, “You’re going to neglect and lose your family, because you are going to school so much.”

Dr. Emma also said,

My mother was an immigrant who didn’t speak the language and worked every day except one day a month. They had to do what they could do to survive. I think her experience impacted and influenced her hopes and dreams for me and my brother. She was always heart broken that she didn’t get to spend as much time with us, and she didn’t get to come to all of the events. She came to what she could. My parents’ perspectives and supporting me to become an educator was probably for the purpose of salary and having a flexible schedule. They were very
supportive, but that was not the reason I chose education. I just love working with
the kids, and I knew the impact a teacher on her students.

The negative impact, however, for these advanced degrees, top of the chain,
female school leaders, was when they were compared to other family members who were
“better.” Dr. Lana expressed with a bit of a shameful tone in her words, “In my family, I
have many cousins who are engineers, doctors, and there is me.” Similarly, Mrs. Mei
said, “My older brother is a neurosurgeon and my parents emphasize him a little more
than the rest of us in terms of career…. After I got the principal position, she [my mom]
will tell the next person that my daughter is a principal, now. She didn’t say that when I
was an assistant principal.” The pressure of being the best in academia causes different
effects on different participants, but one thing is for sure that the importance of education
is ingrained in these outstanding women’s fiber.

Theme 2: A Strong Sense of Responsibility and Obligation Toward Leadership
Role: “My School; My Community; My Students”

Each participant may have had a different desire in pursuing further leadership
position, but all of them shared the similarity in terms of carrying a heavy responsibility
and obligations on their shoulders to be the best they could be for their schools, students,
and community. In their stories, they talked about transforming schools, establishing a
positive learning environment, being the positive impact for students, and simultaneously
striving to be the best in order to prove to others that they could. The concept of “my
community, my school, and my students” was one of the repeating themes in this study.

Dr. Nova revealed some character traits for an effective leader from her
perspectives. She described these traits as follows,
Many effective leaders have the sense of self and the vision of an institution whose primary mission is to educate the teachers. You are there for a purpose, and it’s a noble cause, and no matter what the noise is, you need to have that strength to know that you are doing it for the kids. I can teach you the knowledge, but I cannot teach you to love kids. Therefore, I think a great school leader must know oneself, love kids, be positive, and be consistent.

Dr. Emma also stated, “I want to go back to the classroom. I missed being with the kids…. I have a heart for school that are Title 1 and serving the community with so many needs in a lot of areas. Intervening and supporting students who are below grade level is just a passion of mine.” Although Dr. Emma was the first-year administrator, her goal, to change those students’ mindset who did not believe that they could, is clearly illustrated in her statement.

Dr. Carmen, who had been in her position for seven years, also shared the same purpose as a middle school principal. She stated,

Whatever I do, I do it for students. For me, if we’re all focused on the students, it doesn’t matter what our problem is, the student is the most important thing…. My priority will always be the students. I want to make sure whatever we do, we’re here for them, and I want to let my staff know that I want to support everyone in order to be successful in that mission…. I can’t tell you how many people ask me about my school. Our school is known on the map and on the social media. I still want to do more. I want to build a partnership with the community. I want to do an internship where students can go for an hour after school. The purpose of what we do is to educate the whole child.
These Asian American educational leaders spoke about their success, measured by students’ achievements, community’s wellbeing, and their teams’ harmony. Mrs. Mei said, “My motivator for coming to work every day is the kids.” Dr. Lana’s statement as a high school principal was also very significant. She expressed, “During these four years [in high school], I want to be louder than their inner critics. If they don’t have any other cheerleader, then I am going to be that cheerleader and I am going to be louder than every naysayer in their heads and in their life.” She did not mention their SAT scores, or the school’s graduation rate. Her focus was to beat all the negative voices, which criticize young minds. In terms of her views on effective and efficient public-school leaders, she believes in a good system and process. She said,

If you have solid systems and processes, it doesn’t matter who is in that chair. Because we’re going to talk about the amount of turnover, the structure should move along seamlessly regardless of all that turnover if your systems and processes are solid. When you have a solid foundation, everything you build is going to be on a solid foundation as opposed to if everything is predicated on people…. If you are not enabling your peers, and you’ve not empowered your colleagues in the system, then who loses?” The kids.

Similarly, Mrs. Jin who was offered a principal position in city 60 miles away from her residence. With passion on helping students, she decided to take the position. With the strong support from her family, she decided to rent an apartment in the city where her job was, and her husband would remain living in their home and take care of her two children. For the next five years as a high school principal, Mrs. Jin worked hard and formed great relationships with the district, staff, teachers, and the communities. She
expressed, “In the end, if my decision can help a child, that’s what I am fighting for.”

The strong sense of responsibility and obligation also showed in Dr. Lana’s belief of what an effective leader should be. She said, a strong leader should “establish a solid system and process” regardless of the staff’s turnover, because that is when the kids benefit the most. She said, “When I became the principal of this high school, I was ready to learn the culture and ready to be part of the culture.”

Dr. Nova shared her views on the importance of school leader’s responsibility. She illustrated her thoughts regarding the current school administrators. She stated, “I think the teaching profession is under attack…because younger teachers got more technology experiences, thus, the administrators put the pressure on the older generation of teachers whose dedication and love for students are actually so much better than some younger teachers.” She explained, “When younger teachers are coming in, I feel like they look at it teaching as a job, but I see some older teachers look in more as a calling. I feel like the leaders have to be smarter to mend the gap between both groups.”

Dr. Emma elaborated her desire of being on a school site leader. She stated, I love being at a school site building relationships with kids and with families to support them….I have gone to district, but I know who I am, and I know that I am the type of person who thrives off the connections with kids. That’s what drives me in my work. You don’t get to feel that you made as much as an impact when you at the district.

Mrs. Mei pointed out, My motivator for coming to work every day is the kids. If you look around in our demographics, you will see that poverty is a major factor here. My passion is to
break that cycle of poverty and break the cycle of not going to college for my students. I want these kids here to be able to leave here and know that they can be a contributing member of society and they can break the cycle of poverty. They can do better themselves so that they can have the house of their dreams. That is my motivator here, right now…. During my Morning Break Club meetings with my parents and community members, I tried to speak Spanish, although I cannot say that I am fluent by any means, but when I try to speak, they laugh. They laugh with me. I think what makes it unique is that they know my effort is here. I embrace this community. This is my community, although there are certain judgements that come along with this community from the outsider.

Sharing her character trait for being a successful leader, she stressed, “I also like to be a multiplier. That is, when you allow someone to take the lead, so you are building capacity within your school.”

Dr. Sakari also shared,

When I worked as a teacher, I always wanted to make sure that students all have the same opportunities. Many students in my first school didn’t have the privileged lifestyle, so I want to make sure regardless of their socioeconomic background and the language they spoke at home, they were given a strong education, so they will have the opportunity to make a different choice in life.

She also believes that school leadership should reflect the community the school is in.

She pointed out,

I think one of the goals for district leaders is to have a principal or a school leader that reflects the community. I think it is true in many instances. When you have a
school leader who understands the community, then the trust is easily built….If you are in a more Spanish speaking community, then the district would try to incorporate a school leader who speaks Spanish. I have seen that’s sometimes a requirement in some cases. Even though there are not many Japanese families in my school, I think because I am Asian, there is a sense of connection or identification. That is a benefit, because they feel that they can relate to me a little bit more.

Perhaps many school leaders fight for their students’, parents’, and communities’ benefits but Asian American women educational leaders—whose attitude demonstrates the motto “Your child's success determines my success”—are merely 2% of school administrators nationwide.

**Challenges**

**Theme 3: A Strong Work Ethic and Professionalism: “I Must Prove Myself!”**

Besides the sense of responsibility and obligations toward the school, students, and community, these leaders also possess similar traits of strong work ethic and professionalism. As a leader, Dr. Nova first expressed that she always enjoys challenges. She said, “I get bored easily….In some twisted way, I like to prove people wrong and actually thrive on being underestimated.” Dr. Nova explained,

I’ve walked into a situation when people were surprised that I had never spoken English until I was 23, and then when they realized that I have two boys who went to WestPoint, they were shocked. They just assumed that I must be young, naïve, weak, and soft….I am happy to surprise then, and that kind of thing motivates me.
She also explained as being an Asian American woman, she often must prove herself. This is a key point that many of these Asian American female participants expressed. She shared, “I have accepted the reality of the American society is that you are a minority woman and an immigrant, you have to be twice as good as the next White guy.” The desire of proving herself to be the best also speaks about her strong work ethic. She also stated, “I like to prove people wrong and thrive on being underestimated.”

Coincidentally, Mrs. Jin also shared similar views on her work ethic. She said, “I don’t shy away from the problems or challenges. I always run towards it and deconstruct the problems…. My number one strength is to take the lead on difficult or challenging concerns and issues that arise at schools, when everyone shies away from tackling the issues.” She also emphasized that, “Being a teacher, you never stop.”

Dr. Carmen illuminated the hard work ethic coming from the constant need to prove herself, stating,

I work a hundred times more than anybody else to make sure that I am doing an excellent job at whatever I do. I do that because I know that the moment I don’t work so hard, it be noticed in the sea of Whites. People who don’t work as hard, they get by. Nobody is going to say that you are not working hard. This is my perception and that’s what created in my work ethic.

Dr. Emma echoed the same idea, stating, “Simple things like honesty, integrity, hard work, and persevere are important…. Laziness is frowned upon. My dad said, ‘In everything you do, be your personal best’.” She also explained her cultured background and values that helped her to be successful in her career.
She said,

I think that work ethic as an Asian American is ingrained in you. My parents worked so hard, and they only had one day off per month in order to keep the home and the family tight-knitted, and that took a lot of time. I think you have to do the best you can.

Dr. Sakari also shared, “Complaining won’t really help with anything. If there’s a situation that is hard and challenging, you have to deal with it. Persevere! No matter what the challenges are!”

A strong work ethic and professionalism were not rare among these women who are constantly striving to be the best. This work ethic is also rooted from a sense of obligation towards people who believed in them.

**Theme 4: Self-Doubts: “I Don’t Think I am a Leader!”**

The other side of constantly proving themselves is the inner critic, negatively impacting their faith in their abilities to make a difference. Pacis (2005) pointed out, “The pressures from family compounded by societal stereotypes are frequently sufficient enough to undermine the self-confidence of Asian American women who maybe considering roles in educational leadership” (p. 54).

Through the interviews, many self-doubts have surfaced from the following transcriptions. This also provides another lens to see these successful women leaders. Mrs. Jin said,

We [Asian leaders] lack of certain charisma compared to some of our African American counterparts…. I don’t see myself having that charisma and exuding the articulate talent, so I need to win one by one by my relational skills…. I think to
become a leader; the drive must be internal. It cannot be money. It cannot be for the
title….I asked myself, “Can I do the job?” It’s almost like a challenge. There are
times, I asked myself, “What have I gotten myself into?” But, in the end, if my
decision can help a child, that’s what I am fighting for. So, this is the hardest part
when an administrator focuses on just the politics. When it comes to myself, I
asked, “Can I make the difference?” and “Can I really deliver the excellence?”

Dr. Nova also believes her hard-working ethic is an attribute of growing up in
Korea. She explained, “The American dream taught me that as long as I work hard, I can
achieve that dream. I may not be the smartest, prettiest, or tallest person in this room, but
I will work harder than anyone in the room. For working hard, that’s within my control.”

Dr. Carmen also shared, “Since I was young, I took care of my siblings, and I am
not smart to have a talent to invent something, but at least I could use my skills in my
own way to make an impact on the society.” She also pointed out the cultural differences
create more obstacles for her. She described,

I’m a Muslim. I’m a woman. I’m also an Indian. I have always struggled to be
overlooked. Even though I don’t want to be noticed, I know that I have something
important to say, and I want people to be able to hear it and take it seriously….I
work in an environment here that’s very White. There are certain things that they
don’t want or shutdown when I say certain things because they don’t see it. They
are not going to see it unless they walk a mile in my shoes.

Similarly, Dr. Lana expressed,

I don’t see myself as naturally confident and I don’t always project confidence, so
I know people can see that about me. I am drawn to people who can walk into a
room and *turn it on* so effortlessly…. I just keep watching it and hoping that I can mimic it…. Schooling was not easy for me. My educational path was so not stereotypical Asian. I didn’t excel in math. I was a minority in a hugely White community, and my mom just threw me in a French immersion school. I am Asian, and my parents speak Chinese. We have a hard-enough time in English, but I was learning French. I am not the one who always floats to the top. I always have to work so hard to just be average. I know that I am my internal critic, but once a while, there was someone who told me that I can do it.

Their inner critic sometimes speaks louder than others; even when they meet and exceed all expectations of their superiors, it is difficult to break through their own doubts.

Mrs. Mei talked about how she viewed herself as a leader. She expressed, “I never pictured myself as a principal. I didn’t consider it. I never thought [my previous principal] would ask me to apply for the position.” She told me, ‘I think you will make a great leader one day,’ but I didn’t see it.” She further elaborated that even when she currently held the title and had the power as a school principal, she still said, “I am still thinking that I am not ready. I have no intention [for being a leader]. I still want to stick with what is comfortable for me.” This negative voice in her mind can be traced back to her family’s view on her ability as an educator. She shared,

When I applied for the assistant principal position, the first question my mom asked was, ‘Why did you want to do that?’ It was not like, ‘Congratulations!’ or anything. I think she was just going based on what she knew about me growing up in school and how I was…. I just didn’t see myself as a leader…. My oldest brother is a doctor. My parents emphasize him a little more than the rest of us in
terms of career. They are just really proud of him because he is a doctor…. After
she made it to the principal’s position, she said, “I am starting to see that my mom
is telling a lot of people that I am a principal. Every time when we have a family
gathering, she will tell the next person who we have not seen in awhile, ‘My
daughter is a principal, now.’ She didn’t say that when I was an assistant
principal. She even questioned my choice of applying for the assistant principal
position….That gives me a little glimpse at thinking that she must think this is a
high profile job.

She also provided an example of her working situation to illustrate how this deep-rooted
self-doubt could impact her behavior in a professional setting. Mrs. Mei explained, “In
the principal meetings, I do remain quiet. I listen and absorb first; then I play back in my
head. But my superintendent told me, ‘I want you to feel like you have a voice…. I want
to see you speak up a little bit more and be an active participant in these meetings.”

When Mrs. Mei talked about her experiences of road blocks during her journey of
obtaining the leadership role, her candid response was,

The roadblock is me. That’s what it is. It’s me and my inner personal being that
keeps me from sharing and being a part of the meeting…. I asked myself, ‘Should
I be doing that?’ ‘Did I miss something?’ .... Part of me is listening to other
people and part of me is panicking.

When asked how her ethnicity impacts how she functions in her job, Mrs. Mei spoke of
the one language she didn’t learn when she was young and now she wishes that she had.

I never learned Chinese. My mom shared that she was made fun of her accent so
much by an African-American group of girls back when she was living in San
Francisco. She didn’t want us to be made fun of in a community which didn’t have too many Asians when we were young. She definitely wanted us to learn English first. My mother was placed in a kindergarten classroom at a high school age. So she didn’t want for us to go through the same thing. Even my grandparents lived with us who only spoke Chinese, but I never learned it. However, I work in the educational field, and I do wish I would learn it sometime. It’s just my opinion that I wish I would have learned the language. On the other side of this district, there were openings with predominantly Asian speaking parents and I wanted to avoid it. I just didn’t want to have to explain that I didn’t know Chinese.

Dr. Sakari also shared,

I don’t think that I’ll ever be a principal, and I don’t think that is ever going to be a career choice of mine. Prior to become a TOSA, I had no desire of being an administrator. I earned the administrative credential to gain more credits on the pay scale with no intention of becoming a principal. That was when I was a new teacher. I had already gotten my administrative credential.

The discrepancy between how others view these women and how they view themselves was surprising. Self-doubts are strongly linked to the push force to eagerly blend in with others.

Aspirations

Theme 5: Asian Values and Mentality: “Humility v. Assertiveness”

In this study, the Asian American women came from different backgrounds with different ethnicities and upbringing. Professionally, they had different working
experiences and were in-charge of different levels of K-12 public school. What linked them together were similar cultures and values, focused on hard work and the desire and opportunities to achieve their dreams.

Dr. Nova stated,

I chose to become an American and when I made that choice, I took the commitment very seriously…. The American dream taught me that as long as I work hard, I can achieve that dream. I will work harder than anyone in the room. I may not be the smartest or the prettiest person in the room, for working hard that is within my control.

An inspirational thought from Dr. Nova was when she emphasized the fact why she feels the need to strive to be the best all the time. She said,

Every single day, I have to say to myself that I have to be excellent because I am not just doing it for myself, but I am doing it for the next Asian American women who come to that door, and I am not able to be the cause for them to say, “Don’t give a chance for another look-like an opportunity like this.” This is a sort of responsibility and burden. When I taught at a high school, I was always honest. I told my students that there will be people who are just racist purely. Be grateful if they tell you to your face, because the hidden racism is worse.

In congruence with Dr. Nova, Mrs. Jin, herself an immigrant, also said, “Once I got to America, I was thinking how lucky those American students were. They have so many options and it is a land of opportunities.” Her father once told her, “If you plan to live in the U.S., I should really learn English.” She then became the only Asian student in a class of 50 students who majored in English while feeling like a sore thumb.”
Even now, she is deeply-rooted in the U.S., experiencing a sense of loss for not being able to fully blend into the American culture. She pointed out, “No matter how long I lived in the U.S., I will not be considered as part of American culture, I will never fully be an American.” However, in order to be valued as equal to others, she works hard to prove her ability. She said,

I think Asian women are wired to do the best they can. My mother always said, ‘We are born this way!’ I think many Asian women drive ourselves to be the best and we make it harder on ourselves compared to others…. I can be overlooked, so I have to prove that I have done the best I can and left my signature and mark with an accomplishment that speaks for itself.

However, this Asian Mentality and expectations of being hard-working are not easily met by others. Mrs. Jin said,

One of my blind spot is when I forgot that not everyone has the Asian work ethic. So even I, am willing to put in the hours to solve the problems, my colleagues may not want to do the same….It is difficult to work for me. Although I will support my boss and with the Asian mentality, I will make my boss look good. I would kill myself to work hard for my boss. However, I have to change this mindset if I expect the same from people I supervise. I know it’s not going to happen. So, it is going to be a solid disappointment. I have to learn to lower my expectations. It seems my life mission is to do the heavy lifting in any job I have.

The drive to be seen is also shared by Dr. Carmen, who expressed, “I want to bring a different perspective about my culture and background for everyone.” Her humbleness and modesty were also demonstrated in the example she provided. She said, “When
people come to my school and ask me what I do, I often reply, “I work here.” I never say, “I am the principal.” I think being an Asian American, I want people to genuinely respect me for who I am and what I do, rather than the title I hold.”

Dr. Lana is blunt about the high expectations of working hard in an Asian family. She shared her mother’s opinion,

My mom always said, ‘Because you are Chinese, you have to work one hundred percent. You have to give everything one hundred percent’. She never explained why, so it trickles down for me to always get an A+ effort, even if it just ends up with a B product….I am not the one who always floats to the top. I always have to work so hard to just be average. I know my internal critic, but once in a while, there was someone who told me that I can do it…. I do sometimes wonder, “Would I approach the situation differently if I were not female.” I don’t know if it has anything to do with being Asian or not. Would I be braver or just say, “Shut up, and this is what we’re doing?” I don’t know because I recognize my audience and I’ve been trained to focus on consensus building.

Dr. Lana stated that now Asians in Los Angeles are like the majority minority which is much different than the rest of the country; however, the old Chinese values of respecting the elders and not arguing have been part of her internally. She can see the differences between Western society values of assertiveness, but her culture taught her to act otherwise. She shared,

If you are sharing your opinion, and it contradicted with the elders, it is not being respectful. I had to learn how to express my opinion. Because on the flip side of the Western culture, that is also kind of perceived as being diminutive, being
silenced, being a shadow. I am not that either. For me, I always had to put myself out there to get out of my comfort zone because you can be easily forgotten or overlooked there.

However, hard-working immigrants may also long for a better life for their children in a different measure of expectation. Dr. Emma shared,

My mother was an immigrant who didn’t speak the language. She worked every day except one day a month…. My parents’ views on me being an educator was probably for the purpose of salary and having a flexible schedule [in my own family], but that was not the reason I chose education. I just love working with the kids, and I knew the impact a teacher on their students.

She further elaborated, “My parents worked so hard. They told us to do the best we can. I think that work ethic as an Asian American is ingrained in me.” She further explained the typical Asian traits from her experiences.

Being an Asian, humility is a value, which is not bragging about yourself.

However, as a leader, you have to be your own advocate, so you have to say that I am good at this, and this is where I can grow. Nobody will advocate for you. I think that what often happens with Asian females is sense of uncertainty is conveyed. They know they are capable, but they just don’t come out and say it.

However, Dr. Emma does see the benefit of being an Asian woman school principal when she encounters parents and students of Asian descent.

I’ve heard a lot of praise and appreciation for being the same ethnicity. You don’t see a lot of Asians in administration though I have heard a lot of comments from Asian students and their parents that, “Wow, we are so happy that you are in
leadership, because my kids can look at you and think that they can do that, too. If they don’t see it, they don’t imagine or envision it for themselves, so they are grateful for that.”

Hard-working can also be a way out for people unable to obtain happiness. Their beliefs in hard work also transpired to their visions for schools, students, and community.

Dr. Nova also pointed out that she aspires to be a superintendent in the future. She believes the impact of having an Asian American women representation in the education field will be huge for our future generations. She described,

Children cannot imagine, without seeing it….I feel like, if we don’t see people like us as leaders, how are kids supposed to be inspired? Also, I believe that I can do some good. I believe our society needs someone who is honest and willing to follow the rules with integrity to lead schools like no other places. I also think that some women decided that they cannot be leaders in our society, but I’ve seen mothers who are leaders all the time with love, care, and organization. Why not bring that to schools? We can probably do a better job than men can. Why not rely on our innate strengths? I have seen some fantastic female leaders who have this certain calmness about them.

Being an Asian American woman leader, Dr. Sakari shared her view on being the minority in the leadership position. She explained,

I guess the stereotypical Western view on leaders would be educated White males who come along with power and status. When I became an assistant principal, I was standing around a group of other assistant principals in the district, and I noticed they were all tall, white males and I was a short little Asian girl. I did feel out of
place. However, I said, “That’s ok!” This is a role that I will do well regardless what people see of me. I didn’t let that bother me. You can tell that there’s always going to be people that maybe look the part of a leader. But for me, it’s their actions and what they do that mean more to me than anything else. I respect those leaders that they are doing the best they can with whatever role they are in and whatever goals that they are working toward….I think education is one of those unique fields where males and females do have similar opportunities. Now, more female leaders start to emerge in the primary grades, because they are more prevalent in elementary education.

**Theme 6: Servant Leadership: “Take the Ownership at the Blame and Share the Glory with Others.”**

In the process of transcribing the interviews, words and phrases like, “support,” “serving my school, students, and parents” constantly emerged when these Asian American women were asked how they viewed leadership. The concept of servant leadership can be seen from following statements. Dr. Nova shared, “Many effective leaders have the sense of self and the vision of an institution…. You are there for a purpose. You need to have that strength to know that you are doing it for the kids.”

Similarly, Mrs. Jin said, “With the belief system that all kids can achieve, I went and became an assistant principal.” To Mrs. Jin, the word “leadership” means to take responsibilities and constantly extend the trust in people, even when you are facing a lot of criticism and not being liked. She pointed out:

When my assistant principals come to me upset that others will hate them for the decision they made, I asked the question,” Do you want to be loved or do you want
to be respected?” If you want to be respected, sometimes you have to make that
decision. But once they know that you made the right decisions for the right
reasons, people will respect that.

Their focus for leadership is not fame, money, or title. Their view on successful
leadership is to change for the better, and that better outcome is for the kids. Mrs. Jin
clearly expressed the core of servant leadership, pointing out,

When people come to my school and ask me what I do, my reply is ‘I work here.’ I
never say, ‘I am the principal’. I think being an Asian American, I want people to
genuinely respect me for who I am and for what I do, rather than the title I hold.
Thus, the glory and credits belong to the team, not the person. However, she was not
afraid to promote her teammates to achieve higher goals in their personal life, stating,

It is my belief that my success is measured by people I supervised go into higher
positions than I am…. I make sure that whoever works for me, I promote them the
best I can and hope that they will go over as far as they can go…. I hone in on the
strengths to make sure that they get better.

Likewise, Dr. Carmen shared that her motive as a school leader was to help
students, expressing, “My priority is the students. I also want to let my staff know that I
am here to support them in order to be successful in that mission.” She explained,

My leadership as a woman and as an introvert make me shy away from the
spotlight. I don’t want a lot of attention because I want everybody around me to
get attention. Because I am a woman, I am more willing to listen to other people
to bring their best forward…. I believe in servant leadership. It means that I will
not ask you to do anything that I don’t do it myself…. If I get the respect from my
staff, from the parents, and from the students, that will be all I need….My previous two principals that I worked under as assistant principal (AP), they were shining because I worked so hard as an AP. They didn’t have to work as hard as I did. They didn’t have to work because I wanted to make sure that I am the person who works the hardest. It doesn’t matter that I am a leader of the school. I believe in servant leadership. It means that I will not ask you to do anything that I don’t do it myself, because women I think are generally hard workers depending on your upbringing. If I get the respect from my staff, from the parents, and from the students, that’s all I need.

More examples can be drawn from participants with the same mindset. Dr. Lana illustrated her experience,

I knew I have to get out there and purposely meet and get to know every single person I have on my team. [I want to purposefully ask], “What’s next for you? What do you want to do with your advanced degree? How do I support you? What opportunities do you need?”

She explained her reason behind being a leader, not afraid to be surpassed by her employees. “If you don't enable and empower your peers and your colleagues in the system, then who loses? The kids!” She also shared her realization of being overlooked is not helping her move forward as a leader. She described that moment. “It finally dawned on me, ‘Why are all these people getting recognized for doing great things?’ So, am I not doing anything well? No, you get overlooked because you do your job too well.”

Dr. Emma, an instructional leader at heart, supported her staff by doing the ground work together.
I’ll learn [a strategy] with you. Let’s do it together…. I am here to learn alongside you. I am not the holder of all the knowledge and it really takes a team to move a school forward. I always try to see myself from their [teachers] perspectives and try to understand where they’re coming from…. I am a lead learner, so I believe in collaboration and teamwork that really builds a strong leadership team. I think a great leader trait is empathy by putting myself in the position of whoever that other person is. Whether the other person is a student, a parent, or a teacher, always remember that you may not have the same perspective as me….I always try to see myself from their perspectives and try to understand where they’re coming from. I can understand and find that middle ground. When I think of leaders, I don’t think that’s someone at the front always pulling the crew behind you. I think of someone in the back supporting you and encouraging you to move forward. I believe in getting my team together and building the capacity of a school’s shared vision. I will stand behind you. For those who are struggling or who need an extra push, I am here to support you along the way.

Another participant, Mrs. Mei, throughout her story, one sentence she repeated was “I don’t see myself as a principal.” Perhaps it was her different style of leadership. Her thoughts also affected how others view her in a larger scale.

This is my first year as a principal. It was interesting that my superintendent had told me through our last meeting. She said, “I want you to feel like you have a voice….I want to see you speak up a little bit more and be an active participant in these meetings.” In the principal meetings, I do remain quiet. That’s me as a learner. I tend to take it all in, absorb it. I rarely take notes, although I start to
think that as this job gets more complicated, I should start taking notes. I listen
and absorb, then I play back in my head when I leave the meeting, so I can reflect
upon what I learned.

Dr. Sakari’s view on leadership shared commonalities with the rest of the
participants. She reflected on what she is currently doing for her staff. She stated,
I want to be the one who my staff can talk to, and the one that they can rely on to
help them. After building the relationship and trust, you can start work on the
things you need to work on, and I think that was reflected. As I was an assistant
principal from another district, I had to really build that credibility and trust with
my staff. The credibility came from me being honest and transparent with open
communication. I was fortunate to work with many amazing leaders, and when I
reflect on their leadership styles, I think everyone had a different character trait
that is dominant and strong. For me, I think for being reflective on my decision-
making process and being thoughtful are two of my strong suits.

She further indicated that being a good listener always helps to de-escalate the situations
during hard conversations. Dr. Sakari prides herself for being a good listener and even
though she might not agree with everything, she tries hard to understand the other
person’s concerns. Once the person’s concern is validated, she often lets them know that
she will carefully consider their perspectives. She is also supportive of evaluation and
feedback, and she said, “Feedback really helped me to shape who I am.”

Mrs. Sayda’s view on leadership is very similar to my other participants. She feels
the word leader sounds like someone is upfront and followers are behind the leader, but it
is actually backward.
A leader is being supportive and being that backbone. It’s weird. You are supposed to be in the front, but you really need to be the backbone of your school, your staff, and being able to make others shine in finding that strength. I am not the type of person who wants to be center stage. I am very social and friendly, but I want to let other teachers to have a voice or opportunities to speak up. My job is to guide the questions, so I am that facilitator.

These leaders are willing to share their spotlight with people who work hard and to implement their vision for helping students. This is a rare quality in our current society where people are eager to be recognized.

**Research Question Two: Intersectionality**

In this study, I intended to investigate the success, challenges, and aspirations of these Asian American female leaders who overcame obstacles, unique from others. One of the challenges discovered from interviewing them was being overlooked due to their racial, gender, and class differences. This intersectionality was explored with participants in order to identify the themes relevant to research question two. (see Table 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 2</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How did their intersectionality, such as race, gender and class differences, contribute to their views of being a leader?</td>
<td>Racial differences</td>
<td>Feeling different than others</td>
<td>Gender inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender differences</td>
<td>Conflicting views on humbleness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class differences</td>
<td>Overcome Asian female stereotype</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Balancing family and career</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bestowed upon the responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do not desire leadership role/attention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 7: Gender Inequality: “I am Tiny but Mighty!”

The assumption of being Asian American females created difficulties for them in pursuing their dreams and living up to their potential. Dr. Nova had to face the dilemma between choosing her children or her dream. When Dr. Nova first came to the U.S., she planned to be married and became a housewife. However, when the circumstances changed, and she needed to take on the responsibilities for bringing income to the family, she chose to become a teacher because it provides steady income and the benefits for her children and family. She spoke about it with a sense of pride, stating,

My children are non-negotiable, and I was okay without getting a new car every year, but I made a commitment that I will be there for my children…. I think in the American society, we are under the delusion of thoughts that you can have everything. You can’t! There are always limitations… You can’t have a successful career and wonderfully perfect children, and a rich life, unless you have generations of wealth that you don’t have to work for. My children didn’t ask to be born in my family.

She did not apologize for putting her family first, because she was a mother. She indicated, “I also think that some women decided that they cannot be leaders in our society, but I’ve seen mothers who are leaders all the time with love, care, and organization. Why not bring that to schools? We can probably do a better job than men can.”

Dr. Carmen also said, “I just wanted to step out and do things.” In her free time, she worked as the President of the Muslim Women’s League organization for 10 years. She shared, “I want to bring a different perspective about Muslim women for everyone…
In the late 90’s, I felt the need to do all these events because it was really needed to get information out there about Muslim women, so people don’t think that they’re just women who are covered.” She also stated her struggles when she needs to express her thoughts during meetings. She said,

When I have suggestions, or I have an idea, I always try to listen very deeply and intently to everybody and then wait until everybody is finished. Then, I will say something. It is a product or a consequence of my upbringing as being culturally different than the majority. I think humbleness is one of the things that is different from the Western view of a leader….We don’t have women up in our district leadership. They are also treated differently than the male leaders. When I was an assistant principal, and I was applying for the principal position, I knew that I was not going to get the job because I was up against two male applicants who are easily identify with males in the district leadership. It turned out to be true since this position became the stepping stone for that person to move up into a district position. I applied the second time because I really love this school, the staff, and our community. I feel like that I am the best person to lead the school. Even I knew that I had to overcome the women thing, as well.

Perspectives on intersectionality and leadership. Mrs. Jin’s insights after working as a high school principal for many years on Asian women leaders and leadership were unique and yet commonly heard from other participants in this research. Mrs. Jin recalled that she refused to accept the high school principal position because her children were too young. She waited until her children were old enough before she assumed the role of a principal. However, she also recalled the tough times when she needed to take her
children to many after school functions, such as football games and school functions. She also commented on the 5 years of being a high school principal so far away from her family. She stated,

During those five years, I worked so hard. That school’s API score never went down and so at my 5th year, the school became a California Distinguished School. Before I came along, the school has tried to become a California Distinguished School for a very long time….I went through a lot of storming stages because when you are Asian, people are dubious. I remembered my interview where there were lots of people at the panel, and one question for me was, “Well, you are so little! How do you think you are going to handle a high school?” I said, “I’m tiny, but I’m mighty”….I’m making a stereotypical racist remark, but all the Asian colleagues I know, they kill themselves, I think, compared to some other ethnic administrators. Yes, I can be overlooked. So, I have to prove that where I am, I have done the best I can and left my signature and mark in some way with accomplishments that speak for themselves.

The women thing also matched Dr. Lana’s statement that, “I talk differently when I walk into a men’s office than I walk into a woman’s office.” She considered herself as being a different type of Asian woman since she had to work with many athletic coaches in the school. She recognized that once they feel comfortable speaking around her, she has successfully broken the barrier and become part of the team. However, she did recognize she communicates differently when she speaks to a woman than to a man. The example she shared is, “I talk differently when I walk into a male’ office than I walk into
a woman’s office. Maybe I am more sensitive to it because of my cultured background is this way.” She further explained her views on gender and racial differences.

Let’s call it what it is. The White male is the power majority, and you start going down the hierarchy. Obviously, it is male above female. We are being very black and white here. Now you start breaking it down to cultures. African Americans can totally play that African American card. When you start looking at your politics, you have got the African-American, then Hispanics, then Asians. I am a double negative, because I am female and Asians. Do I feel like I’ve encountered road blocks? Yes! I had parents who came to my office and waited for a parent meeting, and they’re like, “I am sorry! I am looking for the principal” I said, “No, that’s me. I know, surprise!” What’s more surprising is usually on Fridays when I am usually in some kind of spirit shirt and jeans. Many often mistake me for one of the kids.

She expressed one of commonalities amongst my participants was working hard. She stated,

I would get overlooked although I worked as hard as I did….I almost felt like I had to constantly remind people that I am here, because otherwise in my nature, I would much rather just fly below the radar. I used to think that it is a good thing not to get noticed, because it might mean that you are in trouble….I think almost the nature of school, the only people who fly above radar are the trouble makers. You always want to fly below the radar. I think the nature of the assistant principal’s position is that you are doing your job and you’re doing it well, so nobody realizes you are doing it. For example my job was building the master
schedule. The only time anybody notices is if it’s not going well. Well, if it’s not going well, then now you are on the radar. You didn’t do something. Your job is to make things as seamless and run as smoothly as possible.

While Dr. Emma pointed out,

I saw how males and females are treated differently in an administrative setting. I definitely saw that there is something about a male’s presence make people think of him as more of a principal type.

Dr. Emma also provided a gender inequality example that she witnessed.

I saw how males and females are treated differently in an administrative setting. I definitely saw that there is something about a male presence that people think of men as more of a principal type. In my previous district, there were four of us working together. One was a Hispanic male, two were Hispanic females, and me. I can definitely see this kind of perception of people seeing the Hispanic male a more of a leader, even though experience-wise, he was the least experienced out of all four of us. People treated him differently than they did the three others in my group. There are a lot of females in teaching but there are a lot of males in the upper management and leadership. It is not an equal ratio. When the males apply for a job, they apply for the job knowing who they will be qualified when they get the job. For females, they don’t apply for a job until they know for certain that they are qualified for the job. For males, it’s not like “I am qualified for the job already,” but more like “I can be qualified if I get the job.”
These similarities really point out the inequality these women are facing daily. Family and career also become choices when men are free from these obligations. Dr. Lana shared her strategies to balance family and school affairs. She explained,

> Whenever I stay late for school event, I will be late in the morning the next day. I told myself that if I don’t make it home before my twin girls go to bed, I will take them to school the next day. I do sometimes wonder, would I approach the situation differently if I were not a female? Will I be brave to say, ‘This is what we are doing!’ I don’t know, since I have been trained to focus on consensus building.

Mrs. Sayda indicated was the strategies of balancing the intensive administrative work with family. She said,

> For me, balancing life and job is just as important. If there is anything that I can save for the next day, I make sure it’s here for the next day. My priority is providing family time with my kids, such as doing homework. I try to divide my work load with the principal. However, my principal was bad at that. I don’t want to be mean, but he doesn’t necessarily want to rush home. This is the 7th year I worked with him, and I had pushed him to go home more and more every year. At times, I will bring my kids to as many activities as I can. Also when the families saw me with my kids, they are able to relate to me more from the parental perspectives.

The benefit of being a parent helped Mrs. Sayda to easily relate to her parents from school. She expressed, “Being a mom with kids in school, it helps. I’m able to relate a lot
better to parents, a ton better. I was that parent who had to pull my kid out of one school, because the program wasn’t working for him.” She further shared,

> When I first started as a teacher, I wasn’t a mom. So I’ve gotten the card where parents said, “You are not a mom so you don’t understand what I am going through.” I always thought that there was no difference, since I still cared about the kids. Now, I totally understand what they meant. You really do have to be a mom (or a parent) to understand another mom (parent) in terms of how they feel and how they want to receive messages about their kids getting into trouble at school or making those poor choices. I now use different phrases when I talk to the parents. I make sure that I rephrase things in a way that it won’t be offensive to them or shame them.

Dr. Emma felt that being Asian doesn’t create as many obstacles as being a woman in this field.

> I don’t think that [inequality views have to do with] Asians verses non-Asians. I see more as females verses males. I don’t have resentment because at the end of the day, I am going to be at my personal best, and I am going shoot for the stars. I definitely see a difference in female administrator verses male administrator. It’s the way I feel, but it’s also the way I feel that people treat women differently. Males can talk the talk and look the look, but if they don’t walk the walk, they’ll be fine. But females can talk the talk, look the look, but if you don’t walk the walk, your data doesn’t show, you are gone. I’ve seen it happen to female administrators, and I have not seen it happen to a male administrator where they failed because they did not follow through.
Some women are willing to settle in a position where they can serve family and fulfill their dreams to help other children. Mrs. Mei is one woman, who chose teaching for a purpose. She explained,

I got into education for all the wrong reasons. I wanted to be a mother, and I knew that eventually I wanted to be a wife…. If I became a teacher, I would have that vacation time [to spend] and have a big family and stay as teacher for the rest of my life.

She also recalled a conversation between her and another male leader, “I was once told by a male leader who said, ‘I am sorry you have a uterus,’ meaning that we have to take time off, because we are the one giving birth, and we are the ones having a child.” This conversation made her think about being a woman and how a woman has to put her career on hold because of being a woman. Mrs. Mei said that she didn’t regret or apologize for having a family. She said, “That may be true that I would have to put a career on hold, but I can experience something a male will never experience, which is the beauty of motherhood.” For her intersectionality of not only having multiple identities, but also being discriminated for being a woman, she shared her insights of taking a mother responsibility is not as easy as other’s may think.

Being a mom, by any means, I am not the best mom out there. There are times when I think that maybe I was not cut out to be a mom. However, in my experience, many obstacles just worked themselves out. I don’t feel it’s a bad thing to have a uterus and be a leader at the same time.

When she was young, Dr. Sakari’s mother often taught her how to behave like a young lady by helping the household chores.
Growing up, my mother used to call me by my Japanese nickname and told me to set the table and pour the tea. She wanted to me to know the female role like in a traditional Japanese household. I have an older brother, but she never asked him to do this or get that. My mother said, “These are things that you as a girl need to know how to do.” Thus, in a very young age, I had a mindset about equality. I didn’t understand why it would be things that were meant for me to do because I am a girl. I always felt that I should have the same opportunities or be asked to do the same things regardless of my gender. I think that’s always kind of carried on in my personality growing up. So later on, I took on the leadership roles. In a sense, I think it is just justice.

When career advancement came in the way of maintaining family peace, women often picked family traditionally. Mrs. Sayda shared her example, “My priority is to provide family time with my kids… but my principal doesn’t necessarily want to rush home, because he has a wife at home [who takes care of the house.]…. I had to push him to go home more and more every year.” Another young participant, Dr. Sakari, however, viewed this sacrifice as discrimination not obligation, stating, “In a very young age, I had a mindset of equality. I always felt that I should have the same opportunities or be asked to do the same thing regardless of my gender. My mother told me, ‘These are things [chores] that you as a girl needs to know how to do’.”

When asked if Mrs. Sayda feels the differential treatment for being an Asian female leader. She shared the reasons why she returned to Southern California for teaching position. She shared,
When I started my leadership positions in Northern California, I didn’t think my supervisors really looked at my background, because the school just wanted people to take those leadership roles when our school was taken by the state. I came back to this community partially because there was a large Asian community, so I knew it would be beneficial for me being Asian and to be part of that type of community. However, the first school I worked for was mostly Hispanics and never did I feel that people overlooked me for my race, background, or gender. I did feel that others pushed me towards those communities where there is a large Asian student population. I know that in some places, they try to look for leaders that reflect the community demographics. From my experiences, I was given a job easily because networked by making the connections with principals who I worked while I was their substitute teacher.

In the end, children emulate what they see and be inspired. Without strong women leaders, children cannot image themselves being one. If we do not see people like us as leaders, how are kids supposed to be aspired?

**Research Question Three: Mentorship**

The key component of networking professionally is to get to know more people in the same career field in order to seek support, advices, and guidance. This method was seen as one of the major pathways for Asian American women leaders to obtain different positions (see Table 4). Pacis (2005) stated, “With no true support system in place, resources to help Asian women build up their self-confidence and succeed in educational leadership must be implemented” (p. 69).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 3</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What forms of</td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>Encouragement from superiors and</td>
<td>Establishing networks and relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training and</td>
<td>Training/</td>
<td>colleagues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mentoring activities</td>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Lack of formal/official mentoring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>did these Asian</td>
<td></td>
<td>initiation from supervisors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>receive, if any?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 8: Establishing Networks and Relationships: Building an Infrastructure of Support System**

The form of networking is not limited to titles or positions people held in the field. For example, Dr. Nova stated, “A lot of people mentored me…. I think that mentoring can be done with equal power base or from the people who are either in the higher or lower positions than you. You can still learn from them.” Meanwhile, Dr. Carmen also shared her experiences of attending the “Women in Education” conference, where she was able to witness the event, run by women leaders that shed light on the education management level, providing a different perspective to the world of education. She said, “It was great to have that connection [among women leaders], and it was so good that it was all run by women.” Asian American female leaders and their feelings of being treated as outsiders or foreigners regularly frustrated them. They typically possessed the same skills and credentials as their male counterparts but might not be afforded the same opportunities.

Dr. Lana added to the concept of network. It was most beneficial when one district lacked resources for collaboration. She mentioned, “[When I was an assistant principal], the assistant principals [in the neighborhood districts] band together. We met semi-regularly to share working experiences and strategies, because we don’t have many
high schools to collaborate with.” She pointed out that she was the only high school principal in her school district who relied hugely on her superintendent for help.

Besides professionally related factors of networking and mentorship, psychological factors, mentors and networking can provide should not be ignored. Dr. Emma said, “I have multiple adults in my educational career who said to me that ‘You are someone special. You got what it takes to do whatever you want to do.’ They believed in me and helped me pushing forward in every aspect of my life.” She also pointed out, “I am all about community. Once you have the network, you feel that you are not alone.”

This side of relationship building created a safe and comfortable environment for Asian American women leaders to share, vent, discuss, and collaborate with people they trust without the fear of judgment. Mrs. Mei shared, “I want to establish the relationship and then provide the best customer service to [my students, parents, and teachers].” Thus, she expressed her thoughts on mentorship, stating,

I had many cheerleaders who told me to get into the leadership positions. Without them, I would probably want to stay as a teacher and work for 30 years in one school…. I was set up so nicely from the day one when my mentor [my previous principal] and I worked together.

She further pointed out the key of networking she established with her colleagues made her feel comfortable. It is the feeling, “If you need something, call us! We will help you and we will walk you through this.”

Understanding the importance of feeling comfortable and the sense of trust, these Asian American women leaders also try to establish in their own schools. Dr. Sakari
shared, “I want to be the one that my staff can talk to and the one that they can rely on to help them. Only after building the relationship and trust, you can start work on the things you need to work on.”

Dr. Nova shared her experiences about mentors. She described,

As a school leader, your job is to help other people to become successful, moving up or out. A lot of people mentored me. I am not so discriminating who I want to be mentored by, and I think that mentoring can be done with an equal power base or where other people who have higher positions than you do or even somebody could have potentially lower positions than you do, but you can still learn from them.

However, Dr. Nova described her experiences of being mentored by a female leader versus a male leader. Dr. Nova expressed that she has always been proactive when seeking out other people for their advice.

Female leaders tended to be distant when it comes to the actual meetings. However, as opposed to her female mentors, her male mentors tend to be better in terms of following up with sitting down to have a one on one conversation. She stated,

When it comes time to actually meet or sit down with my female mentors, they always said, “I’ll get back to you.” They are always so busy.” However, if we are going to promoting other female leaders, they should do a better job by putting their time where their statement is… I think that is almost as if women in that older generation especially 50 and up, they have clawed their way up to the top….In terms of evening the playing field because you have skills and qualifications, but if you walk into a room of people who don’t look like you and they can’t see beyond your ethnicity and gender, then you are pretty doomed. When I become someone’s
advisor, I am very good in listening to them. It’s very cultural for me. My attitude is I can find mentors in every place I go, and it doesn’t really matter in the kind of mentorship relationship that I’d like to develop because I focus on the knowledge, background, and skill sets rather than the position that they hold.

She believes that an effective mentor should be objective, be empathetic, be knowledgeable and innately care about the success of other people without a personal ego being attached, be kind, and be a good listener who can guide you to focus on the positives of your life and can see from other’s perspectives.

Mrs. Jin’s philosophy of an educator’s success is very inspirational. She spoke about her experiences of mentoring others and she mentioned, “I make sure that whoever works with me, I promote them the best I can and hope they will go far as they can go.” Besides helping her mentees to become proficient at their positions, she also offers her experiences and expertise the way she would have liked to receive from her mentors.

Remember, you are a coach. Don’t be a score keeper. Like a coach in the athletic field, you know individual’s weaknesses and strengths and you try to hone in on the strengths to make sure that they get better. So, I give assignments to my assistant principals based on what they can accomplish and feel good doing them.

She further explained the ideal qualities of an effective mentors should be a listener, a problem solver, and most importantly the mentor should not be judgmental. She said, “To understand the other person’s perspectives is important.”

Dr. Carmen was very humble. She also mentioned the people who helped her along the way. She said,

I think every boss I’ve had has been a mentor. I always want to learn more, and I
always ask them for advice. They were kind enough to give me the advice. That has been very valuable for me. I also work with a district consultant who was an elementary school principal in this district. I also asked for advice from my middle school principal colleagues because we are a close-knit group and we are very honest with each other.

She stated that some valuable traits an effective mentor should have. Those traits are similar with other participants in this study. She said, “Mentors need to listen, and they need to show empathy without judgement. They need to have the ability to draw answers from the person. They also need to help the mentee to reflect on the problem instead of giving her the answer. A good mentor also possesses a sense of calmness in order to lead the mentee through difficult situations.

She also described an organization called “Women in Education Leadership” which also provides conferences and meetings to empower women who hold leadership roles in education. Dr. Carmen shared the experience when attending the conference. It was funny when she said, “It was great to have that connection, and it was so good that it was all run by women. It was really an eye-opening experience to see how other women deal with the issues and that is when I learned about “mansplaining.” “Mansplaining” is when men try to talk over you to explain something that they think you don’t know but you actually know it.”

Dr. Lana shared,

Professionally, I depend a lot on my superintendent and my assistant superintendents. I also depend a lot on being able to just ask the critical, stupid questions to a couple of colleagues. I have mentors who were also my immediate
supervisors, so they essentially played those dual roles for me. I had a lot of honest conversations with them. But now, I am the only one high school principal in my district…. My landing here in this job just reinforced for me that it will work out, and you will land where you are meant to be. You will find your fit.

Dr. Lana separated her mentoring experiences professionally and for personal aspirations. She considered her bosses and supervisors as her mentors in a professional manner, but she also finds inspirations from mentors who care about her as a person. She said, I don’t see myself as naturally confident. I don’t always project confidence, and I feel like people see that about me. I am drawn to people who can walk into a room and turn it on and spin in so effortlessly. I feel like I need more of that, and it’s almost like if I stand closer to you, maybe it’ll rub off a little on me. Or, I just keep watching it and maybe I can mimic it.

She further stated, “An effective mentor should have the ability to listen and can guide me through a problem without just giving out answers.” She also pointed out that an effective mentor should be an unbiased sounding board. She also mentioned her dissertation chair is another type of mentor for her. She said, “I was very strategic in picking my dissertation chair. I chose my chair strictly on who the chair was, not the topic. I could have picked my topic which would have been my passion piece, then you have to go and find your chair. The common model in my college was to look at the dissertation chair’s interest….I picked my chair based on his track record of making sure you finish. I had mentally committed myself to this three-year process.” Dr. Lana was determined to find the person who had the same vision as her to mentor her through the
process. The personality similarities were also one of an effective mentor’s quality in her mind.

Dr. Emma discussed her multiple mentors throughout her educational career who really impacted her greatly. She said,

Mentorship to me is key. It is about personal growth and the connection is huge. I have multiple adults in my educational career who said to me, “You are someone special. You have what it takes to do whatever you want to do.” They believed in me and helped me push forward in academics and in every aspect of my life….I have a mentor who was my previous principal who hired me and continues to be my mentor. I say, “Hey, can I sit down with you and have some coffee and just to *pick your brain* a little?”

She also said that her mentoring relationships came from district and organization programs such as “Principal Pal.” She said, “When I cleared my administrative credential, I was required to have forty hours of job mentoring from another seasoned administrator.” She also reached out to a retired middle school principal to spend hours in the day to listen to her meetings and give feedback from watching me interact with my staff. She said, “I got to experience the power of mentorship, so I was picking out my own mentors whenever I could or finding organizations that provided mentoring services.”

After experiencing positive mentorship, Dr. Emma concluded a few qualities that she appreciated.

I think that the best thing that a mentor can do is to ask the right questions. You have to ask the questions, because you don’t want your mentees to rely on you so
much. They should be reflecting on the mentees’ practices and asking deeper questions for them to think of answers for themselves. Mentors should be the sounding board. To me, that is the best quality you can have in a mentor. Their reflections and solutions the mentees can come up with is how mentors build the capacity. Mentors have to be passionate about the work that you do and have those experiences, so mentees can connect and relate.

She also shared another quality of being a great mentor from her experiences is that the mentor sees the potential of the mentee.

To me honestly, one of the most important things that my mentor did for me was to see potential in me. She would tell me the qualities in me that were strong but also, she was able to have those hard conversations to tell me the qualities I needed to improve. She did it in a way that built me up and did not tear me down. Just like the sandwich methods.

However, it is difficult to pair the proper mentor and mentee in her opinion. Dr. Emma shared the example of mentorship where her mentor was also her immediate supervisor.

It’s hard to be a mentor and an evaluator. Because as an evaluator, you do have to point out and have difficult conversations. You are not necessary their friend. It’s hard. Trust is a hard thing to get. My mentor was my principal and she made me cry multiple times, not because she was mean, but because she was just being honest. She made me feel so little. We talked later after she stopped being my boss. She still remembers how many people stand up to her because she made me cry. She really didn’t do anything wrong, but it’s difficulty to be a boss and a mentor. Some people take things differently. Some things are a little more
sensitive and I might not know about. You don’t know what effect of your comment is going to be, but if you are the principal, your job is not to make teachers happy. Your job is to make sure students are learning.

Although Dr. Emma is a new administrator, her statements certainly demonstrate a new perspective of young administrator and their needs for support.

Mrs. Mei, just like other participants in the study, also credited her success to many people who encouraged her along the way. She shared, “I had a lot of cheerleaders who told me to get into the leadership position. I would just probably want to stay as a teacher and work for thirty years in one school. My biggest mentor was my previous principal, and we stayed together when I was her assistant principal.” The influence and impact of this principal on Mrs. Mei was immerse. She described her experience,

My previous principal and I came into this school together. As new administrators, she and I were always together. It was almost to a point where it was annoying to the staff. They questioned us, “Why did you have to do this together? Why do you have to walk in the room together? Why are you meeting all the time for four hours? I think with that mentorship, she was helping me understand that it is our school. It is not just her school, and I was included in her retirement plan.

Mrs. Mei was very honest as how she stepped up to the administrative position. She stated,

I think because I was set up so nicely here from day one when we worked together, I am capable of taking over here….She was very transparent about her
intention…. I would also be able to offer staff consistency, and they wouldn’t have to go through another leader with new style.

She concluded her thoughts on her experiences for having this great mentor.

We’ve formed this relationship where we are the best friends, since we were together all the time. We even had a pact that we couldn’t be sad on the same day. She lifted me up when I was sad. It is tough. It is tough being new. I think we tried to prove to others that we are going to stick it out. That kind of got us motivated….I feel a sense of obligation to be the best I can for this school.

She also talked about the network she established with other principals in the same district. In a form of casual talk or formal talk, they will share the best practices among each other, and it has helped her tremendously. The feeling of, “If you need something, call us. We will help you and we will walk you through this,” have made her feel comfortable to reach out. Mrs. Mei is another Asian female education leader who is motivated and ready to make a big difference for her students, parents, and her community.

Dr. Sakari shared her first encounter with the district superintendent who was also a Japanese American female. This encounter also gave Dr. Sakari’s some foundational concepts of leadership.

When I first took the TOSA position, I was coming from a whole new school. I ran into the superintendent at that time who was actually a Japanese American woman. It was during her last year of serving the district, and she congratulated me on being the TOSA. She knew that I became the TOSA at that school. I asked her, “This is my first time in this role, so could you give me some advice that will
help me doing well here?” She said, “Always build relationships first! As a TOSA, do whatever you can to build the trust. It could be making copies for the teachers, but you need to build that relationship with them then you’ll be able to move far. If you don’t have that relationship or trust with them, you are not going to get anywhere.” So, I kept thinking about that in every position I took, because I truly feel that helps me with what I need to do and how I can support my assistant principal or support my teachers.

Dr. Sakari shared her journey to the administrative position. She referred to many people who encouraged her along the way and people who gave her suggestions and advices. However, she stated that she never had a formal mentor whose job was to formally provide guidance. She expressed,

I never had a formal mentor, and I don’t have one even now. There is no person that’s identified as my mentor. However, there are several people who I do consider as mentors and have helped me to get to where I am now. I think that all my previous principals are my mentors. My first principal really shaped and changed the school I was working at, and he was an inspiration for me and a motivational figure. He is definitely a person that I admire and still look up to this day.

There is no easy position, but she used her smile to solve many challenges she faced daily. She believes, “I am always looking for people who I respect and admire who I want to emulate. I try to approach situations similar to my mentors. You need to have a strong core value and vision that leads your decision-making process.”
One of Mrs. Sayda’s strengths is establishing networks and building relationships. She is not shy to make connections with her supervisor right away and share her vision. She stated,

I asked my principal, “Hi, this is my goal and my aspirations, is there any way I can help?” Some principals encouraged and welcomed me to implement different things, right away. The commonalities among these leaders are knowledgeable, have the skills to read people, being able to provide constructive criticism without sounding like putting you down, being open for feedback, and encourage new ideas from others. However, I had one of them who really didn’t provide me with any opportunities and support, while others provided me with guidance on how to talk to parents or show me all the logistical side of the school business.

Another mentor is my school counselor who steps in for me and supports me when we have concerns about student’s mental health conditions that I am not able to support that alone.

Therefore, when Mrs. Sayda was approached with a similar request from her staff, she offered her advice and suggestions to those, knowing those teachers were working on administrative credentials. Although she feels that her position is not as secure as a tenured teacher, she knows that she needs to constantly make good impressions in front of her bosses and constantly needs to prove herself. Mrs. Sayda uses that instability as her motivation to re-inventing herself for being a life-long learner. She also mentioned that being an Asian female leader, she received a lot of praises about being a leader who reflects the community. She stated,
I wish there’ll be a lot more Asians in the roles of administrator. I have heard parents say, “Wow! It’s nice to see somebody who’s Filipina doing this job.” Even if I am not, it is still nice to see a lot more of those people in their districts and being the leaders for their children. I want to tell others, “Hey look! I’m Asian and I’m up here. You can do it, too.” That is why I do it. Also, stay positive and build that thick skin without taking everything personally. I smile even after a tough parent conference. It’s not because I don’t care, but because I can understand and relate to my parents and my students.

**Research Question Four: Characteristics of Effective Mentors: Professional and Interpersonal**

According to Rosette et al. (2016), “Agentic deficiency is frequently associated with the evaluation of women's leadership potential. This mismatch between the leader role and the gender role occurs because the communal stereotypes affiliated with the female gender role are perceived as inadequate when paired with the agentic characteristics ascribed to typical leaders” (p. 429). Although all participants have demonstrated greater competency in directing and leading their schools, faculty, staff, and students, these Asian American female leaders expressed a great need of mentorship to assist them in achieving their visions and overcoming their inner critics and societal stereotypes. In the aspect of professional functions, they described the characteristics of mentors who provided the most positive outcome were knowledgeable, objective, who can cultivate leadership skills by accepting different perspectives and able to assist these leaders to solve problems. In the aspect of interpersonal functions, these Asian American leaders described their ideal characteristics of mentors were caring, empathic, trusting,
and reflective. They wanted their mentors to be honest, but also able to empower and inspire them to be better leaders. (see Table 5)

Table 5 Research Question 4: Characteristics of Mentors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 4</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the primary characteristics of mentors that benefited their career advancement and aspirations as identified by the participants?</td>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
<td>Professional traits of mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career related factors</td>
<td>Cultivate leader skills in others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strength finder/builder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Problem solver</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sounding board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Receptive of different perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal related factors</td>
<td>Objective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Interpersonal functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Calmness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good listener</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Empathetic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Honest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultivate trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship builder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 9: Professional traits of mentors “Cultivating Leadership and Allow Me to be Who I am”

The participants were asked about characteristics and personality traits, which benefited them most in the path of obtaining administrative positions. Many traits were similar to what they had discussed about the ideal leader characteristics. Regarding professional related factors, Dr. Emma shared, “A good mentor is to ask the right questions…. They also see the potential in me… to build me up and not tear me down.”
She also pointed out, “Being a mentor and also an evaluator, you are not necessarily their friend. It’s hard. Trust is a hard thing to get…. You don’t know what effect that your comment is going to be [on the mentee].”

The ability for mentors is to focus on the strength of the mentees instead of being a score keeper and being the unbiased sounding board to have the courage to hold an honest, hard conversation in a respectful manner. They should also be knowledgeable in order to ask the questions, which will lead mentees to reflect on the problems. The abilities to cultivate leadership skills and see from other’s perspectives were also mentioned as qualities, which benefited these female leaders most.

**Theme 10: Interpersonal Functions “Empower and Inspire”**

Besides the professional traits of mentors, participants also described a good mentor’s personal characteristics, which help mentees to reflect on their own leadership style. Dr. Carmen stated, “Mentors need to listen, and they need to show empathy without judgment…. They also need to help the mentee to reflect on the problem instead of giving her the answer. They also need to possess a sense of calmness to lead the mentee through difficult situation.” Dr. Lana further emphasized, “Mentors should have the ability to listen and be an unbiased sounding board.” Honesty, transparency, trust, approachability, and sense of calmness while facing difficult situations are qualities, which help participants, feel safe and comfortable.

**Summary**

Chapter 4 discussed the stories of eight participants, their success, challenges, and aspirations in the path of obtaining administrative positions in K-12 public school system
in Southern California. Through retelling each participant’s stories, the narratives showed different perspectives in the eight emergent themes.

Chapter 5 will identify major conclusions, based on the narrative as well as counter-narrative analysis. It will also connect the themes, surfaced in the research to the literature reviewed using the theoretical lenses of critical race theory, servant leadership, and multiple mentorship framework. It will then provide key recommendations for future Asian American women to assist in establishing a diverse leadership platform for all future Asian American female educators in the K-12 educational system. It will end with recommendations and implications for future research and concluding statements.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to understand the factors that impact Asian American female school leaders who are underrepresented among administrators in the American K-12 public school system. I sought to illuminate the experiences of Asian American female leaders who have faced success, challenges, and aspirations on the path to obtaining administrative positions. The other purpose was to provide perspectives on Asian American women’s involvement in mentoring while on the path of career advancement in administrative positions. The goal was that the findings of this study would assist in establishing a diverse leadership platform for all future Asian American female educators in the K-12 educational system.

Initially, as a young Chinese immigrant who came to this country seeking the freedom of different education options, I never thought that one day I would possibly have a chance to move up the social ladder and manage other people. No one in my family understood how to navigate through the American educational system, and thus, I chose to major in Biology as this, I thought, would put me on a level playing field, given that the language was foreign to me and to many native English speakers as well. Also, I dreamt that a major in biology would help me land a lucrative career as a medical doctor, and this way I could make my family proud. The path somehow changed for me, and I ended up teaching science in a district where most students are predominantly of Asian descent. As I looked around, I realized that there were very few female leaders in our district, let alone Asian female leaders whom I could emulate and perhaps follow in their footsteps after working as a teacher for 17 years in one school. That was the beginning of my research journey. I always consider myself lucky to have the opportunity to help
young students who have newly immigrated to U.S. and feel depressed to adapt to a new environment. Moreover, I never felt discriminated at school due to my racial background; however, there were times when I overheard other teachers casually tease my pronunciation of certain words or phrases. At other times, I witnessed how our administrative leaders butchered Asian student’s names during award ceremonies, and noticed their light chuckle, as if no one cared about the embarrassment. That was the moment when I realized that I may never fit into the American culture. I felt like a woman without a country to belong to.

This study is not just to understand the journeys of the Asian American female leaders, but is also a soul-searching project for me. When selecting participants, conducting interviews or transcribing their words, I would find myself reflecting on these women’s experiences. These eight extraordinary women who assumed leadership roles now carry more duties than the title they hold and are still concerned about the educational environment and the young minds that depend heavily on their leadership and guidance. All of them are well qualified, and many of them were offered higher pay checks and a title in the district office where they did not have to deal with a school site. However, all of them stated that their motivation and drive to work as educators comes from seeing their students succeed and become responsible citizens. These female leaders also believe that the value of being a leader is to cultivate leadership culture in their own schools and are willing to support their staff to climb the ladder of success. Although many of them have different childhood experiences, their family values, which lay greater emphasis on education and hard work, weigh heavily on their shoulders; yet, all are of the opinion that our education system should be more diversified.
Storytelling as Critical Race Theorists believe, allows oppressed people to share their perspectives, which may be different from the commonly held views and notions derived from the dominant hegemonic narratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The stories and journeys that the eight participants recalled during their in-depth interviews, reflected on various key aspects of CRT, educational leadership, Asian American women leaders, and the mentorship framework.

**Discussion**

**Family Expectation on Education and Model Minority Myth (MMM)**

According to Kumashiro (2008), the label of model minority given to Asian students due to their high academic achievement leads to several problems, such as subtle hidden racisms and “biases in the curriculum to blatant discrimination and violent acts of harassment” (p. 75). This label is another act of racism against those Asian students who are exceeding the academic expectation, because they are *supposed* to be the model students. It also suggests that the Asian racial stereotype defines Asian Americans as one monolithic group of people who value hard work and education in comparison to other minorities, specifically the African American population (Poon et al., 2016). Although the number of participants in this study is small, it is not difficult to see that over half of the participants obtained a doctorate degree, and all possess more than one credential, plus a master’s degree. All of them work as educational leaders in K-12 public school districts with plenty of opportunities offered to them in terms of career advancement. However, they say their inner critics doubt their abilities to lead others. Dr. Lana shared this comment made by her mother, “My mom always said, because you are Chinese, you have to work one hundred percent. You have to give everything one hundred percent.”
This model minority myth’s intention was not to compliment the high academic achievement of Asian Americans, but to be used as a tool to cause racial conflicts in order to propagate the “ideology of color blind racist society” (Poon et al., 2016). As stated by Kumashiro (2008), “Asian Americans is the group that is considered by some to be “outwhiting the Whites” in levels of achievement” (p. 75). This concept reflected in the statement of Dr. Nova when she stated,

Hidden racism is even worse! Don't forget, you have to be twice as good as the next White guy and have to be constantly excellent. As they don't want that pressure [of being discriminated], [Asian parents] push their kids to be a doctor or a lawyer. Because that is a single profession that has the highest prestige attached to it. It's harder for people to be racist towards you when you're a doctor who would save their life. It's harder for you to question the authority when you're a part of the ecosystem. It's harder for us to survive in corporate America where school system and the social network is the foundation of our promotion.

The major conflict caused by this myth is indicated in Kumashiro’s statement. He explained,

The major implication of model minority myth for Asian students and other minorities is “If some Asian Americans are making it, the problem of all other students of color cannot be structural racism. Rather the problem must be that either their teachers are not teaching well or the students themselves are not capable of learning. (p. 78)

Furthermore, the countering projects of MMM “challenge the deficit notion of education” (Poon et al., 2016, p. 472) to re-examine the damage of what the seemingly harmless
description of model minority and high-achieving Asian Americans has done to many Asian Americans who are not reaching the bar. In Mrs. Mei’s case, the standard set by her physician brother left her feeling not good enough. Mrs. Mei expressed, “My oldest brother is a [medical] doctor. My parents emphasize him a little more than the rest of us in terms of career. They are just really proud of him because he is a doctor.” Her example highlights the difficulties of being other than the “model.” Only after she became a principal did the dialogue and the “status” change. Mrs. Mei shared, “[After I was made principal], I started to see that my mom was telling a lot of people that I am a principal….That gave me a glimpse into her thinking and that she must be considering this as a high profile job.”

What is the function in U.S. society of MMM? As stated by Poon et al., (2016), “Asian Americans are strategically presented as a model of self-sufficient minority success….It is used to blame another minority group for its struggles” (p. 474). In these successful Asian American women leaders’ stories, it was seen that the hidden racism which is deeply embedded in our society is still present and creates obstacles in our educational ecosystem.

**Intercentricity of Race and Racism and Asian Values/Views/Mentality**

One specific tenet about CRT that emerged through the interviews was the intercentricity of race and racism. According to Yosso (2006),

**Discussions of race within CRT begin with an examination of how race has been socially constructed in U.S. history and how the system of racism functions to oppress People of Color while privileging Whites. A CRT in education centralizes race and racism, while also focusing on racisms’ intersections with other forms of**
subordination, based on gender, class, sexually, language, culture, immigrant
status, phenotype, accent, and surname. (p. 7)

The long history and political view on how Asian Americans identify themselves
and their status in the dominant Western society was presented through different aspects.
According to Lott (1998), the levels of identity of Asian Americans included those who
are immigrants and U.S born respondents, wherein they want to pursue their own ethnic
and cultural identity as opposed to a bicultural identity where they claim to be Americans
with an Asian heritage, and the half and half generation where people’s background is a
combination of Asian and American cultures to the last biracial marriages and their
children. Dr. Nova was an immigrant who can be considered as the half and half
generation owing to her interracial marriage, but how she identifies herself is a bit more
complicated. She said,

When I moved to the United States, I married my husband. He's American and I
didn't want to have anything to do with the Korean culture…. So when I moved to
the central coast of California, I really didn't have any desire or need to go to a
place where there would be a huge Korean population. I actually rejected my
language completely.

Similarly, Mrs. Mei’s story also showed how an immigrant mother hoped for a different
treatment for her children. She said,

My mom [who was an immigrant from China] was placed in a kindergarten class
at a high school age [to learn English]. She didn’t want for us to go through the
same thing, so even though my grandparents who lived with us only spoke
Chinese [with us], I never learned it.
Their stories all showed various degrees of oppression, but they also reflected another aspect of motivation. To blend in with the dominant White culture for gaining advanced degrees and following the ideology of other’s image of a successful Asian immigrant. Dr. Carmen narrated her experiences of being the only woman among middle school principals. She said,

I work in an environment that is very White. When there are certain things that they don’t want, they will keep quiet when I express my opinions. They don’t see it, and they are not going to see it unless they walk a mile in my shoes.

She further elaborated her struggles,

I work a hundred times more than anybody…because I know the moment I don’t work as hard, it’d be noticed in the sea of Whites. [White] people who don’t work as hard, they get by and nobody is going to notice….My previous two principals were shining because I worked so hard as an assistant principal.

Asian American women’s intersectionality and multiple identities did not create opportunities for advancing in their career path, instead, they were stuck in the double bind of the societal view of Asians and women leaders. As Dr. Lana said,

Asians in Los Angeles are like the majority minority, which is much different than in the rest of the country; however, the old Chinese values of respecting the elders and to not be argumentative are still part of me internally….If you are sharing your opinion and it contradicts with that of the elders, it is not being respectful…however, in the dominant Western culture of Whiteness, it is perceived as being diminutive, being silenced, and being a shadow.
Because of the lack of a thinking model of how Asian Americans should be to be considered successful, there is sense of obligation among them of making no room for failing. Thus, many participants could recall the way they were told to conduct themselves. Dr. Emma shared,

My uncle used to say, ‘Always walk in the light and you will never fear the shadow.’ That means, have integrity and do the right thing, you won’t have to check yourself and look behind you. Simple things like honesty, integrity, hard-work, and perseverance are important…. Laziness is frowned upon. My dad said, ‘In everything you do, be your personal best.

Asianization and a Strong Sense of Responsibility and Obligation toward the Leadership Role

Asianization is part of a branch of CRT, which emphasizes the focus on how racism affects Asian Americans in the U.S. Museus and Iftikar (2013) stated that Asianization provides a framework to analyze the construction of racial category of Asian Americans that serves the purpose of convenience of the dominant Western culture of Whiteness in policy making, legislation, and resource distribution. Meanwhile, it reviews the concept of Model Minority Myth and labeling of Asian Americans as “honorary Whites” within the affirmative action discussion. The sense of obligation and work ethic presented in the following excerpt from an interview gives a glimpse into Asian American women leaders’ intention to fulfill their calling.

Mrs. Jin shared,

I could be making a stereotypical racist remark, but all the Asian colleagues I know, they kill themselves. I think compared to some other ethical administrators,
I can be overlooked, so I had to prove where I was. I have done the best I can and left my signature and mark in some way with accomplishment that speaks for itself…. I think being an Asian American, I want people to genuinely respect me for who I am and for what I do, rather than the title I hold.

However, for these leaders who constantly strive to be the best and to prove to others that they are capable and responsible, it is difficult to overcome the ideal image of a leaders as in the Western views. Kumashiro (2008) likened this image to the structure of “strick-father,” which illustrated how leaders are like fathers who know what is right and have no need to ask for permission in hopes to protect the danger from the outside. Similarly, Cho (2003) also stated, “Model minority traits of passive and submissive are intensified and gendered through the stock portrayal of obedient and servile Asian Pacific women in popular culture” (p. 351). Thus, these conflicting images have created obstacles for many Asian American women leaders.

Dr. Nova said, “Even though you have the skills and qualifications, if you walk into a room of people who don’t look like you and they can’t see beyond your ethnicity and gender, then you are pretty doomed.” Dr. Carmen shared, “[When I have an idea,] I always first try to listen very deeply and intently to everybody, then I will say something. It is a product of my upbringing for being culturally different than the majority. I think humbleness is one of the things that is different from the Western image of a leader.”

Similarly, Dr. Emma stated,

Being an Asian female leader, we are sometimes perceived to be quiet and meek….It is not confrontational in your face….Being Asian, humility is a value. However, as a leader, you have to be your own advocate. You have to say
that I am good at this and that is where I can grow. Nobody will advocate for you. For Asian females, they know that they are capable, but they don’t come out and say it.

Interest Convergence and a Strong Work Ethic and Professionalism

According to the idea of interest convergence, a tenet in the study of CRT, the Whites only invest in the policies, legislations, and programs for the people of color when the outcome benefits the Whites as well (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Yosso et al., 2009). On the path of pursuing administrative positions, these Asian American women leaders have been supported by many cheerleaders along the way who recognized their abilities and capability to be successful in the leadership positions. However, among the eight participants, only two participants said they received a formal training to cultivate their leadership skills and help them reach the respective positions. When their work ethic and their heritage also aligned with what the district needed, they were promoted and encouraged.

Mrs. Jin shared, “It’s difficult to work for me. Although I will support my boss, and due to my Asian mentality, I will make my boss look good, and will kill myself to work hard for my boss.” Dr. Lana explained,

I told my principal at the time, “Don’t forget, I am your girl! Throw me a project!”…. It finally dawned on me why all other people get recognized for doing great things? Am I not doing anything well? No, you get overlooked, because you do your job too well.

Mrs. Mei shared an anecdote when she was needed to represent Asians due to her heritage and her appearance.
She shared,

When there is a new incoming Asian student, I became the secret sauce….They pushed me out to represent Asians, and I thought it is a bit foolish, because they may not care….It’s like sending a wrong message in some sense that after knowing your principal is Asian, so you will be ok.

Although the encouragements and promotions also benefit these highly driven female leaders, we often have to ask, “Would they have to work this hard in order to gain recognition if they were not Asian American women?”

**Multiple Mentoring Frameworks and Establishing Networks and Relationships**

The additional emphasis of my study, which sets it apart from other studies, is the focus on mentorship and networking. From each participant’s story, it was clear that there exists an institutional bias and lack of systems and process to cultivate Asian American female educational leaders. Similarly, in Hune’s study (2011), the participant who acquired her faculty position in the higher education forum “finds her ‘joy’ of teaching severely diminished as she has to constantly contend with what the dominant culture considers to be appropriate behavior for an Asian American female, namely, being passive, and by being penalized for her professionalism and self-confidence” (p. 308). Therefore, by researching the multiple mentoring framework, I hope to bring to light the multifaceted needs of Asian American female educational leaders.

Dr. Emma stated, “Mentorship to me is key. It is about personal growth, and the connection is huge.” She explained her mentoring network at the district level. She said, “When I cleared my administrative credential, I was required to undergo 40 hours of mentoring from another seasonal administrator…. She watched me interact with my staff
and provided me with feedback. I got to experience the power of mentorship.” However, Kram (1983) states, a multiple mentoring framework can “enhance development in early adulthood by facilitating work on these task” (p. 608). The proper processes, as indicated by Kram (1983), include: a) initiation phase, b) cultivation phase, c) separation phase, and d) a redefinition phase. The participants were asked if they have received any mentoring or have mentored others. The responses were limited. It was found that their supporters and cheerleaders were not a constant factor in their careers. This raises a huge concern about lack of a pathway for those well qualified women who often did not see themselves as leaders. Dr. Sakari shared, “I have many people who encouraged me along the way and provided me with suggestions and advices; however, I never had a formal mentor whose job is to formally provide me with guidance.”

**Gender Inequality and Intersectionality**

Intersectionality, which is one of the focuses of this study, arises from the AsianCrit tenet to understand how the “systemic intersectional, racial identity and other social identities mutually shape Asian American [women] experiences” (Museus & Iftikar, 2013, p. 26). Dr. Lana shared her views on this concept. She stated,

Now you start breaking it down to cultures. African Americans can totally play that African American card. When you start looking at politics, you got the African-American, then Hispanics, then Asians. I am a double negative because I am female and Asian. Do I feel like I’ve encountered roadblocks? The answer is yes.

In this study, throughout the narratives, the participants often said their foremost obstacles in becoming leaders was their gender. They don’t see the extra dedication to
their jobs as a burden, thus, they refer to the “Asian mentality” as a hard-work ethic. They don’t see the extra hours they have to put in as compared to their White counterparts as bias treatment; they share their love and devotion to their students, parents, and the community instead. However, they do see the inequality in the treatment of male and female leaders in an educational forum. Dr. Carmen pointed out, “We don’t have enough women leaders, because we bring a different perspective. Women tend to be more reserved in how they carry out their leadership role.” She further illustrated her own intersectionality as part of her struggle for being a leader. She shared, “I am a Muslim, a woman, and an Indian. I have always struggled to not be overlooked. Even though I don’t want to be noticed, I want people to hear what I have to say and take it seriously.” Her story simply made me wonder if the way I look matters more than who I am. Racial bias seems to be a huge overlooked factor hidden within our system. She further elaborated,

When I was applying for the principal position, I knew I was not going to get the job, because I was up against two male applicants who are easily identified with males in the district leadership. It turned out to be true since this position became a stepping stone for that person to move up into a district position.

The statement ties in with Cho’s statement (2003) of Asian American women, “In the workplace, objectification comes to mean that the material valuation of women’s contributions will be based not on their professional accomplishments of work performance but on men’s perception of their potential to be harassed” (p. 351). Dr. Lana echoed the thought when she explained, “Let’s call it what it is. White male is the power majority and when you start going down the hierarchy, obviously, it is male above female.” Mrs. Mei also shared similar thoughts, “A male leader once said to me, ‘I am
sorry that you have a uterus.’” Furthermore, in Dr. Emma’s observations, she felt, “Males can talk the talk and look the look, but if they don’t walk the walk, they’ll be fine. While females can talk the talk and look the look, but if your data doesn’t show, you are gone.”

Dr. Emma further stated,

There are a lot of females in teaching, but there are a lot of males in the upper management and leadership. It is not an equal ratio….When males apply for a job, they apply for the job knowing they will be qualified, when they get the job. For females, they don’t apply for a job until they know for certain that they are qualified for the job.

Asian American women are an easier target for harassment despite the well-cultivated image of how current education teaches our students to be the future citizens of the world and to tolerate differences among us for bringing in global awareness and to end racial bias and discrimination.

**Self-doubts, Advice, and the Counter-Narratives**

This tenet from the CRT and AsianCrit has helped weave the whole study together. It is through storytelling that I got a glimpse into the world of strong Asian American female leaders in the field of education, and their struggles, success, and aspirations. It is through this method that these oppressed women can truly share what has benefited them in the path of pursuing the leadership position and helped them stand out despite their nature of standing behind the spotlight.

I did not expect to hear the candid versions, wherein they spoke of their flaws and insecurities, but to my surprise, they were extremely forthcoming. For example, Dr. Lana expressed, “I would get overlooked and maybe I worked as hard as I did….I almost felt
like I had to constantly remind people that I am here. Because in my nature, I would much rather fly below the radar.” The fear of being overlooked and the fear of not doing enough to lead was the recurrent theme when they were asked about what leadership means to them. However, they also provided advice for the future Asian American females who are willing to be different in order to pursue their dreams. In a collective way, their advice was, a) Build a network and be visible even if you are scared; b) Do not underestimate yourself. You can do anything you put your mind to; c) Be reflective and always willing to learn; d) Balance life and career. Asian woman do have that work ethic that is engraved in them, of giving so much to their jobs. However, in the process, they lose out the joy of what life has to give. It is not about ability or confidence, but it is about how much of themselves can they give for it; e) Be true to yourself; f) Don't take no for an answer. Do not ask a question to a person who does not have the authority to say yes, and do not take no from a person who does not have an authority to say yes; g) Search for the purpose and the beginning when you decide to be in education. It doesn't matter what you are, whether you're black, white, yellow, green, orange; h) Lastly, be fearless. Although that does not always come naturally to many Asian American women, be fearless or just be braver than we think we are ever going to be to put ourselves out there.

Implications

As I am investigating deeper in each participant’s story, I can see the patterns of struggles and the rewards as they get to where they want to be. I do not think they often blame the society for the different levels of oppressions and discriminations they suffer, even in a forum where models and leaderships are extremely important for our students.
In the beginning, as I composed the framework for this study through the lens of CRT, Feminism and AsianCrit to see the challenges these women face, it was not clear to me. These leaders credited every person who ever supported them or had a bias against them. They took gender discrimination, objectification, racism, as their lessons in life to learn and considered it as their new motivation to prove themselves over and over again. They are not the followers of the dominant culture of Whiteness or see their environment as a color-blind ideology society; instead, they realized how hard they have to work to overcome the feeling of being different and isolated. Therefore, they chose to look at this world and gain respect from others for who they are and others.

Educational implications helped to frame the viewpoints of educators and identified ways to use our knowledge to appreciate as well as understand that true diversity is not based on skin color or facial features, but rather on each person’s uniqueness. A keen awareness of this allowed society to ensure equality for all, ensuring each person has the same opportunities to achieve success.

Another major finding was the power of encouragement. Along the way, all Asian American female education leaders could identify someone who believed in them regardless. Despite the lack of systematic mentorship process as that should be embedded in our school districts in order to ensure and encourage women who have the drive and determination have a clear pathway to obtain higher positions, these encouragements have provided a boost in their confidence. These Asian American female education leaders then sustain the culture that nurtures and discovers the potential in others. The American society cannot afford to waste this untapped resource—there is great potential in this minority group, which has been thoroughly demonstrated by the National Center
for Education Statistics’ (2017) results for 2013–2014. The potential and impact of these female Asian American education leaders are immense along with their cultural perspectives. As stated by Chin, Lott, Rice, and Sanchez-Hucles (2008),

Women who are effective feminist leaders are setting the stage for change-by transforming campus and by influencing others to adopt new attitudes, behaviors, and leadership styles. Feminist leaders empower and influence others to effectively work in more egalitarian climates and to educate student and mentor others, thus preparing future generations of leaders who embrace feminist values. (p. 85)

In the beginning of this study, my hope was to illuminate a path for the women like me who enjoy teaching and wishing to inspire more young women who look like me by providing them with courage and guidance. In the end of this study, I discovered more than I was hoping for, and I realized that each step these women take is a step that constantly reminding me to be fierce and be free from the perception of others. I am finally aware that I have sat by the sideline long enough and now it is my turn to shine.

The location and the history of California where racial diversity is a norm in our daily environment, we should really learn how to celebrate the differences amongst us instead of cultivating racial and gender biases by mystifying who Asian American women are institutionally, culturally, professionally, and politically.

Finally, when reflecting on the available literature that explained, studied, and investigated Asian Americans and the ways the model minority concept impacts this faction of the population’s hope for the future, it was easy to generalize, and in doing so, assume that all Asian Americans focus on family values, community support, education, a
strong work ethic, and high self-efficacy. Like all generalizations and their various assumptions, this is not necessarily true. It is essential to look beyond race and ethnicity as well as commit to understanding the relationships between genders, identity, and sexuality in educational settings. At the same time, it is necessary to develop a healthy dialogue in order to find common ground between the expectations of Asian American parents and their children’s goals and interests.

As the first elected Congresswomen with Asian descent, Patsy Mink once said, “We have to build things that we want to see accomplished, in life and in our country, based on our own personal experiences ... to make sure that others ... do not have to suffer the same discrimination” (Brown & Gershon, 2016, p. 1). Racial discrimination is engrained in American culture, but it is possible to educate others with the broader goal of accepting and respecting the differences between people. Asian Americans must learn not to fixate on academic achievement and prestigious career choices as well as remember that labeling oneself does not equal to success and happiness.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

For future research recommendations, I would suggest to focus on investigating Asian American women who have already obtained or are in the process of obtaining administrative credentials, which grants them the qualifications to pursue the administrative position, and understand their expectations, motives, aspirations, and challenges in order to bridge the gap in the phenomenon of underrepresentation of Asian American female leaders in the highest administrative level, and to further illuminate the pipeline for successfully cultivating the leadership skills of Asian American female educational leaders in the field.
References


https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242122182_Effective_Mentoring_Relationships_with_Women_in_Sport_Results_of_a_Meta-Ethnography


https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-008-9398-2


Nath, I. (2015). The next generation: Education and mentorship are key to fostering the growth of female leaders in the technology sector. *Maclean’s, 128*(40), S1. Retrieved from


https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act


Rosette, A. S., Koval, C. Z., Ma, A., & Livingston, R. (2016). Race matters for women leaders: Intersectional effects on agentic deficiencies and penalties. The

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.01.008


https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716208322957


Appendix A: Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of Study: Asian American Women in Leadership Roles: The Success and the Challenges as Public-School Administrators in Southern California

Investigator’s Name: Melody Isabela
Dept: Education
Phone: 909-869-4915

Introduction

You are being asked to be in a research study of “Asian American Women in Leadership Roles: The Success and the Challenges as Public-School Administrators in Southern California.”

You were selected as a possible participant because you are identified as Asian American women who is a full-time administrator at K-12 public schools.

We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study

This study focuses on analyzing the underrepresentation of Asian American female school leaders in K12 public school system, and furthermore means to understand their success, challenges and aspirations on the path to obtaining administrative positions.

Description of the Study Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, your responses from the interview will be audio recorded.
**Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study**

There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks.

**Benefits of Being in the Study**

The benefits of participation will provide a different perspective on this group of minority women’s aspirations on the path of career advancement in administration positions while understanding their positive impact in terms of establishing a diverse leadership platform for all future Asian American female educators who are motivated in making a difference in K12 education.

**Confidentiality**

This study is anonymous. We will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity. The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. I will not include any information in any report that would make it possible to identify you.

**Right to Refuse or Withdraw**

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of your interview material.

**Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns**

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further
questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Melody Isabela at
misabela@ausd.net or by telephone at (626) 320-5617.

**Consent**

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigators.

Participant’s Name (Print): __________________________ Date: ____________

Participant’s Signature: ______________________________

Researcher’s Signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Research Question No. 1: What success, challenges and aspirations do Asian American women say they experienced while pursuing administrative leadership positions as principals and assistant principals at public schools?

Could you tell me about your background?

1. Could you describe your own education and how it influenced you?
2. What kind of leader character traits contribute to your success in attaining your current position?
3. What are your strengths and skills that help you to be successful in your current position?
4. What strengths and skills do you see that current public-school administrator needs to become an effective leader?
5. What are some of your recommendations for future Asian American educators who would like to pursue the administrative positions in Public School?

Research Question No. 2: How did your intersectionality, such as race, gender and class differences, contribute to their views of being a leader?

1. Explain how your cultural background and upbringing impact your life choices such as education and career choice?

Research Question No. 3: What forms of training and mentoring activities did these Asian American women receive, if any?

1. Please describe and share your experience of mentoring training?
2. What character traits and skills do effective mentors need?
Research Question No. 4: What are the primary characteristics of mentors that benefit their career advancement and aspirations as identified by the participants?