EXPLORING THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF ASIAN AMERICAN LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Despite the representation and significance of Asian American students to enrollment and graduation goals of U.S. colleges and universities, Asian Americans are fundamentally invisible in critical leadership roles that make decisions and drive policy at these institutions. Scholarship points to racism and white supremacy in U.S. higher education as creating inequalities for the non-majority. As a result, the racialized stereotypes of Asian Americans as the model minority and perpetual foreigner construct challenges for advancement of Asian Americans into campus leadership positions of authority and influence. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Asian Americans who succeeded to be executive and senior leaders in higher education. Through the AsianCrit lens, the study sought to understand the experiences of Asian American leaders and examine their narratives of navigating their racialized identities at postsecondary institutions. Fifteen Asian American executive and senior leaders participated in interviews that explored their racialization, experiences with racism, and the meaning of these experiences. Five major themes emerged. The first theme is connected to the racialization of Asian American leaders at colleges and universities and demonstrates how stereotypes underpin the view of Asian Americans as deficient leaders. The second theme is related to the intersectionality of Asian American women leaders and how they navigate race and gender. The third theme surfaces the significance of Asian
American support on leadership. The fourth theme reflects the salience of representation on Asian American leadership experiences and the final theme is connected to Asian American leaders' commitment to social justice and education as the path forward to affect change. Through this exploration, conclusions substantiated the enduring influence of racism and racialization on Asian Americans and their leadership and the prominence of gender on women’s’ leadership experiences. Conclusions also reflected an attenuated appearance of cultural values in leadership, the resilience of Asian American leaders, the importance of support to leadership, and the shrinking leadership pipeline. AsianCrit was also identified as an effective framework for examining Asian American leadership. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research were provided to continue to grow the literature on Asian American leadership.
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Tuesday lunch, Nyan Cat
P’s and S’s, Eyes on fire
Shared only with y’all
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white Supremacist Culture in Higher Education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes and Asian American Experiences</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and Leadership</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cultural Values</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Frameworks</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Race Theory</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Critical Theory</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Positionality</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Design</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Key Terminology</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>white Supremacy in Higher Education</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white-Serving Institutions</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism and the Impact on Asian Americans</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Model Minority</em></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Perfidious and Perpetual Foreigner</em></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gendered Race</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and Asian American Leadership</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racialized Perceptions of Leadership</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Values</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo Ceiling</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Development</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging Collectivist Leadership Styles</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Frameworks</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Race Theory</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Critical Theory</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Approach and Design</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendental and Hermeneutic Phenomenology</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Role and Reflexivity</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures for Data Collection</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness and Credibility</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Participant Attributes</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Participants and Corresponding Themes</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Asian Americans are an important student population for enrollment and degree attainment goals of colleges and universities in the United States. In 2018, 59% of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled as undergraduate or graduate students in 2- or 4-year institutions were Asian American (Hussar et al., 2020). Additionally, in the same year, of Asian Americans 25- to 29-years-old, 71% had attained a bachelor’s degree or higher, and 29% had obtained a master’s degree or higher (McFarland et al., 2019). Postsecondary educational activities have shown strong relationships with long-term life outcomes where higher educational attainment has consistently been associated with higher median earnings (Hussar et al., 2020). For Asian Americans, this is reflected in their median weekly earnings ($1,261), which are above the nation’s median and higher than any other racial/ethnic group including white Americans (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

Despite the representation of Asian American students in higher education, in their academic successes and their subsequent impact and contributions to the U.S. workforce, Asian American representation does not translate to the privileged leadership positions of U.S. colleges and universities. Leaders in higher education hold titles such as president, chancellor, or provost. These individuals influence and guide colleges and universities to success or failure. However, the top ranks of U.S. colleges and universities organization charts are devoid of diversity. In 2016, only 2% of college presidents were Asian American whereas 83% of college

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1 It is important to note that I have made the deliberate decision to stylistically use a lowercase w for any references to white as a racial/ethnic group to stand against white supremacy and racism, to disassociate any attribution to hate groups, and to center my writing on Asian Americans and their narratives rather than perpetuate the visibility of whiteness.
presidents were white, 8% were Black/African American, and 4% were Hispanic/Latinx (American Council on Education [ACE], 2017). The inequitable findings in the ACE American College President Study were further substantiated by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) data collection on higher education administrator positions. Bichsel and McChesney (2017) found Asians Americans made up merely 2% of the racial/ethnic composition of higher education administrators in positions such as provost/chief academic affairs officer and chief student affairs/student life officer whereas 86% of the administrators were white, 7% were Black/African American, and 3% were Hispanic/Latinx. Bichel and McChesney (2017) further concluded the representation gap of minorities is widening. While colleges and universities make commitments to expand diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of their institutional goals, the glaring scarcity of Asian Americans in those critical campus leadership roles is not indicative of those objectives but instead reflects a persistent culture of whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Museus et al., 2015; Patton, 2016).

**Background**

The foundations of U.S. higher education are steeped in racism and white supremacy (Evans-Winter & Hoff, 2011; Patton, 2016; Pine & Hilliard, 1990; Wilder, 2013). Power dynamics of oppression and dominance created inequalities for people of color. The racist history of colleges and universities is consistent with the themes that have emerged from extant literature about Asian Americans, asserting racism and white supremacy in U.S. higher education play a significant role in shaping the experiences of Asian Americans (Buena Vista & Chen, 2013; Museus, 2014; Museus et al., 2015; Museus & Park, 2015). As a result, the enduring influence of white dominant culture and normative values construct
racist conditions impacting how Asian Americans are perceived both socially and in the workplace which, in turn, create major barriers to Asian American movement and promotion into leadership positions.

**white Supremacist Culture in Higher Education**

From its origins, U.S. higher education was a significant contributor to the subjugation of Indigenous populations and people of color, with the first colleges built by slaves on land taken from North American Indigenous people (Patton, 2016; Wilder, 2013). Wilder (2013) identified connections of slave ownership to the charter members of colonial colleges and the use of slave labor by the leaders of these institutions to financially expand and maintain their campuses. These early colleges were white supremacist environments that groomed the founding leaders of the country. Not only did the origins of higher education reflect the origins of the United States, but the resulting oppressive structures of power also established during this time endured for centuries and continue today. For many of these colleges and universities founded in the colonial era, they have ignored their racist roots and for some, it took more than 250 years, in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement and social justice protests of 2020, to acknowledge their racist past and present. Higher education’s long history of white supremacy frames its policies and practices and its leaders, who stood by them.

**Stereotypes and Asian American Experiences**

Stereotypes and white dominant perceptions of Asian Americans are held between being an inescapably, foreign Other, or treacherous “perfidious foreigner” (Suzuki, 2002), and being allied with white Americans as the model minority, potentially the most prevalent stereotype about Asian Americans (Museus, 2014; Museus & Chang, 2009; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 2002). The model
minority depicts Asian Americans as a “phenomenally successful, problem-free minority group” who have overcome all barriers of racial discrimination (Suzuki, 2002, p. 21). This perception of Asian Americans was a white supremacist narrative where the majority used Asian American success to counter claims of the Civil Rights Movement that racism was the cause of the struggles of people of color. Consequently, the misperception of Asian Americans as successful makes it easy for inequities to be neglected; therefore, removing Asian Americans from the equity and diversity conversation. The model minority stereotype presumes all Asian Americans are thriving, are a group that does not need attention, which leads to them being invisible. The stereotype further misidentifies Asian Americans as a monolith who are all the same, but Asians in America are representative of over 20 countries (Asian Americans Advancing Justice [AAJC], 2019) and the success of these diverse Asian communities varies widely with significant disparities in median household incomes, poverty rates, and education. In addition to the perfidious foreigner and model minority stereotypes, gendered race stereotypes of Asian American men as emasculated and women as eroticized and sexualized further perpetuate racist misrepresentations of Asian Americans.

**Race and Leadership**

Research on leadership and race has shown in the United States, because the dominant group, white individuals, more commonly occupy leadership positions, white leaders are perceived as the prototypic standard for comparison of leadership (Festekjian et al., 2014). White leaders are ascribed with characteristics such as masculinity, tyranny, and dynamism which are then those features sought after in leaders. Any attributes that do not fit this standard are not perceived as leadership material perpetuating white dominant culture.
**Cultural Values**

The differences that exist between Asian cultural values and those venerated in the United States are additional barriers that can impede promotion by Asian Americans into management and leadership roles. Asian cultural values are perceived through a racialized lens, and when measured against U.S. prototypic leadership perceptions are viewed as contradictory and, therefore, not leadership material. Asian cultural values such as collectivism and humility are values shared by diverse Asian racial groups (B. S. K. Kim et al., 2005). A collectivistic focus emphasizes the group – family, community – over the individual. However, collectivism and the collective experience of success as a reflection of family and community disagrees with Western independence, autonomy, and “finding one’s passion” (Fouad et al., 2008). Correspondingly, Asian Americans often avoid standing out from others and endeavor not to boast about their achievements and successes - being modest and emotionally self-controlled. Like collectivism, humility is at odds with dominant cultural notions of leadership, producing hurdles for Asian American elevation to top positions.

**Statement of the Problem**

While Asian Americans are a relevant and important student population to the enrollment and completion goals of U.S. postsecondary institutions, Asian Americans are not a represented and significant population to the leadership positions of those institutions. Existing literature points to racism and white supremacy in U.S. higher education as creating inequalities for anyone who is not of the majority (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Museus et al., 2015; Patton, 2016). For Asian Americans, a consequence of the racist, inequitable culture of higher education is the lack of representation of Asian Americans at the executive and senior leadership levels of U.S. colleges and universities. The racialized stereotypes of
Asian Americans as the model minority and perfidious foreigner create challenges for advancement, keeping Asian Americans out of those campus leadership positions of authority and influence. This absence sends a message to students, staff, and faculty that the invisibility of Asian Americans is acceptable. The exclusion of Asian Americans in those campus leadership positions of authority and influence means institutional policies and practices are established without taking into consideration the voices and perspectives of Asian Americans. Lacking Asian Americans in those executive and senior leadership roles of influence, policies will continue to be implemented based on the perception that all Asian Americans are a monolith instead of addressing the needs of the diverse Asian American communities where vast disparities in poverty rates and education exist. As a result, students from underserved Asian American communities are inequitably impacted. Asian American voices in those leadership positions can substantially affect developing policies and practices that are equitable and inclusive of all Asian American communities. As racism and white supremacy persist in influencing Asian American experiences in higher education, undoubtedly the underrepresentation of Asian American leadership in higher education will remain an equity and diversity issue that needs to be explored and addressed.

**Conceptual Frameworks**

With race and racism underlying this study, my research was framed by critical race theory (CRT) and Asian critical theory (AsianCrit) perspectives.

**Critical Race Theory**

CRT grew out of critical legal studies in the 1970s to explain the endurance of racism in America. The literature about CRT begins with the foundation that
racism is “normal, not aberrant, in American society” and, because it is so entrenched in the culture, it appears normal and natural to people (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). After compiling key CRT writings, Crenshaw et al. (1995) noted there is not a collection of doctrines to which CRT scholars all subscribe. However, Matsuda et al. (1993) outlined six basic tenets of CRT to understand the role of racism in policy and practice: (a) racism is normal; (b) CRT challenges dominant ideologies of race-neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy; (c) CRT emphasizes contextual and historical analyses; (d) CRT acknowledges the experiential knowledge of people of color; (e) CRT is interdisciplinary; (f) CRT is committed to social justice and ending all forms of oppression.

CRT can be applied to education to account for the role of race and racism in the field. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) extended the definition of CRT to education arguing the theory provides a rationale “toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin” (p. 25). CRT in education is a “set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p.25). Through the CRT lens, my study critically analyzed the influence of the racial power structures within U.S. higher education.

**Asian Critical Theory**

With AsianCrit, I further analyze the role those power structures have in defining the experiences of Asian American leaders. Iftikar and Museus (2018) developed an AsianCrit framework built on the scholarship that utilized CRT in the study of Asian Americans, research in Asian American Studies, and existing
CRT literature. CRT is foundational to AsianCrit, but the inclusion of Asian American Studies scholarship extends the framework for examining the role of racism in Asian American experiences (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). AsianCrit has seven tenets that align with CRT tenets but are distinctly tailored to analyze the role white dominant culture has in shaping the lives of Asian Americans:

1. Asianization. The endemic racism, white dominant culture of American society results in the racialization of Asian Americans as model minorities and perpetual foreigners.

2. Transnational contexts. The global relationships and situations, as they are related to the U.S., shape the conditions of racism Asian Americans experience.

3. (Re)constructive history. A focus on a historical narrative that includes voices and contributions of Asian Americans, who are silent and invisible in U.S. history.

4. Strategic (anti)essentialism. Countering and recognizing how white dominant culture racializes Asian Americans as a monolithic group in the US, but also acknowledging Asian Americans actively intervene in the racialization process, for example, building coalitions to garner political power against the dominant majority.

5. Intersectionality. Racism and other forms of subjugation intersect to shape the racial and social identities of Asian Americans.

6. Story, theory, and praxis. The lived experiences and narratives of Asian Americans are valid and strengths that challenge traditional paradigms which marginalize the voices of Asian Americans - counter storytelling.
7. Commitment to social justice. Based on CRT, AsianCrit seeks to eliminate racism, sexism, and poverty and to empower the subordinated groups (Iftikar & Museus, 2018).

For my study, I focused on the story, theory, and praxis, and Asianization tenets. The story, theory, and praxis tenet centers on the validity and strengths of Asian Americans’ narratives challenge traditional paradigms and marginalize Asian Americans voices (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). My research encouraged Asian American leaders to express their authentic lived experiences. Through counter storytelling, a method for those on the margins of society to share their own experiences, Asian American leaders shared their experiences to “shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). With the tenet of Asianization, Asian Americans have been racialized by the model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes which inform societal laws and governance that exclude Asian Americans and are reflected in the policies and perspectives at colleges and universities. Through the Asianization tenet, I sought to understand the influence of racialized social constructs of Asian Americans stereotypes and the resultant exclusion have on the lived experiences on Asian American leaders in higher education.

**Researcher Positionality**

Researcher positionality describes “the relationship between the researcher and their participants and the researcher and their topic” (Jones et al., 2014, p.26). My connection to the participants of this study and the topic of the underrepresentation of Asian American leaders in higher education was motivated by my own personal and professional journeys in higher education. As such, my individual experiences and biases played a part in forming and shaping this...
research study. In addition to stating my positionality and relationship to this research, reflexivity was an important action throughout the research process.

I am a Filipino-American woman. I was born in the U.S. and am the youngest daughter and child of immigrant parents. I have two older brothers and one older sister and, as children of a United States Navy servicemember, we spent our childhoods where our father was stationed. I did not realize it until adulthood that our multiple moves as a family, our experiences starting over in and navigating a new place together, would create a connectedness and grounding that is the constant, steady influence that has shaped me. The values, the history, and, as Yosso (2005) defined, the “cultural knowledges nurtured among familia” (p.79) molded my own values, history, and knowledge, including those about education and being a leader. As immigrants, it was important to my parents for the four of us to assimilate to American customs and traditions. While my parents imparted Filipino and Asian cultural values and traditions, those values were blended with American pop culture. My parents also placed a major focus on education in our home, particularly on reading and English proficiency. This was a by-product of our family history - my paternal grandfather, my father and his siblings, and my mother all have college degrees from universities in the Philippines. My siblings and I and our cousins and extended family and friends traversed American higher education. I was led by, mentored by, and learned from those who attended before me - supporting and depending on each other through our experiences. Twelve of us would attain bachelor’s degrees or higher.

When I started my first job in higher education as an academic advisor, there was only one other Asian American, a Filipino American woman, in my immediate organization. While the student population we served had a well-represented and diverse Asian American community, this was not the case for the
staff, much less the executive and senior leadership teams – there was no one to mentor us, no one to model. As a young professional trying to make my way to management and leadership, it was, as Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children’s Defense fund, professed, “[It’s] hard to be what you can’t see” (Edelman, 2015). Instead, I found support and community from the kinship around me. It was my fellow Filipino American academic advisor who encouraged me to pursue an MBA. When I moved on to my next higher education organization and position, I worked with more Asian American colleagues, which created a nice sense of belonging, but my leadership team was again without Asian American representation. Yet again, it was another Asian American colleague, a Vietnamese American woman, who would encourage me to look for promotion and leadership opportunities.

Today, I am an administrator in higher education with over 20 years of practitioner and leadership experience at for-profit and public colleges and universities. Like Asian American students who do not see leaders on campus who look like them, in the span of my work experience in higher education, I also have never been supervised by an Asian American. White men and women have been my supervisors and the leaders at the institutions I have worked. As I moved through the management ranks, it would have been valuable to have Asian American leadership examples before me - to have leaders who were visible, to have a mentor who is culturally compatible, and to have modelled.

Working decades without seeing and experiencing Asian Americans in executive and senior leadership positions compelled me to conduct this study. I was optimistic illuminating the lived experiences of Asian Americans who have attained leadership positions in higher education would raise insights that can support solutions to boost Asian American representation in leadership at U.S.
colleges and universities. It is important to me for budding and experienced Asian American professionals in higher education, future leaders, to gain and learn from the experiences of those who came before them.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Asian Americans who became executive and senior leaders in higher education. Through CRT and AsianCrit perspectives, I sought to understand executive and senior leaders’ experiences as Asian American leaders and examine their stories of navigating their racialized identities in the white dominant spaces of U.S. colleges and universities. An exploration of their lived experiences can provide insights into the underpinnings of the disproportionate representation of Asian American leadership in higher education.

**Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How do Asian American leaders in higher education describe their racialized experiences as leaders at a U.S. college and university?
2. How do Asian American leaders in higher education describe their experiences of racism as leaders at a U.S. college and university?
3. What meaning do Asian American leaders in higher education attribute to their racialized experiences and experiences of racism?

**Study Design**

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) described qualitative research as a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” and qualitative researchers' study “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Creswell and
Poth (2018) built on this definition by integrating elements from Denzin and Lincoln’s definition with elements of research design and the use of inquiry approaches such as case studies, narrative, or ethnography. To respond to the research questions, I utilized a qualitative, phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of Asian American leaders in higher education and how they experienced them in their life setting.

With phenomenology, there are two main approaches: descriptive, also known as transcendental, and interpretive, also known as hermeneutical (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). In transcendental phenomenology, the researcher takes a global view of the essences of the phenomena and meanings being studied and detaches or brackets the way they identify with the essence of a phenomenon (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Conversely, in hermeneutical phenomenology, the researcher is not removed from the process of identifying the essence of a phenomenon and includes their experiences to the discovery of the essence (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). With phenomenology the study of experience, particularly as it is lived, and hermeneutics the study of interpretation and meaning (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012), hermeneutical phenomenological research emphasizes the use of language and the interpretation of the meaning individuals’ attribute to the phenomenon (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). To understand the lived experiences of Asian American leaders in higher education, those main concepts of language, interpretation, and the attribution of meaning are key, which made a hermeneutical phenomenological approach a compatible fit for my research.

To assemble participants for my study, criterion sampling was used as all the participants need to have a minimum of 5 years in an executive or senior leadership rank at a college or university and identify as Asian American. The study sought seven to 10 participants. All participants were required to complete
an informed consent form advising them of their rights as research participants and a demographic questionnaire was requested to gain background information about the participants. Information such as the Asian racial group to which they identify, immigrant generation, gender, comfortability with discussing race and ethnicity, and previous leadership positions held were included. Two individual interviews that included reflecting on a summary of the interviews was employed, with interview protocols applied to maintain consistency across each interview. Interviews, lasting approximately 60-70 minutes in length, were semi-structured using open-ended questions for further probing. Thematic data analysis for significant statements and broader meaning units was conducted to develop a textual description of “what” the participants experienced, a structural description of “how” the experiences happened, and a composite description, the “essence” of the experience, by integrating the textual and structural descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A detailed description of the research design and methods is provided in Chapter 3.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for multiple reasons. With the gap in the literature on the underrepresentation of Asian Americans in leadership in higher education, this study will contribute to existing research by seeking to explain the phenomenon of underrepresentation through the lived experiences of Asian American leaders. Additionally, representation matters, and this study examined Asian American representation in the leadership ranks. Leaders at colleges and universities impact all parts of the student lifecycle - from policies about admissions to graduation, setting tuition and providing finances, hiring faculty and staff, and influencing the overall campus environment. Given the value of Asian American students to colleges and universities, the Asian American perspective
must be made visible at the leadership level of these institutions and students need to see themselves reflected by those who lead. This study is also significant, especially in the current environment of heightened anti-Asian hate, to understand how Asian American leaders navigated their racialized identities in the white dominant spaces of colleges and universities. Their stories are relevant and their voices against racism, violence, and discrimination are influential at their institutions and in their communities. The significance of this study could also be of value to other underrepresented populations who are seeking leadership positions in higher education. The perspectives of Asian American leaders in this study can provide a roadmap for prospective leaders from other marginalized groups. Challenging dominant discourse about Asian Americans by exposing the lived experiences of Asian American leaders could positively support the movement to increase leadership diversity in U.S. colleges and universities and splinter normative higher education practices.

**Definitions of Key Terminology**

In this study, I included terms that are used consistently throughout. To provide context and clarification for how I use the terms, definitions for key terminology are offered.

- **Asian Americans:** It is important for me to be clear that I recognize that Asian Americans are not a monolith and there are multiple and diverse countries embodied within the community of Asians in America. However, Asian Americans collectively hold a pan-ethnic identity because the distinct ethnicities of Asian Americans are not recognized by non-Asians - society racializes Asian Americans as a single group whereby those distinct ethnicities are racialized in similar ways and have a shared experience of racialization (Sy et al., 2017; Takaki, 1998;
Additionally, despite the intra-Asian tensions about the Asian American label, there is value in Asian American pan-ethnicity as a way "to mobilize together, be enumerated, have access to public resources and opportunities, and generate a sense of belonging in the white-dominant American society" (J. Lee, 2019, p.10) For my study, I defined Asian Americans as a community that refers to Americans, who have “origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian Subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam,” living in the United States (Revisions to the Standards, 1997).

- **racialization:** the process of constructing racial categories and attaching racial meaning and labels to a previously racially unclassified relationship, group or social practice (Museus et al., 2015; Omi & Winant, 2015). The application of racial labels and meaning to these relationships, groups, or social practices are for purposes of domination (Omi & Winant, 2015).

- **racism:** “a system of dominance, power, and privilege that is rooted in the historical oppression of subordinated groups that the dominant group views as inferior, deviant, or undesirable” (Museus et al., 2015, p.85). The dominant group creates or maintains their societal privilege through structures, ideology, values, and behavior that have the intent of excluding subordinated groups from power, esteem, status, and equal access to societal resources (Harrell, 2000; Museus et al., 2015).

- **white supremacy:** “the ideology that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to people of
color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions” (Racial Equity Tools, n.d., Glossary section). While typically associated with extremist groups, Harris (1993) describes white supremacy as
A political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings (p. 1714).

For my study, I used terms and phrases such as white supremacist, white supremacist culture, dominant culture equivalently to this definition.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the background for my study and the statement of the problem associated with the underrepresentation of Asian American leadership in higher education. The conceptual frameworks of CRT and AsianCrit were provided as the perspectives through which my study was critically analyzed, and my positionality was provided to name my experiences and history that may influence my research. Additionally, I offered the purpose and research questions that guided the study, and the study design, which described the plan for my research. This chapter concluded with the significance of the study, enumerated how my research will be beneficial, and with definitions for key terminology, which provided context for fundamental terms and phrases used throughout the study.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Although Asian Americans are a key demographic to the enrollment and graduation objectives of U.S. postsecondary institutions, Asian Americans' significance is not transferable to the leadership positions of those institutions. Research has shown that merely 2% of executive and senior leadership positions at U.S. colleges and universities are held by Asian Americans (ACE, 2017; Bichsel & McChesney, 2017). Consistent themes within existing literature reflect the historical and enduring influence of white dominant culture on perceptions of Asian Americans both socially and in the workplace. These perceptions create challenging conditions and barriers to Asian American professional mobility and elevation into leadership positions. The lack of representation of Asian Americans at the executive and senior leadership positions of U.S. colleges and universities communicates to both on and off campus communities that the exclusion and invisibility of Asian Americans is acceptable and tolerated.

This chapter explores the extant, relevant literature on white supremacy in higher education, the impact of racism on Asian Americans, and the relationship of race and Asian American leadership. The exploration of these topics provided a basis for the study of the lived experiences of Asian Americans who became executive and senior leaders in higher education given the context of Asian American underrepresentation in those leadership positions.

white Supremacy in Higher Education

Racism and white supremacy are foundational dynamics in United States higher education (Evans-Winter & Hoff, 2011; Patton, 2016; Pine & Hilliard, 1990; Wilder, 2013). Oppressive power and hierarchical structures were developed that created inequalities for anyone who was “other” than white. While
colleges and universities today tout diversity, equity, and inclusion in their mission statements and institutional goals, the historical dominant narrative of whiteness and privilege continue to persist and to be endemic in higher education (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Museus et al., 2015; Patton, 2016).

**white-Serving Institutions**

From its inception, U.S. higher education contributed to the oppression of Indigenous and people of color populations. The first colleges were built by slaves stolen from Africa on land seized from North American Indigenous people. Research showed the United States accumulated wealth from the transatlantic slave trade that was facilitated through higher education institutions and from which colleges benefitted (Patton, 2016; Wilder, 2013). Designed to serve the white majority and to groom white men to be leaders in American society (Karabel, 2005; Museus et al, 2015; Thelin, 2011), higher education institutions used slave labor to grow and maintain them and the leaders of these institutions made their campuses “the intellectual and cultural playgrounds of the plantation and merchant elite” (Wilder, 2013, p. 138). Undeniably, the American founding fathers were involved in the creation of these institutions or attended them (Patton, 2016). The formation of higher education reflected the genesis of the United States. The country’s founders established the racist ideologies and power constructs that endured and continue to reproduce in higher education.

The racism institutionalized during the colonial era remained profoundly entrenched in colleges and universities even with the establishment of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) in post-Civil War Reconstruction. While these institutions provided educational opportunity, they were racially segregated from white colleges and universities, maintaining the privileged mindset. It would not be until the 1960s
when a critical mass of students of color were seen accessing, persisting, and graduating from predominantly white institutions (Ash et al., 2020; Garces & Jayakumar, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 1995).

To tangibly realize how deeply embedded racism exists in higher education and its broader reaching influence, examining Princeton University through a historic lens provides a palpable depiction. An elite Ivy League university founded in 1746 as the College of New Jersey, Princeton’s roots are steeped in the exploitation and exclusion of African Americans. Its first nine presidents were slaveholders and the university’s sixth president and signer of the Declaration of Independence, John Witherspoon, lectured against the emancipation of slaves and opposed abolition in New Jersey (Kennedy, 2020; Princeton University, n.d.). The white supremacist ideals of another president of Princeton, Woodrow Wilson, were not exclusive to the university but became more widely evidenced when as president of the United States from 1913 to 1921, he supported segregating employees in the federal government by race (Viglione & Subbaraman, 2020). While in 1842 the first Indigenous student graduated from the university, as did the first (known) Asian student in 1876, and the first (known) Hispanic student in 1888, (Princeton University, n.d.), it would be 201 years after its founding, in 1947, that an African American student would graduate from the university (Jerome & Taylor, 2005). Sixteen years following, in 1963, Sir William Arthur Lewis became the first Black person to gain a tenured position at the university (Slater, 1998-1999).

In the summer of 2020, following the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery and worldwide Black Lives Matter and social justice protests, America was forced to reckon with its racist past and its continued manifestation in law enforcement, politics, and the fabric of society. As a
microcosm of society, this same reckoning took place (and continues) in U.S. higher education. It would not be until September 2020, following the killings and global protests, that Princeton president, Christopher Eisgruber, acknowledged:

Racism and the damage it does to people of color… persist at Princeton as in our society, sometimes by conscious intention but more often through unexamined assumptions and stereotypes, ignorance or insensitivity, and the systemic legacy of past decisions and policies. (Princeton Office of Communications, 2020, para.6)

Higher education’s centuries-long history of oppression and white dominance frames its policies and practices and its leaders, who stood by them. Until “critical questioning of the taken for granted and normative” (Kezar & Dizon, 2020, p. 36), questioning, scrutiny, and constructive criticism that are necessary for social justice and dismantling of “oppressive structures and mechanisms prevalent both in education and society” (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 383) takes place, U.S. higher education will continue to subjugate those who are “other” than white.

**Racism and the Impact on Asian Americans**

As these hegemonic ideologies persist in society and are reflected at colleges and universities, Asian Americans, like other communities of color, have experienced the cruelty of oppression. While different from the experiences of the Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities, the oppression of Asian Americans also upholds the power structures of white supremacist culture.

**Stereotypes**

To maintain white supremacist culture, the stereotype of Asian Americans as the hardworking and successful model minority was constructed (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; S. S. Lee, 2006, 2008; Suzuki, 2002; Uyematsu, 1971). This stereotype was a counterpoint to calls for dismantling structural and systemic
racial discrimination by portraying Asian Americans as a non-white group “making it” in American society and placing the blame for any difficulties and oppression of people of color on their own communities (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; S. S. Lee, 2006, 2008; Suzuki, 2002; Uyematsu, 1971). The model minority shifted the focus away from demands to eliminate racism to maintaining the status quo power dynamics of white supremacist culture. The model minority, regarded as a positive stereotype, resulted in enduring, interconnected negative effects by making Asian Americans invisible and silencing their voices, neglecting the diversity of the different Asian American ethnic groups, ignoring Asian Americans as a minority, and creating divisiveness with other marginalized groups. In addition to the model minority, Asian Americans are identified as “Others” and stereotyped through the intersectionality of their race and gender—all serving as instruments of white oppression (S. S. Lee, 2006; Raymundo, 2020).

The following sections will examine, in more detail, the model minority stereotype and other racialized stereotypes of Asian Americans and their ramifications on the Asian American community.

**Model Minority**

While the widespread perception of Asian Americans as the model minority, a hardworking, high achieving, exceptionally successful, and problem-free minority group (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Museus & Yi, 2015; Suzuki 2002; Uyematsu, 1971; Wu 1995), became prevalent in the mid-20th century, the roots of the model minority date back to the 1800s. During Reconstruction, journalists in the South hailed Chinese immigrants over freed slaves for their obedience and industriousness (S.S. Lee, 2006, Wu, 1995). Similarly, in the North, Chinese laborers were praised over Irish immigrants, and, during the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad, Chinese railroad workers were praised for their diligent
work ethic compared to Black railroad workers (Museus & Yi, 2015). These representations divided the labor force along racial lines, initiating an enduring, even today, asset/deficit narrative that pits Asian Americans against other marginalized groups while maintaining the existing power structure. The image of the model minority resurfaced in the 1940s with the internment of Japanese Americans after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entrance into World War II. Being a model minority was a way for Japanese Americans to endure socially and minimize racist backlash.

It was during the 1960s that the model minority became the essentialist perception of Asian Americans but, more importantly, became the instrument to circumvent the strengthening Civil Rights Movement and growing discontent among the Black community and other people of color. As civil rights activists and Black militants claimed the struggles of people of color resulted from racism and America was “fundamentally a racist society, structured to keep minorities in a subordinate position” (S. S. Lee, 2006, p.5), Asian American success was used to disprove those claims. Among various articles published during this time, in 1966, the New York Times published William Petersen’s article titled "Success Story, Japanese American Style" that praised Japanese Americans for their cultural values and exceptional educational and occupational success (Chun, 1980; S. S. Lee, 2006). The use of the model minority by white supremacists invalidated the claims of racial inequality and turned the challenges to racism back on the communities of color, asserting that hard work was valued in Asian American culture and attributed to their success and insinuating for those who had not made it in American society, “that their culture was not "good" enough” (S. S. Lee, 2006, p.5). By foiling the argument of racial oppression with the model minority representation of a non-white group, the majority maintained the structures that
assimilation to white society should be the goal of minorities, sustaining white social dominance and privilege that continues today.

The perception of Asian Americans as the model minority has continued through the decades due in large part on the focus of their educational achievements, economic accomplishments, and effective assimilation into American culture, so much so that they have been characterized as “honorary whites” (Tuan, 1999; S. S. Lee, 2006). The model minority, however, is more accurately, a myth. It refers to Asian American assimilation as an adherence to white American society's “prescribed mode of behavior [for minorities] through hard work, education, quietly remaining in the background, inaction in the face of injustice, and blind faith to the American dream of equality and opportunity for all” (Li, 2014, p. 156). The idea of Asian Americans as “honorary whites” furthers the myth as racial identity is central to how Asian Americans are viewed and accepted by mainstream American society - they are forever foreigners (Tuan, 1999; S. S. Lee, 2006). Additionally, the rhetoric of the model minority myth espouses positive connotations about Asian Americans, which makes the myth difficult to dismiss. The reality, however, is the stereotype has created enduring misconceptions about Asian Americans that sustains their subjugation as an Other “by denying the existence of present-day discrimination and ignoring the effects of past discrimination” (Li, 2014, p. 156).

**Invisibility as a Monolith.** As a result of the supposed positive perception of Asian Americans, the model minority myth presumes that all Asian Americans are thriving, are a group that does not need attention since they “don’t face race-related problems” (Oguntoyinbo, 2014, p. 10). Being problem-free has led to Asian American invisibility. Not only are Asian American experiences and contributions to American society unseen, but invisibility also excludes Asian
Americans from policymaking and governance. This is reflected in positions of leadership across various industries: in 2020, Asian Americans represented 0.9% of U.S. elected leaders (Reflective Democracy Campaign, 2021), in 2016, 2% of college and university presidents were Asian American (ACE, 2017), and, in 2018, 3.7% of Board of Directors seats at Fortune 500 companies were held by Asian/ Pacific Islanders (Alliance for Board Diversity, 2019).

Invisibility makes it easy to neglect inequities. Asian Americans are therefore, bypassed and excluded from conversations on equity and diversity, which is particularly troubling for the underrepresented Asian American communities. Asian Americans are recognized as a monolith, but Asians in America are representative of over 20 countries (AAJC, 2019; Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). The uniqueness and the needs of the various Asian American communities are ignored through this monolithic narrative. It is undeniable that Asian Americans have attained much and have prospered but this is not true of all Asian Americans as demonstrated by the widely varying and significant disparities of median household incomes, poverty rates, and education among Asian American groups. Of the individual Asian American communities, a majority of Burmese, Nepalese, Hmong, and Bangladeshi Americans are low-income and Mongolian, Burmese, Hmong, Bangladeshi Americans also have among the highest rates of poverty (AAJC, 2019; Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Comparatively, Indian and Filipino Americans exceed the median annual income for Asian Americans overall ($85,800) and have a poverty rate four times lower than those Asian communities with poverty rates among the highest. Additionally, the education gap within the Asian American community is equally disparate. While 70% of Indian and 65% of Malaysian Americans ages 25 and older held college degrees in 2019, 15% of Bhutanese and 18% of Laotian Americans ages 25 and older held college degrees
in that same year (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Further, Burmese, Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian Americans are least likely to hold a high school degree or higher (AAJC, 2019). All Asian Americans are not successful or problem-free - they are not all the same - but all Asian Americans need to be made visible.

**De-minoritization.** The perceived success that the racialized construct of Asian Americans as the model minority advances has furthered the community’s invisibility as Asian Americans have been removed from minority status – de-minoritized. This is particularly notable in higher education where Asian American students “have ceased to be "minorities" because they are no longer underrepresented” (S. S. Lee, 2008, p.129). In 2018, 59% of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled as undergraduate or graduate students in 2- or 4-year institutions were Asian while making up 7% of the U.S. population (Hussar et al., 2020; Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). This alleged overrepresentation serves as a basis for de-minoritization through practices like excluding Asian Americans from being identified as underrepresented minorities at many colleges and universities and through lawsuits to end affirmative action policies that use race as part of university admissions decisions.

When defining underrepresented minorities (URMs), Asian Americans are not considered minorities or people of color. This de-minoritization manifests as invisibility and, like mentioned previously, removes Asian American students from conversations on equity and diversity at colleges and universities. URMs commonly include, Black, Latinx, Native American, and Pacific Islander race and ethnic groups. For example, the California State University (CSU), the country's largest 4-year public university with the most ethnically, economically, and academically diverse student body in the nation (California State University [CSU], 2021), defines URMs as “students identified as African American,
American Indian, or Hispanic” (CSU, n.d., Glossary). With URM definitions excluding Asian Americans, institution leaders and administrators perceive all Asian American students as not requiring support or resources like other minorities. This perception does not account for the needs of the various Asian American communities where students are underserved and need support. Maintaining the dominant narrative that all Asian Americans are model minorities sustains the racial order and status quo of an institution (S. S. Lee, 2006).

Through lawsuits that challenge affirmative action policies, white individuals and groups argued that the affirmative action policies used by universities in their admissions process discriminated against white applicants such as *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin* (2016). Failing to prove discrimination, white groups took a different tact in their lawsuits, like *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President & Fellows of Harvard College* (2020), and argued that Asian American applicants were discriminated against by holding them to higher standards. Asian Americans were used as “racial mascots” and “Asian victims” against affirmative action to show the policy is detrimental, not to whites, but to a non-white group (S. S. Lee, 2006; Poon & Segoshi, 2018). Asian Americans became a political tool in the fight to eliminate affirmative action in education, in anticipation of leading to its elimination publicly, where the beneficiaries are white students and society, not Asian Americans. The challenge to affirmative action in higher education is reflective of the white dominant ideology that seeks to maintain the racial hierarchical order at elite colleges and universities and other social institutions (S. S. Lee, 2006, 2008).

**Racial Wedge.** As a result of the model minority myth, a racial hierarchy was established and created a misperception that Asian Americans are not marginalized compared to other people of color. The racial hierarchy purposefully
separated Asian Americans from other people of color and was intended to cause infighting amongst all racial minority groups to uphold white power. As a “racial wedge” or “middleman barrier,” Asian Americans are racialized in relation to the Black/white binary; wedged between the dominant white group and oppressed racial groups (AAJC, 2021.; C. J. Kim, 1999; S. S. Lee, 2006; Poon et al., 2016; Raymundo, 2020). As they are praised for their hard work and success as the model minority by the majority, other racial and ethnic groups do not consider Asian Americans full-fledged minorities and are thought of as outsiders in communities of color (S. S. Lee 2006; Suzuki, 2002). At the same time, Asian Americans are othered in the white community. They are seen as inherently different from whites and inescapably foreign, so they are prohibited from the privileges of the majority. C. J. Kim (1999) termed these dynamics racial triangulation, where both cultural and racial rationale are enacted to oppress both Asian Americans and Black Americans and to exclude Asian Americans from society. This exclusion takes places through “relative valorization,” in which the dominant group, whites, valorize one subordinate group, Asian Americans, in comparison with another subordinate group, Black Americans, and through “civic ostracism,” where the dominant group, whites, establish a subordinate group, Asian Americans, as foreign (C. J. Kim, 1999, p. 107).

Despite the history of Asian Americans being compared with and set against other communities of color, specifically the Black community, there is also a history of solidarity that defies the purposeful intention of the racial wedge and the majority’s belief that Asian Americans assimilate and remain silently in the background as the model minority. As far back as the 19th and early 20th century, solidarity was enacted through various actions. Frederick Douglas, abolitionist and social reformer, denounced the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that restricted
Chinese immigration and made Chinese immigrants ineligible for naturalization in the government’s attempt to maintain racial order and purity (Lang, 2020). H. G. Mudgal, an Asian American, was a contributor and editor of The Negro World newspaper, founded by Black nationalist, Marcus Garvey, after Mudgal was prevented from joining white newspapers (Desai, 2018).

Even as the model minority was disseminated in the 1960’s, Asian American leaders and communities were supported and galvanized to activism by the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. Activism was seen in the grape fields of central California, for example, where Mexican farmworkers and Cesar Chavez joined Larry Itliong and the Filipino farmworkers-led Delano Grape Strike to fight for better wages and conditions, health care, and retirement benefits for all farm laborers. Additionally, inspired by Black activists, the phrase “Asian American” evolved to bring the diverse people of Asian descent under one umbrella that not only served to eliminate the use of the racist, colonialist rooted term “oriental” as a collective description but also united Asian activists under one banner, providing a greater effect on the public (Kambhampaty, 2020). Further, Asian American students rallied with Black students and other ethnic student groups as part of the Third World Liberation Front that fought for a curriculum that was designed for and taught by people of color that were the foundations for the ethnic studies courses and programs currently developed in higher education.

In the last 30 years, the main narrative about Asian Americans and communities of color, especially the Black community, has been about interracial conflict (Lang, 2020). The physical attacks and shootings committed by Asian Americans against Black Americans, including Latasha Harlins and Akai Gurley, created division. However, with the recent mass uprisings against racial injustice and police brutality, communities of color have reignited their past solidarity.
Collectively, activists in communities of color are calling out racism, fighting against anti-Black racism and the increase in violent anti-Asian attacks and discrimination. The white supremacist approach to divide and conquer people of color ultimately deflects attention from the institutional racism that all who are “other” than white suffers from (C. J. Kim, 1999). While the experience of racism is different in the Black community than that in the Asian American community, the racism and the marginalizing is the same, it is intended to subordinate communities of color, to exclude them from leadership positions, to deny the voices, stories, and histories of those who experience and have experienced oppression (Lang, 2020).

**Perfidious and Perpetual Foreigner**

Historically, Asian Americans have been portrayed as an invading “yellow peril,” primitives who endanger American society and way of life (Miller, 1969; Ogawa, 1971; Suzuki, 2002). Even as the model minority stereotype was perpetuated, Asian Americans were also seen as treacherous and deceitful, the “perfidious foreigner,” who could not be trusted because of their ethnic backgrounds and ties to Asian countries (Suzuki, 2002). The perfidious foreigner portrayal of Asian Americans reemerges when U.S. relations with Asian countries become contentious and, more recently, due to the first discovery of the coronavirus in China, Asian Americans as the perfidious foreigner has resurfaced with vitriol and violence against them during the COVID-19 pandemic. The perfidious foreigner stereotype makes it acceptable for the highest levels of U.S. government to racialize the virus as the “Chinese virus” and for mainstream and social media to spread racist comments and false information about Asian Americans. These actions are tolerated because Asian Americans are seen as aliens and are not exemplars of who is American (Devos & Banaji, 2005; S. S. Lee
Asian Americans are not only stereotyped as an untrustworthy foreigner, but stereotyped as a perpetual foreigner, a community that will always be the “other” in the white dominant society of the U.S. (Devos & Banaji, 2005).

The tandem of the perpetual foreigner and model minority are the racial projects that shape the conversation about Asian Americans in higher education (S. S. Lee, 2006, Omi & Winant, 2015). Racial projects are “the ways in which human identities and social structures are racially signified,” and the corresponding actions that racial meaning becomes ingrained in social structures (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 13). The perpetual foreigner and model minority construct structures of oppression based on white dominant race categories that are replicable and persistent (S. S. Lee, 2006). With this perspective, the underrepresentation of Asian American leadership at colleges and universities is purposeful and intentional to maintain racial status quo.

**Gendered Race**

Gendered race theory proposes stereotypes about race are characterized as masculine or feminine suggesting racial and ethnic groups are stereotyped with gendered components (Schug et al., 2015). In the U.S., Asians tend to be associated with femininity, which extends to the perception of Asian American men, who are often seen as emasculated (Eagly & Kite, 1987; Galinsky et al., 2013). This perception was furthered when Hall et al. (2015) studied gendered race and person-occupational position fit and Asian men were ranked as significantly more hirable to a traditionally feminine role (a librarian job) and less hirable to a traditionally masculine role (a security guard) compared with African American and white men. Additionally, Schug et al. (2015) argued that the non-prototypicality of Asian men is comparable to the intersectional invisibility of Black women, who are “frequently overlooked and rendered invisible due to their
non-prototypical status in relation to Black (prototyped as male) and female (prototyped as white) identities” (p. 122). It was also suggested that the non-prototypicality of Asian men in relation to the Asian identity, prototyped as feminine, and male identity, prototyped as white, may affect and impact their minimal presence in mass media, reducing them to be culturally invisible in U.S. society (Schug et al., 2015). The portrayals of Asian American men in film speak to this as they have historically been depicted by white men, such as Mickey Rooney’s portrayal of the Mr. Yunioshi character in 1961’s “Breakfast at Tiffany’s,” or by a puny Asian actor who ended up the target for all jokes, like the Long Duk Dong character played by Gedde Watanabe in the 1984 movie “Sixteen Candles.” These media depictions suggested that only white Americans could portray Asians as normal or as intelligent sages and only Asians could portray themselves as fools (Mok, 1998; Paik, 1971). While the 2018 film “Crazy Rich Asians” was celebrated for being a Hollywood studio film that saw all the main characters portrayed by actors of Asian descent, unsurprisingly, overall Asian Americans in mass media have been invisible maintaining their exclusion. According to a 2020 report that examined the portrayals of gender, race/ethnicity, LGBTQ, and disabilities in 1,300 popular films, only 7.2% of the movies had speaking characters who were Asian American, and 36 films had no speaking characters who were Asian American (Smith et al., 2020). The gendered stereotypes of Asian American men and the pervasiveness of the perception sustains Asian American oppression and maintains majority order.

Stereotypes of Asian American women are equally a misrepresentation as the stereotypes of Asian American men. While Asian American men are perceived as weak, perceptions of Asian American women are sexualized and objectified. Rooted in historical images of Japanese geishas and Chinese prostitutes, Asian
American women are characterized as submissive, passive, and obedient yet “surprising in [their] sexual prowess and desire to please [their] male master” (Li, 2014, p. 153). Asian American women are further fetishized as the ideal of femininity and womanhood, which has been contrasted against the non-femininity of career and independence gains of white American women (Li, 2014). These sexualized perceptions of Asian American women are reinforced in U.S. mainstream media. Portrayals are typically of the meek and shy Lotus Blossom doll or the devious and sexually alluring Dragon Lady - both portrayals are “strikingly sexed and defined in relation to men” (Uchida, 1998, p. 162). In her analysis on the objectification of Black women, Collins (1991) showed how stereotypes such as mammies, matriarchs, welfare mothers, whores sustained Black women’s oppression and labelled these stereotypes that oppress and objectify controlling images. Equivalently, these sexualized, racialized stereotypes that objectify Asian American women are the controlling images that reinforce their subordination. These stereotypes not only shape how Asian American women are viewed but shape their own experiences and endangers them to the potential of being sexually harassed and assaulted.

**Race and Asian American Leadership**

Given the racialized nature of higher education, it is not surprising that a large majority of those who lead colleges and universities are not representative of Asian Americans. To be represented matters, as Alphonso David, president of the Human Rights Campaign, presented at the 2020 Salesforce Racial Equality Summit, Representation Matters

Representation matters because we all bring different perspectives to the table, and those perspectives are really informed by our experiences and our identities. So, it could be geography or education or family structure or race or sexual orientation. We bring all of those perspectives to the table and
those factors inform who we are as people. They also inform how we look at the world. So, if those structures don’t incorporate our perspectives, then our perspectives don’t factor into decision making. And if we don’t exist, then policies are developed, and they ignore us to our own detriment. (Office of Equality, 2020)

David’s response speaks to precisely why it is paramount that Asian American leaders are visible; to have those voices at the table to represent and make Asian American perspectives known, and to contest societal norms that marginalize the Asian American community. However, racialized perceptions of Asian Americans and their cultural and ethnic differences persist in creating barriers for those who pursue leadership positions whether in corporate America or at colleges and universities.

**Racialized Perceptions of Leadership**

Race is key to how people view themselves and others, making it significantly relevant to the discourse on leadership perceptions (Festekjian et al., 2014; Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Research on leadership and race has shown that in the United States, because the dominant group, white individuals, more commonly occupy leadership positions, white leaders are perceived as the prototypic standard for comparison of leadership (Festekjian et al., 2014). Attributes such as masculinity, tyranny, and dynamism are ascribed to white leaders and are those features that are sought after in leaders. Any attributes that are recognized as different from these do not fit the standard and therefore are not perceived as leadership material. Additionally, Holladay and Coombs (1993) submit that leadership is a behavior carried out through communication. Holladay and Coombs asserted that how a leader’s charisma is viewed is influenced by communication in how the content of the message a leader sends and how the message is presented. When leaders’ messages, like their vision, are
communicated effectively, a greater sense of employee satisfaction is experienced (Madlock, 2008).

The standard described above by which leadership is compared creates conditions that can limit Asian American opportunities to move into management and leadership positions. Asian Americans have demonstrated their capacity to lead through their communities and in their activism, but racist structures and conditions exist to minimize that capability. The stereotypes of Asian Americans described earlier impact how Asian Americans are perceived socially and in the workplace. According to role congruity theory, when expectations of a leadership role conflict with group-based stereotypes, the stereotyped group is less likely to be chosen as leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001; F. Lee, 2019). As a consequence, the perfidious foreigner stereotype of Asian Americans, together with the model minority, can then be attributed to creating barriers to leadership. For example, as students Asian Americans are viewed as problem-free high achievers, who are not encouraged to develop verbal and linguistic skills. But the underdevelopment of these skills affects them later as they pursue professional careers and are viewed as “lacking requisite skills to be effective leaders;” therefore, are often passed up for management positions (Suzuki, 2002, p. 28). Those who achieve management and other leadership roles are viewed with suspicion and mistrust because they are seen as the perfidious foreigner (Suzuki, 2002). The model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes not only make it difficult to be selected for leadership positions but also challenging to succeed, if selected.

The gendered race stereotypes of Asian American men also clash with the U.S. leadership prototypes lessening the likelihood of them being chosen as leaders (Eagly & Kite, 1987; Galinsky et al., 2013; Hall et al., 2015; Schug et al.,
Asian American men experience the intersectionality of their race and gender as both privilege and marginalization. Their male privilege is lessened by the gendered race stereotype of being emasculated and unseen. Effective leadership is evaluated on standards based on Western values and norms where qualities associated with prototypical leaders are assertiveness, passion, and vigor. The perception of Asian American men conflict with these prototypical characteristics forming biases such that Asian Americans may be less likely to be promoted and overlooked for leadership positions (Sy et al., 2017).

The gendered race stereotype of the ultra-feminine Asian American woman also clashes with U.S. leadership prototypes. For Asian American women, the dually subordinate intersectionality status of being Asian, where Asians are perceived as more feminine (i.e., less aggressive) and being a woman, prototypically feminine, are not archetypal attributes that correspond with leadership. A study by Tinkler et al. (2019) indicated Asian American women were perceived as the least fit for leadership roles compared with white and Asian men and white women. Though Asian American women are perceived as competent and stereotyped, as such, as the model minority, the gendered stereotype of Asian American women as subservient and passive influences the perception they are unsuitable leaders, compounding their invisibility in leadership positions.

For Asian American women, the intersections of their race and gender also creates challenging and stressful conditions that can cause mental, emotional, and physical trauma, symptoms likened to racial battle fatigue. Racial battle fatigue originated from research on the experiences of racism and racialization of the Black community to describe the mental, emotional, and physical strain and trauma experienced in battling racism on a continuous basis. The white dominant
environments of U.S. colleges and universities have been associated with producing racial battle fatigue among oppressed groups (Farmer, 2019; Dade & Rios, 2015; Smith, 2008). Recent research showed that microaggressions based on the model minority stereotype results in a type of racial battle fatigue specifically experienced by Asian Pacific American women (Farmer, 2019). The fatigue resulting from managing racism and sexism further reflects the dually subordinate status of Asian American women.

**Cultural Values**

The differences that exist between Asian cultural values and those esteemed in the United States are additional barriers that can inhibit moves by Asian Americans into management and leadership roles. Asian cultural values are perceived through a racialized lens and when compared to U.S. leadership prototypes are seen as different and, therefore, not leadership material. As C. J. Kim (1999) asserted, by focusing on Asian culture, the image of Asian Americans marks them as different from the dominant group and maintains their exclusion.

Given the diversity of the Asian American community and variability of enculturation, the process of retaining one’s indigenous cultural values, behaviors, knowledge, and identity (B. S. K. Kim et al., 2001), of Asian Americans as more generations are born and raised in the United States, identifying Asian cultural values across the diaspora and the adherence to them will also vary. However, B. S. K. Kim et al. (2005) identified Asian cultural values that are commonly recognized among Asian Americans: collectivism, conformity to norms, family recognition through achievement, emotional self-control, and humility. While each of the values have specific characteristics, the values have connections that influence and overlap with one another.
**Collectivism.** A collectivistic focus emphasizes the group – family, community – over the individual. While an individual is interdependent with other members of the group, collectivism promotes the group’s interest and goals above that of the individual (B. S. K. Kim et al., 2001). Individuals with a more collectivist focus tend to be “more holistic in the way they think about problems, focusing more on the relationships and the context of the situation,” while those with an individualist emphasis tend to “focus on separate elements, and to consider situations as fixed and unchanging” (Robson, 2017, para.10). In a work setting, for example, a collectivist leader would seek a harmonious group orientation where an individualist leader would seek a results-oriented environment. For Asian Americans who enculturate the value of collectivism, they will encounter disagreement with the independent sensibilities and self-interest in American, individualist leadership behaviors and expectations.

**Conformity to Norms.** Like collectivism, conformity to norms is family and community focused. While conformity to social norms may be inclusive in this value, conformity to familial norms is important and filled with expectation. Asian Americans’ family expectations, values, and pressures are factors that influence career trajectories (Leung et al., 1994; Lowe, 2009, Tang et al., 1999). In a study of culture’s influence on the career choices of Asian Americans, Fouad et al. (2008) found that families were key to transmitting cultural values of work. In that same study, Fouad et al. found expectations of parents and family about prestige and status of their child’s education and career were a “pervasive and salient influence” on career choices (p. 54). Through adulthood and later in life, Asian Americans negotiate between their own desires and their parents’ wishes for them, seeking approval of their career choices. Asian immigrant parents often encourage their children to consider high-prestige occupations (e.g., math and
science related) to establish themselves in U.S. society (Leung et al., 1994; Tang et al., 1999). Consequently, it could be argued this “prestige factor” is an underlying contributor to the overrepresentation of Asian Americans in the higher paying science and technical fields while underrepresented in higher education and leadership positions.

**Family Recognition through Achievement.** High-prestige occupations, such as doctors or lawyers, are a status symbol for the family and they are recognized for that achievement (Kodama & Huynh, 2017). Not only does a high prestige job reflect well on the family, but it also reflects well on the community. The study by Fouad et al further surfaced that “success as an individual is evidence of the success and quality of the family and the community” (p. 54). Similarly, failure can bring shame and loss of face to the family and community, which is a powerful motivator for Asian Americans to conform to familial norms (Ho, 1987; B. S. K. Kim et al., 2001). With work and professions as public representations of family and community, this maintains the connection to collectivism and group orientation which can create conflicts to U.S. individualistic notions.

**Emotional Self-Control.** Traditional Asian culture favors repressing expressions of emotion and encourages restraint when experiencing emotional conflicts (Uba, 1994). Uba asserted this cultural value of emotional self-control underlies Asian American communication style and expressive behavior. Asian Americans interactions with others tend to be non-confrontational, cooperative, and accommodating, where passive communication is preferred to verbal. Nonverbal communication, including gestures and facial expressions, is more likely to be utilized to express feelings and emotions during both conversation and silence (Kaneshige, 1973; B. S. K. Kim et al., 2001; Kitano & Matsushima, 1981).
The cultural value of emotional self-control may attribute to Asian Americans commonly described as cold, shy, uptight, reserved, and lacking in charisma (Berdahl & Min, 2012; Cheng et al., 2006; Osajima, 2005; Wong et al., 1998), which undermine the perception of Asian Americans as effective leaders (Sy et al., 2017).

**Humility.** Asian Americans often avoid standing out from others and endeavor not to boast about their achievements and successes. Asian Americans are encouraged to be humble and modest as seeming boastful or self-centered could be seen as a negative reflection on the family (B. S. K. Kim et al., 2005). In a study on self enhancement, participants in more individualistic, Western societies tended to value personal success over that of the group and a greater need for self-esteem that was demonstrated in overconfidence and overestimating their abilities (Heine & Hamamura, 2007). For instance, when asked about their competence, 94% of American professors claimed they were “better than average” (Heine & Hamamura, 2007). In more collectivistic societies, participants did not self-inflate, and some participants underestimated their abilities. Humility and modesty do not fit American characteristics of leadership. In an interview Oguntoyinbo (2014) conducted with a former Asian American university president, the former president remarked “one of the difficulties for many Asian Americans is that they come out of a culture where people try not to take credit for things...For many Asian Americans, that's doing something that's quite different” (p. 11). Like the Asian cultural values of collectivism, conformity to norms, family recognition through achievement, emotional self-control, humility is at odds with American ways.
Bamboo Ceiling

In the U.S. government report, *Good for Business: Making Full Use of the Nation’s Human Capital*, the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) studied the “artificial barriers to, the advancement of minority men and all women into management and decision-making positions” (p.3) that create the glass ceiling. Playing on the glass ceiling phrase, leadership strategist, Jane Hyun, introduced the phrase bamboo ceiling, “a combination of cultural and organizational or systemic barriers that keep Asians from rising to the top management” (Hyun, 2012, p. 15) to name the scarcity of Asian Americans in senior level leadership positions across the U.S. labor market. Assorted reasons are recognized as underlying the bamboo ceiling, including the model minority and perfidious foreigner stereotypes, cultural values and, even the lack of interest in leadership. In a study that examined the bamboo ceiling in higher education, F. Lee (2019) found that Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) faculty were less likely to hold leadership positions compared to white, Black, and Latinx faculty, affirming the existence of a bamboo ceiling. When F. Lee (2019) examined explanations for the bamboo ceiling that included the lack of seniority, professional accomplishments, and unfamiliarity with American culture, APIA faculty were still less likely to be leaders compared to other racial groups. However, when examining how stereotypes of APIAs affected their leadership in higher education, F. Lee (2019) surfaced evidence that racial stereotypes may underpin the bamboo ceiling, finding that stereotypes consistent with APIAs produced low ratings for perceived leadership effectiveness.

In a related study that looked at Asian American perceptions of higher discriminatory treatment due to their race, Yu (2020) found that Asian Americans collectively perceive higher discriminatory treatment due to their race, supporting
the existence of a bamboo ceiling, but when the data was disaggregated by Asian ethnic groups, the perception of discriminatory treatment varied among the Asian ethnicities. This finding demonstrates the heterogeneity of the Asian American community, and that diversity provides a more realistic assessment of discriminatory treatment in the workplace. Undoubtedly, the bamboo ceiling exists. While the extent to what explanations can account for its existence may vary, race and racism have shown to be significant reasons, which may also account for why the status quo of white dominance in leadership positions remains.

As a counterpoint, for this Asian Americans who have become leaders, they have demonstrated the strength of resilience to overcome racialized perceptions as they sought and achieved their positions (Kawahara et al., 2013). Resilience in literature has also been connected to achieving goals and adopting positive perspectives (Reyes & Constantino, 2016; Yang 2014). Despite the challenges and barriers, there are Asian Americans who have persisted to advance to leadership positions.

**Leadership Development**

As scholarship identifies and challenges the obstacles that prevent Asian Americans from moving into leadership ranks, it is equally important to consider facilitators that can mitigate these barriers and grow the pipeline of future Asian American leaders. Leadership development programs serve as training grounds for future leaders to acquire management and personal leadership skills that are requisites for advancing and promotion. For Asian Americans, however, it is essential these programs are culturally relevant and complement current mainstream training approaches (Sy et al., 2017). Balancing identity-conscious training with growing the skills necessary for Western work environments
supports beneficial leadership development. Effective leadership development for Asian Americans not only requires a safe space for participants to speak freely and to ask honest questions but also a space that has the support and shared understanding of other Asian Americans where they are free from having to explain and justify themselves (Akutagawa, 2013). Programs like Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, Inc. (LEAP) (LEAP, n.d.) provide this type of culturally appropriate, directed, and purposeful leadership development.

**Mentoring**

Blackwell (1989) defined mentoring as “a process by which persons of superior rank, special achievements, and prestige instruct, counsel, guide, and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of persons identified as protégés” (p. 9). Mentoring is another essential component of leadership development and was identified as a critical tool for career advancement for Asian Americans (Nguyen et al., 2007; Woo, 2000). Asian Americans could benefit from a mentoring relationship particularly with someone who has advanced to positions that they aspire to. Mentors can guide and support the professional development needs of their mentees to help them progress through the leadership pipeline. In a study of Asian American leadership experiences, Kawahara et al. (2013) found that Asian Americans who received mentoring praised their mentors for serving as models and as supports in thriving, surviving, and balancing their professional careers and personal lives. Additionally, studies have illustrated that mentorship can lead to higher rates of promotion, higher salaries, career mobility, growing a professional identity, improving professional competency, career satisfaction, and decreasing job stress and role conflict (Johnson & Ridley, 2004; Kawahara et al., 2013).
For Asian Americans, a principal element of the mentor-mentee relationship is cultural congruence or incongruence, the compatibility of cultural styles between mentor and mentee (Chin & Kameoka, 2019). Research of Asian American faculty by Nguyen et al. (2007) found that Asian American mentees who were American culturally oriented (i.e., individualistic) engendered more mentoring from European American mentors whereas those Asian American mentees who were more Asian culturally oriented (i.e., collectivistic) received more mentoring from Asian American mentors. Cultural congruence/incongruence could impact mentoring outcomes. In cross-racial and cross-cultural mentoring, race, gender, power, and privilege affect the mentor-mentee relationship and must be addressed (Feroglia, 2011 as cited in Guramatunhu-Mudiwa & Angel, 2017; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2002, 2004). Non-Asian American mentors and Asian American mentees need to manage the stereotypes and perceptions about Asian Americans, recognize the historic and contemporary racism that Asian Americans experience, and acknowledge the difference in cultural values as part of the mentoring process as these circumstances may influence the mentoring relationship.

Mentoring is also an opportunity to support and grow the leadership pipeline. Asian American leaders have acknowledged in research studies they were not actively seeking leadership positions and were often asked to lead (Kawahara et al., 2013). The accidental Asian American leader is particularly visible in higher education administration where the path to leadership has been characterized as by accident or unplanned (Adrian, 2004; Kobayashi, 2009; Li-Bugg, 2011; Mella, 2012). Leadership development and mentoring can support Asian Americans who seek positions of leadership as they come up the ranks.
Emerging Collectivist Leadership Styles

It is encouraging that more leadership styles and models have emerged that leverage collectivism and emphasizing the group over the individual as well as considering the cultural aspects of a leader, particularly in the field of education. One of those leadership models, applied critical leadership (ACL), aims to empower members of educational organizations to develop and exercise leadership (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2011). Reconceptualizing principles of transformational leadership, through the application of critical pedagogy and through the lens of CRT, ACL establishes a strengths-based leadership model that encourages leaders to enable members of their educational communities to use their various social backgrounds and contexts and the positive attributes of their identities in their leadership practice (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2011). Through ACL, leaders of color are spurred to reflect on how their identities can be employed to strengthen their practice of effective leadership and enhance their ability to engage alternate perspectives.

Similarly, the shared equity leadership model draws on the experiences and expertise of individuals as they work together. While still evolving, shared equity leadership is rooted in the idea of collaboration and collective work toward equity goals of a campus (Kezar et al., 2021). Like ACL, colleagues working together can lean into their strengths and skills while also supporting their colleagues develop in areas where they are less skilled. Shared equity leadership embraces a more asset based, multiple perspective approach that collectively benefits group decision-making rather than relying on the limited and limiting perspective of a sole individual leader to make decisions.

Additionally, the Social Action, Leadership, and Transformation (SALT) leadership model “focuses on leadership that is socially conscious and facilitates
transformation to achieve justice” (Museus et al., 2017, p. 3). Developed collaboratively by the National Center for Institutional Diversity (NCID) at the University of Michigan and National Institute for Transformation and Equity (NITE) at Indiana University, the SALT model uses the Social Change Model (SCM) of leadership that identifies leadership attributes for leaders who seek to make positive social change, as a starting point (Museus et al., 2017). The SALT model advances SCM by centering equity and social justice and openly acknowledging the contexts of power, privilege, oppression, culture, and identity. Tenets of the SALT model include the capacity for empathy, critical consciousness, commitment to justice, equity in purpose, value of collective action, controversy with courage, and coalescence (Museus et al., 2017). Not only can the SALT model be the basis for leadership in practice but it is a framework for research and can also be used as foundations for leadership development programs that seek to cultivate leaders with an understanding of oppression and equity. The emergence of these leadership styles signals some movement of Western leadership behaviors toward better alignment with Asian cultural values that can influence Asian Americans leadership styles.

**Conceptual Frameworks**

**Critical Race Theory**

CRT grew out of the legal movement, critical legal studies (CLS) in the 1970s. CLS challenged traditional legal scholarship by exposing the inconsistencies of legal doctrine that supported the U.S. social class structure and utilizing the notion of hegemony to legitimize the endurance of the oppressive structures in American society (Crenshaw, 1988). CLS, however, failed to provide strategies for transforming society in its critiques and, to the discontent of legal
scholars of color, excluded race and racism from its critiques. CRT, therefore, emerged with two interests: “to understand how a “regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiii) and “to transform the connection that exists between law and racial power” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 12).

CRT begins with the foundation that racism is “normal, not aberrant, in American society” and, because it is so entrenched in the culture, it appears normal and natural to people (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). Thus, CRT is a strategy of “unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). After compiling key CRT writings, Crenshaw et al. (1995) noted that there is not a collection of doctrines to which CRT scholars all subscribe. However, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) offered a set of seven interrelated CRT tenets that expand on the basic tenets offered by Matsuda et al. (1993) and have been widely cited and, inarguably, have guided the research of CRT scholars:

1. Social constructionism is the principle that race is a socially constructed phenomenon with no scientific basis for racial categories.
2. Racism as normal suggests that racism is endemic to society.
3. Differential racialization is the notion that different racial groups are racialized in varied ways, and the same racial group can be racialized in different ways in different time periods and contexts.
4. Interest convergence suggests that whites who wield disproportionate decision-making power in society only support laws, policies, or programs that improve the lives of people of color when they also benefit themselves.
5. Anti-essentialism argues that there is no essential experience or trait that defines a racial group.
6. Intersectionality refers to the ways that racism intersects with other structural forces to shape the forms of oppression and exploitation as well as individual identities.

7. Storytelling is necessary to provide context to stories of oppressed and exploited people constitute valuable knowledge and can be utilized to counter dominant (pp. 6-9).

With these tenets and the notion of CRT revealing racism in its various permutations, CRT can be applied to education to account for the role of race and racism in the field. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) advanced that CRT in education can critically analyze and transform structural and cultural factors that perpetuate dominant racial hierarchies in and out of the classroom. In addition to seeking to eliminate racism, CRT in education looks to end other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin. (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002)

**Asian Critical Theory**

CRT was further expanded with the emergence of Asian critical theory (AsianCrit). In 2014, Iftikar and Museus (2018) built on the scholarship that utilized CRT in the study of Asian Americans, research in Asian American Studies, and existing CRT literature to develop an AsianCrit framework. The foundations of AsianCrit are based on CRT but the inclusion of Asian American Studies scholarship extends the CRT framework to examine the role of racism in Asian American experiences. AsianCrit has tenets that align with CRT tenets but are distinctly tailored to analyze the role that white dominant culture has in shaping the lives of Asian Americans (Iftikar & Museus, 2018):

1. Asianization. The endemic racism, white dominant culture of American society results in the racialization of Asian Americans as model
minorities and perpetual foreigners. These social constructs inform laws, policies, perspectives that exclude Asian Americans.

2. Transnational contexts. The global relationships and situations, as they are related to the U.S., shape the conditions of racism that Asian Americans experience.

3. (Re)constructive history. A focus on a historical narrative that includes voices and contributions of Asian Americans, who are silent and invisible in U.S. history.

4. Strategic (anti)essentialism. Countering and recognizing how white dominant culture racializes Asian Americans as a monolithic group in the US, but also acknowledging that Asian Americans actively intervene in the racialization process, for example, building coalitions to garner political power against the dominant majority.

5. Intersectionality. Racism and other forms of subjugation intersect to shape the racial and social identities of Asian Americans.

6. Story, theory, and praxis. The lived experiences and narratives of Asian Americans are valid and strengths that challenge traditional paradigms that marginalize the voices of Asian Americans - counter storytelling.

7. Commitment to social justice. Based on CRT, AsianCrit seeks to eliminate racism, sexism, and poverty and to empower the subordinated groups (pp. 940-941).

The tenets of AsianCrit, collectively, can challenge and expose how racism and white predominance affect Asian Americans in education and the underrepresentation in higher education leadership positions in higher education. In applying the AsianCrit framework, specifically counter storytelling, Asian Americans can express their authentic, lived experiences. They can share their
own experiences, tell their own stories which could challenge or reinforce dominant narratives. Through a legacy of racial privilege and white supremacy, the narratives, experiences, and cultural understandings of white persons, majoritarian stories, are natural and a part of everyday life and silence the experiences of people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter stories and storytelling are important because they expose racial privilege, but they also expose the unheard experiences of people of color and “shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32).

With my study focusing on the lived experiences of Asian American leaders in higher education and their stories of racialization in the white dominant environs of U.S. colleges and universities, CRT and AsianCrit are fitting perspectives to frame my research. Race and racism underpin CRT and AsianCrit. For Asian Americans, the pervasiveness of racism renders the community invisible and voiceless. Through Asianization, the influence of racism in higher education on the experiences of Asian American leaders will be recognized. A common tenet of CRT and AsianCrit is intersectionality. While the intersection of race and other methods of oppression impact forming identities, the intersection of race and gender is particularly relevant in shaping the racial and social identities of Asian American men and women. The application of CRT and AsianCrit are appropriate as these frameworks acknowledge the many intersectionalities of Asian Americans. The fundamental tenet of a commitment to social justice further justifies the use of CRT and AsianCrit as conceptual frameworks for my study as the underrepresentation of Asian American leaders at U.S. colleges and universities is an issue of equity and inclusion that needs to be made visible and acted on.
More specifically, for my study, I will center on the AsianCrit tenets of story, theory, and praxis and Asianization. CRT and AsianCrit champion storytelling and validating the stories of Asian Americans as meaningful and of value. This tenet aligns with my study’s intent to explore Asian American leaders’ lived experiences and to draw out their authentic narratives. I endeavor to understand Asian American executive and senior leaders’ experiences and illuminate their stories in the context of white dominant higher education. An exploration of their lived experiences can provide revelations into the underpinnings of the disproportionate representation of Asian American leadership at U.S. colleges and universities. With the tenet of Asianization, Asian Americans have been racialized by the model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes. These social constructs inform societal laws and governance that exclude Asian Americans and are reflected in the policies and perspectives at colleges and universities that also do not include Asian Americans. Through the Asianization tenet, I seek to understand the influence of racialized social constructs of Asian Americans and their exclusion have on the lived experiences on Asian American leaders in higher education.

**Chapter Summary**

Persistent themes within extant literature reflect the historical and enduring influence of white dominant culture on U.S. society and, as a microcosm of society, on postsecondary institutions. The founding and expansion of higher education in America originated from the oppression of people of color. The power structures established in the colonial era have been sustained for centuries, and the long history of white dominance in higher education frames current day practices and leadership. Correspondingly, white dominant culture influences the racist perceptions of Asian Americans, particularly the stereotypes of the model
minority and perpetual foreigner. These perceptions create barriers to Asian American promotion into leadership positions as race is significant to how leadership is perceived (Festekjian et al., 2014; Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Festekjian et al. (2014) found that since white individuals more frequently occupy leadership positions, white leaders are perceived as the prototypic standard for comparison of leadership. Not only are the model minority and perpetual foreigner perceptions of Asian Americans far from the prototypic standard of leadership, but Asian cultural values are also perceived through a racialized lens when compared to U.S. leadership prototypes and clash with the dominant culture’s notions of leadership, producing hurdles for Asian American advancement to top positions including those in higher education.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of my study was to explore the lived experiences of Asian Americans who became executive and senior leaders in higher education. I sought to understand executive and senior leaders’ experiences from Asian American leaders and illuminate their stories of navigating racialized identities in the white dominant spaces of U.S. colleges and universities. The research questions guiding my study are:

1. How do Asian American leaders in higher education describe their racialized experiences as a leader at a U.S. college and university?
2. How do Asian American leaders in higher education describe their experiences of racism as a leader at a U.S. college and university?
3. What meaning do Asian American leaders in higher education attribute to their racialized experiences and experiences of racism?

In Chapter 3, I present my methodological approach and design, including the rationale for a qualitative, phenomenological study, and my role as the researcher. Additionally, I describe the assembly of participants and the procedures for data collection. In this chapter, I also discuss the data analysis steps, the strategies used to ensure trustworthiness, and limitations of this study.

Methodological Approach and Design

In the social constructivist worldview, “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” and “develop subjective meanings of their experiences” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). Aligning with the social constructivist paradigm, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) described qualitative research as a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” and defined qualitative researchers’ roles as studying “things in their natural settings,
attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Creswell and Poth (2018) furthered this description by incorporating elements from Denzin and Lincoln’s definition with components of research design and the use of approaches such as case studies, narrative inquiry, or ethnography. Creswell and Poth stated to study “problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem,” qualitative researchers use an “emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns and themes” (p. 8). To seek responses to the research questions of my study, I will employ a qualitative, phenomenological approach to inquiry to examine the lived experiences of Asian American leaders in higher education and how they experienced them in their life setting.

**Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry**

While qualitative research is broadly used to describe various approaches, such as case studies or narrative inquiry, as mentioned above, qualitative research is grounded in a common philosophical foundation. It is based on a subjectivist paradigm whereby “reality is constructed as subjective and contextually bound” and not absolute as characteristic of positivistic traditions (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). Qualitative research also views knowledge construction as involving the researcher as an individual who has values, opinions, biases, and feelings and who brings experiences to the research process that influences the phenomena studied (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). A qualitative researcher seeks “to interpret, understand, and describe in a reflexive process” rather than be the “omniscient observer” that is more commonly attributed to quantitative research (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005, p. 98).
I chose a qualitative methodology for my study as I explored human experiences and the meaning of those experiences – these cannot be measured or explained by a quantitative study. Equivalently, I chose phenomenology as my research design since it is “the study of experience, particularly as it is lived and as it is structured through consciousness” (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012, p.1). Experiences in the context of phenomenology refers to things that an individual undergoes, something that happens to them, rather than something accumulated or knowledge that is mastered (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012). Phenomenology emphasizes the world as lived by a person, not as something separate from the person and examines “What is this experience like?” to uncover meanings as they are lived in everyday life (Laverty, 2003; Valle et al., 1989).

With the various qualitative approaches, researchers must determine which approach is the best fit for their research needs. Narrative inquiry, which focuses on exploring the life of an individual, and ethnography, which aims to interpret a culture sharing group (Creswell & Poth, 2018), were considerations for my research design; however, the focus of my study is on understanding the meaning of lived experiences shared by multiple individuals - making phenomenology the most suitable design. Additionally, the connection of phenomenology with social constructionism and of social constructionism with CRT and AsianCrit creates alignment of my methodological approach, research design, and conceptual framework for this study.

**Transcendental and Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

There are two main approaches to phenomenology: descriptive, also known as transcendental, and interpretive, also known as hermeneutical (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Transcendental phenomenology was developed by German philosopher, Edward Husserl (1859-1938) and contemporarily is associated with American
psychologist Clark Moustakas (1923 – 2012). In transcendental phenomenology, the researcher “transcends the phenomena and meanings being studied to take a global view of the essences discovered” and brackets and detaches the way they identify with the essence of a phenomenon (Sloan & Bowe, 2014, p. 1294). Conversely, in hermeneutical phenomenology, developed by German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and contemporarily is associated with Dutch Canadian scholar Max van Manen, the researcher cannot be removed from the process of identifying the essence of a phenomenon (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Researchers cannot bracket their experiences as they are part of the world and existence but should explicitly make their personal bias and judgements known. Henriksson and Friesen (2012) described hermeneutics as “the art and science of interpretation and thus also meaning” (p.1). van Manen (1990) further stated hermeneutics is how we interpret the texts of life. Hermeneutic phenomenology then, is “the study of experience together with its meanings” (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012, p. 1). Hermeneutical phenomenological research emphasizes “language, conversations, one’s historical context, understanding, and interacting with cultural elements” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 100). To gain a deep understanding of the lived experiences of Asian American leaders in higher education, those main emphases will be key, making a hermeneutical phenomenological study a good fit for this research.

**Researcher Role and Reflexivity**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that qualitative research is interpretive research where the inquirer is involved in a deep experience with their participants which can introduce ethical and personal complications into the research process. As such, researchers must reflect about their role in the study; reflect on their past experiences and how their past experiences shape the direction of, and
interpretations developed from the research. Reflexivity, “a person’s reflection upon or examination of a situation or experience,” is a key component of hermeneutical phenomenology (Sloan & Bowe, 2014, p. 1297). It can be seen as being part of and aiding the process of researching the phenomenon, the data analysis, and interpreting meanings (Sloan & Bowe, 2014; van Manen, 1990). For my study, I endeavored to be reflexive throughout the research process in writing about and discussing my connections to the underrepresentation of Asian American leaders in higher education. As this study was motivated by my identity and my multidimensionality of experiences (Crenshaw, 1989), both personal and professional with higher education, my history, biases, and assumptions had a part in shaping my research.

I am a Filipino-American woman. The youngest daughter and child of immigrant parents, born, raised, and educated in the United States. I have three older siblings, two brothers and one sister, and a posse of cousins, extended family, and friends. My “emotional, moral, educational, and occupational consciousness” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79) is informed by my family, immediate, blood related, and extended, and the kinship of my collective cultural community. All of which results in familial capital that shapes my identity, my perceptions and views, and how I experience the world. My multidimensionality of experiences includes being an Asian American, a Filipino American administrator who currently works in higher education and who has over 20 years of practitioner and leadership experience. In those 20 years, however, I have not been supervised by an Asian American, someone who looks like me. In those years, I worked with only two Asian Americans who attained vice president positions. And, in those years, as I moved through the management ranks, I did not have an Asian American leadership example before me. While I know there are Asian Americans
who have reached executive and senior leadership positions, they have been invisible in my decades long career. My identity and my multidimensionality of professional experiences converge on the topic of the underrepresentation of Asian American leaders in higher education, and not seeing myself and my community represented galvanized me to conduct this study. Exploring the lived experiences of Asian Americans who have attained leadership positions at U.S. colleges and universities and learning from their experiences is an impactful way of surfacing insights that can guide solutions to improve Asian American representation in leadership in higher education.

Acknowledging that my own experiences could influence my study required me to be reflexive and to critically self-evaluate. Some of the strategies for maintaining reflexivity included repeated interviews with the same participants and member checking, which I discuss in upcoming sections on interviews and trustworthiness. An additional strategy for maintaining reflexivity was keeping a research journal to note and document my decisions, reasoning, and reactions. This journal was the “audit trail” of my reflections throughout the research process.

**Procedures for Data Collection**

Data collection procedures set boundaries for a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The boundaries are enacted through identifying requirements used for recruiting participants, identifying participants and the sample, and collecting data through interviews.

**Recruitment**

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct my study, I began recruiting participants. My outreach was a multi-
pronged approach: (a) I contacted leaders in my network who met the sample criteria, (b) I requested and received assistance from professional contacts to help in identifying potential participants for my study, and (c) I communicated directly with campus leaders who I found from searching the websites of colleges and universities in California and across the nation who potentially met the sampling criteria. Correspondingly, I sent recruitment emails that were specific to the audience of the three prongs of my approach (see Appendix A). Within each email, a link to a demographic questionnaire was included to gain background information about the participants. Information such as the Asian racial group to which they identify, immigrant generation, gender, comfortability with discussing race and ethnicity, and previous leadership positions was requested (see Appendix B). Responses to my email and to the survey were reviewed and participation emails were subsequently exchanged to set up and confirm interview dates and times and to provide and collect participants’ informed consent forms. For my own due diligence, one follow-up email was sent to those participants who did not respond to my initial outreach and did not submit a demographic questionnaire.

Sample

For this study, participants who are or were leaders with the rank of associate vice president or higher, which includes presidents, chancellors, provosts, vice presidents, and equivalent titles, who identify as Asian American were selected. Participants have or had a minimum of 5-years of experience within those leadership ranks and were recruited from two-year and four-year public or private, non-profit, for-profit colleges or universities in the United States. I chose these criteria as participants are/were in leadership positions that developed and implemented policy and influenced equity at colleges and universities. Furthermore, Asian American leaders in these positions have experiences from
their paths to leadership and from their roles as leaders in higher education from which meaning can be explored. Criterion sampling “seeks cases that meet some criterion” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 159). As all of the participants needed to meet a specific rank at a college or university and identify as Asian American, criterion sampling was the purposeful sampling strategy used to discover participants for the study. The recommended sample size for a phenomenological study can range from 3 to 25 participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dukes, 1984; Polkinghorne, 1989). In this study, the sample size was 15 participants.

**Participants**

Fifteen participants, 10 women and 5 men, took part in my study. With the small number of Asian Americans in positions of executive and senior leadership at U.S. colleges and universities, specific information about the participants’ Asian identity, their position titles, and their institution details, the criteria to participate in the study, are reduced in this reporting to preserve confidentiality. I reflect Asian identity by using Asian geographic descriptions. Twelve East Asian and three Southeast Asian participants participated in this study. I downsize position titles to describe participants’ leadership role as either executive or senior. Executive leadership roles include positions such as president and chancellor and senior leadership roles include cabinet and advisory positions, such as provost, vice president, or associate vice president. Seven executive and eight senior leaders participated in the study. Details about the participants institutions are scaled down to identify their institutions as either a two-year or four-year. Thirteen participants were from four-year institutions and two participants were from two-year institutions. I chose pseudonyms to further maintain confidentiality. Table 1 depicts, in a list table format, the participant demographics of Asian identity,
position title, and institution details in categories of Asian Background, Leadership Role, and Institution Type, respectively.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Asian Background</th>
<th>Leadership Role</th>
<th>Institution Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belle</td>
<td>Southeast Asian</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>4 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>Southeast Asian</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>4 year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>East Asian</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>2 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>Southeast Asian</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>4 year</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Senior</td>
<td>4 year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
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<td>Executive</td>
<td>4 year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
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<td>Senior</td>
<td>2 year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marcie</td>
<td>East Asian</td>
<td>Senior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patty</td>
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<td>Senior</td>
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<td>4 year</td>
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<td>Shermy</td>
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<td>Senior</td>
<td>4 year</td>
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<td>East Asian</td>
<td>Senior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violet</td>
<td>East Asian</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>4 year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews

For a phenomenological study, “the process of collecting information involves primarily in-depth interviews” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 161). I employed a process of two individual interviews per participant. In hermeneutic phenomenological research, van Manen (1990) asserted that interviews can serve
to gather experiences and narrative material that may “serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon,” (p. 66) or serve to reflect with the participant. Prior to conducting interviews, I reviewed the questions for both the first and second interviews with multiple colleagues. Though few changes were made to my interview questions, this peer debriefing process helped to provide clarity and minimize ambiguity. The interview questions were added to the two interview protocols created for the first and second interviews.

With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and for safety reasons, the interviews were conducted via the Zoom web conferencing platform from which the interviews were both audio and video recorded to support the succeeding data analysis phase. I also took handwritten notes to be reflexive. The length of the interviews were approximately 60-70 minutes and were semi-structured with open-ended questions that allowed me to follow up on responses. The interviews took place between October 2021 and January 2022. All 15 participants participated in the first interview but only 14 participants took part in the second interview. One participant, the first to be interviewed, was non-responsive to email requests to schedule a second interview but consented to allow the first interview to be included in the study. Subsequently, to ensure time on my participants’ calendars, dates and times for both interviews were scheduled at the same time with the second interview scheduled at a minimum one week later where possible.

For the first interview, I spent this time building rapport with my participants and gathering their lived experiences by asking questions about their racialized experiences, their experiences with racism, their leadership approach and values, and their identity as an Asian American (see Appendix C). After the first interview, audio recordings were uploaded to the Temi audio to text online
transcription service to produce transcripts. I reviewed the transcripts for exactness and made transcription updates by hand to accurately reflect what the participants stated and expressed. I re-read and reviewed the transcripts to write summaries of participants interviews.

For the second interview, I opened our conversations by reading the summary of the first interview, identifying key statements, and reflecting on our previous conversation. This member checking activity gave the participants an opportunity to clarify and add to their responses from the first interview. Clarifications and feedback were appended to the summaries. Following the reflection, I continued collecting participant data by asking questions about what their racialized experiences, experiences of racism, and their Asian identity meant to them (see Appendix D). After the second interview, I repeated the process of uploading the audio recording to Temi to generate a transcript, reviewing and updating the transcripts for accuracy, and re-reading the transcript and writing summaries of the second interview. Since I did not be meeting with the participants again, I emailed the summaries of the second interview to the participants providing them a chance to add or edit their responses. Feedback from participants was again appended to the participant’s interview summary. van Manen (1990) stated that as researchers go back and forth with interviewees, a hermeneutic interview develops where interviewees become collaborators in the research project. I was determined to create this type of environment to provide my participants an opportunity to co-construct the research and ensure their lived experiences and meanings were represented as they envisioned.

Data Analysis

A hermeneutical phenomenological approach asks the researcher to engage in a process of self-reflection where “the biases and assumptions of the researcher
are embedded and essential to the interpretive process” (Laverty, 2003, p. 28). For my study, I employed the data analysis steps defined by Creswell and Poth (2018), a simplified version of the approach advanced by Clark Moustakas, who is typically associated with transcendental phenomenology. However, rather than bracket my own personal experiences with Asian American leadership in higher education as the first step in the data analysis process, I self-reflected with journal notes to explicitly identify the ways in which my experiences related to my research. My data analysis continued with the following steps:

1. The transcribed data and summaries were uploaded to Dedoose Version 9.0.18 research data analysis software. The data were analyzed to identify significant statements about the participants' experiences. These significant statements were treated with equal value. I identified the following statements, for example, as significant as they discussed participants’ path into higher education and leadership positions:

- “My career in higher education, I would say, was sort of accidental. I fell into community college because my background. I had a master's degree in counseling, psychology, so I am qualified to be a counselor.”
- Our Dean basically said that since you know so much about what we are doing, what we were doing wrong. Maybe you could help lead us in that area. That's how I got into higher ed administration. At the time, nobody ever told me that was even a viable career path for an Asian American, and I never really thought about it.
- “I never intentionally sought out leadership positions particularly in higher ed.”
- “People would nominate me and say, ‘oh, you could do this, you could do this’ and so that's why I initially called myself, privately, an accidental provost and accidental president, because I never thought about those things.”
- “I wasn't planning to be in higher ed…I felt I'd be in the private sector.”
• “I have to say [higher education] was not planned. My thought was I would actually work in a community based setting.”

2. The significant statements were grouped into broader meaning units or themes. This is the foundation step for interpretation as broader meaning units are clustered and repeated statements are removed. Using the example of significant statements about participants’ path into higher education and leadership positions in the previous step, the statements were grouped into a theme of Asian Americans as Accidental Leaders.

3. From the broader meaning units, I developed a textual description of “what” the participants experienced, followed by developing a structural description of “how” the experiences happened. Continuing with the example from the preceding step of the theme Asian Americans as Accidental Leaders, descriptions were developed using participant descriptions of their backgrounds in fields such as business, engineering, counseling, and psychology and how higher education was not their first career industry. Once in the higher education field through part-time lecturing or colleague encouragement, their work and capabilities were noticed and led participants to be nominated or tapped to move into leadership roles.

4. Finally, I created a composite description, the “essence” of the experience, which integrates the textual and structural descriptions, and is the culminating aspect of phenomenological studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Building on the example from the prior step of integrating the “what” and the “how” of Accidental Leader experiences, participants did not think of or consider higher education administration as a career or leadership option which contributes to the lack of an Asian American leadership pipeline and lack of support to cultivate
careers and leaders. With further analysis, Asian Americans as Accidental Leaders ultimately became a subtheme to a broader theme related to support, which is discussed in the subsequent Findings chapter.

**Trustworthiness and Credibility**

Jones et al. (2014) describes trustworthiness as the “qualitative paradigmatic means by which to assure a study is of high quality” (p. 35). To ensure trustworthiness of my study, I employed “techniques that increase the probability that the criteria [of trustworthiness] are met” (Schwandt et al., 2007, p. 18). In addition to reflexivity and member checking, described in the previous sections, peer debriefing, and thick descriptions were utilized. Peer debriefing is the process of collaborating with a professional peer uninvolved in the study to assist in analyzing the researcher’s reasoning about all or parts of the research process (Given, 2008). I collaborated with colleagues as a peer debriefing activity for an outside review of my research design to ensure credibility. Given (2008) defines credibility as the “methodological procedures and sources used to establish a high level of harmony between the participants’ responses and the researcher's interpretations of them” (p. 139). Peer debriefing was also employed to confirm content credibility of my interview questions. Feedback was reviewed and integrated into the interview protocol. Further, rich, thick descriptions were developed to provide the context and setting to describe the findings and to support their credibility.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study complied with the university’s human subjects requirements as defined by the IRB at California State University, Fresno, the Committee for the
Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS). Approval by the CPHS was obtained before initiating my study and any activity with participants. Informed consent from the study’s participants were obtained for the demographic data questionnaire and interview. Before audio and video recording the interviews, verbal agreement for permission to record from all study participants was obtained and reiterated once recording began. The interview protocol scripts included language that further reiterated the voluntary nature of participating, reassurance of confidentiality by using pseudonyms, and clarifying to participants that they can bypass any questions and stop the interview at any time. Collected data like interview transcripts and the demographic data survey were securely saved on a password-protected drive. Significant effort was taken to ensure security of my participants' data and research materials. In addition to using pseudonyms, I pared down reporting participants’ Asian identity, their position titles, and their institution details to preserve confidentiality. Further, when sharing their experiences, in instances that included details that could divulge the participants' identity, I did not use the pseudonym but named them generically as a participant.

**Limitations**

Regardless of the type of research, study limitations “represent weaknesses within the study that may influence outcomes and conclusions of the research” (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019, p. 261). A significant limitation to my study is the COVID-19 pandemic or the effects of the pandemic. My interviews were conducted over Zoom and, while many people are comfortable with web conferencing platforms as a communication tool, the nuances, depth, and familiarity that can be developed from in person interviews may be lost with online interviews. Another limitation is the performative aspect of executive and senior leaders positions. There is the potential that my participants were not
completely candid and were putting on a good face. Lastly, another limitation was sample representation. While I reached out to a diverse group of Asian American leaders, my sample skewed to more East Asian participants.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described hermeneutic phenomenology as the methodological approach and design that was utilized for my study. Phenomenology is “the study of experience, particularly as it is lived and as it is structured through consciousness” (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012, p. 1) and, as the focus of my study is on understanding the meaning of lived experiences shared by multiple individuals, phenomenology was the most suitable approach for my study’s needs. Additionally, I described my role as the researcher and my connection to the topic of the underrepresentation of Asian Americans in higher education. I also discussed my data collection procedures, the data analysis steps, trustworthiness and credibility, ethical considerations, and closed the chapter with potential limitations of this study.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

My study sought to understand Asian American executive and senior leaders’ lived experiences by illuminating their narratives about their racialized identities at U.S. postsecondary institutions. The research is guided by three research questions:

1. How do Asian American leaders in higher education describe their racialized experiences as a leader at a U.S. college and university?
2. How do Asian American leaders in higher education describe their experiences of racism as a leader at a U.S. college and university?
3. What meaning do Asian American leaders in higher education attribute to their racialized experiences and experiences of racism?

In this chapter, I present my research findings. From my study, five major themes emerged that illustrate how the racialized experiences and experiences of racism of Asian American leaders in higher education manifest and depict the meaning they attributed to those experiences. Table 2 illustrates the themes corresponded with each participant and the data saturation for the themes. The first theme that emerged is connected to the racialization of Asian American leaders at colleges and universities. The theme demonstrates how stereotypes of archetype leaders underpin how Asian Americans are viewed as deficient leaders, resulting in increased individualized efforts to counter the stereotypes. To support this theme, subthemes focus on the perceptions of Asian Americans as leaders, the incongruence of their leadership in practice with those perceptions, and the extra actions Asian American leaders take to ameliorate how they are perceived. The second theme is related to the intersectionality of Asian American women leaders. This theme exposes that, in addition to managing the racialization of how they are
viewed as Asian American leaders, Asian American women leaders navigate the subjugating layers of gender and sexism, which are revealed through subthemes of proving their capability and silencing. A subtheme also highlights the motivation of Asian American women leaders to lift up others as they climb, which also connects to the third theme to emerge from the data, the significance of Asian American support on leadership. Within this theme, three subthemes depict layers of support: receiving support from others, lacking Asian American support, and providing support to Asian Americans. The fourth theme that surfaced is the salience of representation on Asian American leadership experiences. This theme demonstrates how being an Asian American leader means representing more than yourself and is manifested in who they represent, the expectations of their representation, and how they represent. The final theme that emerged is connected to Asian American leaders’ commitment to social justice and change. As a result of their racialization and experiences of racism, Asian American leaders acknowledge that a lot of work still needs to be done but also see education as the path forward to improve society and affect change, and as the vehicle that advances social justice.

**Experiencing Racialization and Racism**

In sharing their lived experiences, the participants in my study disclosed their experiences with racism and racialization both in their private lives as well as in their professional lives as executive and senior leaders. These glimpses and narratives provide context that help frame the depth and breadth of experiences that inform their leadership. While I have made every effort to name participants with their pseudonyms when sharing their experiences, some instances include details that may reveal the participants' identity. For those experiences, I do not include the pseudonym but name them generically as a participant.
Table 2

Participants and Corresponding Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Perception of deficient leader</th>
<th>Incongruent to leadership practice</th>
<th>Extra actions</th>
<th>Proving capability</th>
<th>Silencing</th>
<th>Lifting</th>
<th>Receiving support</th>
<th>Lacking support</th>
<th>Providing support</th>
<th>Who they represent</th>
<th>Expectations</th>
<th>How they represent</th>
<th>Education</th>
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Some of the personal experiences that were shared were overt racist incidents such as being spit on, having reprehensible names yelled at them by passersby in cars or while walking in a mall, and receiving stares when entering restaurants. The incidents were also covert, like enduring others' astonishment when speaking without an Asian accent. One participant shared,

I was in a department store to get some cosmetics. When I asked [the salesperson], the woman could not believe that I didn't have an accent…I said, “well, no, I teach English. I majored in English.” “Wow. That is really amazing and you still don't have an accent.”

Overt and covert racist incidents also occurred that were connected to their roles as leaders. When one participant assumed their executive position, a proud, well-resourced alum contacted the institution to say he would not give “a
[expletive] penny to a Jap from an internment camp.” Another executive leader shared when they were appointed, they received emails and postcards calling them an affirmative action hire. Participants’ colleagues also contributed to their experiences of racism. Lydia conveyed a story where a campus dean, a white man, “walked up to me, got in my face and said, ‘you inscrutable Asians, think you could come in here and take over everything’ and walked away.” Linus shared that after making comments at a staff meeting, a colleague said aloud to him “you know, this is not China.”

Depending on where the participant was situated geographically, how the racist incidents materialized varied but they still occurred. Having taken positions at institutions across the country, participants shared that in the Midwest their experiences included hostility and verbal attacks and being ignored or othered since Asians do not fit the racial tensions of the Black/white binary. Sophie shared that “you really stick out in the Midwest” so at restaurants she would “start speaking very loudly to my children, emphatically so that people knew that I spoke English.” In the South, participants spoke about not fitting into a box that locals understood and locals not knowing how to treat a minority who is not Black, as race is also focused on the Black/white binary and, in some southern states, on the Native American/white binary. Charlie spoke of being forewarned that if he was stopped while driving in any of the small towns in Texas not to ask any questions, take the ticket, unless he wanted to spend time in the county jail because he was not the right color and when he was pulled over, he did what he was told.

Participants overwhelmingly referred to California as more open and familiar for Asian Americans. Racism was experienced more blatantly outside of California. Sophie reflected that she “could move around very comfortably and
very easily because you [aren’t] regarded as special or different.” However, with the rise in anti-Asian hate during the pandemic, that comfort, even in California, has been challenged as participants are compelled to alter their lives and guard against being attacked. For Freida, she opened up to say

I stopped running in the morning by myself because of all of the attacks…I was really angry and, at the same time, I just had to be practical…I'm a lot more careful than before the pandemic, before the rise in anti-Asian hate. I've always been pretty aware of my environment, but I do different things. I've changed my patterns. That makes me really angry but, it also gives me a lot of empathy for other folks who have been doing that all of their lives.

The women participants, more specifically, expressed worry about looking like the demographic that was targeted, elderly Asian women, as they had let their natural hair color show during the pandemic. While the rise in anti-Asian hate fostered safety measures from physical attacks, the racist experiences over time have taught women participants to “armor up.” Marcie used the metaphor of putting on a coat,

We have to walk into work with an extra layer of protection so I call it putting on my coat. There have been some campuses where I have worked where I had to bring a metal coat, bulletproof…[at another] I wore the lightest coat. It was maybe a light crochet jacket.

As Asian Americans, there are more “layers of things that are impacting your decisions,” as Lucy stated, when “you just want to be who you are and how you feel comfortable.

Through their experiences of racism, the participants have learned resilience, as Linus expressed, “what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, right? I think those experiences just make you more resilient and I think to this day it teaches you how to ignore the negative and to focus on the positives.” They have also recognized that racism and racialization are part of their life experiences. Schroeder described the impact as, “it's probably good in a perverse way that I grew up facing bullying and other stuff because it made me a tougher person. I just
wouldn't be who I am if you removed all this stuff.” Through participants’ narratives of racism and racialization, the depth of their experiences can be better understood and more palpably depicts the themes from my study discussed in the following sections.

“**We are not seen as leaderly**”

As participants spoke about their experiences, they expressed that “we are not seen as leaderly,” as leadership material. This perception is connected to the racialization of Asian Americans, who are racialized as the meek model minority, and are not recognized as demonstrating the attributes of the prototypic standard of leadership. The prototypic standard of leadership is white leaders who exhibit attributes of masculinity, tyranny, and dynamism (Festekjian et al, 2014). As the model minority, Asian Americans do not fit the standard of leadership material. From the data, a theme surfaced that this perception of Asian Americans as deficient leaders is perpetuated, which is in conflict with Asian Americans’ leadership praxis and results in extra work to counter the stereotypes.

Asian Americans have demonstrated their capacity to lead as executive and senior leaders at U.S. postsecondary institutions, but the archetypal leadership standard against which leadership is compared creates perceptions and stereotypes about Asian American leadership that minimize and dismiss that capability. Many of the participants expressed these perceptions in various ways where “people just don’t look at Asians as leaders.” Charlie vocalized this perception as an obstacle in saying,

I think the first challenge is the stereotype of Asian Americans being timid, not being able to make decisions. And I’d counter that with, will we make smarter decisions? It's hard for me to think when I'm speaking. I'm better off listening first, understanding what's at stake, making assessments instead of jumping into explaining. But there's this stereotype, I use John Wayne because of what he represents, go in guns blazing kind of stereotype
of what a leader is, has to be a forceful leader. But I've met quite a few Caucasian CEOs and they don't fit that mold and I look at them, they've been very successful as well, but sometimes I think the stereotype prevails, that's the only leadership style that works.

The attributes of the archetypal leadership standard, masculinity, tyranny, and dynamism also do not align with the participants' leadership in practice and the values they identified as necessary to lead successfully. This creates an incongruence with the norm of what a leader is expected to be, perpetuating the stereotype that Asian Americans are not leadership material. This incongruence is expected since, as Lucy stated, “all of our models for leadership don't look like us, don't act like us, don't have the same cultural upbringing and our styles and our manner are not there when you read all those leadership books.” Participants described their approaches to leadership as “building consensus,” “connected leadership,” “shared governance,” “giving others an opportunity.” These descriptions align more with collectivist and collaborative approaches which have proven to be equally successful. Additionally, participants expressed that leadership is informed by life experiences and they demonstrate that different leadership that is not “six feet tall, male, and white” can be effective.

To counter the racialized perception and improve how they are perceived, Asian American leaders take extra measures in their work and leadership. Participants identified that they have to work harder and do better compared to their peers who are not Asian. Lydia spoke about developing a critical eye and being a perfectionist because in her path to leadership her teams had to “work harder to prove ourselves and we just couldn't look like we threw something together…I can see through something that has not been thought through or put together well.” Franklin also strives to be “two standard deviations above the mean” and doing his job exceptionally well. Linus stated that Asians have “to be
on the extreme in order to fight the stereotypes.” In his executive position, he is cautious and more by the book, “you only say things that you mean, and you follow up whatever you promise that you will do, and you follow all the guidelines on ethics.” He went on to say “Asians have to do more than other people in order to prove that they are good leaders. If an Asian leads at the same level as others, people will not see them as a separate leader.” The participants clearly exemplify Asian Americans can be leaders in spite of not fitting the perceived leadership norm. The persistence of that standard, however, undervalues their capability and their more collectivist leadership approaches that results in them doing more, putting in extra work to negate those perceptions and views of them as Asian American leaders.

**Asian American Women Leaders: Navigating Gender and Race**

Intersectionality is a key tenet of AsianCrit, focusing on how the intersection of racism and various forms of subordination, such as sexism, genderism, classism, shape the racial and social identities of Asian Americans (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Intersectionality connects to another emergent theme that acknowledges Asian American women leaders navigate the additional layers of gender and sexism in conjunction with managing the stereotype of Asian American leaders. In the interviews with the five Asian American men leaders, the topic of gender was not brought up and discussed as affecting their leadership, whereas all of the Asian American women leaders discussed and described their experiences as women of color and how the intersection of their gender and race impacted how they were viewed and treated on their path to leadership and as leaders.
**Proving They are Capable**

Many of the women participants referred to having to demonstrate they were capable of doing the job and as a woman of color having to “work about 10 times as hard to get a third of the credit and advancement.” Patty described her experience,

> At the beginning, it was more just being female in a room of all males and most often pretty dominant personalities. It was sometimes more difficult so you always were proving your whatever, either written assignments or what you did to achieve the goals. It starts to become apparent you can do it. What I say as I present to other groups, there’s a saying about a number of men have to prove they're incompetent but women still have to prove they are competent from the get-go.

Many of the women spoke of being microaggressed about their capability, where reasons other than their own abilities, like being an affirmative action hire, were attributed to their success. Frieda described being confronted by a white, male faculty member who said, “You're so lucky that you've got a partner that supports you because I'm sure that accounts for a lot of your success.” The minimizing and dismissiveness also came in more egregious displays of sexism. Lucy shared that she had a supervisor who yelled at her every day and she did not understand why. When another person of color pointed out “the person that is supervising you, that is yelling at you doesn't know how to deal with you…he doesn't expect that you have any answers or know anything,” there was a sense of relief but also a realization that Lucy stated

> [I] began to think I was losing my mind or I was incompetent because when you have someone who is your boss, shouting at you every day, it just tears you down. And it was all related to race and gender.

This constant proving and the sexist experiences takes a toll on an individual’s mental, emotional, and physical health. Participants talked about enduring but also
that it’s “exhausting,” “frustrating,” “irritating,” and “tiring” describing signs of racial battle fatigue.

**Being Silenced and Finding Their Voice**

Silencing, being talked over, and not heard marginalizes people from the conversation and their perspectives are then excluded (Mahoney, 1996). The idea of being silenced was also described by many of the women participants. Marcie illustrated her experience:

> You say something, people talk over you, you say something, no one listens to it. The man at the end of the table says it. They're like, oh, that was so good. And you're like, what the hell? …Early in my career, just showing up, people thinking you're the person that is here for catering or you're the person that's going to take notes or you're the staff support. It's inconsistent. You're the boss.

Being soft-spoken, Patty was not always heard. She adapted the strategy to call out individuals when she was silenced - “I literally had to say to a colleague, you know, I think I said that about 10 minutes ago. Do you remember that?” - in order to be heard.

Where silence subordinates, strength is seen in a person’s voice (Mahoney, 1996). Participants spoke about the significance of having a voice and using it. As Sophie explained,

> Because I'm an Asian-American woman I've been in the position sometimes of being voiceless and being ignored or being taken for granted so I never want other people to be in that position. Speaking up, forcefully, when I need to be, I think that's important so I've made it a point to always keep that in mind when I'm sitting at the table.

Similarly, for Charlotte, instead of speaking up forcefully, she repeated herself, tapping into a cultural strength. She described “they really think my voice is soft but, if I say it once and they don't hear it, don't worry, I will use my culture. We
always like to repeat things like thank you is not enough. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.”

“Lift As You Climb”

As the women participants moved up to leadership positions, they recognized they have the opportunity of supporting other women, “lift as you climb.” A variation of the motto of the National Association of Colored Women “Lifting as we Climb” and attributed to Mary Church Terrell (Michals, 2017), women participants of the study only discussed this concept. From their positions of influence, women participants acknowledge, as Sophie expressed, we can “demonstrate to other Asian American women, you can do this too.” Sophie further explained that one of the benefits of being an Asian American leader in higher education is going back to being able to lift as you climb, being able to lift up other people. I have been able to promote many women, many talented women, and women of color. To me, that's been gratifying. Being able to write countless letters of recommendation and use my own network to help people get positions, that's been gratifying. Because the more responsibility you have, the higher position you have, the more influence you have.

Sophie also wanted Asian American women to know there are women who have achieved leadership roles who are happy to help. This sentiment was shared by Lucy, who said, “there are people who have opened the path a little bit and are there to support and will help lift you.”

The use of the words “lift” and “lifting” to describe assisting or elevating someone both literally in a workplace position or figuratively through encouragement were also only expressed by the women participants. Violet described the work she did to rewrite position descriptions to professionalize her staff as “lifting up her staff.” When describing her own support network, Belle met some amazing people who lifted her along the way. She said, “I found people
who were my cheerleaders who were around me and whenever I was at my lowest, they lifted me up…I did not have all the successes. I had a lot of failures then they picked me back up…I had a lot of people beside me that were always lifting me up.”

In reading about Mary Church Terrell, I found the quote to read “And so, lifting as we climb, onward and upward we go, struggling and striving and hoping that the buds and blossoms of our desires will burst into glorious fruition ere long” (Sweet Briar College, 2017). This statement was part of a speech made in 1898 but is still applicable today, reflecting the challenges and hopes of my women participants.

**Receiving, Lacking, and Providing: The Layers of Support**

The practice of lifting others up connects to another emergent theme, the importance of having Asian American support. In analyzing the data, this theme was exhibited in three layers. The first layer is receiving support. In this layer, participants received support and guidance from peers and colleagues regardless of race/ethnicity or gender, creating their circle from whom they could receive sustenance. The second layer is recognizing the lack of Asian American support. Participants recognized the absence of Asian American support that comes through role models and mentors. A third layer is providing support. Having experienced insufficient Asian support, participants felt a responsibility to become role models and to provide mentorship. These layers of support create a process that reflects the career and leadership development for many participants.
First Layer: Receiving Support from Others

Many of the participants shared that they had mentors and role models who were influential to their careers, helping to position them into situations where they could grow and thrive as leaders. As Frieda’s mentors encouraged her to move into administration, she noted “they saw something in me that I didn't see in myself.” This sentiment was echoed by Charlie, who stated, “once I was tapped on the shoulder by my provost [to move into a leadership role], I guess he saw something in me, which I really didn't know.” Their mentors also came from different and unexpected backgrounds. The mentors Frieda mentioned were Black women who were older and had done a lot of equity work. Marcie also spoke about receiving support from a mentor who was an older, white male, “definitely a product of the good old boys system,” but who recognized early on her ability to do bigger things and saw her potential.

Not only did participants identify receiving support from individuals, but they also mentioned the value of leadership development programs and professional organizations that provided them mentorship. Charlotte described herself as an “leadership institute junkie” and credits the women she met at the National Institute for Leadership Development (NILD) for how her career started. From her participation with NILD, she gained many mentors and she stated, “once you have a number of mentors, they just guide you. They kick you in a good way. I always say my back is full of footprints.” Similarly for Lucy, she described “I’ve been leadership-ed. I've been in every kind of leadership program” and shared that being an ACE Fellow has given her a strong network to connect with. For some of the participants, their involvement with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) also has provided that network from which they have received guidance. Through AASCU, participants mentioned peer to
peer support and participation on committees that created a support network. The National Teacher Corps and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) provided Violet opportunities for leadership development but her association with these groups connected her with peers and mentors from whom she has received lifelong support.

**Second Layer: Lacking Asian American Support**

Extant literature emphasizes mentoring as a key component of leadership development and was identified as a vital tool for Asian Americans to advance in their careers (Nguyen et al., 2007; Woo, 2000). Cultural congruence, the compatibility of cultural styles between mentor and mentee, is also an essential element of a mentor-mentee relationship (Chin & Kameoka, 2019). Asian American mentors and role models, however, were lacking or did not exist for participants on their paths to leadership and even in their current positions as executive and senior leaders. As Belle stated, “It’s hard to feel like I have role models and mentors when there is no one who really looks like me.” For many of the participants, they are the first Asian American, not only at their institutions but nationally, to hold executive and senior level positions in higher education. Lucy found herself “trying to model myself after a white woman…because there were no Asian American leaders at the campus.” For Schroeder, he did not have role models or mentors because “there wasn't anyone doing what I did…I came up with this path all on my own…stumbled around until this worked out.”

Charlie, one of the few participants who had Asian American mentors, recognized the importance of having culturally congruent mentors to his career, “I think the lack of mentorship plays into a lot of challenges [of being an Asian American leader in higher education]. I am where I am because of my mentors. They were the ones who tapped me on the shoulder and helped me get into
Marcie affirmed the importance of Asian American mentors. Her Asian American mentor was a role model “who represents my identities, but, more importantly, [the mentorship] was what it's like to have somebody who understands me.” Marcie’s mentor further encouraged and championed her,

“We don't have models of what more can be, the range of what more can be. That's what [my Asian American mentor] was for me…She's the first person who ever said, “you're going to be a president.” No one had ever said that until I met her. I didn't see presidents who looked like me and she's like, “you can be a president.” She was the first one to say that to me.

With so few Asian American leaders in higher education, there are also few peers to reach out to for support. As a consequence, being an Asian American leader is an isolating and lonely place. Many of the participants described landing in higher education and in administrative leadership as “accidental” or “serendipitous,” which further speaks to the severe absence of Asian American peers who have common experiences and challenges. As Frieda lamented,

It's kind of lonely when you get higher up for almost anybody in administration, but I think it's particularly hard for Asian-Americans because there just aren't that many of us…I just wish there were other people who were similar to me that I could connect with and chat with in-person, right? There's certainly people I text and I call…I just wish there were more people up in administration.

**Third Layer: Providing Support to Asian Americans**

With the lack of mentors and role models of their own, participants expressed it was important for those Asian Americans who want to pursue leadership careers in higher education to have, as Frieda noted, somebody who “can help you process what it means to be an Asian American in leadership.” As such, they also felt a responsibility for mentoring and role modeling for others. When Shermy recognized there were no other Asians at the table of his department, he was motivated “that if nothing else I'm going to be there and try to
at least show [Asians] that you actually can take on leadership positions…at least show you, you can be a leader.” Lydia advises Asian Americans who seek leadership roles in higher education that they need a strong mentor and others “who will help to guide you, tell you your strengths and your weaknesses, and tell you how you can improve so that you know, how you come off to others, what your assets are that you need to put forward.” Frieda also shared similar thoughts. As Asian Americans will experience racism and racialization, they need mentors who can cut through all [the niceties] and validate what you're experiencing, but also work with you to try to frame, process and learn from it, and to respond to it. Then turn that around and say, “So then how do I help other people who are subjected to similar behaviors?”

Marcie shared that she wants to be part of inspiring professionals and “what I didn't have earlier in my career, I can be now part of that, giving this generation images that inspire and hope. That's a really weighty feeling, a really satisfying feeling, a little bit, slightly scary feeling. It’s sort of like I have to hold this with care.” Marcie further shared that the most positive way her identity as an Asian American has impacted her path to leadership and her current leadership role

[I have] an opportunity to role model for students, to role model for Asian American Pacific Islander professionals, and in particular Asian American professional Islander women. For women of color, staff of color, there are cases where there's a sense of coalition building across race and ethnicity. I think I've been able to be that source of support and mentorship and advocacy for Black women and Latino women.

Equally, Charlotte also devotes a lot of her energy on mentoring others and leadership development work. When she speaks with anyone at her institution, she tries to help them see they are important and regardless of the “role you play, what is on paper in the HR office” to develop the concept that everyone needs to be and can be a leader. Because of her own experience and how important mentorship and
leadership development played out for her, it is something she wants to share. The importance of Asian American support is demonstrated in the layers of receiving, lacking, and providing support. While the participants received support and were mentored, the lack of Asian American mentors and role models create an absence of culturally congruent support, which ultimately leads to a wanting to provide that guidance to current and future Asian American leaders.

**Representing More than Yourself**

Marcie’s role modeling and mentorship for not only Asian Americans but other people of color speaks to another theme that surfaced, the salience of representation to Asian American leadership experiences. This theme demonstrates how being an Asian American leader means representing more than yourself and is manifested in who they are expected to represent and how they are expected to represent.

As executive and senior leaders at a higher education institution, all of the participants expressed representing their college or university, its interests and their students, first. For Patty, the values she expressed were important to lead successfully were “trust, competence, and alignment with the university’s values and mission.” Similarly, Charlie reminds his leadership team that “every decision they make is to serve the best interests of our students.” He expressed the importance of taking responsibility at the institutions where he was the executive leader, saying when he was at a public institution “every dollar we spend, that’s taxpayer and student money” and at a private institution “every dollar we spend, a student is borrowing money to pay for that.” Violet spoke about the work of accomplishing the diversity goals of the university. She had the benefit of working with students who felt that they had somebody who looked like them and who they saw as an advocate for students of color and women. She was also pleased that her
advocacy extended to the whole of the university, stating “this is what I was aiming for and I'm accomplishing because I'm not only seen as an advocate for persons of color and women, but also white male students.”

Participants also recognize they represent their Asian communities. They are typically the first Asian leader at their campus and understand that it has meaning to Asian communities. Franklin spoke about feeling a certain level of obligation, with so few Asian Americans in executive positions, to represent exceptionally well and always keep “in the back of my mind that I'm representing my Asian brothers and sisters and making sure that's always at the forefront of what I do.” Equally, Lucy discussed Asian American representation and its meaning being a role model and feeling responsible. She also stated,

You really want to do an extra good job, not just for yourself and not just for your campus, but for the community you represent because you realize there aren't many of us; if I'm not successful or I'm criticized in any way, then it's not just a reflection on me.

Belle further exclaimed that “by being here, the representation, it's not even just for me, it's for the ones coming behind” for her Asian community,

[It is] one of those where the community here is like, we have [someone like us] in administration, that's never happened before. So that's been a nice part but it then does create things where I'm expected to represent all the time and that can be a little exhausting. But I've had such great opportunities to connect with students.

Correspondingly, Asian American leaders become symbols to represent Asian communities and broader communities of color. One of the main tenets of CRT and AsianCrit is anti-essentialism, which asserts that since race is socially constructed, there is not a characteristic or experience that can describe a racial group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Grillo (1995) emphasized individuals cannot speak for all of the people in the group to which
they belong or a group they do not. Anti-essentialism connects to this theme as Asian American leaders are expected to represent whole racial groups.

When he became an executive leader, Charlie realized,

You become a symbol for people in different areas without knowing it...we should always know that you represent the institution, but now you start to represent different groups whether by race or ethnicity or immigrant status and you have to live up to their expectations.

Schroeder spoke to being symbolic to many Asian Americans, particularly Chinese Americans. He recognized he is important to them, they are invested in him, and they want him to identify with them and would be disappointed if he did not return the affinity. Schroeder acknowledged,

Like it or not in this way, I'm representative and if I really mess up things, I will be embarrassing myself and my family. Shame and honor are so important. I have to be thoughtful about that. I can't be dismissive because they are honoring me.

Living up to the expectations of those for whom they are symbolic, how participants represent is a consequence. They are watched, targeted, and judged.

Patty was taught early on by her parents that “you represent more than yourself. You don't embarrass.” With that understanding, she always knows,

What I do is being watched by more than my colleagues, one, because I'm in a leadership role, but also because I'm a minority person, an Asian person, how would they perceive [me] and what would they do? I have internalized that a lot.

Franklin also realizes the power of his executive position and being aware of the interest in every interaction. With that awareness and being Asian, he knows he has to represent well because “you become a role model and mentor, even if it's not a direct mentorship, for those students who have never seen an Asian leader.” Lucy speaks to needing community support because leaders are being watched and targeted
We need that community support behind us. It can't end once we have gotten a certain leadership position because we're still targeted, there are still stereotypes or there's still misunderstandings, or there's still evaluations of us that say you're not as good as, or you're not like so-and-so… We still need that support out there and the checking in and seeing what folks can do to support us so that we can stay and thrive in our positions.

While Asian American leaders recognize they represent more than themselves, the stereotype of Asians as a monolith persists and leaders are expected to represent all Asian communities. Sally spoke to the idea of being expected to represent one Asian story,

Campus communities need to know that Asian American stories cannot be homogenized. I have been trying to understand how better to tell the story about Asian Americans to the public and particularly to the majority and am not sure what the answer is because Asian stories cannot be homogenized or aggregated into one overarching story.

Belle also spoke about being expected to represent all people of color,

It wasn't even my identity as an Asian American woman, it was just my identity as a person of color being asked to give the perspective for people of color… to speak about all the students of color and their experiences.

Representation for higher education Asian American leaders comes with widespread expectations. As part of their positions, they are expected to represent their institutions. But, that expectation of representation gets expanded beyond their position, into communities and racial and socioeconomic groups for which they are not equipped to represent, as Grillo (1995) so aptly put, because “[their] view is still shaped by where [they] are situated” (p.28).

**Education as the Path Forward**

The final theme that emerged is connected to Asian American leaders' commitment to change and social justice. As a result of their racialization and experiences of racism, Asian American leaders acknowledge that a lot of work still needs to be done but they also see education as the path forward to better
society and affect change, and as the vehicle that advances social justice. In speaking about what her experiences with racism mean, Lucy expressed “they mean we have a long way to go and that is why I do what I do. Education is the way forward to improve society and that gives me hope.” With that same thinking, Franklin believes education is “the game changer” and is “all in” for changing trajectories of students and focusing on student success for historically marginalized populations. For Sally, she is strongly motivated to be in higher education and trying to bring more people into the college space to expose them to important understandings about other cultures, other religions, other ways of being and thinking about the world. She wants to expose more Asian Americans and people of color, who are not of the mainstream white majority, and help them make sense of prejudice and racism and for future generations. Sally also had a more developmental psychology leaning to her belief about education and its potential to lead change. She is gratified to be in higher education as it is

[It] is designed to create and disseminate, educate and inform. From that standpoint, when we have faculty who are engaged in the active research and scholarship to better understand the principles by which people make decisions, and in order to improve our practices, our behaviors, and our policies in light of these prejudices, it makes me hopeful that if we are of diverse racial backgrounds and ethnic backgrounds and gender, et cetera, then the best place for us to be is in higher education, where we have the potential to study and ameliorate and improve these concepts and prejudicial things.

Some participants considered the educational direction of Asian American students and encouraging them into social science fields as part of the path forward. Shermy hopes Asian American children “do not just choose STEM fields or to be a doctor or to be a lawyer, but rather choose the social sciences or education that impact the policy making of this nation.” Frieda echoed those sentiments expressing that more APIs need to go into public service, into diversity,
equity, and inclusion work, into politics, into “arenas of life that actually promote change on equity issues where you can leverage that and can be a role model and influence other people.” Particularly in higher education, Frieda also wants to see more staff coming up through the ranks who “are not necessarily in STEM and business that bring the humanity side or the social science side to their leadership.”

Marcie spoke to the transformational capacity of education and how it is meaningful to her leadership as an Asian American

I really live through a trio of guiding stars and that is education can transform and is probably only one of the ways to increase quality of life and the human condition. Public health, you can't be a fully engaged human being if you don't have health and wellness, starting with safety and your core needs. And, social justice, because social justice mediates your access to education, your experience of education and your health status. Those three are very strong defining values for me.

She further shared that education is the tool to advance social justice and public health and “if we can’t do that unless everyone is brought along.” With racism and racialization a continuing reality for Asian Americans, education has the capability to affect change. It provides hope that a path to representation in higher education leadership will be carved for Asian Americans, an awareness that colleges and universities will benefit from a diverse and inclusive leadership, and a norm for Asian American leaders to infuse their perspectives into higher education conversations and decision making is a possibility.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the five major themes and supporting subthemes that emerged from the data collected from participant interviews and data analysis. One of the themes that emerged is connected to the racialization of Asian American leaders at colleges and universities and demonstrates how stereotypes of archetype leaders impact how Asian Americans are viewed as deficient leaders.
Another theme is related to the intersectionality of Asian American women leaders. This theme demonstrates how Asian American women leaders navigate the subjugating layers of gender and sexism. The significance of Asian American support on leadership was another theme that emerged from the data. The scarcity of Asian American leaders in higher education results in minimal peer support that leads to isolation and loneliness. The salience of representation to Asian American leadership experiences is a theme that demonstrates how being an Asian American leader means representing more than yourself. The final theme that emerged is connected to Asian American leaders' commitment to social justice and change where education is seen as the path forward to improve society and advance social justice.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

My phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of Asian American executive and senior leaders in higher education by illuminating their narratives about their racialized identities at U.S. colleges and universities. Data from the study consisted of 29 interviews from 15 participants. In this chapter, I present a summary of my study including a summation of the purpose, methodology, and key findings. Additionally, the findings from the study are discussed in relation to extant literature about Asian American leadership, racism, and racialization. Implications for practice and recommendations for future study are also included. In closing, I share my reflections on this research journey, how it has permanently been imprinted on my spirit and how it has shaped me as an Asian American, a Filipino American researcher.

Study Summary

The purpose of my qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Asian Americans who are or were executive and senior leaders in higher education. I sought to understand executive and senior leaders’ experiences as Asian American leaders and examine their narratives of navigating their racialization in the white dominant environments of U.S. postsecondary institutions. The study was guided by three research questions:

1. How do Asian American leaders in higher education describe their racialized experiences as a leader at a U.S. college and university?
2. How do Asian American leaders in higher education describe their experiences of racism as a leader at a U.S. college and university?
3. What meaning do Asian American leaders in higher education attribute to their racialized experiences and experiences of racism?
Persistent themes within extant literature reflect the historical and enduring influence of white culture on postsecondary institutions. The historical power structures have been sustained for centuries, and the long history of white supremacy in higher education underpin today’s practices and leadership. Correspondingly, white dominant culture influences the racist perceptions of Asian Americans, particularly the stereotypes of the model minority and perpetual foreigner. As race is significant to how leadership is perceived, these stereotypes create barriers to Asian American advancement into leadership positions (Festekjian et al., 2014; Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Festekjian et al. (2014) found that white leaders are perceived as the prototypic standard for comparison of leadership. In addition to the model minority and perpetual foreigner perceptions of Asian Americans not the prototypic norm of leadership, Asian cultural values also clash with the leadership norm, producing challenges for Asian American promotion to top leadership positions including those in higher education.

My research was framed by CRT and AsianCrit conceptual perspectives to critically analyze the influence of the racial power structures within U.S. higher education and the role those power structures have in defining the experiences of Asian American leaders. CRT and AsianCrit tenets are applied to depict the influence of racism in higher education and the impact of racism and racialization have on shaping the experiences of Asian American leaders. Key tenets relevant to this study are: Asianization, intersectionality, anti-essentialism, story, theory, and praxis, and the commitment to social justice.

To respond to the research questions of my study, I employed a qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of Asian American leaders in higher education and how they experienced them in their life setting. I chose a qualitative methodology for my study as it is based on
exploring human experiences and the meaning of those experiences. Equivalently, phenomenology was chosen as my research design since it is “the study of experience, particularly as it is lived and as it is structured through consciousness” (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012, p.1). Furthermore, the hermeneutic approach to phenomenology aligned with my design as it is the study of experience alongside its meanings (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012).

Recruitment of participants was a multi-pronged approach: (a) I contacted leaders in my network who met the sample criteria, (b) I requested and received assistance from professional contacts to help in identifying potential participants for my study, and (c) I communicated directly with campus leaders who I found from searching the websites of colleges and universities in California and across the nation who potentially met the sampling criteria. The criteria were participants who hold/held the rank of associate vice president and equivalent titles or higher, who identify as Asian American, and have/had a minimum of five years of experience within those leadership ranks from 2-year and 4-year public or private, non-profit, for-profit colleges or universities in the United States. These criteria were chosen as I sought participants who are/were in leadership positions that had influence over policy and equity at their colleges and universities.

Data collection resulted in 15 participants, 10 women and five men, taking part in my study. Two individual interviews per participant were employed for collecting data. With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted via the Zoom web conferencing platform from which the interviews were both audio and video recorded. After the first interview, I produced a summary of the interview. During the second interview, the summary was read aloud with time for reflecting on the previous interview. This member checking opportunity allowed for clarification and feedback. After the second interview,
summaries were emailed to participants, again allowing for clarification and feedback. All 15 participants participated in the first interview but only 14 participants took part in the second interview resulting in 29 total interviews. One participant was non-responsive to email requests to schedule a second interview.

Data analysis followed structured procedures that included uploading audio recordings to the Temi audio to text transcription online service to produce transcripts for all interviews and uploading transcripts and summaries to Dedoose Version 9.0.18 research data analysis software. Data was analyzed for significant statements which were then grouped into broader meaning units that created themes. A textual description of “what” the participants experienced and a structural description of “how” the experiences happened were documented. Integrating the textual and structural descriptions produced the meanings or “essence” of the participants' experiences.

To ensure trustworthiness of my study, I was intentional about building rapport and trust with my participants over the two interviews. We made space before, during, and after the interviews to share current happenings in our lives and organizations unrelated to the study. The summaries of each interview were member checking actions that provided opportunities for participants to provide feedback. I also employed reflexivity to check my own biases by journaling and note taking. Regular peer debriefing sessions with research colleagues allowed me to validate content credibility during each phase of the study. Rich, thick descriptions were developed to provide the context and setting to describe the findings and to support their credibility.

While all efforts were made to establish trustworthiness and credibility, there are limitations to this study. The effects of COVID-19 pandemic required my interviews to be conducted over Zoom. While I was diligent and attentive to my
participants, the nuances, depth, and familiarity that can be developed from in person interviews may have been missed with online interviews. Similarly, as executive and senior leaders, there is a performative aspect to their positions. There is the potential that they were not completely candid and were putting on a good face. Lastly, while I reached out to a diverse representation of Asian American leaders, my sample skewed to more East Asian participants.

Five major themes emerged that demonstrate how the racialized experiences and experiences of racism of Asian American leaders in higher education surfaced and portray the meaning they attributed to those experiences. One of the themes is connected to the racialization of Asian American leaders at colleges and universities. The theme demonstrates how stereotypes of archetype leaders underpin how Asian Americans are viewed as deficient leaders, resulting in increased efforts to counter the stereotypes. Subthemes center on the perceptions of Asian Americans as leaders, the incongruence of their leadership in practice with those perceptions, and the extra actions Asian American leaders take to negate the stereotyped perception. A second theme focuses on the intersectionality of Asian American women leaders. This theme illustrates that Asian American women leaders have to navigate the layers of gender and sexism. Subthemes to support this theme are proving their capability, silencing, and the motivation of Asian American women leaders to lift up others as they climb. Another theme that emerged is the importance of having Asian American support. Within this theme, three subthemes depict layers of support: receiving support from others, lacking Asian American support, providing support to Asian Americans. Another theme that surfaced is the salience of representation on Asian American leadership experiences. This theme demonstrates how being an Asian American leader means representing more than yourself and is manifested in who
they represent, the expectations of their representation, and how they represent. The final theme that emerged is related to Asian American leaders’ commitment to social justice. As a result of their racialization and experiences of racism, Asian American leaders see education as the path forward to affect change and as the method that advances social justice.

Discussion

Existing literature about Asian American leadership in higher education demonstrates the persistent influence of white dominant culture on postsecondary institutions that underpins practices and leadership today. The racist stereotypes of the model minority and perpetual foreigner impact Asian American experiences and their advancement into leadership positions at U.S. colleges and universities. These perceptions of Asian Americans conflict with leadership norms that result in challenges for Asian American promotion to top positions. From the findings of my study, several conclusions can be drawn that connect the literature to the lived experiences of Asian American leaders in higher education and their experiences of racialization and racism.

First, the findings of my study substantiate the consequential impact of racism and racialization on Asian Americans. Their socially constructed racial identity is key to how Asian Americans are perceived and acknowledged by American society (Tuan, 1999; S. S. Lee, 2006). Together the perpetual foreigner and model minority stereotypes about Asian Americans form those perceptions and create oppressive systems that are replicable and enduring (S. S. Lee, 2006). As a result, negative effects on the Asian American community were produced that include Asian American invisibility and silencing their voices, neglecting the diversity of the Asian American community, and ignoring Asian Americans as a minority. The stereotypes have created misconceptions about Asian Americans
that dismiss and minimize them as illustrated by the participants’ overt and covert experiences of racism.

Additionally, these stereotypes are reproduced in higher education as they frame the perception of Asian Americans as leaders. The findings highlight the influence these experiences have on the leadership of Asian American executive and senior leaders in higher education. The enduring racialization of Asian Americans as the reserved model minority and the other, perfidious foreigner do not satisfy the archetypal white dominant, masculine leadership norm (Festekjian et al., 2014). As Asian Americans are not the exemplar, the view of Asian Americans as insufficient leaders was established and maintained. Despite Asian Americans holding executive and senior leadership positions and demonstrating their capability to lead U.S. postsecondary institutions, the perception disregards their leadership abilities resulting in extra work by leaders to invalidate the perception.

Second, the findings of my study demonstrate that in spite of the racism and racialization, Asian American leaders in higher education persisted, are hopeful, and are committed to affect change. In the face of racism, participants demonstrated resilience and persisted to advance to executive and senior leadership positions. Existing literature identifies resilience as a strength Asian American leaders have demonstrated to overcome racialized perceptions as they sought and achieved leadership positions (Kawahara et al., 2013). Resilience in literature has also been conceptualized as a coping strategy that is not only connected to managing challenges but also to achieving goals and adopting positive perspectives (Reyes & Constantino, 2016; Yang 2014) which participants exhibited in attaining leadership positions, their optimism about the promise of education, and in their desire to push change forward. Having self-understanding
about their experiences of racialization and racism, participants recognize that a lot of work needs to be done about racism and prejudice against Asian Americans but remain hopeful that the work they are doing in higher education will foster change and understanding.

A third conclusion from the findings confirmed that gender is a salient factor that influences leadership. The findings evidenced the Asian American women leaders face more challenges, in addition to those of race, than their men counterparts. Their intersectionality of race and gender impacts their leadership in ways that the Asian American men leaders do not experience. As reported in extant literature, Asian American women are perceived as submissive and passive, these stereotypes subordinate Asian American women and sustain their oppression (Li, 2014, Uchida, 1998). Additionally, the intersectionality of race and gender for Asian American women conflicts with the white, masculine leadership archetype, dually subordinating them as leadership material (Festekjian et al., 2014; Tinkler et al., 2019). The findings reflect how these oppressive perceptions manifest in participants having to prove their capability as well as being silenced and having to develop strategies or making it a point to use their voices.

Managing the additional layers result in extra education and a fatiguing toll on their mental, emotional, and physical health, symptoms similar to racial battle fatigue. Racial battle fatigue evolved from research on the experiences of racism and racialization of the Black community. Higher education is an environment identified as producing racial battle fatigue among oppressed groups (Farmer, 2019; Dade & Rios, 2015; Smith, 2008). Emerging research also indicates that model minority based microaggressions result in racial battle fatigue specifically experienced by Asian Pacific American women but also recognizes self-care and using their voice as ways to respond to the microaggressions (Farmer, 2019).
Fourth, the findings revealed that Asian cultural values were not as markedly apparent in leadership as the literature discussed. Among Asian Americans, collectivism, conformity to norms, family recognition through achievement, emotional self-control, and humility are Asian cultural values commonly recognized within the diverse Asian American communities (B. S. K. Kim et al., 2005). Of those Asian cultural values, collectivism was the most evident in the participants' leadership. Their leadership values were collaborative and consensus oriented, aligning with a collectivist centering that elevates the group’s interest above that of the individual (B. S. K. Kim et al., 2001). The other commonly recognized cultural values did not reveal themselves in participants’ leadership. However, cultural values were discussed as part of their homes growing up, in their relationships with and lessons learned from parents and family, and in recognizing them as important to their communities. This indicates cultural values influence aspects of their life experiences which may still inform their leadership.

A fifth conclusion from the findings surfaced the significance of support to leadership. Participants spoke about receiving support and lacking Asian American support as influential to shaping their leadership. Most of the participants had role models, mentors, and colleagues who provided support and guidance. Literature supports the importance of role models and mentors particularly when needing advice and support to address difficult and challenging situations (Kawahara et al., 2013). Additionally, research shows mentorship has benefits that include increased promotions and higher salaries, improved career mobility and satisfaction, and decreased job stress (Johnson & Ridley, 2004; Kawahara et al., 2013). Participants also identified support came from leadership development programs and institutes as well as the networks they cultivated from
these activities. Research indicates the training and skills gained from leadership development programs aid in advancement and promotion. For Asian Americans, however, research also shows that leadership development programs should be culturally relevant to enhance and complement traditional training approaches (Sy et al., 2017). Support, in its various types, is relevant to Asian American leadership.

Related to the previous conclusion, a sixth conclusion from the findings is the Asian American leadership pipeline is lacking and not growing. As the findings from my study indicated, many of the participants were accidental or serendipitous leaders, this intimates that there was not an intention to enter higher education administration leadership ranks. The accidental leader connects to dissertation research that illustrated similar findings where the path to leadership in higher education administration was by accident or unplanned (Adrian, 2004; Kobayashi, 2009; Li-Bugg, 2011; Mella, 2012). This phenomenon further appears in literature about Asian American leadership in other industries. Asian American leaders also were not seeking leadership positions and were often asked to lead. Additionally, with so few Asian American leaders at postsecondary institutions currently, Asians Americans making up 2% of the racial/ethnic composition of higher education administrators in positions such as president, provost/chief academic affairs officer and chief student affairs/student life officer (ACE, 2017; Bichsel & McChesney, 2017), there are few role models and mentors to inspire and encourage future leaders. Having experienced the lack of Asian American role models and mentorship, participants expressed the importance of providing support. While the findings showed that current leaders are motivated to guide professionals seeking positions in higher education leadership, there was no indication how pervasive their work has been in increasing the leadership pipeline.
Lastly, the findings demonstrated that AsianCrit, when applied to higher education leadership, is an effective framework for examining Asian American leadership experiences. AsianCrit tenets connect to the findings to demonstrate how Asian American leadership is shaped by racism and racialization. The tenet of Asianization frames how the social constructs of the perpetual foreigner and model minority stereotypes and the gendered race stereotypes of Asian women racialize Asian Americans and create perspectives that dehumanize and subordinate Asian Americans (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Asianization manifests in the perception of Asian Americans as deficient leaders and Asian American women perceived as passive and obedient, which are influential determinants on leadership.

The AsianCrit tenet of intersectionality also connects with the finding of how Asian American women leaders navigate their race and gender, affecting their leadership. Intersectionality addresses the concept that white supremacy and other structures that oppress and subordinate intersect to shape Asian Americans identities and experiences (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). As Asian American women leaders deal with both the oppressive systems of racism and sexism, their leadership is influenced by those conditions. Participants expressed that their leadership is informed by their life experiences. For Asian American women, their leadership is informed by their racial and gender identities and their multidimensionality of experiences (Crenshaw, 1989) that do not affect the leadership of Asian American men.

Anti-essentialism, another AsianCrit tenet, frames the finding related to representation Asian American leaders voiced that they are recognized as symbols and are expected to represent not only their Asian communities but other racial and immigrant groups. Anti-essentialism speaks to the concept that since race is
socially constructed and influenced by societal forces, racial groups do not have a singular, common experience (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Grillo, 1995; Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Asian American leaders are expected to speak for racial groups and all people of color as though there is a single experience to represent. More specifically, with Asian Americans racialized as a monolith, Asian American leaders are expected to represent all Asian communities when each communities’ experiences cannot be homogenized.

Additionally, the AsianCrit tenet of the commitment to social justice relates to the finding that education is the path forward to affect change. AsianCrit advocates for the elimination of all forms of oppression including racism and sexism (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). From the findings, participants acknowledge that education has the capacity to improve society and is the vehicle to advance social justice. Education provides the opportunity to demonstrate to society the importance of understanding other cultures and ways of engaging the world to end racism.

As a final connection, the AsianCrit tenet of story, theory, and praxis relates to the whole of my study. The story, theory, and praxis tenet identifies that the stories and experiences of marginalized people provide knowledge that challenge white perspectives and can inform theory and praxis (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). My study reflects this tenet. The narratives of my participants are replete with insight and knowledge that demonstrate how white culture has influenced their experiences but also how those narratives oppose white supremacy. Their stories are a contribution that inform theory and practice and bring about transformative change. With the multiple connection to the study’s findings, the AsianCrit framework provided an effective and understandable means to analyze how racism and racialization impacts Asian American leadership experiences.
Implications for Practice

The findings of this study provide substantive implications for colleges and universities to practice equity and actualize their institutions as inclusive environments. This includes recognizing and advancing Asian Americans into leadership positions. Developing Asian American leaders and infusing their perspectives into conversations and decision making can heighten equitable and socially just leadership. While I specifically apply these implications to higher education and Asian Americans, these implications are transferable to other industry organizations and communities of color as a guide to grow prospective leaders.

Colleges and universities can provide culturally relevant leadership development programs aimed at Asian American students, staff, and faculty. Balancing identity-conscious training with leadership development for growing the skills for the workplace supports value added, constructive leadership development. Programs like Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics (LEAP) Advance provides leadership development to Asian and Pacific Islanders specifically for higher education and equips administrators, staff, and faculty the professional development to promote to positions of influence. Organizations like Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education (APAHE) and the NASPA Asian Pacific Islanders Knowledge Community (APIKC) supports advancing educational and professional opportunities for and educating them on current issues that affect Asian Pacific Americans in higher education. Through their annual conferences, APAHE and NASPA provide culturally relevant professional development. Culturally relevant leadership development facilitates growing the pipeline of Asian American leaders and a roadmap to representation. It also advances cultural awareness and diversity into campus leadership teams. Like any
organization, postsecondary institutions benefit from a diverse and inclusive workforce.

Colleges and universities can intentionally educate their students, staff, and faculty about the model minority myth and the perpetual foreigner perceptions in their diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts to address racism toward Asian Americans but racism in general. My study’s findings identified education as the path forward and this recommendation aligns with this finding. Building on the sentiments of my study participant, Frieda, the education should include deep literacy, understanding, and cognitive empathy about the different types, mechanisms, and dynamics of inequity that different people experience. As such, experiences of Asian Americans should be part of that dialogue. The education provided should be purposeful, ongoing, and personal so that it leads to creating a culture of diversity, inclusion, and social justice and is integrated into our learning.

Colleges and universities can develop mentor programs aimed at Asian American students, staff, and faculty, and where possible assembling culturally congruent mentoring relationships. Mentoring is another essential component of leadership development and has been identified as a critical tool for career advancement for Asian Americans (Nguyen et al., 2007; Woo, 2000). Participants discussed the significance of role models and mentoring to their career paths despite not having Asian American mentors. Asian Americans could benefit from a mentoring relationship particularly with someone who has advanced to positions that they aspire to. Mentors can guide and support the professional development needs of their mentees to help them progress through their leadership journey.

As many higher education institutions have departments of Asian American Studies, Asian Studies, or other Asian culture specific programs, recruiting and developing leaders from these fields could grow the pipeline for Asian American
leadership. Individuals in these non-STEM fields have likely engaged in diversity work and worked with emancipatory pedagogy. Their work conceivably already aligns with advancing Asian American perspectives into higher education leadership and is an opportunity for cultivating Asian American leadership from within the staff and faculty ranks of the institution.

Colleges and universities can create diverse recruitments, searches and selection when seeking leadership positions. By including non-traditional values and characteristics to job requirements for leadership recruitments, there is potential to increase diversity in applicant pools. Similarly, the language used in job postings should be inclusive to appeal to various backgrounds. Findings from my study illustrated how Asian American leadership is incongruent with expected leadership norms. Recruitment requirements that use inclusive, culturally aware language signals that different leadership styles and diversity beyond the norms are encouraged and accepted.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

With much of the extant literature about Asian Americans focused on students and published articles and dissertation research from a leadership perspective centering on two-year college executive or senior leadership or specifically on women’s’ experiences, this study will provide an appreciable contribution to the existing literature on Asian American leadership. This study includes perspectives from a significant number of executive and senior leaders from four year colleges and universities, Asian American women and men leaders from postsecondary institutions across the U.S. and has an explicit focus on experiences of racism and racialization, features not typically embodied in research about Asian Americans. The recommendations for further research build
on this study and can continue to grow the body of work on Asian American leadership.

First, future research could explore Asian American women leaders in higher education and their intersectionality of race and gender. The additional layers that Asian American women leaders have to navigate relative to Asian American men leaders was evident in my study and deserves deeper investigation. An exploration of how women support one another and boost each other through these experiences of racism and sexism, like the concept of “lift as you climb,” has the potential to provide valuable insights to Asian American women leaders and women of color who may have similar experiences.

Second, future research should explore Asian American leadership experiences by generation. Literature shows that as generations are born and raised in the U.S., adherence to Asian cultural values may vary (B. S. K. Kim et al., 2001). How acculturation influences other aspects of Asian Americans’ experiences can reveal if there are differences across immigrant generations. Examining lived experiences of racism and racialization through the generations may reveal if societal improvement has been made over time.

Third, future research should explore leadership experiences disaggregated by Asian groups. My study included both East and Southeast Asian participants and disaggregating those groups may prove valuable to illuminate similarities and differences in leadership, influence of cultural values between Asian groups. This could also surface the Asian communities where the pipeline of leaders is growing or can be recruited from. However, it may also prove to be challenging. Given the small number of Asian Americans currently in executive or senior leadership positions, there will be an even smaller number of leaders within each disaggregated group.
Fourth, future research should explore different geographic contexts that might shape Asian American leaders. While participants for my study were from across the country, there was agreement that racism and racialization was influenced by region. A study that is more regionally focused will include the nuances, history, and culture of the area that may impact the experiences of Asian Americans. There may be findings and implications from the different areas that are regionally impactful and context specific that can help inform local policies and practices.

Finally, future research should focus on Asian American leaders in the academic affairs space. While provosts and chief academic officers were included in the criteria for this study, college deans and department chairs, leaders in the academic areas of colleges and universities, were not. These positions are traditionally part of the career trajectory of an executive leader. Understanding how those positions are influenced by racism and are racialized can provide insights into the leadership pipeline and the desire and willingness to move into leadership in administration.

**Researcher Reflections**

I shared in previous chapters that this study about the lived experiences of Asian American leaders in higher education evolved from my own experience of working many years in higher education and not having Asian American role models or leaders who looked like me. As I began my research and learned more about Asian experiences of invisibility, silence, and exclusion in America, the pervasiveness of white culture in my life started to ring true and once you recognize the impact, you cannot unrecognize it. I realized this study was more meaningful and had a bigger connection to me beyond not having culturally congruent leaders in my professional life. As such, I approached my research with
determination. I hoped my study would provide insights about the scarcity of Asian American executive and senior leaders at our postsecondary institutions but, from the research process, I learned this was also a journey of personal change and self-awareness.

As I met with participants, we created collaborative, trusting conversations that allowed them to share their racialized experiences and experiences of racism openly and honestly. I appreciated that participants permitted themselves to be vulnerable when discussing the hate and prejudice they encountered. The overt and covert racism they experienced in their personal and professional lives prompted me to think about my own and to recognize how insulated and sheltered I am and have been. A participant and I discussed this as relative privilege, that I have some privilege in a marginalized population. The idea of privilege is an uncomfortable feeling for me. Much of my identity leans more toward the oppressed so having privilege as an Asian American woman within the Asian American community, even if it is relative, makes me feel both regretful and humbled at the same time. As a researcher, I have to acknowledge my relative privilege and how it could influence my research. I was particularly self-reflective about this and became more aware to identify any other instances during the research process where I may be privileged. This also has become an emergent understanding in my everyday life. I need to be able to recognize my own privilege, something I had not done before - since I did not think I had much privilege at all.

As I met with the women participants of my study, I felt a kinship with them as Asian American women. Marcie described that “there is something comforting in the workspace to have somebody who intuitively understands.” This is how I felt with all of my participants but more specifically with the women. I
recognize that Asian American women are inadequately situated on the leadership continuum in higher education, which makes me so appreciative of my women participants and what they have accomplished. They are the role models and leaders I longed for throughout my career. As they shared their narratives, there were connections that I could make to my own experiences that I did not have with the men. Like my women participants and as reflected in my findings, it is my own experience to navigate race and gender in the white male dominant spaces of higher education. Whether it is fortune or another position of relative privilege, I have not experienced having to prove my capability and my experiences with being silenced not as blatant. My challenges have not been as grievous, which makes the struggles my participants shared all the more poignant. As an Asian American woman, it was painful to hear that they were minimized and dismissed. I felt heartbreak for what they experienced. However, I am heartened by the idea of Asian American women uplifting each other. It gives me hope that better is coming along.

My research journey has also made me aware that I should be doing more. My participants shared that to improve society more needs to be done and education is that path. Working in higher education, I have been content to provide support to all students and mentorship to Asian American colleagues and colleagues of color as my way of doing my part. But my study has challenged me to rethink that. I need to be part of what “that more” should look like. While I will continue to do my part to advance students and put their needs at the forefront and mentor colleagues as they plot out their careers, my part now needs to include how do I use my voice to help Asian American voices be heard and make us visible? How do I lift up Asian American women and men? What can I do to dismantle
stereotyped perceptions and normative thinking about Asian Americans? A lot of work to do, indeed!

While this study was challenging, emotional, grueling, and, to put it simply, a lot of work, it also led me to self-reflect on what it means to me to be Asian American, to be Filipino American. I am sure this meaning will continue to evolve as I add on more experiences but it means that, despite all of the negative - stereotypes, invisibility, silencing - I am thankful to be part of a diverse and beautiful community. A community that is strong in its individual groups but equally strong as a collective. A community that has many similarities but just as many differences that gives us distinctiveness and multiplicity. A community that gives me a sense of comfort. A community that is like my family.
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Recruitment Email – Invitation

Subject: Invitation: Research Study on the Underrepresentation of Asian American Leaders in Higher Education

Dear <insert name>,

Greetings. My name is Darlene Daclan and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at California State University, Fresno. For my dissertation, I am examining the underrepresentation of Asian American leadership in higher education. I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in this study.

The purpose of my research is to explore the lived experiences of Asian Americans who became executive and senior leaders in higher education. I seek to understand executive and senior leaders’ lived experiences as Asian American leaders and illuminate their stories of navigating racialized identities in U.S. colleges and universities. An exploration of leaders’ lived experiences can provide insights into the underpinnings of the disproportionate representation of Asian American leadership in higher education.

If you agree to participate in this study, I ask you to dedicate time for two interviews lasting approximately 60-70 minutes each interview via Zoom. All interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may end your participation at any time.

If you are interested in contributing to my study, please complete this online questionnaire for background information. It will take 5 to 10 minutes to complete. If it is more convenient, feel free to reply directly to this email with your contact information. Once I receive your questionnaire or reply, I will coordinate with you and/or an assistant for opportune interview times.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors. The data collected will provide valuable knowledge toward addressing the equity and diversity issue of the lack of representation of Asian Americans leadership at colleges and universities. If you require additional information or have questions, contact me at ddaclan@mail.fresnostate.edu and/or (562) 673-6909.

Sincerely,
Darlene Daclan
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership in Higher Education
California State University, Fresno
ddaclan@mail.fresnostate.edu | 562-673-6909
Recruitment Email – Colleagues Recommendations

Subject: Participants for Research Study on the Underrepresentation of Asian American Leaders in Higher Education

Hello <insert name>,

As you may know, I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at California State University, Fresno. For my dissertation, I am examining the underrepresentation of Asian American leadership in higher education. I am writing to ask for your assistance in referring colleagues in your network to participate in my dissertation research.

I am seeking participants who meet the following qualifications:
- Identifies as Asian American
- Is or was a college/university leader with the rank of associate vice president or higher, which includes presidents, chancellors, vice presidents and equivalent titles
- Minimum of five years of experience within the above leadership ranks
- Leadership experience within the above ranks at a 2-year, 4-year public or private, non-profit, for-profit college or university

Participation in this study will include two interviews lasting approximately 60-70 minutes each interview via Zoom.

The purpose of my research is to explore the lived experiences of Asian Americans who became executive and senior leaders in higher education. I seek to understand executive and senior leaders’ lived experiences as Asian American leaders and illuminate their stories of navigating racialized identities in U.S. colleges and universities. An exploration of leaders’ lived experiences can provide insights into the underpinnings of the disproportionate representation of Asian American leadership in higher education.

If you would like to suggest a colleague as a potential participant who meets the criteria noted above, please forward my email to them and request they take this online questionnaire for background information, which will take 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Once I receive their questionnaire, I will coordinate with them for opportune interview times. Also, if it is more convenient, reply directly to this email with your recommended colleague’s contact information and I will happily continue the outreach to them.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration. Feel free to contact me at ddaclan@mail.fresnostate.edu and/or (562) 673-6909 should you have any questions.
Sincerely,
Darlene Daclan
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership in Higher Education
California State University, Fresno
ddaclan@mail.fresnostate.edu | 562-673-6909
Recruitment Email – Follow Up Invitation Email

Subject: Invitation: Research Study on the Underrepresentation of Asian American Leaders in Higher Education

Dear <insert name>,

My name is Darlene Daclan and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at California State University, Fresno. I recently contacted you regarding participation in my research study. Specifically, I am exploring the lived experiences of Asian Americans who became executive and senior leaders in higher education. I seek to understand executive and senior leaders’ lived experiences as Asian American leaders and illuminate their stories of navigating racialized identities in U.S. colleges and universities. An exploration of leaders’ lived experiences can provide insights into the underpinnings of the disproportionate representation of Asian American leadership in higher education.

I hope you will be able to participate in my study. If you agree, please complete this online questionnaire for background information. It will take 5 to 10 minutes to complete. If it is more convenient, reply directly to this email with contact information. Once I receive your questionnaire or reply, I will coordinate with you and/or an assistant to schedule two interviews lasting approximately 60–70 minutes each interview via Zoom. All interviews will be scheduled at your convenience.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors. The data collected will provide valuable knowledge toward addressing the equity and diversity issue of the lack of representation of Asian Americans leadership at colleges and universities. If you require additional information or have questions, contact me at ddaclan@mail.fresnostate.edu and/or (562) 673-6909.

Sincerely,  
Darlene Daclan  
*Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership in Higher Education*  
*California State University, Fresno*  
ddaclan@mail.fresnostate.edu | 562-673-6909
Participation Email – Interview Participation

Subject: Your Participation in Research Study on the Underrepresentation of Asian American Leaders in Higher Education

Dear <insert name>,

Thank you for completing the Asian American Leaders Demographic questionnaire. As a reminder, my name is Darlene Daclan and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at California State University, Fresno. In my dissertation, I am exploring the lived experiences of Asian Americans who became executive and senior leaders in higher education. I seek to understand executive and senior leaders’ lived experiences as Asian American leaders and illuminate their stories of navigating racialized identities in U.S. colleges and universities. An exploration of leaders’ lived experiences can provide insights into the underpinnings of the disproportionate representation of Asian American leadership in higher education.

For the next phase of my study, I am requesting to schedule two interviews lasting approximately 60-70 minutes for each interview via Zoom video conferencing. Below are dates and times I have prioritized for interviews, however, I am happy to schedule all interviews at your convenience.

[Date/Times]

Should you have any questions regarding this process, please contact me at ddaclan@mail.fresnostate.edu and/or (562) 673-6909.

Sincerely,
Darlene Daclan

Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership in Higher Education
California State University, Fresno
ddaclan@mail.fresnostate.edu | 562-673-6909
Participation Email – Interview Confirmation

Subject: Your Participation in Research Study on the Underrepresentation of Asian American Leaders in Higher Education

Dear <insert name>,

Thank you for consenting to participate in interviews regarding your lived experiences as an Asian American leader in higher education. Your interview is confirmed for the following date and time using Zoom:

DATE:  
TIME:  
ZOOM LINK:

Attached is an informed consent for your participation in the series of interviews. I ask that you read and review the form. If you choose to continue to participate in this study, please sign and date the form and return it to me via email. It can be scanned or you may take a picture of the form and send it as an attachment.

If you have any questions regarding this research, please do not hesitate to contact me at ddaclan@mail.fresnostate.edu and/or (562) 673-6909. I appreciate your assistance in advance and look forward to meeting with you soon.

Thank you,
Darlene Daclan

*Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership in Higher Education*  
*California State University, Fresno*  
*ddaclan@mail.fresnostate.edu | 562-673-6909*
APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Asian American Leaders Questionnaire

11 Informed Consent for Questionnaire

Title of Research Study: Exploring the Underrepresentation of Asian American Leadership in Higher Education

Researcher(s): Doctoral student investigator name: Darlene Daclan; Principal investigator name (Dissertation Chair): Dr. Varaxy Yi

Description: You are being asked to participate in this research study because you can provide valuable information about the experiences of Asian American leaders in higher education. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Asian Americans who became executive and senior leaders in higher education. This study seeks to understand executive and senior leaders’ lived experiences as Asian American leaders and illuminate their stories of navigating racialized identities in the white dominant spaces of U.S. colleges and universities. An exploration of their lived experiences can provide insights into the underpinnings of the disproportionate representation of Asian American leadership in higher education.

Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

Procedures: If you agree to be part of the research study, in addition to the series of interview questions, you are asked to complete this demographic questionnaire for background information.

Non-identifying participant responses and pseudonyms for names, position titles, and institutions will be included in the results and dissemination of study findings. At no time will any identifiable information be published or shared in this study.

Possible risks: Participation in this study is associated with minimal potential risk. Potential risks and/or discomforts of participation may include discomfort when responding to questions.

Compensation: There is no compensation being offered for participation in this study.
Voluntary Participation: Participating in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question or choose to end your participation with the study at any time for any reason without penalty. If you decide to withdraw early, the information or data you provided will be destroyed unless you give consent for it to be used.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study or your participation, please feel free to contact me via email at ddaclan@mail.fresnostate.edu and/or at my cell phone (562) 673-6909.

If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact Dr. Jennifer Randles, Chair of the California State University, Fresno Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at 559-278-5146 or jrandles@csufresno.edu.

The Department of Educational Leadership Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects at California State University, Fresno has reviewed and approved the research study.

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Q YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. BY SELECTING YES, YOU ARE INDICATING THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE, HAVING READ AND AGREED WITH THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.

- Yes, I consent. Start the questionnaire. (1)
- No, I do not consent. I do not wish to participate. (2)

Q1 Your Name

________________________________________________________________
Q1a Email Address - *If an additional email address and point of contact should be included in communications to you, please include their name and email address also.*

______________________________________________________________________

Q1b Phone Number - *If an additional phone number and point of contact should be contacted by phone, please include their name and number also.*

______________________________________________________________________

Q2 What is your current title/rank/position?

______________________________________________________________________

Q3 At which college/university do you hold your current title/rank/position?

______________________________________________________________________

Q4 Years working in your current position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>30</th>
<th>35</th>
<th>40</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of years in current position ()</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q5 Total years working in higher/postsecondary education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of years in higher education ()

Q6 List other leadership positions held and the college/university they were held
(examples: Provost/Chief Academic Officer, California State University, Long Beach; Dean of Health and Human Services, UC Irvine)

________________________________________________________________________

Q7 I identify my gender as

- Man (1)
- Woman (2)
- Transgender Man (3)
- Transgender Woman (4)
- Non-binary (5)
- Not Listed (6) ___________________________________________________________
- Decline to State (7)

_________________________________________
Q8 I identify my race/ethnicity as *(multiple responses can be chosen)*

- Asian American (1)
- Black/African American (2)
- Latinx/Hispanic (3)
- Native American, American Indian, or Alaska Native (8)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (5)
- white American/Non-Hispanic (6)
- Decline to State (9)
Q8a Which of the following best describes your Asian background

- Asian Indian (1)
- Bangladeshi (2)
- Burmese (3)
- Cambodian (4)
- Chinese, except Taiwanese (5)
- Filipino (6)
- Hmong (7)
- Indonesian (8)
- Japanese (9)
- Korean (10)
- Laotian (11)
- Malaysian (12)
- Okinawan (13)
- Pakistani (14)
- Singaporean (15)
- Sri Lankan (16)
- Taiwanese (17)
- Thai (18)
- Vietnamese (19)
- Other Asian/Not Listed (20)
Q8b To which immigrant generation do you consider yourself part of

- First generation (1)
- Second generation (2)
- Third generation (3)
- Fourth generation or higher (4)
- Not Sure (5)

Q9 This study will explore experiences with race and racism. How comfortable are you discussing these topics?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comfortability discussing race and racism (1)</th>
<th>Extremely uncomfortable (1)</th>
<th>Somewhat uncomfortable (2)</th>
<th>Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat comfortable (4)</th>
<th>Extremely comfortable (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q10 Were you born/raised in the United States or in another country?

- Born/raised in the U.S. (1)
- Born/raised in another country (2)
- Born in the U.S./raised in another country (3)
- Born in another country/raised in the U.S. (4)
Q11 How was your racial/ethnic identity influenced by the country and environment in which you were born/raised?

________________________________________________________________

Q12 What have been your experiences navigating race and racialization as an Asian American leader?

________________________________________________________________

Q13 How would you describe your racial/ethnic identity is perceived by others?

________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – FIRST INTERVIEW

Lived Experiences of Path to Leadership and
Current Leadership Role

Good morning/Afternoon/Evening Dr./Mr./Ms.__________________________________

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today.

As part of my dissertation for the doctorate in Educational Leadership at Fresno State, I am interviewing Asian American leaders in higher education. I seek to understand executive and senior leaders’ lived experiences as Asian American leaders and illuminate your stories of navigating racialized identities in U.S. colleges and universities. This interview is designed for you to share any narratives and experiences to inform my research.

The interview is scheduled for 60-70 minutes. Before we get started, I want you to know your responses will be kept confidential. No references to an individual or an institution will be reported as part of this research study. I want you to be comfortable during this interview. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you can bypass any questions or discontinue this interview. This is all voluntary.

As mentioned in our email/phone/text exchange, this interview will be recorded to ensure accuracy of the data collected. The recording will be destroyed at the end of my research study. Do you have any objections to my recording your statements?

Do you have any questions? Let’s get started!

1. What led to your career in higher education?
2. What experiences led you toward leadership in higher education? What mentors/role models were available to you?
3. Tell me about your current position.
4. Describe your experiences where your racial/ethnic identity as an Asian American impacted, both positively and negatively, your path to leadership in higher education? Your current position?
5. Describe your experiences with racism in your path to leadership in higher education? In your current position?
6. What is your leadership approach? What value(s) are important to you to lead successfully?

7. Describe how your racial/ethnic identity as an Asian American influences your leadership approach and leadership values?

8. What are the benefits and the challenges of being an Asian American leader in higher education?

As we come to an end, is there anything you would like to add that I have not asked to better understand your experiences? Thank you. I appreciate your time and support with this study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - SECOND INTERVIEW

Meaning and Reflection

Thank you again for agreeing to meet with me and continuing the interview process.

Today’s interview is scheduled for 60-70 minutes and, as a reminder, your responses will be kept confidential. No references to an individual or an institution will be reported as part of this research study. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you can bypass any questions or discontinue this interview. This is all voluntary.

Like our last interview, this interview will be recorded to ensure accuracy of the data collected. The recording will be destroyed at the end of my research study. Do you have any objections to my recording your statements?

Do you have any questions? Let’s get started!

Before jumping into questions, I wanted to reflect on our last conversation. What reflections do you have about our last conversation?

My summary of revealed <state each revelation>. Does the summary accurately reflect our last conversation? Are there areas you would like to add to or further clarify? Do you have any questions?

1. What does it mean to be an Asian American leader at a U.S. college/university?
2. In the previous interview, we discussed your racialized experiences as an Asian American and experiences of racism,
   a. What do these experiences mean to you?
   b. How do they make you feel about being Asian American?
3. What do you think campus communities need to know and understand about Asian American leadership?
4. What would you like to say to Asian Americans who want to pursue careers and leadership roles in higher education regarding your experiences?

Before we end, is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you again for sharing your experiences with me. Since this is our final interview, I will reach out to you via email with a summary of this conversation and, as we did today, will provide you an opportunity to reflect and clarify. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.
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Darlene Balderas Daclan

Type full name as it appears on submission

5/15/2022

Date