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Speaking Ourselves into History: Asian American Educators'

Pathways to the Principalship in K-12 Public Schools

by

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Omnia autem ex Deo Gloria

I'm a firm believer that life is not what we make it when we make it by ourselves; we are all part of each other (Yuri Kochiyama). This dissertation is the product of exactly that– the culmination of my life experiences and the people who made them possible. While I lack the words to adequately express my gratitude, I will attempt to honor those who held me with grace, love, and compassion throughout this journey.

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DEDICATION

To my grandfather and my first teacher: 홍승주

<div align="right">나의 첫 번째 선생님이신 할아버지, 홍 승주님께</div>

Thank you for instilling in me the value of higher education.

<div align="right">저에게 고등 교육의 가치를 심어주심에 감사드립니다.</div>

You've paved the path and allowed my generation and future generations to take one step further in sustaining our culture and relevance.

<div align="right">할아버지께서는 지금 우리 세대와 미래 세대가
우리의 문화와 관련성을 유지하는 데 한 걸음 더
나아갈 수 있도록 길을
닦아 주셨습니다.</div>

You wrote yourself into history and because you modeled this for me, I can now do so for myself.

<div align="right">할아버지께서 역사 속에 자신을 쓰셨고,
그것이 저에게 본이 되었기 때문에,
저도 이제 제 자신을 위해 그렇게 할 수 있게
되었습니다.</div>

Your granddaughter,
Lisa

<div align="right">할아버지 손녀,
해리</div>

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ABSTRACT

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Pathways to the Principalship in K-12 Public Schools

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Data shows that there is an overall dearth of Asian Americans in the role of the principalship in K-12 public schools. According to the Department of Education (2019), Asian Americans made up 5% of the national student population, but less than two percent of all K-12 public school principals identified as Asian. This mixed methods study is designed to provide insight into why there is an underrepresentation of Asian Americans in roles of the principalship in K-12 public schools. Through the theoretical framework, Asian Critical Race Theory, the aim of this dissertation study is to a) examine the factors that may hinder or encourage Asian Americans from embarking on the journey towards the principalship and b) make recommendations and observations on how to break through the existing barriers that may inhibit Asian Americans from pursuing the role. The dissertation studied 92 principals and assistant principals in K-12 public schools and utilized a quantitative methodology with a questionnaire and a qualitative methodology with semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and field notes as data sources. Findings indicate that it is still difficult to be viewed as a competent, Asian American principal. Additionally, women experienced an added layer of challenges related to their gender; and first- and second-generation participants experienced greater difficulty in navigating the system. The findings hope to be the catalyst for promoting more Asian American principals in ways that their

voices and stories may be heard. Moreover, this emancipatory research can serve as a liberating experience and contribute to the greater Asian American community, specifically our students. As we continue to make strides towards a more equitable and diverse society, we must prioritize our efforts to truly diversify our educational systems, which include understanding biases and breaking through the bamboo ceiling.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When I dare to be powerful—to use my strength in the service of my vision—then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.—Audre Lorde [Conference session]

I am a second-generation Korean American. In other words, I was raised in a traditional Korean household, overwhelmed by the clash of Western culture and my immigrant parents' Eastern expectations, never quite knowing what was "normal." I spoke Korean at home and English at school—and to this day, I still wrangle with the generational and cultural gaps I experienced as a child. I fumble in the in-betweenness of my identity while navigating through racial politics in a predominantly White world.

I am also an Asian American educator. In other words, I am constantly confronting the frustrating lack of Asian leadership in the classroom, a lack that the K-12 public school system affords little to no concern. I recognized at a very young age that I was not represented in the faces of my teachers. Thus, my dissertation research exposed the commonplace denial of Asian Americans—not just our plight but also our existence. We have been left out of the national conversation about race for too long.

Yet even as an educator who openly addresses race and social justice issues in her classroom, workplace, and community, I am not fully equipped to manage these complicated racial and cultural tensions, and especially that East-West binary. Perhaps the push and pull is not entirely surprising: for a long time, Asian Americans have tried to find a foothold in a Black and White United States (Wing, 2007). The constant "in-betweenness" of being Asian feels like a Chinese finger trap, a gag toy I played with as a child—the harder you pull your fingers apart,

the more impossible it is to be free. Especially for those of us who have wrestled with the race

question all our lives, it can seem like the longer we buck against the racial confines of America,

the more difficult it is to be truly liberated from them. What does it mean to be Asian American?

Like me, many Asian Americans have felt underprepared to navigate that term.

Sometimes we feel less Asian; other times less American. We are not colored enough to be

considered true people of color with authentic racialized experiences, but we are far too ethnic to

be considered White. Instead, Asian Americans are labeled as perpetual foreigners, never fully

embraced into U.S. society (Ng et al., 2007). We are dubbed the *Model Minority*, the group that,

despite the existing discrimination and racism, still manage to achieve financial and academic

success through grit and hard work (Chong, 2016). According to many Whites and non-Whites

alike, we are submissive and docile—an often apolitical group (Kiang et al., 2016). Asian

Americans are applauded for keeping their heads down and working hard, often compromising

racial awareness for economic success (Chong, 2016).

While each ethnic group has distinct cultures, ideals, morals, languages, and histories,

non-Asians in America tend to oversimplify the Asian American experience as monolithic and

make assumptions that lead to the perpetuation of damaging stereotypes (Wong, 2011). Given

the complex history of Asian American discrimination (Takaki, 1998)—particularly in regard to

narratives of Yellow Peril and the Model Minority (Leonardo, 2009) and now, in light of the

COVID-19 pandemic, the "Chinese virus"—Asian Americans tend to be designated the title of

"Other" (Wong, 2011).

Because of my own experiences with racial discrimination, I have become hyper-aware

of how the world perceives me and how I, in turn, choose to engage with the world. I also realize

that the heightened racialized experiences I encountered during my initial years of teaching started long before I considered myself an educator.

One of my most traumatic memories features my bento box, which I carried to elementary school until the day I was taught to hate it. "What is that smell!" my classmates shrieked when I opened it up one day. They pinched their noses at the 김치 my umma had packed me, sniggering in hostile disgust at Korea's most traditional side dish, and also my favorite one. My face flushed the same color as the spicy fermented cabbage. Although I kept telling myself, "Don't cry. Keep it together," my teary eyes did not listen.

Figure 1.

Korean Side Dish Kimchee Dish
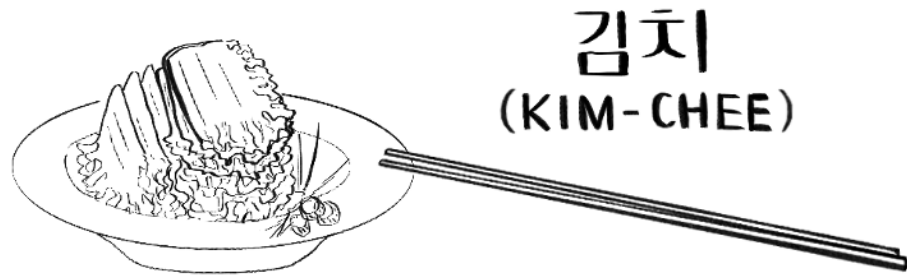
Note. "Kimchee Banchan," by Eunice Hong (2021). Used with permission.

At that moment, one of the teachers stepped in and cheerfully extended an invitation for me to have lunch with her. She took my hand in hers, and as we walked to her classroom, I learned about the first time she invited her friends over for dinner. She told me that her friends had refused to eat her mother's morcillas, blood sausages, even though the dish was an Argentine

delicacy. That lunch was my first palpable experience with empathy. As early as third grade, I discovered that teaching is not the mere transmission of knowledge; it is empowering students to embrace themselves and pursue their full potential. And seeing myself in her, even if she was not Asian herself, was definitely empowering. I did not even know her name. As time passed, this glimmer of understanding turned into an interest and then a commitment to bettering the education system on both macro and micro scales. As an Asian American woman, this commitment also means championing Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) and especially Asian American representation.

The purpose of this study was to give voice to the Asian American principals and assistant principals who broke through the *bamboo ceiling*—the Asian version of the glass ceiling (Chong, 2016). These leaders served as role models for other Asian Americans pursuing the principalship, as well as Asian American students. Moreover, I believe this research to be emancipatory: not only did it contribute to Asian American representation in academic research, it also contributed knowledge to the greater Asian American community; it has allowed me to cope with my own struggles. While there do exist Asian American allies, activists, and leaders, the group is still relatively small—and only a few reside within my personal sphere. So, how do I continue to trudge through my personal "in-betweenness" while modeling for my own students? How can I model for them what I was not taught? How can I expand my circle of influence beyond Asian American students to students of all backgrounds, colored or not, so that together we might break the mold of white-oriented education? In the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire (1970) taught that none are set free until all are liberated, including the oppressor. Perhaps the

Asian Americans feeling of in-betweenness actually leads us toward complicated self-reflection,

and then transformative empathy, and finally, a community understanding that liberates us all.

Background of the Problem

An Open Letter to the Woman Who Told my Family to Go Back to China

Dear Madam:

> Maybe I should have let it go. Turned the other cheek. We had just gotten out of church, and I was with my family and some friends on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. We were going to lunch, trying to see if there was room in the Korean restaurant down the street. You were in a rush. It was raining. Our stroller and a gaggle of Asians were in your way. But I was, honestly, stunned when you yelled at us from down the block, "Go back to China!" Maybe you don't know this, but the insults you hurled at my family get to the heart of the Asian American experience. It's this persistent sense of otherness that a lot of us struggle with every day. That no matter what we do, how successful we are, what friends we make, we don't belong. We're foreign. We're not American.
> —Michael Luo, 2016, p.1

Defining Asian Americans

In his article "Getting It Right: Schools and the Asian-American Experience," Wong

(2011) highlighted the rapidly increasing Asian American population in the United States.

According to Pew Research, although Asian Americans make up only 5.6% of the total U.S.

population this minority group is expected to increase fivefold by 2050 (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021).

This statistic makes Asian Americans the fastest-growing racial group in the United States

(Wong, 2011) and 38% of the U.S. immigrant population. But who exactly are Asians?

According to the American Community Survey (ACS), *Asian* was defined as:

> people having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. It includes people who indicated their race or races as "Asian Indian," "Chinese," "Filipino," "Korean," "Japanese," "Vietnamese," or "Other Asian," or wrote in entries such as Burmese, Hmong, Pakistani, or Thai. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004, p. 2)

Interestingly enough, no single Asian ethnic group has dominated the U.S. Asian American population. The largest single origin group is of Chinese origin, making up 24% of the U.S. Asian American population (5.6 million). The next in line are of Indian origin, making up 20%, and Filipino origin, making up 19% of the Asian population. Those who had roots in Vietnam, Korea, and Japan followed; the three groups combined easily surpassed one (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). **Asian American Pan ethnicity**

> Pan-ethnic group refers to a politico-cultural collectivity made up of peoples of several, hitherto distinct, tribal or national origins.—Espiritu, 1992, p. 2

Despite the increasing number of Asian Americans, their ambiguous status in the United States has contributed to racial invisibility and misunderstanding of this ethnic group. Scholars refer to this concept as "pan-Asian," and it originated with non-Asians, who monolithically lumped all Asian Americans together, unable or unwilling to make distinctions amongst different ethnic groups (Espiritu, 1992). Before the term "Asian American" was coined, those of Asian descent in the United States would generally refer to themselves by their specific subgroup (i.e., Korean American, Chinese American, Filipino American, etc.). When referenced broadly, the term "Oriental," which held colonialist connotations, was often used.

In 1968, young college activists refused to accept the stereotypical term "Oriental" and coined their own "Asian American" (Rodríguez, 2019), which was to be used as a unifying force to bring together diverse individuals and advocates to combat antiracist politics. Led by Gee and Yuji Ichioka, they formed a political organization called Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA), which consisted of "multiethnic Asians from a variety of geographical, socioeconomic, class, and immigrant backgrounds" (Rodríguez, 2019, p. 215). Likewise, Yen Le Espiritu (1992), prominent Ethnic Studies scholar and award-winning author, argued for a unified approach as

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one pan-ethnic Asian group, rather than individual efforts to advance particular subgroups, in order to more effectively advocate for change against inequity. This historical trend was seen among other marginalized populations, such as African Americans and Latinos. The term "Asian American" thus captures the historical experiences and issues faced by Asian immigrants and their children, particularly regarding the prejudice, racism, and discrimination that may hinder their full participation in U.S. society (Fong, 2008).

Pan-ethnic terms such as "Asian American" are widely used in society today; however, this term fails to fully encompass the immense diversity and complexity in ethnicity, culture, language, class, religion, education, historical experiences, reasons for immigration, etc. (Espiritu, 1992; Lee, 2015). The lumping together of these diverse groups overlooks their multiplicity and individuality. Each Asian American ethnic group differs in terms of how they adhere to specific shared values (Kim et al., 2001). There are distinct differences in dialect, religion, social class, level of education, and distinctions based on gender and immigrant/refugee generation, even within a single nationality. For example, in a group of Korean Asian Americans, one may be from the cosmopolitan Seoul, another from rural Korea, and the third from Alabama—each with obviously different lives and stories. Therefore, there is no singular Asian American experience (Rodríguez, 2019).

Yet despite these pitfalls, the use of pan-Asian grouping is appropriate when studying Asian Americans in the principalship pipeline in K-12 public schools—simply because of the relative scarcity of Asian American leadership. In fact, pan-ethnic grouping, especially when used intentionally and by Asian Americans themselves, can also result in a higher collective call to action against racism and discriminatory policies (Espiritu, 1992). When it comes to K-12

public school administration, desegregated data was not available for the individual Asian American subgroups. Thus, studying each ethnic group separately proved extremely difficult.

For the purposes of this study, the category "Asian American" included persons of Asian descent residing in America, regardless of their citizenship status. My use of "Asian American" sought to reflect the political resistance and united efforts of activists in the '60s, who found power in the term. The idea of an Asian America emboldened Asian immigrant solidarity through community and allyship with other peoples of color as well.

However, before one begins unpacking the underrepresentation of Asian Americans, especially in regards to Asian American principalship, one must unravel the complex history of this minority group. Asian American underrepresentation in the K-12 pipeline is intimately tied to how Asian Americans are perceived by American society, which includes Asian Americans themselves.

Malleable Misconceptions of Asian Americans

The terms "Asia," "Asians," and "Asian American" have been on contentious ground in their relations with the United States nationwide. Before the 1965 immigration reform, immigration was restricted, and policies like the 1882 *Chinese Exclusion Act* were particularly racist against Asians. The history of Asian immigration to the United States is replete with race-based discriminatory legislation, which has jeopardized the rights and citizenship of Asian Americans (Okihiro, 2001).

Beginning in the 1850s, Asian immigrants played a vital role in the development of this country (Bhattacharyya, 2001). By the 1970s, despite making up on .002% of the entire population, the Chinese represented 20% of California's working force: miners, railroad builders,

farmers, factory workers, fishermen, etc. But stereotypical depictions of Asian Americans had already plagued the national consciousness, and with the depression of 1876, anti-Chinese legislation and violence raged throughout the West Coast. Fearful of losing their jobs, White working-class Americans discriminated against the "filthy yellow hordes" (Chin & Chan, 1972, para. 2) from Asia, leading to the 1882 *Chinese Exclusion Act*. Although this group of working Asians were initially favored for their work efficiency and cheap labor, xenophobia crept in, and Asian Americans became an existential threat to the Western, particularly American, world. At the root of these misconceptions is the concept of the *Yellow Peril*, which John Dower described as "the core imagery of apes, lesser men, primitives, children, and madmen and beings who possessed special powers," something that would invade and disrupt Western culture. Since its genesis in the late 1900s, the idea of the Yellow Peril has been repackaged—often fluctuating between covert and overt racism (Yang, n.d.).

In order to fully understand the lack of Asian American K-12 principalship, it is imperative to recognize the historical misconceptions of Asian Americans, ranging from Yellow Peril to Model Minority. These racist misconceptions and stereotypes have had a lasting impact not only on the Asian American community but specifically Asian American principals and assistant principals in the K-12 public education system. Only when we directly address these racist histories can we develop a liberatory recruitment plan for K-12 Asian American principals and assistant principals and, by so doing, improve the lack of diversity currently within K-12 public schools.

Impact of Perceptions in the Workplace

The challenges that Asian Americans have faced due to national biases and stereotypes are evident. Not only do these prejudices alter the way individual Asian Americans perceive themselves; they also affect the workplace, specifically in K-12 public education. The terms "bamboo ceiling" and "sticky floor" are often used to describe the unique barriers that Asian Americans face when pursuing leadership positions (Chong, 2016). The reference to the bamboo ceiling is similar to the term *glass ceiling*, which speaks to the barriers women and minorities need to break through to advance to higher leadership positions (Chong, 2016). In contrast, the *bamboo ceiling* is "an invisible barrier based on an attitudinal or organizational bias that prevents minorities from advancing to high-level positions, despite their qualifications" (p. 69). A common factor for both ceilings is the significant disadvantage that minority groups and women are forced to navigate in the workplace. Chong (2016) highlights this disadvantage by providing examples of unequal work conditions, such as a "lack of training and mentorship, exclusion from informal networks, menial assignments rather than challenging ones, and placement in jobs with few advancement opportunities" (Chong, 2016, p. 69). Consequently, both ceilings exist due to the biases of the dominant culture—White culture—in explicit and implicit ways.

The term "sticky floor" is often used in conjunction with the term "bamboo ceiling" (Morgan, 2015) to metaphorize an individual stuck at their current position. This individual has no mobility or ladder; in other words, they are unable to advance in pay grade or position within their organizations. Morgan (2015) stated that those who are on the sticky floor have "limited possibilities for up or sideways movements" (p. 8). This term is especially used when Asian American minorities can break through the bamboo ceiling but are unable to achieve upward

mobility afterwards. Examples of being relegated to the sticky floor include having the lowest pay, being given the menial tasks, and having no opportunity for promotions, despite being qualified for them (Morgan, 2015). Thus, the negative perceptions that Asian Americans have endured since the 1800s are still evident in U.S. society today.

Impact of Perceptions in K- 12 Public Schools

In the United States, the supposed land of opportunity, one's success is often correlated with one's merit; however, it is difficult for Asian Americans to break through the bamboo ceiling without the right "look, connections, and luck" (Chong, 2016, p. 69). Asian Americans, despite having the same educational levels as their White colleagues, receive lower wages per average household (Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997). In many cases, while Asian Americans outperform their White colleagues, many Whites in leadership positions still either consciously or unconsciously prefer and promote "members of their in-group to maintain White privilege and high status" (Chong, 2016, p. 69). This phenomenon is likewise found in today's K-12 public schools. Although the Asian American population has grown significantly, there has still been a lack of Asian American presence in the education field. Asian American educators and leaders have not accurately reflected the growing Asian American student population in the K-12 public school system. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2009), Asian Americans are underrepresented in administrative positions in elementary and secondary schools. According to California Department of Education, in a state that boasts one of the highest percentages of Asian American students, only 4.7% of principals are of Asian American heritage, in comparison to the 9% Asian American student population (NCES, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

> There's this idea that monsters don't have reflections in a mirror. And what I've always thought isn't that monsters don't have reflections in a mirror. It's that if you want to make a human being into a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves. And growing up, I felt like a monster in some ways. I didn't see myself reflected at all." I was like, "Yo, is something wrong with me? That the whole society seems to think that people like me don't exist?" And part of what inspired me, was this deep desire that before I died, I would make a couple of mirrors. That I would make some mirrors so that kids like me might see themselves reflected back and might not feel so monstrous for it.—Junot Díaz, 2009 speech at Rutgers University

Absence of Asian Americans in Education

According to the National Center of Educational Statistics, the nation's racial makeup continues to shift in favor of diversity, schools tend to students with increasingly different strengths and needs (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). While all teachers, by definition, impact their classes, students need to see themselves in their educators in order for that impact to reach its full potential. Specifically, students benefit from learning with and from culturally, ethnically, and racially relatable models of success. Despite the fact that Asian American students make up 9% of all enrolled K-12 students, Asian American teachers still only consist of less than 6% of the entire workforce (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). In K-12 education, Asian American principals are the least represented minority group, and it may be because within their 6% workforce, Asian Americans are not entering the field of teaching—a prerequisite of becoming a principal. In other words, principals typically come from the teacher pool—but because there is already a lack of Asian American teachers, there will also be a lack of Asian American principals.

To further compound this issue, those who actively pursued the principalship have been repeatedly overlooked, regardless of their efforts and qualifications. While institutions are pressured by legislation (e.g., Title VII) to integrate inclusive and diverse hiring practices, Asian

Americans are often considered afterthoughts when it comes to consideration for leadership positions (Hyun, 2007), particularly principalship. The perpetual-foreigner trope has harmful repercussions: Asian Americans are eclipsed by other minority groups who may seem more American. According to Budiman & Ruiz (2021), Asian American principals make up less than four percent of all principals in the K-12 system, followed by Latinx principals (8.2%), and Black principals (10.3%). Due to the current rise in anti-Asian sentiments, heightened by the harmful rhetoric from former President of the United States, Donald Trump (Porterfield, 2021)—Asian American representation is critical for all students now more than ever.

It is evident that school populations are diversifying, with a rapidly growing Asian American student population; however, literature on the presence of Asian Americans in education has hardly been attainable—if not nonexistent. As it stands, most research addressing the lack of diversity in the educational realm prioritizes the experiences of the Latinx and African American populations. And while the study of other marginalized groups is essential to understanding the collective plight of people of color, the absence of an Asian American perspective in education literature is alarming. According to Liang and Liou (2018), Asian Americans represent a small percentage in the academic field despite the ongoing initiatives to diversify educational leadership roles for people of color. These statistics signal an urgent need for the United States to prioritize the active diversification of our educational systems, which include understanding and addressing biases, disrupting the bamboo ceiling, and eliminating sticky floors. The underrepresentation of Asian Americans in education results in a dearth of successful role models for the Asian American student population. Students deserve nothing but

the best leaders, and neither ceilings nor floors—no iteration of racial inequity and discrimination—should hinder that access.

Diversity in the Classroom

The increasing diversity of American school students necessitates widespread understanding of how, exactly, the concept of diversity impacts individuals, workplaces, and institutions (Bireda & Chait, 2011). Promoting diversity has been a common goal many U.S. institutions and schools strive to achieve; however, this is often a daunting task, especially in the educational realm (Bireda & Chait, 2011).

Let us look at the impact that diversity, or the lack thereof, has on the classroom. Although most public school students are identified as students of color, most teachers are still primarily White (Boisrond, 2017)—a significant problem that Boisrond coins the *teacher-diversity gap*. This racial disparity between the teacher and student may not seem like an essential factor in academic performance; however, Boisrond (2017) affirms that students learn better from teachers that share their cultural background. The study suggests that students not only felt disconnected from their teachers, who did not share their same racial identity, but also a severe lack of student-to-teacher communication. Consequently, students reported not having a role model.

Boisrond (2017) further argued that the benefits of diversity in the teaching force go beyond providing a culturally relevant role model for students; they have positive effects on students' academic performances. The study results demonstrate that when students and their teachers shared the same racial identity, students feel more cared for, and, in return, become more invested in their education. Kim-Qvale (2012) asserts that although a principal does not

need to identify as an Asian American to understand the needs of an Asian American student population, Asian American principals most likely have greater insight on student needs, and their presence provides these students with a culturally relevant role model. If Asian Americans continue to be absent in educational spaces, Asian American students will not have any mirrors that reflect their racial identity.

Research Questions

I am a second-generation Asian American educator committed to increasing the number of Asian Americans principals in K-12 public schools. For this study, the principalship referred to assistant principals and principals. To effectively recruit more Asian Americans into this role, it was imperative to identify the factors that hindered or encouraged these individuals from embarking on the journey to the principal role. Additionally, it was essential to gather demographic information on participants to create a profile of characteristics, which allowed me to analyze data grouped in various ways. The global research question and three sub-questions that focused this study were:

- How do Asian Americans perceive the challenges and opportunities of becoming a K-12 public school principal?

  - Are gender differences correlated with the way that principals perceived their challenges and opportunities?

  - Are role distinctions (i.e., assistant principal versus principal) correlated with the way principals perceived their challenges and opportunities?

  - Are generational differences correlated with the way that principals perceived their challenges and opportunities?

Purpose

There has been an overall shortage of Asian Americans in the principalship role in K-12 public schools and a need to recruit more role models for Asian American students. This study was designed to provide insight on why there has been an underrepresentation of Asian Americans in roles of the principalship in K-12 public schools. The aim of this study was to (a) develop a profile of the characteristic of Asian American participants, (b) examine the factors that may hinder or encourage Asian Americans from embarking on the journey toward the principalship, and (c) make recommendations and observations on how to break through the existing barriers that may inhibit Asian Americans from pursuing the K-12 principalship. This study hopes to be the catalyst for promoting the voices of Asian American principals and aspiring principals. Further research is necessary to determine how the experiences of Asian Americans can be relatable and transferable to other underrepresented minority groups, such as Latinx and Black populations. Different factors may influence the absence and presence of Asian American principals in K-12 public schools. This study sought to shed light on this phenomenon through the theoretical framework of Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit)

Theoretical Framework

The primary conceptual lens of this study, consistent with its intention, is that of AsianCrit (Iftikar & Museus, 2013). AsianCrit has historically been used to understand the Asian American community's racialized experiences, as well as to elevate Asian American stories (Iftikar & Museus, 2013). This perspective provided a useful theoretical framework to process my data, which explored the motivating and deterring factors that have affected Asian American

representation in the K-12 principal positions. The following section will provide an overview of

the framework, while the methods are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Asian American Thought

when i was 14, i
consoled a crying friend
over her math grade.
she laughed
self-deprecatingly.
"am i even asian, then?"
...
when i was 17, i
was talking to my friend when
she let spill that she wanted to pursue the humanities
and ranted that she was the only goddamn asian
in this school, in the bay area even,
who didn't want to pursue stem.

people call asians the "model minority."
we're associated
with being smart
and generally overachieving, videos of amazing performers
waved off with a, "well, he's asian," comment that apparently
explains everything.
we're all upper-middle class who make
lots of money in big corporations.
we all score incredibly on tests,
go to top-100 colleges and successful careers.
we're heterosexual, complacent and apolitical.
we have small eyes, faces that white men
sometimes find attractive.
we're east asian,
chinese, japanese, korean.
we're the "model minority."

and so asians are lumped into one huge category,
and stereotyped.
but many of us are dirt poor.
but asians are ethnically more diverse than
chinese, japanese, korean
(even if some are now classified as
pacific islanders, because they're different

from the image people associate "asian" with).
but hand in hand with this stereotype is
a culture of ever-increasing stress, pressure, overwork,
and an intense fear of failure —
a culture people are failing to address.
but we aren't represented in government.
but when you're asian and applying for
colleges, jobs, positions,
you're forced to find ways to "stand out"
and prove yourself to be different
from the stereotype, because apparently,
no one wants that.

in many cases, i'm probably a stellar example
of the "model minority."
i'm at a top college. i did well in school.
i'm even pursuing computer science, and so supposedly,
i will land a six-figure job right out of college.
but that barely tells you anything about me,
about my experiences,
about my interests,
and if i am going to be judged and
have my voice dismissed because i fit the "asian" stereotype,
i will tear apart these notions of me.

—"Stereotypically Asian: a poem" by Candance Chiang (2017)

While Critical Race Theory (Delgado, 1995) operates within a Black–White paradigm, AsianCrit offers a novel perspective: the weaving of the Asian American voices into the conversation of race in the United States (Menon, 2016). Recognizing the need for a conceptual framework centered around the racial realities of the Asian American experiences, Iftikar and Museus (2013) cited seven tenets to AsianCrit: (a) Asianization; (b) Transnational Contexts; (c) (Re)Constructive History; (d) Strategic (Anti) Essentialism; (e) Intersectionality; (f) Story, Theory, and Praxis; and (g) a Commitment to Social Justice. The first four tenets built upon the

original Critical Race Theory (CRT) tenets, while the latter three tenets are reiterations of the CRT tenets necessary to understand Asian American experiences related to race and racism (Iftikar & Museus, 2013). Similar to Latina/o Critical Race Theory (addresses experiences unique to the Latina/o community such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture) and Tribal Critical Race Theory (addresses the issues of Indigenous Peoples in the United States), Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit) is not meant to replace CRT, but rather to offer a redefined set of tenets that focuses on the racial realities at the core of the Asian American experience (Iftikar & Museus, 2013).

The purpose of this framework was to disrupt the socially constructed discourse that Asian Americans are not capable of leadership in public K-12 schools. The critical analysis lens of AsianCrit necessitates that we acknowledge that most American K-12 principals are White (Kim-Qvale, 2012). We must recognize that White-dominant ideologies and structures of control have emerged from this majority-White principalship, and they have long disempowered the Asian American community. In simplest terms, we must acknowledge that racism is alive and well in the United States. The methodology of AsianCrit is consistent with creating a platform for the silenced and marginalized voices of K-12 Asian Americans in the principalship, especially in relation to the contentious history of representational absence. Asian American students need leaders, teachers, and role models to advocate for their success, and this need exists in all areas of K-12 education. Through this lens, this dissertation combatted the historically dominant non-Asian narrative, contributed to the critical conversations about Asian American race and leadership recruitment, and provided an understanding of how both institutional and cultural barriers impacted the Asian American principalship pipeline.

Overview of Methodology

Working from a pragmatic paradigm, I designed an explanatory, mixed methods study that explored the current conditions of Asian American principalship and investigated its relationship to generational, gender, and role differences. According to Leavy (2014), mixed methods research involves "the collection, analysis, and 'mixing' of quantitative and qualitative research designs to understand a research problem" (p. 430). It takes advantage of quantitative and qualitative research designs and data collection strategies to fully understand the absence of Asian American principals in K-12 schools. A vital feature of this research design is integration (combining the quantitative and qualitative methods of study) and "how the researcher relates the quantitative and qualitative datasets" (Leavy, 2014, p. 171).

A questionnaire (*N=100*) was used as the first quantitative data collection method to identify some of the unique factors that may deter or encourage Asian Americans from pursuing the principalship and develop a profile of characteristics of Asian American principals. Characteristics included gender, generation, role, ethnic group, years of experience, school setting, and levels of education, among others. This profile allowed me to analyze the data by grouping the participants in various ways. The questionnaire, however, could only broadly identify the challenges and opportunities of K-12 Asian American public school principalship/assistant principalship. To further unpack the questionnaire responses, a smaller sample of Asian American principals were invited to focus groups (*n=11*) and semistructured interviews (*n=15*) to discuss the emerging themes from the questionnaire data, their personal experiences, and stories of liberation.

Questionnaire research is mainly collected through surveys and involves "assessing the preferences, attitudes, practices, concerns, or interest of a group of people" (Mills & Gay, 2019 p. 11). My questionnaire research was followed by a qualitative research approach in order to reflect on "the way things are, why they are that way, and how the participants in the context perceive them" (Mills & Gay, 2019, p. 13). Flick (2014) asserted that to achieve a more detailed understanding of a specific phenomenon, a researcher must explore rich and complex human experiences and perspectives; therefore, I held two focus groups and 15 semistructured interviews. Field notes were used as points of data and to allow for triangulated analysis. The methods will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

Significance of Study

The findings of this study may benefit those who want to make changes in the Asian American recruitment and hiring processes and address the salient underrepresentation of Asian Americans in the K-12 principalship. The individuals who take part in the hiring processes may include but are not limited to superintendents, superintendent's cabinets, principals, and other high-level administration officials. This study addressed the issue of representational disparity between schools' administrative population and the growing Asian American student population. The U.S. Department of Labor commissioned a report with the following findings:

> Unlike other spheres of employment, academic institutions, given their educational mission, have a direct and longstanding influence on the availability pool itself. The skewed distribution of Asian American faculty into a narrow range of disciplines or fields is likely to persist precisely because policies for recruitment are, for the most part, based on the existing availability pools. Breaking this cycle would mean committing resources towards raining the next generation of students in areas where Asian Americans are largely underrepresented, thereby creating a pool of candidates from which a more diverse faculty might be recruited. (Woo, 1994, p. 99)

This study aimed to make Asian American principalship more accessible by illuminating the barriers and successes identified by those currently in principalships. This study involved current K-12 Asian American principals in Southern California public schools, who broke through the bamboo ceiling and escaped the sticky floors. Their insights contributed to the growing discussion of Asian American leadership representation. Ultimately, I hope this dissertation will provide helpful information to educational leaders and policymakers on assisting future Asian Americans in accessing principal positions in K-12 public school settings.

Delimitations and Limitations

One limitation of this study was the small sample size of 100 survey participants. Because there was an overall absence of Asian American leaders in public K-12 education, it was challenging to find a larger pool of candidates. Another limitation concerned the specificity of the survey participants. All of them identified as Asian Americans in K-12 public schools; therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other minority groups. Finally, the questionnaire itself, as well as the fact that my primary data collection method involved focus groups and interviews, posed a research limitation. These qualitative research methods assumed that all my participants were transparent with their responses.

Definitions of Key Terms

Asian American: "A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004, p. 2).

Asianization: refers to the notion that Asian Americans experience nativistic racism in the United States, which is defined as "the ways in which society lumps all Asian Americans into a monolithic group and racializes them as overachieving model minorities, perpetual foreigners, and threatening yellow perils" (Iftikar & Museus, 2013, p. 23).

Assistant Principal: This label was used to identify the role of the assistant, vice, or associate position to the principal.

Bamboo Ceiling: An "invisible barrier based on an attitudinal or organizational bias that prevents minorities from advancing to high-level positions, despite their qualifications" (Chong, 2016, p. 69).

Critical Race Theory (CRT): "A framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that 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).

Glass Ceiling: "The barriers that women and minorities need to break through to advance to higher leadership positions" (Chong, 2016).

Perception: The attitude or understanding of what is being observed.

Principalship: This term was used regarding the role and duties of the principal and assistant principal.

Transnational Contexts: consider the importance of historical, national, and transnational contexts when analyzing the impacts of racism on Asian Americans. Seen as foreigners in their own country, Asian Americans have been specifically disenfranchised by

nativist U.S. laws and policies, often dictated by unequal relationships between the United States and Asian countries (see also Kim, 2008).

Organization of Dissertation

The research for this dissertation is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 provided an introduction to this study. It examined the term "Asian American"—who Asian Americans are and who they are assumed to be, with a focus on their historical absence in leadership spaces. Chapter 2 discusses the contentious history of Asian Americans in the United States, a brief historiography of the principalship, and the unique barriers to becoming an educational leader, specifically a K-12 Asian American public- school principal. Chapter 3 highlights the mixed methods research design, specifically an explanatory sequential design. Chapter 4 reports the profile of participants' characteristics and the questionnaire, focus group, and interview findings. Chapter 5 provides recommendations, based on the data collected, for Asian American liberation within the education system—so that Asian American educators might break the bamboo ceiling, Asian American students might see themselves represented, and practices ensuring racial equality are reaffirmed. Ultimately, my dissertation is centered around Asian American storytelling: we tell stories to write ourselves into existence and therefore become free.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

> What follows, then, is a story of the past. It is also a story of the present. I tell it now because I do not want it to be a story of the future.— Robert Chang (1993, p. 1289)

Much of the literature surrounding education leadership—particularly the principalship—has omitted the perspective of the "Other." Historically, educational leaders of color have been marginalized and face more barriers in achieving the principalship than others (Gooden, 2004). People of color share this story of navigating through hardship, and it forms an interconnected experience. The discourse on the history of people of color and their struggle in achieving equity is important to note (Gooden, 2004); however, this story is not complete without including the voices and experiences of Asian Americans. It is vital to consider leadership through the perspectives of Asian Americans, who for many years have been cast as foreigners and second-class citizens, unqualified for high positions. Asian Americans in the principalship have a unique role in education; they occupy a predominantly White, male-dominated field. Because Asian American principals further do this in shifting social and political contexts, they redefine what it means to be a school leader (Fernandez et al., 2015).

In the first part of this literature review, I unpacked the contentious history of Asian Americans in the United States. The second part of this literature review focuses on the history of the principalship in the United States. It highlights the role of the school principal, which is constantly being redefined (job duties), as well as the role's social and political expectations, which are not part of the "job description." This second part also overviews the challenges that all principals and assistant principals may face while pursuing the principalship, and it seeks to explain the overall shortage of all K-12 principals. The theoretical lens of AsianCrit provides

further insight into ongoing anti-Asian discrimination, the cultural values that may impact leadership styles, and the Asian American principal pipeline. Thus, the last section of the literature review focuses on my theoretical framework.

Contentious History of Asians in the United States: Then Versus Now

19th Century Yellow Peril

In the mid-1800s, an influx of Chinese immigrants settled in the United States, mainly Washington and California, searching for work. Cheap labor was high in demand, and Chinese immigrant workers were viewed as hardworking and respectful individuals who complained little (Bhattacharyya, 2001). But when economic conditions worsened in the 1870s, the necessity for cheap labor drastically declined, and along with it, the perception of Chinese workers. Xenophobia swept across the United States, and anti-Chinese sentiments grew exponentially (Bhattacharyya, 2001).

It was during this economic decline that Yellow Peril first emerged as a problem in California (Yang, n.d.). White laborers discriminated against Asian immigrant workers out of fear of losing their jobs. This combination of fear and racism eventually led to the 1882 *Chinese Exclusion Act*, which banned all Chinese immigrants from entering the United States and blocked legal residents from obtaining citizenship (Yang, n.d.). Despite the passage of this new law, cheap labor was once again in demand. However, this time it was the Japanese immigrants who dominated the low-wage jobs: from 1886 to 1911, legal barriers to immigrate began to drop, and major immigration by the Japanese followed. The Japanese, similar to the Chinese, were seen as extremely hardworking and resilient. But when fear of Yellow Peril reemerged in the 1900s, this positive perception was quickly shattered, and the federal government sought to limit

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Japanese immigrants (Bhattacharyya, 2001). Such a trend was mirrored in future immigrant groups, such as Koreans, Japanese (1924) and Filipinos (1934): immigrants were positively received for their cheap labor, but when an economic crisis hit, they became a threat to Western culture (Bhattacharyya, 2001). Difficult economic crises in America thus reveal the unsettling reality that Asian Americans have never been seen as anything more than foreigners (Wong, 2011).

Citizenship of Asian Americans

Citizenship in the United States has historically been controlled by White men with property (Glenn, 2002). After much struggle, women and then Black people were given citizenship rights through the 14th Amendment (Espiritu, 1997). As liberating as this amendment was, it demonstrates America's White-over-Black racial model—a model that has often left Asian Americans in the margins. Indeed, they are seen as second-class U.S. citizens and not American (Wong, 2011), a racist presentation of that persists today. No other racial group has been excluded from the country to the extent that Asian Americans have been. The 1875 *Page Act,* which banned Chinese and Mongolian prostitutes, felons, and contract laborers, drastically reduced the entry of all Chinese women who were suspected of prostitution (Espiritu, 1997). The same trend was seen in 1917 with the exclusion of Indians, in 1924 with the exclusion of Koreans and Japanese, and in 1934 with the exclusion of Filipinos. In short, most Asians faced great difficulty immigrating to the United States because of their race.

But even the Asians who resided in the United States could not obtain legal citizenship. In the 1922 landmark case, Ozawa vs. the United States, the Supreme Court ruled that Takao Ozawa, a Japanese American who had lived in the United States for 20 years, was ineligible for

naturalization because of his race (Marshall, 1973). By the 1950s, the exclusion and anti-naturalization laws barring Asian American naturalization had been lifted, but the damage was done. Asian Americans have been significantly disadvantaged by the many years that went by without obtaining legal citizenship, and even when they did obtain it, Asian Americans have been denied a place in the nation-social citizenship (Marshall, 1973).

Nativistic Racism

Ancheta (1998) posited nativistic racism based on several stereotypes: the economic competitor, the organized criminal, the illegal alien, the unwelcomed immigrant, and the Yellow Peril (Kim, 1999). As previously mentioned, the rising economic competition and resentment of Asian American immigrants led to exclusion acts. Yellow Peril emerged from World War II; the United States' extreme anti-Asian racism was seen in Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order to mass incarcerate Japanese Americans (Ancheta, 1998), a group primarily of U.S. law-abiding citizens. Kim (2008) offered many more contemporary examples in which Asian Americans have faced ongoing discrimination and racism.

In 1982, two White men beat a Chinese American draftsman to death with a bat. His name was Vincent Chin. While the Asian American community eagerly waited for justice, the judge charged the two White men a mere $3,000 fine and three years of probation (Ancheta, 1998). To date, these killers have not spent a single night in prison, and many Asian Americans, myself included, have often wondered if our lives are worth so little. In the 1995 O. J. Simpson trial, racial epithets were hurled at Judge Lance Ito, a Japanese American and an exemplar of the model minority. These racial aggressions again surfaced when Alfonse D' Amato, a New York Senator, made a mockery of Ito's accent on the Don Imus show, and when Howard Stern labeled

him as a "nip" (a derogatory ethnic slur against people of Japanese origin). The book *OJ's Legal Pad* featured images of a narrow-eyed "samurai/kamikaze" warrior with a caption that read: "Hiroshima, Nuke Judge Ito/Banzai, Banzai, Nagasaki/Use his head for backyard hockey!" (Kim 1999, p. 127). In 1996, two Asian American men named John Huang and Charlie Yah-lin Trie were involved in the Clinton campaign finance scandal. The Democratic National Committee decided to contact all donors with Asian-sounding names and interrogate their citizenship status, something that would not have happened if the two Asian American men were replaced by White Europeans (Ancheta, 1998).

At the end of 2006, U.S. comedian Rosie O' Donnell mocked the Chinese language in a parody. No remorse was shown until Asian American organizations decided to band together and protest for a sincere apology (Kim, 2008). The following year, politicians and news anchors "foreignized" Seung-Hui Cho, the Virginia Tech School shooter, as a "South Korean" national when in fact, he has resided in the United States since he was eight years old. The media not only reported his name in a Korean fashion, but they also used the family name first. In 2020, these issues once again emerged in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The language of the Coronavirus has repeatedly included the terms such as, "Chinese virus" and "King Flu" (Lee, 2020).

To these issues, many scholars have studied the ways in which Asian Americans remain subordinated along citizenship lines. Literature has identified this line as the "insider-foreigner" axis, or, as Kim (1999) would determine, their status as *civic ostracism*. Most scholars have noted that while some Asian American ethnic groups are placed higher than Blacks along class and color hierarchies, they are not genuinely seen as Americans in the same way that Blacks are.

This invisibility exists because the U.S. White-Black legacy leaves Asian Americans out of the picture entirely.

Assimilation

> Assimilation is the sum of a million small decisions and tiny changes in daily life that often occur despite the immigrant's efforts to ward off assimilation. (Kasinitz, et al., 2008, p. 10)

The racial and ethnic makeup of U.S. society has been in flux. The 1965 *Immigration and Nationality Act,* which repealed national origins quotas in place by the *1882 Chinese Exclusion Act,* allowed for new waves of immigrant groups to trickle in, adding to the cultural and phenotypic diversity of the U.S. population (Perez & Hirschman, 2009). Due to the 1965 *Immigration and Nationality Act, f*amilies were flooding the nation's cities; industrialization, urbanization, and immigration were rapidly reshaping the face of the United States. Non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants, expected to acculturate into the already established Protestant beliefs of the United States, were instilled with values and norms that were not their own (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

In 1909, Stanford University professor Ellwood P. Cubberley described the new immigrants as:

> illiterate, docile, often lacking in initiative, and almost wholly without the Anglo-Saxon conceptions of righteousness, liberty, law, order, public decency, and government, and thus needed to learn to adapt to American ways. (as cited in Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 117)

The United States is famous for being a melting pot of culture, popular for its diversity. Yet the implication of such diversity is that the county likewise holds a tradition of assimilation, in which "ethnic minorities shed themselves of all that makes them distinctive and become carbon copies of the ethnic majority" (Alba, 1999). The term "melting pot" is known by scholars as the straight-line model because this name implies assimilation to be a sequence of generational

steps: the longer the immigrant group lives in the host country, the more assimilated the group

will become (Alba & Nee, 1997). They "melt" into the dominant culture and adopt the majority

group's language, behaviors, and characteristics (Alba, 1999). As Chang (1993) argued,

Anglocentric middle class norms are prioritized for the melting pot (Bourdieu & Passeron,

1990).

Melting Pot

> The devotees of the crude, current notion of the 'melting pot' bid America take the immigrant . . . strip him of his cultural heritage, throw him into the great cauldron, stir the pot vigorously, speak the magic word 'Americanization,' and through the mystic vapors would rise the newly created 'American.—Gleason, 1964, p. 37

The melting pot concept originated in a play directed by Israel Zangwill in 1908

(Gleason, 1964). For the first time in U.S. history, the play portrayed the melting pot concept

through the story of two lovers with different racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds.

Through the term "melting pot," the play metaphorized the assimilation of two immigrants with

stark differences coming together. Similarly Asian Americans are expected to "melt" into the

dominant U.S culture; however, despite their desires to assimilate, it has been challenging to do

so due to their stark differences from U.S. culture phenotypes, language, and cultural values

(Okihiro, 2001). AsianCrit has argued that Asian Americans encounter pervasive racism in their

lives by the prioritization of the dominant, white culture. The reinforcement of racial

subordination and Orientalist ideologies frame Asian Americans as foreign. When we perform

"too" well, we are seen as a Yellow Peril. We are the "inferior and child-like Filipino little

brown brother" (Espiritu, 2003), or in the case of North Korea and Vietnam, the evil enemy

"gook." And yet in the case of South Korea, we become feminized and fetishized (Lowe, 1996).

No matter how intelligent, wealthy, culturally literate, or light our skin is, Asian Americans have been seen as un-American.

20th Century Model Minority

By the 1960s, Asian Americans were not only known as the affluent cultural minority but also as the model minority (Wong, 2011). The model minority trope insinuates the false perception that all Asian Americans have assimilated into corporate U.S. culture and achieved the American Dream (Wong, 2011). Suzuki (1995), a third-generation Japanese environmental activist, further highlighted how this positive association has negatively impacted this population. He explained:

> The actual status of Asian Americans was being deliberately distorted to fit the "model minority" image to discredit the protests and demands for social justice of the other minority groups by admonishing them to follow the "shining example" set by Asian Americans. (Suzuki, 1995, p. 114)

This suggests an equal playing field with Whites and ignores the plight that Asian Americans may face in their lives. To further compound this issue, portraying the Asian American as a "shining example" (Suzuki, 1995, p. 114) pits Asian Americans against other minority groups, creating a us versus them mentality.

The model minority particularly impacts Asian American students by glorifying their supposed academic talents in mathematics, science, music, etc. (Chong, 2016). Asian American students are locked into a stereotype of quiet, respectful, and studious. Thus, Asian American students who struggled with school work were often overlooked, and their needs unaddressed. Ngo and Lee (2007) highlighted an example of this struggle by writing:

> Vietnamese Americans, Hmong Americans, Cambodian Americans, and Lao Americans—occupy a unique position in relation to this discourse of Asian American success. On one hand, they are positioned inside this discourse and viewed as

hardworking, high achievers. On the other hand, they are positioned outside this discourse of success and portrayed as high school dropouts, gangsters, and welfare dependents (Ngo, 2006). The experiences of Southeast Asian Americans in U.S. schools and society are thus reduced to binary extremes. One consequence of such categorization is the denial of attention and support to Southeast Asian students and families based on dual, contradictory assumptions that they have no problems or are dysfunctional and do not deserve assistance. (p. 416)

Despite the positive connotations of the model minority image, this stereotype is far more complicated and multifaceted than meets the eye. The stereotypical Asian—even in his or her model role—is passive, submissive, and weak, with no leadership qualities (Kiang et al., 2016). According to Bhattacharyya (2001), the image of Asians as threats to Western society has not changed, just the specific labels and perceptions associated with the image. The stereotype is a socially constructed mechanism of discrimination and deception, aimed to silence Asian Americans. Given the complex history of discrimination against this ethnic group, the existing perceptions may have prevented Asian Americans from achieving upward mobility and obtaining leadership positions in the workplace, particularly the principalship in K-12 public schools (Chong, 2016).

History of the Principalship

Much of the current research related to people of color in the education system highlights the Latinx and Black experience. In contrast, there is an overall absence of research that focuses on the unique Asian American experience. Beyond the general challenges of attaining principalship, Asian Americans face an additional layer of obstacles (Kim-Qvale, 2012).

Shifting Roles of the Principalship

Over the past 30 years, school reform movements have reanalyzed the traditional role of the school principal. The 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* and the rise of state accountability

measures, such as 2002 *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), have restructured the landscapes of public schooling. The government's swift focus on school improvement and student achievement data (Cuban, 1990) created a nationwide sense of urgency for improving the education system. Little research focused on the role of the principal as it correlates to the growth in both school and student achievement data (Wallace Foundation, 2013). However, a growing body of scholarship has suggested a noticeable correlation between the actions of a school principal and how schools and students perform (Kafka, 2009).

The following sections discuss the history and evolution of the principalship, which is an essential part of the "grammar of school" (Kafka, 2009) in the United States. As public schooling gradually expanded to serve more students, so did the roles of the principal—a role that has always been one of constancy and change. School principals have long been recognized as the key player in school reform, wearing multiple hats while juggling different expectations (Kafka, 2009). In recent years, the scope of the role has become even more demanding, and the professional requirements and expectations more regulated (Kafka, 2009). These noteworthy changes have reshaped how principals interact with their school community—students, parents, supervisors, etc.

The following sections consider the historiography of the school principal in three sequential areas: the rise of the modern principal from the mid-1800s through the early 1900s, the expectations of the principal in the 20th century (and the impact of race and gender during this time), and the principal role as it stands today.

Rise of the Modern Principalship

Pierce's (1935) monograph on the history of the principalship offers a detailed analysis of the early developments of the principalship role, illustrating the complex nature of the early principal's work. From the 1800s to the 1930s, the United States experienced a steady rise in the establishment of schools and the development of grade-level classes. During this time, the role of the principal had not been clearly defined; however, this role was similar to that of a teacher. Hence, the position "principal teacher" was created—a role generally filled by a male teacher responsible for teaching and administrative duties. The principal teacher's role included assigning classes, addressing disciplinary issues, maintaining the building, and ensuring school hours were being kept (Kafka, 2009). Adding these responsibilities to an already loaded teaching plate gave the principal teacher a new degree of authority. As the century progressed, the role focused mainly on administrative duties.

In 1916, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) was created, shortly followed by the establishment of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) in 1921. The establishment of these two professional associations within the National Education Association (NEA) established professional legitimacy to the principalship role. It held states to a greater standard of ensuring quality principals, pressuring them to pass laws ensuring guidelines for certification requirements. By establishing academic qualifications and skills, the status of the principal was elevated. While initially seen as "teachers" who had additional administrative responsibilities with better pay, the principalship was increasingly seen as a distinct and prestigious profession (Kafka, 2009).

It is important to note that the rise of the modern principal did not happen overnight; principals had to intentionally fight to gain the prestige and authority they currently have. From 1880 through 1898, school enrollment doubled (from 7 million to 15 million students), and by the end of the 19th century, 71% of Americans between the ages of 5 and 18 were enrolled in some sort of schooling (Pierce, 1935). Schools quickly replaced churches as the leading site of socialization in U.S. history. Although it was previously a parent's choice to send their children to school, compulsory education laws were enforced by the state in 1940. When local officials started to strictly enforce these laws, around 80% of youth between the ages of 14 and 17 attended high school. This data highlights the increasing number of students who attended school and the rising value and importance placed on education (Pierce, 1935). More than ever, teachers and principals were considered to be prominent figures in their local communities.

Race and Gender Affecting the Principalship

> These teachers, school principals, and janitors would rather have kept their jobs and their positions of power and influence than to see their charges bused to White schools run by White principals where White educators often made the children all too grimly aware of their distaste for the new state of affairs. (Ogletree, 2004, pp. 296–297)

While current scholarship adequately covers the history of the U.S. school principal, this research does not provide detailed information on the impact of race, class, and gender on schooling and the principal role. In the second half of the 20th century, there was a noticeable downturn of marginalized groups in leadership roles, specifically Black school principals and women. In 1954, the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling influenced the slow shifting of the schools' racial makeup (McCray et al., 2007). This ruling intended to eliminate racial inequality in education and other parts of society, and it was the first step in ensuring that all students would receive an excellent education, regardless of the color of their skin. Although

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there have been significant gains in desegregation due to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, many educators and scholars have questioned whether there have been effective gains in school integration. Many scholars believe that the initial progress made by the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision later reversed due to factors such as, the use of neighborhood schools and the increased enrollment in private schools (McCray et al., 2007). Furthermore, despite the intentions of the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, there was little to no impact for Blacks in leadership roles at predominantly White schools.

The many shortcomings of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision were evident in the hiring and placement of Black principals (McCray et al., 2007). School integration, the process of ending race-based segregation in public and private schools, took place in southern states; however, Black principals leading predominantly Black schools often lost their jobs to White administrators. In one southeastern state, the number of Black principals dropped a whopping 99% from 209 to 3 during the years between 1963–1973 (McCray et al., 2007). Patterson (2001) concluded that the primary factor as to why Black principals lost their jobs was discrimination and bias.

Thus, many Black leaders advocated for a drastic reduction in school integration. As racial tensions rose, cities in both the North and South redefined the purpose of schooling, which ultimately questioned the principal's authority. In desegregated regions in the South, Black principal positions were cut because Whites did not want Black men or women as their supervisors. In the North, protests were carried out by students and community members in a call for Black leaders to replace the White ones. Understanding the different motivating and deterring

factors that affected the principalship will give insight into the unique barriers that marginalized populations, especially Asian Americans, must navigate through today.

As evidenced by the history of the principal role and exacerbated by American's own history of racial discrimination, the principalship is complicated and demanding. The fact that principals shoulder many responsibilities is not a novel idea: principals are expected to enact educational change and improve schooling while responding to the constantly changing structures and systems. Those who want to take on this challenge and embark on this arduous path must consider the different steps in getting there.

K-12 Principal Pipeline

The career path to the principalship has remained relatively constant (NCES, 2008). The traditional pipeline to the principalship in K-12 public schools includes the following steps: (a) working as a teacher, (b) obtaining an administrative credential, (c) working as an administrative staff outside of the classroom, such as dean of students, and (d) working as an assistant principal before advancing to the role of a principal (NCES, 2008). Specifically in the state of California, the certification process for obtaining a Tier I Preliminary Administrative Credential and Tier II Professional Administrative Credential include: (a) obtaining a California teaching credential; (b) successfully teaching full time for three years; (c) passing the California Basic Educational Skills Test; (d) holding an administrative position; and (e) completing an accredited university program, or passing of the Assessment on School Leadership Licensure (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2014).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2017), which has thoroughly outlined the qualifications needed of an education administrator, nearly all school principals start their

careers as classroom teachers and advance by obtaining a master's or a doctorate. However, out of the 3.5 million public school teachers, only 200,000 teachers have earned the credentials needed to become a school leader. Out of those 200,000, only a small number end up in the principal role. Although unlikely, some teachers move directly to the principalship role while others hold semi-administrative positions, such as teacher leaders or district staff. From there, if a teacher or teacher leader were interested in becoming a principal, they would traditionally start as an assistant principal (U.S Department of Education, 2017). According to the Wallace Foundation (2013), the assistant principal position is an integral role that mirrors the principals. Many districts have groomed their assistant principals for principalship by providing mentorship and coaching. Most people who make it to the principal role have graduated from traditional university-based programs; albeit, a growing number of individuals have taken the nontraditional route through district-based programs since 2000. In most public schools, principals must have a state certificate and hold a degree in educational leadership. Except for having certification in education or leadership, there do not seem to be set requirements consistent across all states for K-12 public school principals in the United States. It is important to note that each state adopts its own set of standards and certification process to determine who qualifies as a good school principal (NCES, 2008). Acknowledging the K-12 principal pipeline will give us better insight into why an underrepresentation of Asian American principals exists in K-12 public schools.

Teacher Perceptions of the Role

To better understand the challenges of becoming a school principal, it is imperative to identify the different factors that either motivate or inhibit teachers from seeking administrative positions. Hancock and Müller (2012) conducted a study on the factors impacting the motivation

of German and U.S. teachers to become school leaders. According to study results, many teachers are attracted to the administrative role due to the opportunities of making a positive impact in the community that they serve: they want to make a difference in student learning, initiate meaningful school-wide changes, and experience the challenges of being in the position. Furthermore, U.S. teachers are attracted to the benefits associated with school administration, such as a raise in salary (Hancock & Müller, 2012). Many teachers want to seek challenges beyond the classroom by impacting local school policy. Others want to influence a larger number of students and community members (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Finally, research indicated that peer influence impacts teachers to pursue principalship. Many aspirants have stated that peers have encouraged them to seek the principalship due to their leadership capabilities and ability to lead others effectively.

At the same time, many teachers experience doubt and uncertainty about the position. Many have been dissuaded from entering into an administrative leadership role due to the amount of paperwork, the hefty commitment, the distance from students, the possibility of litigation, job security, lack of tenure, and often the lack of autonomy (Hancock & Müller, 2012). Additionally, many teachers doubt their ability to balance their professional versus personal lives and their knowledge and leadership skills pertaining to the position. Some are further hesitant to leave their routine jobs for a more nuanced role, that is, one that has shifting responsibilities, such as a principalship. Principal roles are not clear-cut and may require those who occupy them to be highly flexible, especially in comparison to routine teaching positions (Shoho & Barnett, 2010).

Challenges Facing the Principalship

The common assumption in the education system is that the transition from the role of classroom teacher to that of [assistant] principal does not involve a change in professional identity. . . . And yet, the scant research on the transition from the role of teacher to that of [assistant] principal testifies to its being a complex one, carrying broad effects—emotional, social, and professional, described in terms such as "shock" and "unpleasant surprise." (Cohen & Schechter, 2019, p. 100)

The role of an educational leader has undoubtedly become complex and arduous (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). School leadership comes second only to classroom teaching, and good Educational leaders enhance student outcomes and overall school success (Bush, 2011). Many entering the principalship are often not prepared for the external pressures of leading a school (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Educational leaders, specifically principals, are often drawn from a pool of teachers, and this shift in responsibility and expectation is monumental.

The everyday tasks of a school leader may vary; however, these tasks must be fulfilled by a competent and conscientious leader. Powerful school leaders can optimize student learning by exerting influence on teacher motivation and commitment. Several studies emphasized the importance of the school leader's ability to empathize with people (Hallinger & Heck, 2002), create a solid vision, establish direction for a school (Billman, 2004; Harris, 2002), and prioritize positive relations with parents and the community (Louis & Kruse, 1998; West et al., 2005). The duties of a principal include supervising both the instructional and extracurricular activities within the school, ensuring the implementation of regulatory requirements, influencing the work assignments of teachers and staff, observing and evaluating the performance of school personnel, preparing a myriad of reports and records, and interacting with external constituencies such as parents and community leaders (Hancock & Müller, 2010).

Pressure of Role

> If there is one overall conclusion, based on the past two decades of study of beginning principals in America, it would be that the job has become increasingly complex, more difficult, and with intense and unreasonable pressures to solve a broad menu of education, social, and personal problems. . . . We also are very concerned about how long they can survive in the pressure cooker that the principalship has become. (Hall et al., 2003, pp. 2–3).

The increasing demands from policymakers and district leaders to hold schools accountable by measuring student performance has inevitably placed most of the onus on the school principal; often forcing them in a binary role—as either an influencing visionary leader of success or as the primary source of the school's failure (Marzano et al., 2005). Compounded with working in a high-stakes environment, principals face punitive measures when school improvements failed to meet federal mandate guidelines. While principals were once able to succeed and propel the work forward by simply following orders and fulfilling mundane tasks, they are now pressured to do so much more (Gawlik, 2008). As the transition from being a classroom teacher to becoming a principal occurs, principals are often confronted with an overload of new information and expectations.

Instructional Leadership

By 1930, principals no longer were responsible for teaching. Instead, principals were viewed as instructional leaders, responsible for teachers' professional growth and development. They helped teachers improve their teaching practices by observing teacher and student performances. Thus, increased supervisory responsibilities further sharpened the distinction between the role of a teacher and the role of a principal, adding a new layer of prestige and power to the title of principal (Kafka, 2009).

The first challenge that new principals face is the expectation to increase student achievement and maintain high standards for their schools. One principal succinctly stated, "The biggest challenge is now that as the principal I am responsible for the success of the kids, all of them now" (Shoho & Barnett, 2010, p.).

Management

The second challenging area for new principals concerns administrative issues—dealing with school budget, personnel issues, and maintaining a balance in their workload. New principals have unanimously identified that the former responsibility, managing school budgets, is one of the biggest administrative challenges. One principal explained, "I felt really unprepared coming into the job as far as trying to put the federal, state, and local accounts together to have a good instructional program" (Shoho & Barnett, 2010, p. 575). An additional administrative challenge is navigating complex personnel issues, such as helping the staff adjust to change. Novice principals share the difficulty of managing team unity, and they struggle against staff resistance to change. Principals must also manage their increased workload. Many principals have shared sentiments similar to this one: "When you become a principal, it's everything. It's the cafeteria lines, it's the bus, it's the angry parents about a class, it's the curriculum, it's all that" (Shoho & Barnett, 2010, p. 575). New principals must learn to adjust to the big leap of going from either a teacher or assistant principal to a principal.

Community Leadership

Principals have established themselves as local leaders through building rapport and trust within their local communities. By the late 1800s, principals began holding social functions, such as back-to-school night and open houses, to gain support from parents and their communities. As

the role of the modern school principalship became more and more defined, principals were seen as the head of their school and community. Most new principals are surprised by the amount of time spent addressing parental and political school climate issues. If the previous principal had a different vision, the biggest challenge for the new principal would be to attend to parents who have difficulty adjusting to changes in the school and the school's vision. For example, a principal who has replaced another principal who had been at that school site for more than 25 years shared, "The biggest challenge for me is trying to help the community know who I am and what parameters that I work under. And for some, they have been able to adjust and for some, they haven't" (Shoho & Barnett, 2010, p. 576). A change in leadership inevitably causes a shift in the school climate, which in the past has erupted into political issues (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Incoming principals must understand campus history and tradition; at the same time, they cannot be fearful of controversy. New principals must push against the status quo. A new high school principal reinforced this by stating, "One minute you could be the best thing that has happened to the organization and the next, your head is wanted on a platter" (Shoho & Barnett, 2010, p. 576). The many administrative challenges, which include instructional leadership, management, and community leadership, may deter those who want to pursue administrative leadership positions (Shoho & Barnett, 2010).

Professional and Personal Balance

For novice principals, the balance of professional and personal responsibilities is often overwhelming. Many express an overall feeling of guilt for prioritizing professional responsibilities over personal ones, which has often led to missing out on important family milestones (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Factors that increase difficulty in balancing professional

and personal responsibilities include having younger children, insufficient time, university work, and long commutes to home and school. The new principals who were older in age have admitted they would not have assumed the principalship if they were younger and had children to take care of. Many principals emphasize the importance of a support system, which helps decrease the difficulty of balancing responsibilities. Factors reducing the difficulty in balancing professional and personal responsibilities include having support from a spouse, having no spouse, and having older or no children. One principal stated, "I waited until my children were all grown. . . . We could easily work 16 hours a day. That would not leave a lot of family time" (Shoho & Barnett, 2010, p. 578).

Thus, singleness simplifies principal responsibilities; it allows principals to commit to their careers without neglecting other personal commitments at home. The question has become, "Can people who aspire to be highly effective 21st-century principals have balanced professional and personal lives without sacrificing one for another?" (Shoho & Barnett, 2010, p. 578). The difficulty of balancing a professional and personal life may deter those who want to pursue the principalship.

Bamboo Ceiling in the Workplace

Despite being valorized as the model minority, the infamous bamboo ceiling has continued to disadvantage Asian Americans (Nunes, 2021). One shocking example of income discrimination is the discrepancy between Asian American wage level versus level of education (Kochhar & Cilluffo, 2020).

While Asian Americans achieve higher levels of education compared to White Americans, they lack representation in two major occupations: lawyers and judges. Asian Americans make up only 2.7% of the legal system, and only 2.4% of legal administrators (Xie & Goyette, 2004). Xie & Goyette (2004) further contended that Asian Americans are underrepresented in managerial and leadership positions in other occupational sectors, such as government, private employment, and higher education. Specifically, in the civil service sector, many Asian Americans have been passed over for managerial positions by those with far fewer qualifications, training, education, and years of experience.

As Jane Hyun (2007) described, the bamboo ceiling is not entirely surprising (Iftikar & Museus, 2013) has suggested that those in power prefer to choose successors who are similar to them. When it comes to these positions, Asian Americans are assumed to be simply disinterested; therefore, they lack the desired and required skills and experiences to become leaders (Wong & Nagasawa, 1991). Wong and Nagasawa (1991) found in their study that Asian Americans were seen as candidates who were highly qualified in technical areas but lacked essential attributes or qualities as an administrative or executive leader. In fact, 75% of Asian Americans expressed interest in managerial positions instead of technical work while expressing their concerns about the injustices at play in the workforce. The same study suggests that the underrepresentation of Asian Americans in leadership and managerial roles is strongly tied to their lack of English proficiency or cultural differences. White participants in the study indicated that Asian Americans were too passive for administrative positions, or that they were content with their current placement and had no desire to climb the corporate ladder. Chang (1993) wrote about the racial inequities that plague hiring practices—Asian Americans are simply not given

the same chance to intermingle or network with others in professional roles. Asian Americans

working in the education sector are often assigned projects that prepare them to deal with

minority groups, or else menial issues that do not truly prepare them for the administration's role.

Asian Americans are thus excluded from a fair training process; schools have failed to provide

them with the proper resources for K-12 principalship roles. In alignment with AsianCrit, Asian

Americans have not been granted the same rights and opportunities. Instead, they continue to

face discrimination while navigating through a social system that legitimizes those in power,

specifically those who identify with Anglocentric middle class norms (Chang, 1993).

Ho and Jackson (2001) and Lin et. al (2005) conducted two separate studies in which

participants were asked to generate a list of Asian stereotypes. After analyzing the data and

clustering similar items together, two central stereotypes emerged: (a) Asians are highly

competent, often being seen as flourishing and intelligent, and (b) Asian Americans lack social

skills, often being seen as aloof, nerdy, and antisocial. The authors of both studies synthesized

that Whites are threatened by the abilities possessed by Asian Americans and that they therefore,

perpetuate the stereotype that this highly competent group lacks social skills (Johnson & Sy,

2016). Such a phenomenon reinforces the damagingly adaptive qualities of Yellow Peril (Chin &

Chan, 1972).

Bamboo Ceiling in K-12 Education

In K-12 public education, the lack of representation has detrimental impacts on public

education. According to NCES (2018) 79.3%of public school teachers identified as White, 6.7%

of public school teachers identified as Black, 9.3% of public school teachers identified as

Hispanic, and less than 3% of public school teachers identified as Asian, despite the growing 6%

Asian student population at the time.

Figure 2

Percentage of K-12 Public School Teachers Nationwide, by Race and Ethnicity
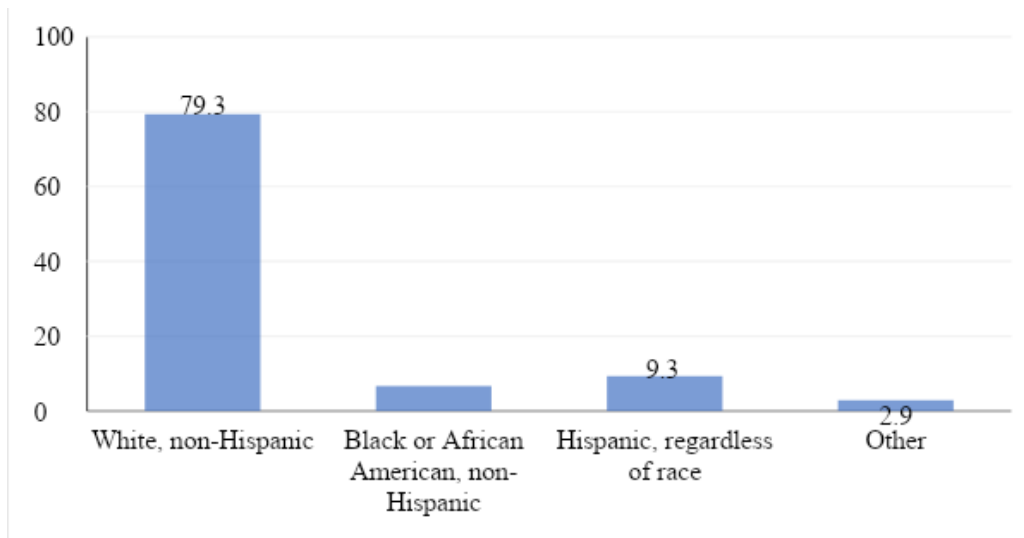
Similarly, the percentage of principals who identified as Asian was measurably lower

when compared to other ethnic groups; 77.7% of public school principals were White, 10.5% of

public school principals were Black, and 8.9% percent of public school principals were Hispanic.

Those who were of two or more races, Asian, and American Indian/Alaska Native and those who

were Pacific Islander each made up around 1% of public school principals, categorized as the

"Other" (NCES, 2018).

Figure 3

Percentages of K-12 Public School Principals Nationwide, by Race and Ethnicity
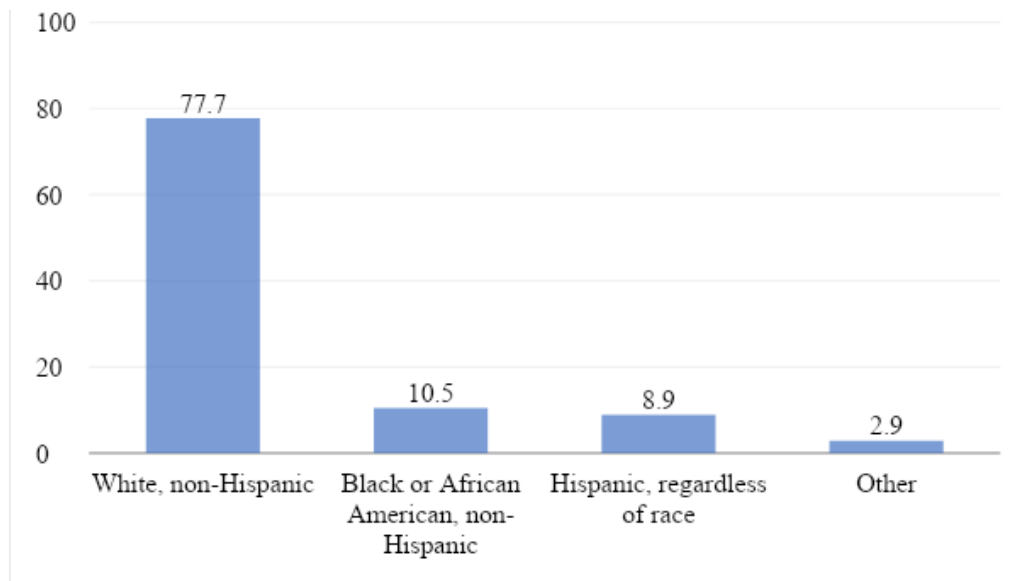
The numbers are not any more encouraging in K-12 education administration. The School Superintendents Association (2016), which surveyed approximately 1400 superintendents, reported that there were only two Asian American superintendents. This astounding number was far fewer than the 29 Black superintendents, 32 Hispanic superintendents, and even the 15 American Indian superintendents.

In comparison to other ethnicity groups, Asian Americans are less likely to be chosen for the principal position and even the superintendent position. Without a critical presence of Asian American teachers in public education, it is far too easy for policymakers and district hiring leaders to ignore our cultural values and experiences when addressing educational reform.

Asian American Cultural Values and Leadership

There has been a stark discrepancy in the way others have perceived Asian Americans and the traits people tend to gravitate toward in a leader: Western leaders are expected to be

competent, charismatic, and masculine; Eastern cultural norms teach humility and deference to authority (Hyun, 2007). This has put Asian Americans at a significant disadvantage and restricts them to "sidekick" or mid-level management positions instead of top-level leadership ones. Asian Americans therefore face a double-bind: if they project more dominance, they are less liked, but if they do not project dominance, they are not viewed as leaders (Johnson & Sy, 2016). Gender adds yet another complexity to these inequalities: Asian women experience greater difficulty than Asian men in being promoted to executive positions, comprising only 3.1% of executive positions in America compared to their male counterparts at 13.5% (Johnson & Sy, 2016).

The Difference in Leadership Styles

Among studies, there have been substantial differences in how leadership is defined, especially as it is related to culture. Meuser et al. (2016) identified the six theoretical perspectives that receive the most recognition in contemporary leadership research: (a) charismatic leadership, (b) transformational leadership, (c) leadership and diversity, (d) strategic leadership, (e) participative/shared leadership, and (f) trait approaches to leadership.

Compared to popular leadership theories, there has been a dearth of literature on Asian American leadership ideals and how cultural characteristics and values may affect effective leadership. Existing literature has attempted to better understand Asian American leadership from a diverse cultural and sociological perspective. Yammarino and Jung (1998) identified four cultural values to be central in understanding Asian leadership ideals: (a) collectivism, (b) high power distance, (c) long term orientation, and (d) group-based reward. When contrasted with conventional Western employer–employee relationships dominated by transactional exchange

and reward systems, Asian leader–follower relationships focus heavily on loyalty from employees and care for their employees. Yammarino and Jung (1998) also highlighted that due to high power distance culture, Asian Americans have been more willing to accept inequality without challenging authority, which is contrary to Western culture, where power and status are two sides of the same coin. Yammarino and Jung (1998) argued that Confucian values—such as collectivism, high power distance, and sense of shame— shape how Asian Americans view good leadership. Asian Americans then tend to view leadership as group-based: leaders are individuals, and followers are a collective being. This sharply contrasts with the Western-style where Americans view leader–follower relationships as more of a partnership with both parties seen as equally contributing individuals. It is important to note that Asian American leaders and principals, including myself, value collective and partner-like relationships. This kind of collectivism is in line with much of this dissertation to: the formation of Asian America, and the solidarity that so many of our forerunners have built the framework for.

Collectivism

Kim (1999) defined collectivism as prioritizing the needs of a group or community before oneself. Compared to Western culture, Eastern culture tends to be highly collectivistic. Kim (1999) further contended Asian parents view their children as an extension of themselves. This type of expected behavior is illustrated in *The Joy Luck Club,* where Tan portrayed a mother who lived vicariously through her daughter's talent in chess. She wrote:

> And my mother loved to show me off, like one of my many trophies she polished. She used to discuss my games as if she had devised the strategies. I hated the way she tried to take all the credit. (Tan, 1989, p. 170)

When reviewing the literature on Asian American career development, it is crucial to note that Asian American culture is a collective one—one that comes with a sense of shame or loss of face and filial piety, an obedience and devotion to elders (Yeh & Huang, 1996). Due to this fear of bringing shame to the family, Asian Americans choose their careers based on their families' desires rather than their interests (Shon & Ja, 1982). Data has suggested that Asian parents view only a handful of professional career fields as financially competitive, and teaching is not one of them, especially because teacher positions in the United States are associated with low status and income. Because Asian parents tend to equate success and prestige with higher pay, many Asian parents have dissuaded their children from joining the teaching force (Leong & Leung, 1998). These beliefs translate to an overrepresentation of Asian Americans in science and technology fields, in contrast to their vast underrepresentation in social and humanistic fields. Although Asian Americans comprised "4% of the U.S. population, 30% were medical scientists, 25% were computer engineers, 17% were physicians, 14% were dentists; and only 1% were employed as social service workers" (U.S Bureau Census, 2007). The emphasis on collectivism may affect Asian Americans' career choices and contribute to the lack of K-12 Asian American principals and assistant principals.

High Power Distance

According to Chung (2000), people from *high power distance* cultures view and accept power and authority as a way of life. Confucian principles, which are ingrained within many East Asian cultures, demand respect for those higher in the hierarchy. Furthermore, the influences of Buddhism affect the way Asian leaders lead and interact with their subordinates (Ma & Tsui, 2015). Asian cultures influenced by sects of Buddhism and Confucian teachings believe in good

virtues and deeds in hopes of being rewarded in their reincarnated life. People from a high power distance who do not necessarily believe in reincarnation still may respect authority as a fact of life. A famous Chinese saying proclaims that daughters-in-law can one day become mothers-in-law as long as they endure (Chung, 2000). This proverb implies that those who are powerless (i.e., daughters-in-law) must bear through suffering now so that one day they could gain power (i.e., mothers-in-law) and treat the powerless however they please.

Hofstede (1980) originated this power distance research and explained the power dynamics in different cultures. According to Hofstede (1980), low power distance cultures (e.g., United States, Canada, New Zealand, Austria, Israel) tend to distribute power among subordinates and superiors equally. Status is less marked, and subordinates are comfortable with challenging the inequalities in society. This is culturally accepted as subordinates consider superiors to be just like them. On the contrary, high power distance cultures (e.g., China, Malaysia, Philippines) tend to accept unequal power. Subordinates operating in high power distance cultures tend to communicate more respectfully and are less assertive toward their superiors. A participant in Chung's (2002) study, Mr. Aoi, illustrated the power distance that most East Asians could relate to, saying:

> Two years after taking my first job in the United States, I was already aware that the superiors and the subordinates see each other equally. Managers and employees joke with each other like peers. They even call each other by their first names. But, when I first heard my co-worker say "no" to the boss, I was shocked. The boss was simply asking her to give him a ride to the airport, and she declined by saying that she was tired after a two-hour meeting. Having the courage to bluntly say "no" to the boss was beyond my imagination.

In Eastern cultures, deference and respect are seen as polite behavior; however, in Western cultures, politeness may often be perceived as a lack of confidence. Furthermore, nonverbal cues,

such as avoiding eye contact, smiling too much, and nodding, can be interpreted in the West as appearing too timid and not assertive. These deeply ingrained cultural values work against Asian Americans in the workplace because Western ideals of leadership place a heavy emphasis on communication that exudes confidence, assertiveness, and charisma (Hyun, 2007).

Group-Based/Reciprocity

Mr. Aoi's remark underlines a highly overlooked cultural value by Western culture: maintaining a reciprocal relationship between superiors and subordinates (Chung, 2002). Mr. Aoi's shocked reaction to his co-worker declining to give her boss a ride shows the mutual expectation that East Asian employees and employers have to assist each other with tasks unrelated to work, in other words, personal favors. East Asian cultures believe in the importance of maintaining a reciprocal relationship—one where superiors do not take for granted the obedience from subordinates because subordinates expect superiors to support, mentor, and protect them under their care (Chung, 2002).

The collectivism value of many Asian cultures contrasts individualistic American society, which prioritizes personal agendas over group goals in employer–employee relationships (Hofstede, 1980). Asian Americans quickly learn that sacrificing their own needs to accommodate their superiors may never get reciprocated in Western society. Ms. Biq, a participant in Chung's study (2000), stated:

> My grandma and parents always taught us, children, "Taking advantage is taking advantage." They told us that fighting for trivial interests is not worthwhile because most people will remember our favor and pay back eventually, even though we should not anticipate getting paid back. Why do we have to count down to the penny in our daily relational exchange?—p. 98

Ms. Biq spoke of an exchange that happened at her workplace where she did not receive reciprocation of her sacrifice in her workplace; this taught her to become more assertive and prioritize her own needs over the needs of others. Asian American leaders tend to mirror the transformative and collaborative leadership style (Chung, 2002). Kawahara (2007) found that Asian American female leaders value relationships and guide the team toward a shared vision. This model, which emphasizes service to others, is similar to many feminist leadership styles (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). The perception that Asian Americans lack leadership qualities may be since they are viewed as not masculine enough in the United States, which may explain the underrepresentation of this group in K-12 principalship roles in public schools.

Long Term Orientation

In addition to the concept of reciprocity, the way Asian cultures develop interpersonal relationships may contribute to the perception that Asian Americans lack leadership skills (Chung, 2002). Interpersonal relationships take much longer to develop in Asian cultures; therefore, when there are conflicts, Asians rely on *noon-chi* (눈치) in the Korean language, a term used to describe the art of being in tune to someone else's feelings, thoughts and emotions to properly gauge and react to a situation. Someone with good *noon-chi* can read others' body language or tone of voice to understand their real feelings. Comparatively, someone with bad *noon-chi* is said to lack tact or observational skills. Interpersonal friction is resolved through toleration and mutual understanding, building an even stronger bond.

Another participant in Chung's study (2002), Mr. Doshi, a loyal employee, highlights the consequences of his tolerant attitude of "grinning and bearing it" (p. 98). When a new department had opened, his colleagues all thought he deserved the position of chief of the new

section. To Mr. Doshi's surprise, the department head had blocked his promotion by accusing

him of lacking leadership ability. Although he rebutted her claim, he never confronted her

directly or aggressively. He shared his reasons:

> I thought we would be colleagues for much longer and would need to get along. I lost that promotion opportunity, and she left the company for higher pay just a few months later. I never saw her again. I lost my promotion for nothing simply because I did not argue and fight. Now, I strongly believe that because of my tendency not to fight for my right, they (the superiors) must have thought that it would be easier to displease me than to displease the so-called assertive, or even aggressive, competitors for the job.

Blake and Mouton (1978), in their book *The New Managerial Grid*, highlighted the two options

people consider when dealing with conflict: cooperativeness and assertiveness. In Asian culture,

a willingness to cooperate means that a person values that relationship; in contrast, assertiveness

means advancing one's own motives and is therefore selfish. When the concern for the

relationship is great, Asians' styles of resolving conflict are generally perceived as passive. This

withdrawing style in dealing with disputes naturally makes one appear nonassertive. Such

withdrawing types of communication often contradict Western styles of problem-solving and can

be seen as a lack of initiative and assertiveness, which are highly valued qualities in Western

leadership styles.

Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling

Even when qualified Asian Americans do break through the bamboo ceiling, many must

repeatedly prove their ability to lead, which reflects the Asian American experience of repeatedly

proving their belonging and status in this country (Chin & Chan, 1972). In a Washington op-ed

addressing the recent rise in anti-Asian hate crimes, Andrew Yang (2020) wrote that Asian

Americans need to prove their worth as equals. He wrote (2020):

> We should show without a shadow of a doubt that we are Americans who will do our part for our country in this time of need. Demonstrate that we are part of the solution. We are not the virus, but we can be part of the cure (para. 2).

His remarks sparked outrage among the Asian community; many found that his approach missed the point entirely—Asian Americans should not have to prove that they belong in America because they already do. Yang approached racial equity as something Asian Americans need to earn when, in fact, they are entitled to it. Anand & Huet (2021) further highlighted that countless Asian Americans who have stepped up are still not immune to bigotry and racism; they simply cannot control the way others perceive them.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Asian Americans are exceedingly underrepresented in leadership roles in K-12 public schools, specifically in principal positions. As stated in the first two chapters, the purpose of this research is to better understand the challenges and opportunities of becoming an Asian American principal. What are the various factors that may have contributed to the presence or absence of Asian Americans in the K-12 principalship? Do generational differences impact how Asian Americans perceive the challenges and opportunities of becoming K-12 public school principals? Do gender differences affect how Asian Americans engage their environment vis-a-vis career paths? Are role distinctions (e.g., assistant principal versus principal) a contributing factor in the way Asian Americans perceive their career trajectory?

To answer these questions from a humanizing approach, this research uses a mixed methods methodology. Specifically, this research was conducted through a questionnaire, focus groups, interviews, and field notes. The questionnaire provided easily quantifiable data to broadly identify the perceptions of the challenges and opportunities ofAsian American principals throughout their careers. To engage with the richness of Asian American stories—stories that remain absent in the critical conversations about race and education—I held focus groups and interviews. This qualitative method of data collection allows Asian American voices, which have been historically silenced, to lead discussions about educational change and reform. This study aims to elevate the voices and participants' stories, using an adaptation of Delgado's (1995) five tenets in CRT. The conceptual framework employed in this study, AsianCrit focuses specifically on addressing the complex racialization of Asian Americans in the United States. This chapter

discusses the research methodology used in this study, the research design, the theoretical

framework, the details on the selection of participants, the data collection and analysis process,

questions of reliability and validity, the expected limitations, and the researcher's role.

Research Question

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this research is to better understand the perceptions

of Asian Americans on the challenges and opportunities of becoming a K-12 public school

principal. This study aims to provide current K-12 Asian American principals and assistant

principals a platform to tell their stories of success and struggle, and to channel the power of

those stories towards an educational reform rooted in equity and diversity. The global research

question that guided this study was:

- How do Asian Americans perceive the challenges and opportunities of becoming a K-12 public school principal?

The sub-questions that guided this study were:

- Are gender differences correlated with the way that principals perceived their challenges and opportunities?

- Are role distinctions (i.e., assistant principal versus principal) correlated with the way principals perceived their challenges and opportunities?

- Are generational differences correlated with the way that principals perceived their challenges and opportunities?

The research questions allow the voices and lived experiences of Asian Americans in the K-12

principalship to guide this research. They also prioritized the participants' stories to mold the

findings while grounded in the theoretical framework AsianCrit.

Research Design

This research study utilized a mixed methods methodology and employed four sources of data collection. The primary source of data was the use of a questionnaire with 100 Asian American principals and assistant principals. Out of the 100 emailed requests, 92 participants responded, constituting a response rate of 92%, which is exceptionally high for survey research. Secondly, 26 of the 92 participants were purposefully selected to participate in either a focus group or an individual, semi-structured interview. Finally, to enhance the validity of the study, focus groups, field notes, and interviews were used to triangulate the data.

Explanatory Sequential Design

For this study, a mixed methods approach, specifically an explanatory sequential design, was appropriate because the quantitative data informs the creation of the experimental intervention. This type of design begins with quantitative methods, and is followed by qualitative methods to explain former findings in-depth (Creswell, 2015). I initially sent out a questionnaire to 100 Asian Americans in the K-12 principalship pipeline in public school districts in the United States. The first part of the questionnaire focused on a series of demographic questions used to develop a profile of the participants of interest, specifically Asian American principals and assistant principals. The second part of the questionnaire included various questions related to: Career Aspirations, Cultural Influences, Experiences in the Workplace, and Support Networks.

Through purposive sampling, I then followed up with 26 specific participants in focus groups and interviews. Two focus groups, along with 15 interviews, helped explain the questionnaire data in language chosen by the participants and at a greater depth so experiences, motivations, and context were understood.

The questionnaire broadly identified that deterring and motivating factors do exist when it comes to Asian American journeys to the principalship. The focus group and interviews allowed participants to explain why these deterrents and motivators existed at all. Because of its explanatory sequential design, the questionnaire (the quantitative piece) had to be sent out first. The data from the questionnaire then informed the focus group/interview protocol questions, as well as the selection of candidates.

Figure 4

Explanatory Sequential Design Model
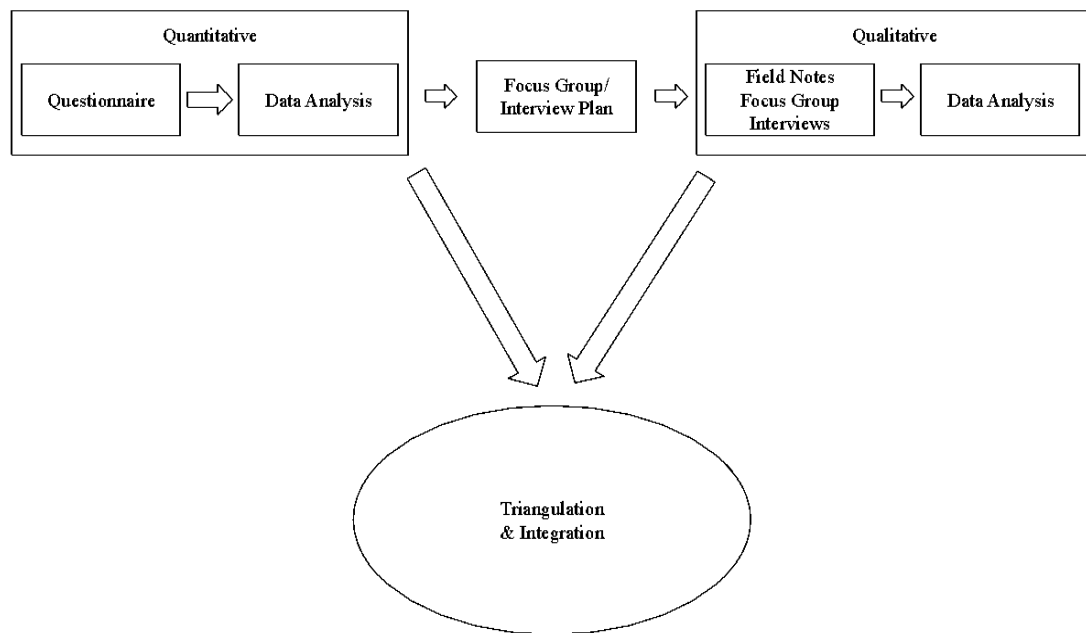
Research Setting

This study focused on Asian American principals in K-12 public schools. Except for a few participants located on the East Coast, the main pool of participants resided on the West

Coast. These research parameters were chosen with careful intention and reflect my aim to elevate Asian American voices on both educational and national fronts.

This study focused on public schools instead of private schools because public schooling will continue to educate the vast majority of the U.S. student population for the foreseeable future (Kober, 2007). While private schools serve 12% of the nation's elementary and secondary students, public schools serve 88% (Kober, 2007). The Center on Education Policy (CEP; Kober, 2007) defines *public education* as:

> education that is publicly financed, tuition-free, accountable to public authorities, and accessible to all students. It covers various types of public schools, including traditional schools, charter schools, vocational schools, and alternative schools. (p. 1).

For this study, traditional public schools included elementary and secondary schools, determined by a grade-level criterion (e.g., Grades K-6 were considered elementary, and Grades 7-12 were considered secondary). This study was conducted in several public school districts and charter school networks. These locations were selected due to the accessibility for convenient sampling and snowball technique (i.e., reaching out to colleagues and mentors).

Participants

For the quantitative portion of the study, 100 Asian American principals and assistant principals were invited to participate in a questionnaire (*N=100*). There were two selection criteria. The first was that the participant was currently in a principal or assistant principal role and worked in a K-12 public school; the second was that the participant identified as Asian American. Participants in both K-12 elementary and secondary levels answered the questionnaire consisting of basic demographic questions, which was followed by 20 closed Likert scale questions about their experiences.

The qualitative portion of the study applied a purposeful sampling criterion by selecting 26 specific participants to partake in the focus groups and interviews. Of those who took the questionnaire, six individuals were selected for focus group A and six individuals were selected for focus group B; however, one participant in focus group B did not attend, which resulted in 11 focus group participants for Group B. Additionally, 15 individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Patton (2014) asserted that the strength of purposeful sampling ensured the chosen participants and school districts could best add rich information and knowledge to an in-depth study.

Recruitment

This study received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Loyola Marymount University for a sample size of 100 participants *(N = 100)*. The questionnaire participants were identified and chosen using convenience sampling and non probability snowball technique, which is the process of initial participants recommending other potential participants (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Therefore, I was either personally acquainted with the principals and assistant principals, or more were recruited through the help of other participants. Due to the low number of participants in my personal network, I also purposefully recruited participants from professional organizations, such as Association of California School Administrators (ACSA).

Questionnaire Participants. Once I had a consolidated list of potential participants from my personal and professional network, I requested their participation via email. In the email, I informed participants of the nature of the study and how it could greatly benefit Asian American leaders in the educational realm and the greater Asian American community. I notified them that a questionnaire link would be arriving via email within two weeks, if they agreed to participate.

To encourage honest responses, I reminded the participants that the questionnaire was entirely voluntary, confidential, and anonymous. The first 100 participants that responded received the questionnaire *(N = 100)*.

Focus Groups/ Interview Participants. Of the 92 participants that responded to the questionnaire, 15 participants were purposefully selected to participate in either a focus group or individual semi-structured interview. In order to gauge a wide range of perspectives and stories, participants were intentionally recruited based on their profile of characteristics (gender, role, generation, etc.) and availability. Due to the insufficient number of Asian Americans in the principalship and various scheduling conflicts, I could only successfully conduct two focus group sessions *(n = 11)* and 15 semi-structured individual interviews *(n = 15)*. To ensure anonymity for participants, personal information was not included. For confidentiality, each participant was given a letter code instead of using their name. Chapter 4 includes a profile of participants (see Tables 2 and 3).

Data Collection

This study employed four types of mixed methods data collection, which allows for triangulation of the data. According to Flick (2014), triangulation of data refers to the "combination of different methods, study groups, local and temporal settings, and different theoretical perspectives in dealing with a phenomenon" (p. 183). The data collection techniques for the questionnaire, interviews, focus groups, and field notes are discussed in the following subsections.

Questionnaire

The primary data collection used in this study was a questionnaire. The follow-up email, which was sent approximately two weeks later, reminded participants of the nature of the study and when the survey would close. Every participant ($N = 100$) was sent a link to the questionnaire using Qualtrics. The questionnaire items (#1-20) consisted of demographic information, which was used to develop a profile of the characteristics of participants and to purposefully select focus groups and interview participants ($n=26$). The items also addressed interest in becoming a principal and factors that motivated them to pursue the principalship or deterred them from doing so. I emailed each participant a questionnaire link that directed them to a survey and consent form (Appendix E) Before they were able to start the survey, they were asked to read the subject's bill of rights (Appendix D) and to give their consent.

Focus Groups

The second method of data collection used in this study was focus groups, which consists of individuals dialoguing informally about a specific topic ($n=11$). The focus group A ($n=6$) and focus group B ($n=5$) were intentionally crafted based on participants' profile and questionnaire results. My role as the researcher was to encourage conversations between focus group members and co-construct meaning (Morgan, 1997). When researchers and participants co-construct meaning, they create knowledge together: we are all active parts of the process, as opposed to an interview where knowledge is directly coming from the single participant. For example, in the focus groups, others build off of what one person says, and each participant therefore "co-constructs meaning." Unlike interviews, the purpose of a focus group is to foster dialogue among group members through posing meaningful questions (Morgan, 1997). Through focus groups,

participants with similar experiences were given opportunities to share their insights and responses, building on one another's ideas and beliefs (Wilkinson, 2004). Consequently, this process offers a different lens from the one found in one-on-one interviews (Wilkinson, 2004). Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, both focus groups were conducted via Zoom (www.zoom.us).

Field Notes

The third method of data collection used in this study was field notes. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), field notes are "the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data of the qualitative study" (p. 119). Qualitative research is reflexive; the use of field notes serves as an opportunity to remain conscious of the need for reflexivity (Galletta, 2013). As an Asian American educator who hopes to be a K-12 public school principal one day, I am influenced by my own experiences and beliefs when it comes to the term "Asian American," especially in relation to the U.S. education system. These field notes served as an opportunity to construct knowledge with participants through shared experiences; Briggs (1986) affirmed there were no neutral truths in research. My notes allowed me to draw connections through observing participants' lived experiences and capturing my thoughts about the significance of the study. Field notes were taken during focus group A and focus group B.

Semi-structured Interviews

The fourth method of data collection used in this study was semi-structured interviews, which consisted of one-on-one conversations between the participant and me. Based on the emerging themes and responses from the questionnaire, 15 participants were purposefully

selected. Flick (2014) believed that semistructured interviews effectively lifted the voices of participants to reveal information and support the construction of knowledge by offering new meanings. For this study, semi-structured interviews supported my desire to elevate the authentic stories of Asian American principals and assistant principals and to understand the opportunities and challenges they encounter daily. I sought to empathetically listen to the participants' stories. Unlike the focus group or questionnaire, the interviews allowed me to elaborate on questionnaire findings through engaging in authentic dialogue with participants. Because the interviews were semi-structured, the topic often shifted, and follow-up questions were asked.

Using AsianCrit as a Theoretical Framework

The analysis of the questionnaire, focus groups, interviews, and field notes attempted to address why Asian American principals and assistant principals continue to be absent in K-12 public schools. The most common misconception of Asian Americans is that they are academically successful, overrepresented in higher education, and often immune to racial discrimination. The truth is that Asian Americans have dealt with discrimination for centuries. Recent anti-Asian sentiment, fueled by the Coronavirus pandemic, has revealed covert, yet insidious forms of racism. Racial microaggressions then transformed into violent attacks against the Asian American community, from shouting racial epithets to go back to our country to the 2021 Atlanta Spa shootings. Iftikar & Museus (2013) offered an AsianCrit perspective to better understand how Asian Americans are affected by racial oppression. I use this same theoretical framework of AsianCrit to help contextualize and center the racialized experiences of principals and assistant principals, who have often felt silenced and invisible. AsianCrit offers seven

interconnected tenets, four of which are utilized in this study: (a) Asianization; (b) Transnational Contexts; (c) Intersectionality; (d) Story, Theory, and Praxis.

Asianization

Although seen as highly competent and hardworking (Bhattacharyya, 2001), Asian Americans are often viewed as unfit for leadership roles. These mismatched perceptions, whether they are conscious or unconscious, shape how Asian Americans are treated. Thus, a large portion of the questionnaire attempted to measure participants' perceptions regarding K-12 public school principalship pathways, using AsianCrit's tailored tenet, Asianization. Iftikar & Museus, 2013 (2013) asserted that polar extremes are a manifestation of the tenet, either acknowledged as an honorary White or Yellow Peril, depending on the shifting political landscape of the White majority. Whereas the original tenets of CRT posit that racism is deeply embedded in the fabric of this country (Delgado, 1995). Asianization focuses on ways in which society monolithically lumps all Asians into one category, thus reinforcing stereotypes of overachieving minority and a forever foreigner. Additionally, Asianization continues to emasculate Asian American men and hypersexualize Asian American women (Iftikar & Museus, 2013, Chang, 1993), which may explain why Asian Americans are viewed as unfit to lead: apparently, they are not assertive enough.

Transnational Contexts

To better understand how race operationalizes conditions of Asian Americans in the United States, both historical and contemporary transnational contexts must be acknowledged: migration trends, imperialism, global economics, and international war (Iftikar & Museus, 2013). For this study, generational differences were used to determine whether there were any

statistically significant differences in how Asian Americans perceived their lived experiences and perceptions of the principalship based on (a) generational levels among participants, dividing participants into four independent groups (i.e., first generation, 1.5 generation, second-generation, and third-generation and beyond).

Of 92 participants, 12 (13%) identified as the first generation, or people who left their hometown and immigrated to a new country. Twenty-four participants (26%) identified as one and a half generation, or immigrants who arrived in the United States before their teens. Forty-two participants (46%) identified themselves as the second-generation, native-born, but children of immigrants. Fourteen participants (15%) identified as the third-generation and beyond, or those who have both parents born in the United States, but at least one foreign grandparent. The analysis of transnational contexts, particularly examining immigration trends of participants and its impact on the lives of Asian American principals and assistant principals, may contribute to a more holistic understanding of more extensive processes of how covert racism operates in their lives.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, one of the tenets in AsianCrit, asserts that it is important to analyze the intersections of our identity (race, gender, etc.) and how they contribute to the racial realities and conditions of Asian Americans. My subquestions (measuring gender, role, and generation) were crafted based on this tenet. Thus, conducting intersectional analyses may assist in assessing the societal structures or processes that shape the conditions and realities for Asian American principals and assistant principals in K-12 public schools. Throughout the study, the three sub-questions measured notable differences between male and female participants; principals and

assistant principals; and first, one and a half, second, and third-generation and beyond participants. The complex, multilayered identities of Asian Americans cannot be fully understood without unpacking participants' intersectionality across gender, generation, and role distinctions.

Story, Theory, Practice

Based on the tenet, Story, Theory, Practice, principals and assistant principals completed a questionnaire about their career aspirations, cultural influences, experiences in the workplace, and support networks. Through focus groups and interviews, 26 participants were asked to dialogue and share their counter-narrative stories of struggle and success. This tenet, building on the work of CRT scholars who value storytelling, recognizes the need to uplift the voices of people of color and the work of intellectuals of color and centers the stories of participants. The AsianCrit framework, grounded in a commitment and dedication to social justice, asserts that stories inform theory, which inform practice.

Measures

A mixed methods study is a problem-centered approach to research that integrates quantitative and qualitative data in a single project, resulting in a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of a particular phenomenon (Leavy, 2014). This study, used four data sources, therefore providing a thorough examination of the research topic. It offered insights that a single methods collection may overlook. The questionnaire was used as the anchor data for this study. After analyzing its results, I coded themes that emerged from the questionnaire, which I refer to as "emerging themes." Focus groups and interviews were held to validate the themes and to foster more profound discussions. Morgan (1997) asserted that the use of both methodologies,

semi-structured interviews, and focus groups, strengthens the entire study. Additionally, field notes were taken during focus group A and focus group B. The focus group, semi-structured interviews, and field notes were used as triangulation data points.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) consisted of basic demographic and background questions followed by closed-ended Likert scale questions, so data was easily quantifiable. The questionnaire included five major sections: (a) Demographic Information, (b) Career Aspirations, (c) Cultural Influences, (d) Experiences in the Workplace, and (e) Support Networks. All items were measured on a 5- point Likert scale (1- *Strongly Disagree*, 2- *Disagree*, 3- *Neither Agree or Disagree*, 4- *Agree*, and 5- *Strongly Agree*). A snapshot of the questions follows, and the findings are discussed in Chapter 4.

Demographic Information. The questions included simple demographic information, such as: (a) Asian identity, (b) role identification, (c) gender identification, (d) generation identification, (e) years of experience, (f) school information, and (g) highest degree. These questions were designed to develop a profile of characteristics of Asian American principals and assistant principals. Based on their responses, I was able to group participants in various ways and cross-analyze different factors based on the data collected. Main factors included gender, generation, job role, school setting, years of experience, and highest academic degree. I aimed to incorporate a wide range of participant experiences.

Career Aspirations. Questions 1-5 pertained to "Career Aspirations". They specifically asked if the participants had any prior interests (growing up, in education) in becoming a principal. The sources of data for this construct of AsianCrit include Intersectionality and

Asianization. To align to this framework, five items assessing cultural aspirations growing up

included:

1. Growing up, I wanted to become (or thought about becoming) a principal.
2. Growing up, I was encouraged by my parents to pursue "typical Asian careers" such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers.
3. When I entered college, I wanted to pursue a career in education.
4. My cultural values growing up influenced my decision to pursue a career as a principal.
5. My own career advancement goals influenced me in deciding to pursue a career as a principal.

Cultural Influences. Items 6-11 measured the cultural factors influencing the pursuit of

the principalship. Given the literature (Chung, 2002) on the impact of cultural values on

leadership and Asian Americans pursuing the principalship, these six items included questions

such as:

6. In my culture, the status of a teacher is viewed as an honorable position.
7. In my culture, the status of a principal is viewed as an honorable position.
8. The pay rate of teachers is decent compared to other professional jobs.
9. The pay rate of principals is decent compared to other professional jobs.
10. I grew up significantly valuing education as a vehicle for upward mobility.
11. I was taught that hard work and humility will help me in life.

Experiences in the Workplace. Items 12-16 asked participants about their experiences

in the workplace regarding discrimination. As the bamboo ceiling has continued to remain in

place (Johnson & Sy, 2016), it was necessary to unpack the nuanced stories of the participants.

Five items assessing cultural aspirations growing up included:

12. Throughout my career, there were times that I thought I would not achieve the principal position due to my culture or Asian American identity.
13. As an Asian American principal, I've experienced discrimination from my superiors.
14. As an Asian American principal, I've experienced discrimination from my colleagues.
15. As an Asian American principal, I've experienced discrimination from my community members.

16. I've found my gender to be an advantage in being chosen for the principalship.

Support Networks. Items 17-20 asked participants about their various support networks. Hyun (2007) highlighted the undeniable power of mentoring. Questions such as:

17. My friends have supported my decision to pursue a career as a principal.
18. My colleagues have supported my decision to pursue a career as a principal.
19. My family has supported my decision to pursue a career as a principal.
20. A mentor influenced me in deciding to pursue a career as a principal.

Focus Group Interview Protocol

After the analysis for the questionnaire data, interview and focus group questions (see Appendix B) were carefully crafted. Once I composed the interview questions, which were based on questionnaire responses, I selected a group of participants (*N=26*) to participate in either a focus group or a one-on-one semi-structured interview. This selection was informed by participant interest, profile, and availability. The last item on the questionnaire asked participants if they'd be interested in a follow-up interview/focus group. Out of those who responded, I attempted to best sort by their profile of characteristics (gender, role, generation, etc.) and availability. Based on their profile and availability, participants were either given a focus group or interview.

The interviews and focus groups were scheduled for one-hour blocks of time at a date and time of the participant's choice via Zoom. I requested permission to record the focus group and interviews, and I used the transcription service Otter.ai to do so. This transcription service has a data protection contract, which guarantees that all transcriptions would not be used for any other purposes. The interviews and focus group data were thoroughly reviewed and coded, and secured on a password-lock computer.

During the focus groups and interviews, participants were asked guiding questions regarding their perceptions of the challenges and opportunities that may affect Asian Americans pursuing the principalship in K-12 public schools. All questions were intentionally crafted to confirm the emerging themes found in the questionnaire results (the quantitative piece). In alignment with AsianCrit, the focus groups and interviews (the qualitative piece) allowed for deeper discussion among group members (e.g., "Describe your journey to the principalship"), followed by prompting questions (e.g., "Can you explain those feelings of hesitancy or reluctance to lead?," "Have your cultural values impacted your decision to be a principal?" and "Describe a moment either prior to you becoming a principal or during your principalship where your Asian American identity or culture hindered your advancement"). Participants were also asked specifically about the effects of gender when it came to acquiring a K-12 public school principalship. A follow-up question asked, "Did gender affect your journey to the principalship? If so, how?" Additionally, questions such as, "What was the motivating factor to transition into the role?" "What contributes most to being a successful Asian American principal?" and "When was a time you felt particularly supported while pursuing the principalship?" were asked. Because both focus groups and interviews were free-flowing and semistructured, at times, the flow of the informal discussion dictated follow-up questions.

Field Notes

Throughout focus groups, field notes were collected using a standardized template (see Appendix C). Each field note document was collected by taking electronic notes via laptop. I observed the group member's nonverbal cues, such as body language or emotion, which the audio recording could not capture. These nonverbal cues were essential to understanding the

participants' unspoken emotions and nuanced reactions, making room for the ineffable realities of racial oppression and racial solidarity. The field notes also allowed me to track my own thoughts and reactions. Since the focus group was recorded, I, as the researcher, had the ability to reflect on and re-listen to what the group members said. To ensure participant privacy, the field notes were safely secured in a file on a password-protected computer that was kept in a locked location.

Analytical Plan

This mixed methods study employed both quantitative and qualitative data methods. The quantitative data was analyzed through Qualtrics. Mean, standard deviation, and frequency responses by percent for each item were recorded on an Excel sheet and are presented in Chapter 4. The qualitative data was analyzed through Creswell's (2015) six-step framework.

Quantitative Data Analysis

To determine what factors principals contended within becoming a K-12 public school principal, basic descriptive data such as mean and standard deviations were calculated for each of the questionnaire items (1-20) in an Excel spreadsheet (Microsoft). In addition to means and standard deviations, frequency responses were examined to understand the breakdown of responses by Asian American principals. This analysis indicated through percentages how many principals agreed or disagreed with each item on the questionnaire. Frequency analyses were also utilized to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences in the way Asian Americans perceived the challenges and opportunities of becoming a principal based on (a) generational levels among participants, dividing participants into three independent groups (i.e., first generation, 1.5 generation, second-generation, and third-generation); (b) gender differences

among participants, dividing participants into two independent groups (i.e., male and female); and (c) role distinctions among participants, dividing participants into two independent groups (i.e., principal and assistant principals). Frequency analyses were conducted using Qualtrics.

Qualitative Data Analysis

To analyze the qualitative focus group and interview data, the conceptual framework adapted from Creswell's (2015) six-step data analysis provided a lens to view Asian American's perception of the challenges and opportunities of becoming a K-12 public school principal. The concepts of the framework were used to analyze the focus group and interview responses (or data sources according to Creswell's framework). Creswell (2015) highlighted six critical steps in analyzing qualitative data: (a) organizing and preparing data, (b) reading through all data, (c) coding the data, (d) generating a description or themes, (e) interrelating themes, and (f) making sense of the data.

Step 1 involved sorting and arranging data into different types depending on the source of the data. It included transcribing focus groups and interview responses. Step 2 involved obtaining a general sense of the information and reflecting on its overall meaning. I recorded thoughts about the data and jotted down my notes. Step 3 involved coding, which entails reviewing transcripts and field notes. Coding also refers to creating categories and grouping together different instances of datum under one umbrella term. Step 4 involved using the codes to generate smaller themes or categories, which was used to create headings and subheadings in the final chapter of this dissertation. Step 5 used narrative passages to interconnect themes or to convey the findings of the analysis. This was done using visuals (i.e., figures and tables) to aid discussion in the following chapter. Finally, according to Creswell (2015), data alone does not

have meaning until it is contextualized and becomes information, which leads to knowledge that would inform the decision-making process and future action. This last step of the framework captured the process of interpreting data into meaning.

Reliability and Validity

Often, validity in research emphasizes the statistical results while forgetting the importance of taking into account the individual's life experiences. However, this mixed methods study focused on both accounts using statistical analysis and incorporating the powerful stories of those marginalized, such as the Asian American principals who were participants in the study. AsianCrt prioritizes the often marginalized stories of Asian Americans; however, "Asians" constitute a wide disparity of people, and it is essential to note that there are a multiplicity of truths rather than generalizable truths (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The goal of compiling participant stories is to challenge the hegemonic view of Asian American principals. Such stories are counter-narratives: stories that are not the dominant.

As a researcher, I sought to increase the credibility of this study through triangulation of data and member checking. The credibility of the study refers to "the researcher's ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained" (Mills & Gay, 2019, p. 561). As mentioned previously in this chapter, triangulation, which involved comparing various sources or methods to cross-check data, is one method that Lincoln and Guba (1985) highly encouraged researchers to practice. They also suggested that researchers do member checks along the way. Participants of the study were given the opportunity to provide input on the analysis and findings during the focus group and

interviews. They were sent the final version of this dissertation prior to defense and publication, and they were offered an opportunity to review and respond to findings if desired.

Role of the Researcher

As an Asian American educator and the facilitator of the mixed methods study, I sought to establish credibility and trust by building rapport with my participants. My identity as an Asian American educator, advocate, and ally allowed me to express sympathy, establish a common connection, and guide the work of this mixed methods study.

Limitations

Some may argue a significant limitation of this study is its small sample size of 92 Asian American questionnaire participants, 11 Asian American focus group participants, and 15 Asian American interview participants. While the small sample size allowed me to study the phenomenon in-depth, it also meant the results might only be a snapshot rather than a national, comprehensive study of Asian American principals and their experiences. Although the criterion sample might not be generalizable to all Asian American principals, this small sample size allowed for richer interpretation and insights as the participants shared their lived experiences and empowering stories.

Another limitation of this study is its focus on the public school context. While on the one hand, it allowed for more substantial internal validity and transferability, on the other, it further decreased generalizability. According to Mills and Gay (2019), transferability refers to "the researcher's belief that everything is context-bound" (p. 560). Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that researchers collect descriptive data and develop a detailed picture of the context that would allow the reader to compare one possible context to another possible context.

The sensitive nature of analyzing qualitative data responses from the interviews and focus groups was another limitation of the study. The participants self-reported their experiences and were asked to disclose personal information such as their experiences with discrimination, self-worth, cultural impacts, etc. Despite conscious efforts to ensure confidentiality and anonymity in the research process, some participants may not have been fully transparent in their responses, which could have hindered the study's credibility.

Additionally, it was difficult to identify participants; a systematic database for all Asian American principals in K-12 public schools does not exist. Its absence justifies a purposive, convenient sampling, and the snowball technique. While the lack of a consolidated database may have led to a limited sample, I gained a deeper perspective of the rich stories and insights that emerged from engaging with a smaller number of participants in a more intimate setting.

Summary of Methods

This chapter examined the research methodology utilized to answer the global research question and sub-questions. The study used purposeful and convenience sampling to identify K-12 Asian American principals in public schools. Using a mixed methods approach, the study collected data using a questionnaire, 15 semi-structured interviews, two focus groups, and field notes. The following chapter will provide a profile of characteristics of Asian American principals. It presents both quantitative and qualitative findings associated with Asian Americans in K-12 public school principalship, as well as the challenges and opportunities that they encounter en route.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

History is not the past. It is the stories we tell about the past. How we tell these stories - triumphantly or self-critically, metaphysically or dialectically - has a lot to do with whether we cut short or advance our evolution as human beings.—Grace Lee Boggs, 1998

Study Background

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine Asian American assistant principals' and principals' perceptions of the principalship in K-12 public schools and the factors that deter and motivate them to pursue this role. This chapter presents the findings that address the research question. The global research question was: How do Asian Americans perceive the challenges and opportunities of becoming a K-12 public school principal? To address the global research question, three sub-questions were further unpacked in the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups:

- Are gender differences correlated with the way that principals perceive their challenges and opportunities?

- Are role distinctions (assistant principal vs. principal) correlated with the way principals perceive their challenges and opportunities?

- Are generational differences correlated with the way that principals perceive their challenges and opportunities?

Review of Methods

A two-phased explanatory, mixed methods design gathered quantitative data from a sample of Asian Americans in the principalship. It then further analyzed those results by

dialoguing with a subset of the participants through focus groups and interviews. The first phase used a questionnaire to develop a profile of the participants, broadly identify the emerging themes, craft the qualitative protocol for focus groups and interviews, and purposefully select participants for the second phase. Emphasis was placed on the second qualitative phase, which focused on understanding the lived experiences of Asian Americans principals and assistant principals. The conceptual framework, AsianCrit, was used to provide a platform for participants to share their authentic stories of success and struggle. Four of the seven tenets of AsianCrit are detailed in this study: (a) Asianization; (b) Transnational Contexts; (c) Intersectionality; (d) Story, Theory, and Praxis.

The study involved four methods of data collection: a 20-item Likert- scale questionnaire, two focus groups, field notes, and 15 semi-structured interviews (see Table 1). The sample population consisted of 100 Asian American participants in the K-12 principalship role. The majority of participants (92 out of 100) identified for the study completed a survey with a response rate of 92%. The first section of the questionnaire focused on gathering demographic data to create a profile of characteristics for participants in the focus groups and interviews. Additional questionnaire items measured factors that may have either deterred or motivated Asian Americans from pursuing the principalship, including broad challenges and opportunities. The means and standard deviations were calculated for each item and are presented in this chapter. The frequencies and percentages of principals and assistant principals who agreed or disagreed with certain items are also presented to provide further context.

The emerging themes in the quantitative data were confirmed via interviews and focus groups with a select group of participants, purposefully selected based on their responses to the

questionnaire. Transcripts were coded and decoded by dividing the data into categories and

subcategories consistent with the emerging themes from the questionnaire.

Profile of Participants

Participants of this study consisted of 92 principals and assistant principals who identified

as Asian Americans in K-12 public schools. A letter was assigned to each participant in place of

their name to protect their identity. The tables below present: a data collection overview (see

Table 1), questionnaire participants by ethnicity and generation (see Table 2), questionnaire

participants by gender and role (see Table 3), focus group A participants (see Table 4), focus

group B participants (see Table 5), and individual interview participants (see Table 6).

Table 1

Data Collection Overview

Quantitative N		Qualitative N	
Questionnaire	92	Focus Group 1	6
		Focus Group 2	5
		Semistructured interviews	15
		Field notes for focus groups	

Table 2

Questionnaire Participants by Ethnicity and Generation

Identity	First generation	One/half generation	Second-generation	Third-generation and beyond	Count	Percentage
Asian Indian	3	1	2	0	6	7%
Burmese	0	0	1	0	1	1%
Cham	0	0	1	0	1	1%
Chinese	2	2	7	2	13	14%
Filipino	2	6	16	1	25	27%
Indonesian	0	1	0	0	1	1%
Japanese	0	0	0	10	10	11%
Korean	1	6	9	0	16	17%
Okinawan	0	0	0	1	1	1%
Taiwanese	0	0	1	0	1	1%
Vietnamese	4	8	5	0	17	19%
Count	12	24	42	14	92	—
Percentage	13%	26%	46%	10%	—	100%

Note. n = 92

Table 3

Questionnaire Participants by Gender and Role

Participants	Male	Female	Total
All	25	67	92
Principal	13	41	59%
Assistant Principal	12	26	41%

Note. n = 92

Table 4

Focus Group A Participants

Participant	Identity	Gender	Generation	Highest degree	Current setting	Number of years in current role
Principal A	Vietnamese	Female	2	Doctorate	Elementary	6–10
Principal B	Burmese	Female	2	Doctorate	High school	6–10
Assistant Principal C	Korean	Female	1.5	Masters	Middle/high	6–10
Assistant Principal D	Japanese	Male	3	Masters	Middle	1–2
Principal E	Filipino	Male	2	Masters	Middle	10+
Assistant Principal F	Vietnamese	Male	3	Masters	Middle	3–5

Note. n = 6

Table 5

Focus Group B Participants

Participants	Identity	Gender	Generation	Highest degree	Current setting	Number of years in current role
Principal H	Chinese	Male	1.5	Doctorate	Middle/high	6–10
Principal I	Korean	Female	2	Masters	Elementary	10+
Principal K	Korean	Male	2	Masters	Elementary/ middle	3–5
Assistant Principal J	Japanese	Male	4	Masters	Elementary	3–5
Assistant Principal G	Taiwanese	Female	2	Masters	High school	6–10

Note. n = 5

Table 6

Individual Interviews Participants

Participants	Ethnicity	Gender	Generation	Highest degree	Current setting	Number of years in current role
Principal L	Korean	Female	1.5	Doctorate	Middle	10+
Principal M	Chinese	Male	2	Doctorate	Elementary	1–2
Principal N	Japanese	Female	3	Masters	High school	10+
Assistant Principal O	Filipino	Male	2	Doctorate	High school	10+
Principal P	Korean	Female	1.5	Doctorate	Elementary	1-2
Principal Q	Chinese	Female	3	Masters	High school	6–10
Principal R	Filipino	Female	1.5	Masters	Elementary	6–10
Principal S	Asian Indian	Male	2	Doctorate	Elementary	3–5
Assistant Principal T	Chinese	Female	2	Doctorate	High school	1–2
Assistant Principal U	Vietnamese	Female	2	Doctorate	High school	3–5
Principal V	Korean	Female	1.5	Doctorate	Elementary	3–5
Principal W	Asian Indian	Female	1	Masters	Elementary	1–2
Assistant Principal X	Japanese	Female	4	Masters	High School	1-2
Principal Y	Vietnamese	Male	1.5	Masters	Middle	3-5
Assistant Principal Z	Korean	Female	1	Masters	Middle	3-5

Note. n = 15

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Quantitative Data Results

To broadly determine the participants' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities of becoming an Asian American principal, the questionnaire asked K-12 assistant principals and principals questions regarding their Career Aspirations, Cultural Influences, Experiences in the Workplace, and Support Networks. As reflected in Tables 7-10, the questionnaire was divided into four sections to help determine why there has continued to be an underrepresentation of Asian American principals, despite our growing Asian American student population. All of these items assessed how participants perceived becoming a K-12 public school principal; and yielded mean scores on a 5-point scale (1- *Strongly Disagree*, 2- *Disagree*, 3- *Neither Agree or Disagree*, 4- *Agree*, and 5- *Strongly Agree*). The numbers in Table 7-10 indicate the mean, standard deviations, and frequency of responses by total count (how often participants selected each response option for items assessing how they perceived the challenges and opportunities of becoming a principal). These items broadly assessed how principals perceived the different factors that influenced their journey towards the principalship.

When asked about Career Aspirations (Table 7), all of the means were lower than a 3.0 (i.e., *neither disagree nor agree*), with the exception of Item 2 ($M = 3.54$; $SD = 1.39$) and Item 5 ($M = 4.19$; $SD = 0.90$). The results of this section broadly indicated that principals did not initially consider pursuing the field of education nor the principalship. In fact, 53% of the participants *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they were encouraged to pursue stereotypically traditional Asian careers growing up. However, when deciding to pursue a career as a principal, 77% of participants indicated their own career advancement goals ultimately influenced their decision.

Table 7

Questionnaire Items for Career Aspirations by n, Mean, and SD

Items	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Strongly Agree or Agree	Count	Mean	SD
		Likert Scale				
	(Percentage of Respondents)					
Career Aspirations						
1. Growing up, I wanted to become (or thought about becoming) a principal.	80	10	10	92	1.85	1.06
2. Growing up, I was encouraged by my parents to pursue typical Asian careers such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers.	27	15	58	92	3.54	1.39
3. When I entered college, I wanted to pursue a career in education.	52	14	33	92	2.76	1.39
4. My cultural values growing up influenced my decision to pursue a career as a principal.	35	32	34	92	2.97	1.16
5. My own career advancement goals influenced me in deciding to pursue a career as a principal.	5	10	85	91	4.19	0.90

Note. n = 92

The next section of the questionnaire was a list of statements that indicated whether

Cultural Influences (Table 8) impacted participants' decision to step into the principalship.

Results suggested that teachers or principals were culturally viewed as honorable jobs, yielding a

mean score of 3.78 (*SD* = 0.88) and 4.48 (*SD* = 0.60), respectively. When asked to indicate

whether the pay rate of teachers was decent compared to other professional jobs, 53% of

participants *strongly disagreed* or *disagreed,* yielding a mean score of 2.55 (*SD* = 1.11).

Conversely, when asked about the pay rate of principals being "decent compared to other

professional jobs," only 34% of participants *strongly disagreed* or *disagreed,* yielding a mean

score of 3.11 (*SD* = 1.12). Participants also agreed that they were raised with values such as

higher education, hard work, and humility; both Items 10 and 11 yielded a mean score above 4.0.

The results of this section broadly revealed that the principal role was viewed as more honorable

and sustainable in pay than the teacher role.

Table 8

Questionnaire Items for Cultural Influences by n, Mean, and SD

Items	Likert Scale					
	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Strongly Agree or Agree	Count	Mean	SD
	(Percentage of Respondents)					
Cultural Influences						
6. In my culture, the status of a teacher is viewed as an honorable position.	11	16	72	92	3.78	0.88
7. In my culture, the status of a principal is viewed as an honorable position.	0	5	94	92	4.48	0.60
8. I believe the pay rate of teachers is decent compared to other professional jobs.	57	13	29	92	2.55	1.11
9. I believe the pay rate of principals is decent compared to other professional jobs.	37	16	47	92	3.11	1.12
10. I grew up significantly valuing education as a vehicle for upward mobility.	2	7	91	92	4.54	0.76
11. I was taught that hard work and humility would help me in life.	4	4	92	92	4.43	0.85

Note. n = 92

The third section of the questionnaire, Experiences in the Workplace (Table 9), listed statements about whether or not participants faced discrimination in their roles. Participants were asked to indicate the times they thought they would not achieve the principal position due to their culture or Asian American identity, yielding a mean score of 3.11 (i.e., *neither disagree nor agree*). When asked about experiences with discrimination by superiors, colleagues, or community members, all means were either 3.0 or lower (i.e., *neither disagree nor agree*). These answers directly contrasted with focus group and interview discussions, which affirmed that participants did face discrimination, even if it manifested in covert, subtle microaggressions. Although these microaggressions were implicit biases the participants could not strictly prove, they nevertheless strongly believed they were racially motivated and highly discriminatory.

Table 9

Questionnaire Items for Experiences in the Workplace by n, Mean, and SD

Items	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Strongly Agree or Agree	Count	Mean	SD
		Likert Scale				
	(Percentage of Respondents)					
Experiences in the Workplace						
12. Throughout my career, there were times that I thought I would not achieve the principal position due to my culture or Asian American identity.	35	22	43	91	3.11	1.24
13. As an Asian American principal, I've experienced discrimination from my superiors.	44	29	28	91	2.80	1.11
14. As an Asian American principal, I've experienced discrimination from my colleagues.	48	16	26	91	2.81	1.17
15. As an Asian American principal, I've experienced discrimination from my community members.	35	26	38	91	3.00	1.08
16. I've found my gender to be an advantage in being chosen for the principalship.	50	36	14	91	2.60	0.86

Note. n = 92

The last section of the questionnaire asked participants to identify Support Networks (Table 10). Because all the means were higher than a 4.0, the results of this section strongly suggested that participants either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they were fortunate to have a support system in place, whether family, friends, colleagues or a mentor.

Table 10

Questionnaire Items for Support Networks by n, Mean, and SD

Items	Likert Scale			Count	Mean	SD
	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Strongly Agree or Agree			
	(Percentage of Respondents)					
Support Networks						
17. My friends have supported my decision to pursue a career as a principal.	1	13	85	91	4.21	0.75
18. My colleagues have supported my decision to pursue a career as a principal.	2	5	92	91	4.38	0.74
19. My family has supported my decision to pursue a career as a principal.	3	8	89	91	4.25	0.78
20. A mentor influenced me in deciding to pursue a career as a principal.	8	16	75	91	4.16	1.00

Note. n = 92

As shown in Tables 7-10, the 20 questionnaire items listed statements that broadly identified the different factors that may have motivated or deterred Asian Americans from pursuing the principalship. The following section presents the questionnaire findings by sub-research questions (i.e., gender, role, generation).

Questionnaire Results by Sub-Questions

To determine if participants' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities of becoming an Asian American principal varied, the questionnaire responses were analyzed by gender, role,

and generation. The numbers in Table 8 provide the mean, standard deviations, and percentages of participant responses for 20 questionnaire items by the three sub-questions: (a) gender differences (i.e., male or female); (b) role differences (i.e., assistant principal versus principal); and (c) generational differences (i.e., first, one and a half, second, third-generation and beyond).

The first section, Career Aspirations, consisted of five questionnaire items (1–5) (Table 11). When analyzing Items 1, there were no differences in the way participants responded based on their gender or role. However, it is essential to note that one and a half generation participants yielded the lowest mean score of 1.83 ($SD = 0.90$), while third-generation participants yielded the highest mean score of 2.14 ($SD = 1.41$). These differences suggest that third-generation participants enjoyed more autonomy when it came to their career choices. Item 2 asked participants to indicate if they wanted to pursue a career in education when entering college, yielding a mean score of 2.40 ($SD = 1.36$) by third (and beyond) generation participants compared to the average mean score of 3.50 (*relative agreement)* reported by first, one and a half, and second-generation participants. These results broadly indicated that although most participants were somewhat interested in exploring the field of education during undergraduate years, third-generation participants did not want to pursue teaching when entering college. There were no notable differences in participant responses regarding gender and role. There were no differences to note for Item 3.

Table 11

Questionnaire Items for Career Aspirations by Gender, Role, Generation

Career Aspirations	Subquestion	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Strongly Agree or Agree	Mean	SD
			Likert Scale			
		(Percentage of Respondents)				
1. Growing up, I wanted to become (or thought about becoming) a principal.	Male	88	4	8	1.60	1.02
	Female	77	12	11	1.94	1.06
	Principal	79	15	6	1.85	1.01
	AP	85	0	14	1.80	1.09
	1st	73	9	18	2.09	1.31
	1.5	84	8	8	1.83	0.90
	2nd	78	14	7	1.86	0.99
	3rd +	85	0	18	2.14	1.41
2. Growing up, I was encouraged by my parents to pursue typical Asian careers such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers.	Male	32	8	60	3.44	1.30
	Female	25	18	57	3.58	1.42
	Principal	26	25	49	3.42	1.39
	AP	29	3	68	3.69	1.37
	1st	25	8	67	3.75	1.36
	1.5	21	21	58	3.58	1.26
	2nd	21	14	64	3.79	1.32
	3rd +	58	14	28	2.40	1.36

Table 11(continued)

Questionnaire Items for Career Aspirations by Gender, Role, Generation

Career Aspirations	Subquestion	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Strongly Agree or Agree	Mean	SD
			Likert Scale			
		(Percentage of Respondents)				
3. When I entered college, I wanted to pursue a career in education.	Male	64	20	16	2.16	1.19
	Female	48	12	40	2.99	1.40
	Principal	53	19	28	2.66	1.29
	AP	49	9	43	2.97	1.48
	1st	66	8	25	2.42	1.44
	1.5	60	17	34	2.75	1.33
	2nd	52	10	38	2.83	1.40
	3rd +	42	29	29	2.60	1.36
4. My cultural values growing up influenced my decision to pursue a career as a principal.	Male	44	28	28	2.68	1.26
	Female	32	33	35	3.07	1.10
	Principal	51	25	24	2.83	1.18
	AP	60	23	17	3.20	1.09
	1st	42	8	50	3.17	1.46
	1.5	34	37	29	2.83	1.11
	2nd	26	38	36	3.10	1.15
	3rd +	58	21	21	2.40	0.49
5. My own career advancement goals influenced me in deciding to pursue a career as a principal.	Male	8	17	75	4.08	0.95
	Female	5	7	88	4.22	0.88
	Principal	8	9	83	4.17	0.95
	AP	3	12	85	4.21	0.87
	1st	0	0	90	4.67	0.47
	1.5	4	13	83	4.08	0.91
	2nd	10	12	78	4.10	1.03
	3rd +	0	7	93	4.33	0.48

Note. n = 92

Item 4 asked participants to indicate if cultural values influenced their decision to pursue a career as a principal, yielding a mean score of 2.68 (*SD* = 1.26) for men and 3.07 (*SD* =1.10) for women. These mean scores suggest that female participants, compared to their male counterparts, consider their cultural values to be influential in their decision to pursue the principalship. When examining Item 4 by generation, 43% of first- and second-generation participants *agree* or *strongly agree*, yielding a mean score of 3.17 (*SD* = 1.46) and 3.10 (*SD* = 1.15), respectively. However, only 23% of one and a half and third- generation participants indicated that they *agreed* or *strongly agreed*, yielding a mean score of 2.83 (*SD* = 1.11) and 2.40 (*SD* = 0.49), respectively. These results indicate that first- and second-generation participants were more influenced by their cultural values than one and a half-or third-generation participants. There were no notable differences in role, as both principals and assistant principals responded similarly. Item 5 asked participants to reflect upon their own career advancement goals, yielding the highest mean score of 4.67 (*SD* = 0.47) for first generation participants. This suggests that immigrants, who left their home country, may have a stronger drive to achieve the American Dream of self-made success. There were no notable differences in gender or role.

The next section of the questionnaire, Cultural Influences, consisted of six items (6–11) (Table 12). Item 6 asked participants to indicate if they believed the status of a teacher was an honorable one, yielding a mean score of 4.08 (*SD* = 0.63) for men and 3.67 (*SD* = 0.94) for women. Item 7 asked participants to indicate if the status of the principal was an honorable one, 100% of male participants either *strongly agreed* or *agreed* to the statement, compared to 92% of female participants. The results in Items 6 and 7 suggest that female participants may experience

slightly more significant cultural pressures or expectations than male participants. These pressures in turn, may impact their decision to pursue the principalship. Although there are only minor differences between generations, it is essential to note that second-generation participants' responses yielded the lowest mean across both items; 3.67 ($SD = 0.86$) and 4.40 ($SD = 0.66$). There were no noticeable differences between the way principals and assistant principals responded to Items 6 and 7.

Item 8 asked participants about the pay rate of teachers; yielding a mean score of 3.00 ($SD = 1.29$) for first generation participants, 2.58 ($SD = 0.95$) for one and a half generation participants, 2.48 ($SD = 1.07$) for second-generation participants, and 2.22 ($SD = 0.95$) for third+ generation. Although not large, there was a steady decline in the mean score, which indicated those who were immigrants (i.e., first- and one and a half generation) or child of immigrants (i.e., second-generation) viewed the teacher salary more favorably than those participants whose parents were U.S. citizens (i.e., third-generation). There were no differences for gender and role for Item 8. Similarly, when analyzing participants' responses regarding the pay rate of principals (Item 9), third-generation participants yielded the lowest mean score of 2.40 ($SD = 0.80$). Although there were no notable differences between the genders, assistant principals viewed the principal salary more favorably than principals, yielding a mean score of 3.34 ($SD = 1.01$) and 2.98 (1.17), respectively.

Table 12

Questionnaire Items for Cultural Influences by Gender, Role, Generation

Cultural Influences	Subquestion	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Strongly Agree or Agree	Mean	SD
			Likert Scale			
		(Percentage of Respondents)				
6. In my culture, the status of a teacher is viewed as an honorable position.	Male	0	16	84	4.08	0.63
	Female	15	16	69	3.67	0.94
	Principal	11	21	68	3.74	0.87
	AP	12	8	80	3.86	0.93
	1st	16	17	67	3.75	1.23
	1.5	4	12	84	3.96	0.68
	2nd	14	17	69	3.67	0.86
	3rd +	0	22	78	3.89	0.57
7. In my culture, the status of a principal is viewed as an honorable position.	Male	0	0	100	4.60	0.49
	Female	0	8	92	4.43	0.63
	Principal	0	6	95	4.47	0.60
	AP	0	6	95	4.46	0.60
	1st	0	9	91	4.50	0.65
	1.5	0	0	98	4.58	0.49
	2nd	0	10	90	4.40	0.66
	3rd +	0	0	100	4.56	0.50
8. I believe the pay rate of teachers is decent compared to other professional jobs.	Male	60	20	20	2.48	0.94
	Female	56	11	33	2.58	1.16
	Principal	62	13	25	2.45	1.09
	AP	48	12	40	2.77	1.12
	1st	42	8	50	3.0	1.29
	1.5	58	17	25	2.58	0.95
	2nd	59	14	26	2.48	1.07
	3rd +	66	11	23	2.22	1.13

Table 12 (continued)

Questionnaire Items for Cultural Influences by Gender, Role, Generation

Cultural Influences	Subquestion	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Strongly Agree or Agree	Mean	SD
		(Percentage of Respondents)				
9. I believe the pay rate of principals is decent compared to other professional jobs.	Male	40	16	44	3.00	1.20
	Female	36	16	48	3.15	1.08
	Principal	41	13	46	2.98	1.17
	AP	29	20	51	3.34	1.01
	1st	34	8	58	3.17	1.28
	1.5	33	25	42	3.04	0.93
	2nd	36	17	48	3.17	1.17
	3rd +	33	11	55	2.40	0.80
10. I grew up significantly valuing education as a vehicle for upward mobility.	Male	4	12	84	4.20	0.80
	Female	2	4	94	4.67	0.70
	Principal	2	8	90	4.53	0.79
	AP	3	3	94	4.60	0.68
	1st	0	0	100	4.92	0.28
	1.5	8	8	84	4.17	1.03
	2nd	0	7	93	4.62	0.62
	3rd +	0	20	80	4.78	0.42
11. I was taught that hard work and humility would help me in life.	Male	4	8	88	4.20	0.89
	Female	5	3	92	4.52	0.82
	Principal	6	5	89	4.36	0.89
	AP	0	3	97	4.66	0.53
	1st	0	0	100	4.92	0.28
	1.5	8	0	92	4.21	1.08
	2nd	2	7	91	4.55	0.73
	3rd +	11	11	78	3.89	0.87

Note. n = 92

Item 10 asked participants to identify if they valued education as a vehicle for upward mobility, yielding a strong mean score of above 4.0 across all sub-questions. First generation participants yielded the highest mean score of 4.92 (*SD* = 0.28), which may suggest that those who left their home country may have a stronger belief in the value of education. There were no notable differences for gender or role categories. The final question (Item 11) in this section asked participants to indicate whether they were taught Asian values such as hard work and humility. Although there were no discrepancies in participant responses regarding gender or role, third-generation participants' responses, once again, yielded the lowest mean score of 3.89 (*SD* = 0.87), which affirmed the more established roots one has in the United States, the less cultural values seem to have an impact.

The third section of the questionnaire, Experiences in the Workplace, consisted of five questions (12–16) (Table 13). Item 12 asked participants to indicate the times they thought they would not achieve the principal position due to their identity, yielding a mean score of 3.00 (*SD* = 1.22) for men and 3.15 (*SD* = 1.24) for women. This may have suggested that female participants may face more perceived barriers than their male counterparts. Although no discrepancy in participant responses was noted when examining role distinction, there did exist a declining mean score for the generation category. Item 12 yielded a mean score of 3.92 (*SD* = 0.95) for first generation participants, 3.13 (*SD* = 0.97) for one and a half generation participants, 3.00 (*SD* = 1.33) for second-generation participants, and 2.67 (*SD* = 1.33) for third+ generation participants. This data largely suggested that later generations (i.e., second and third) may view their Asian American identity as less of a barrier or limitation than earlier generations (first and one and a half).

Items 13, 14, and 15 asked participants to indicate moments of discrimination by superiors, colleagues, or community members. There was no discrepancy in participant responses regarding gender or role; however, a similar trend appeared for third-generation participants, who yielded the lowest mean score for all three items. This may suggest that those in later generations may be able to assimilate and navigate the system better than those who may be immigrants or children of immigrants, thus avoiding discrimination. The last question in this section, Item 16, was crafted in response to the literature (Johnson & Sy, 2014), highlighting the added layer of challenges women must overcome in leadership roles. When asked if gender was advantageous in being chosen for the principalship, 60% of female participants indicated either *strongly disagreed* or *disagreed,* yielding a mean score of 2.37 (*SD* = 0.75). Conversely, only 21% of male participants indicated either *strongly disagreed* or *disagreed*, yielding a mean score of 3.25 (*SD* = 0.83). Interview and focus group participants expanded upon these qualitative gender differences. Their responses will be further discussed in the qualitative data analysis.

Table 13

Questionnaire Items for Experiences in the Workplace by Gender, Role, Generation

Experiences in the Workplace	Subquestion	Likert Scale			Mean	SD
		Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Strongly Agree or Agree		
		(Percentage of Respondents)				
12. Throughout my career, there were times that I thought I would not achieve the principal position due to my culture or Asian American identity.	Male	30	38	34	3.00	1.22
	Female	37	16	46	3.15	1.24
	Principal	36	25	39	3.09	1.17
	AP	36	18	47	3.09	1.34
	1st	8	25	66	3.92	0.95
	1.5	25	42	33	3.13	0.97
	2nd	46	12	41	3.00	1.33
	3rd +	44	11	44	2.67	1.33
13. As an Asian American principal, I've experienced discrimination from my superiors.	Male	38	38	26	2.83	1.21
	Female	46	25	28	2.79	1.07
	Principal	49	23	29	2.72	1.12
	AP	38	35	37	2.88	1.08
	1st	16	17	67	3.67	0.94
	1.5	50	33	17	2.63	0.95
	2nd	44	29	27	2.80	1.09
	3rd +	44	45	11	2.56	1.17

Table 13 (continued)

Questionnaire Items for Experiences in the Workplace by Gender, Role, Generation

		Likert Scale				
	Subquestion	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Strongly Agree or Agree	Mean	SD
Experiences in the Workplace		(Percentage of Respondents)				
14. As an Asian American principal, I've experienced discrimination from my colleagues.	Male	42	17	42	2.96	1.31
	Female	50	16	32	2.76	1.11
	Principal	56	11	32	2.68	1.16
	AP	35	24	41	3.03	1.10
	1st	17	8	75	3.67	0.85
	1.5	50	25	25	2.71	1.02
	2nd	51	15	34	2.78	1.18
	3rd +	55	22	22	2.56	1.26
15. As an Asian American principal, I've experienced discrimination from my community members.	Male	35	21	55	3.33	1.14
	Female	39	28	33	2.88	1.03
	Principal	34	26	40	3.02	1.09
	AP	38	26	35	2.91	1.04
	1st	25	33	42	3.17	0.80
	1.5	32	25	42	3.04	0.93
	2nd	36	27	36	3.05	1.15
	3rd +	33	33	33	2.78	1.13
16. I've found my gender to be an advantage in being chosen for the principalship.	Male	21	38	42	3.25	0.83
	Female	60	36	4	2.37	0.75
	Principal	48	36	17	2.66	0.87
	AP	53	35	12	2.56	0.85
	1st	50	42	8	2.58	0.95
	1.5	37	50	13	2.71	0.73
	2nd	52	32	14	2.56	0.88
	3rd +	44	22	33	2.78	1.03

Note. n = 92

The fourth section of the questionnaire, Support Networks, consisted of four questions (17-20) (Table 14). Item 17 asked participants to indicate if their friends have supported their decision to pursue the principalship, yielding a mean score of 4.21 (*SD* = 0.75). Item 18 asked participants to indicate if their colleagues have supported their decision to pursue the principalship, yielding a mean score of 4.38 (*SD* = 0.74). Item 19 asked participants to indicate if their family has supported their decision to pursue the principalship, yielding a mean score of 4.25 (*SD* = 0.78). Finally, Item 20 asked participants to indicate if a mentor has supported their decision to pursue the principalship, yielding a mean score of 4.16 (*SD* = 1.00). This strongly suggested that most participants had a strong support network in place during their pursuit of the role. There was no discrepancy in participant responses when examining gender, role, or generation distinctions; however, third+ generation participants yielded a mean score of 3.44 (*SD* = 1.07) for Item 20. This data may suggest that third+generation Asian Americans may not have enjoyed the same level of family and institutional support compared to those who identified as first, one and a half, or second-generation Asian Americans. This may further suggest that third+ generation Asian Americans may better navigate the system; therefore, not intentionally seeking out a mentor.

Table 14

Questionnaire Items for Support Networks by Gender, Role, Generation

Item Support Networks	Subquestion	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Strongly Agree or Agree	Mean	SD
		(Percentage of Respondents)				
17. My friends have supported my decision to pursue a career as a principal.	Male	0	21	79	4.13	0.73
	Female	1	19	88	4.24	0.75
	Principal	2	19	79	4.04	0.80
	AP	0	3	97	4.47	0.55
	1st	0	25	75	4.17	0.80
	1.5	4	0	96	4.25	0.83
	2nd	0	15	86	4.22	0.68
	3rd +	0	33	66	4.00	0.82
18. My family has supported my decision to pursue a career as a principal.	Male	0	17	84	4.42	0.74
	Female	2	1	96	4.29	0.73
	Principal	4	6	90	4.30	0.81
	AP	0	3	97	4.53	0.55
	1st	8	8	83	4.25	0.92
	1.5	4	4	92	4.33	0.90
	2nd	0	2	97	4.54	0.55
	3rd +	0	22	78	4.00	0.67
19. A mentor influenced me in deciding to pursue a career as a principal.	Male	4	13	84	4.21	0.82
	Female	2	6	91	4.27	0.76
	Principal	6	9	85	4.09	0.85
	AP	0	6	94	4.47	0.61
	1st	8	8	84	4.17	0.90
	1.5	4	8	88	4.17	0.90
	2nd	0	10	90	4.32	0.64
	3rd +	11	0	89	4.33	0.94

Table 14 (continued)

Questionnaire Items for Support Networks by Gender, Role, Generation

Item		Likert Scale				
		Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Strongly Agree or Agree	Mean	SD
	Subquestion					
Support Networks		(Percentage of Respondents)				
20. My own career advancement goals influenced me in deciding to pursue a career as a principal.	Male	8	13	79	4.29	0.98
	Female	7	18	74	4.12	1.00
	Principal	11	19	70	4.00	0.71
	AP	3	12	86	4.47	0.81
	1st	0	8	92	4.58	0.64
	1.5	4	8	88	4.25	0.92
	2nd	7	22	71	4.17	1.01
	3rd +	22	33	44	3.44	1.07

Note. n = 92

Emerging Themes From Quantitative Data

During the process of analyzing the 20-item questionnaire results, I grouped similar responses to make overarching themes. The six themes organize the quantitative findings for this research study. Each coded theme has several items, presented in Tables 15 and 16. Items 1, 2, and 3 provided the first coded theme: Reluctance to Lead. Reluctance to Lead was the coded theme for responses categorized by participants who indicated that growing up, they had no intention of exploring the field of education. Items 4, 6, and 7 provided the second coded theme: Immigrant Guilt. Immigrant Guilt was coded for participants who indicated that the status of a teacher was not viewed as honorable or prestigious as the principal. Items 11–16 provided the third coded theme: Bamboo Ceiling, coded for those who indicated experiencing discrimination and valuing traditional Asian values. Items 8–10 provided the fourth coded theme: Leadership That Is Impactful and Sustainable, which was coded for participants who believed the pay rate

for principals was somewhat decent compared to other professions and for those who also indicated the importance of valuing education. Items 5 and 12 provided the fifth coded theme: Leadership That Embraces the Balance of Our Nuanced Identities, which was coded for participants who indicated that their Asian American identity was not a barrier to the principalship along with those who also showed that their own career advancement goals ` were the influential factor in deciding to pursue the role. The last theme, Leadership That Uplifts Our Asian American Educators, was coded for participants who indicated that they had a support network. The emerging themes from the questionnaire are confirmed by the qualitative data in the following section.

Table 15

Emerging Themes for Perceived Challenges by Questionnaire Item

Theme	Item	Question
Reluctance to Lead	1	Growing up, I wanted to become (or thought about becoming) a principal.
	2	Growing up, I was encouraged by my parents to pursue typical Asian careers such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers.
	3	When I entered college, I wanted to pursue a career in education.
Immigrant Guilt	4	My cultural values influenced my decision to pursue a career as a principal.
	6	In my culture, the status of a teacher is viewed as an honorable position.
	7	In my culture, the status of a principal is viewed as an honorable position
Bamboo Ceiling	11	I was taught that hard work and humility would help me in life.
	13	As an Asian American principal, I've experienced discrimination from my superiors.
	14	As an Asian American principal, I've experienced discrimination from my colleagues.
	15	As an Asian American principal, I've experienced discrimination from my community members.
	16	I've found my gender to be an advantage in being chosen for the principalship.

Table 16

Emerging Themes for Perceived Opportunities by Questionnaire Item

Theme	Item	Question
Leadership That Is Impactful and Sustainable	8	I believe the pay rate of teachers is decent compared to other professional jobs.
	9	I believe the pay rate of principals is decent compared to other professional jobs.
	10	I grew up significantly valuing education as a vehicle for upward mobility.
Leadership That Embraces the Balance of Our Nuanced Identities	5	My own career advancement goals influenced me in deciding to pursue a career as a principal.
	12	Throughout my career, there were times that I thought I would not achieve the principal position due to my culture or Asian American identity.
	17	My friends have supported my decision to pursue a career as a principal.
Leadership That Uplifts Our Asian American Educators	18	My colleagues have supported my decision to pursue a career as a principal.
	19	My family has supported my decision to pursue a career as a principal.
	20	A mentor influenced me in deciding to pursue a career as a principal.

Themes Confirmed by Qualitative Data

While the quantitative data provides a broad understanding of participants' perceptions, it does not provide in-depth analysis to understand why these perceptions exist. Therefore, utilizing a qualitative approach, conducting focus groups and interviews, was necessary to fully unpack the perceptions of Asian American principals and assistant principals. The six main interview questions organize the qualitative findings for this research study. Table 17 provides the protocol used during the focus group and individual interviews, which simultaneously took place. These questions were intentionally crafted based on the emerging themes from the questionnaire data.

Because the interviews were semi-structured, open-ended questions were asked, allowing robust discussions with the interviewees. The same six-question protocol was used for focus groups; however, instead of engaging mainly with the researcher, the participants co-constructed knowledge. Based on the flow of conversation, or how participants responded to one another, follow-up questions were asked and are also presented in Table 17.

During coding the participants' focus group and interview transcripts, I confirmed the themes from the questionnaire data and grouped similar responses to make subthemes. Each overarching theme was confirmed by the focus group and interview participants (see Tables 18 and 19). Items 1, 2, and 3 were categorized as Perceived Challenges, and items 4, 5, and 6 were classified as Perceived Opportunities (see Table 17). As previously discussed, the themes that emerged from the questionnaire data were the primary guide to developing the focus group interview protocol. Additionally, the questionnaire data analysis created the profile of characteristics, which allowed for a deeper analysis of the responses by the breakdown in gender, role, and generation differences. Any discrepancies within focus groups and interview participant responses pertaining to the sub-questions will be addressed in the following section.

Table 17

Focus Group and Interview Protocol

Items

Perceived Challenges

1. Describe your journey to the principalship

   Follow-up Question: Why were there initial feelings of hesitancy when asked to step into the principal role?

2. Have your cultural values impacted your decision to be a principal? If so, how?

3. Describe a moment either before becoming a principal or during your principalship where your Asian American identity or culture hindered your advancement.

   Follow-up Question: Did gender affect your advancement to the principalship? If so, how?

Perceived Opportunities

4. What was the motivating factor to transition into the principal role?

   Follow-up Question: What are the best parts of your job? What are the worst parts of your job?

5. What contributes most to being a successful Asian American principal?

   Follow-up Question: What is one piece of advice you would give to aspiring Asian American principals?

6. When was a time you felt particularly supported while pursuing the principalship?

   Follow-up Question: When was a time you did not feel supported while pursuing the principalship?

Focus Group and Interview Results by Sub-Questions

Table 18 reflects the perceived challenges that Asian American principals and assistant principals have confirmed through focus groups and interviews; Table 19 reflects the perceived opportunities that were identified. All of these items aimed to holistically understand the unique experiences of participants in the study, assessing if participants perceived factors differently

based on their gender (e.g., male or female), their role (i.e., principal or assistant principal), and their generation (i.e., first, one and a half, second, third-generation and beyond). The notable differences are highlighted below by item number.

Item One

The first item on the focus group interview protocol asked participants to describe their journey to the principalship. The first coded theme, Reluctance to Lead, was confirmed by 23 out of 26 participants (88%). Within this overarching theme, three subthemes emerged: Feelings of Inadequacy, Honing the Craft, and the complex nature of the role. When asked a follow-up question as to why participants felt an initial hesitancy or reluctance to lead, 13 out of 23 focus group/interview participants (57%) identified having Feelings of inadequacy; 6 out of 23 participants (27%) identified wanting to Hone their craft before stepping in the principalship role, and 5 out of 23 participants (22%) identified the Complex nature of the role as a deterring factor.

Although there were no discrepancies when examining role or generation distinctions, it is important to note the differences when analyzing focus group/interview participant responses based on gender. Three participants, all males, did not resonate with the Reluctance to Lead theme. In fact, two out of the three male principals believed that they were more than willing and capable to lead but were often overlooked. The majority, 14 out of 23 participants (54%), who indicated reluctance to lead, were female participants. This may suggest that women were more hesitant to step into the principalship role than their male counterparts.

Item Two

The second item on the focus group/interview protocol asked participants to reflect on the impact of cultural values on their decision to pursue the role. The second coded theme, Immigrant Guilt, was confirmed by 18 out of 26 participants (69%). Within this overarching theme, two subthemes emerged: Overt Pressure to Pursue Traditional Asian Careers and Overt Pressure to Pursue Traditional Asian Careers. When further unpacking the reasons as to how culture influenced participants' decision to pursue the principalship, three out of 18 participants (17%) identified experiencing overt pressure from mainly their parents; and 15 out 18 participants (83%) identified experiencing covert pressure from either their friends, family members, or community.

Although there were no discrepancies when examining role or gender distinctions, it is important to note the differences when analyzing participant responses based on generation. Eight participants, mainly third-generation and beyond, did not resonate with feeling the pressures of Immigrant Guilt. The majority of those who identified with this theme were second-generation participants. This may suggest that Asian Americans who are native-born but have foreign-born parents may be more influenced by their cultural values than Asian Americans with parents born in the United States.

Item Three

The third item on the focus group/interview protocol asked participants to describe a moment where their Asian American identity hindered their advancement. The third coded theme, Bamboo Ceiling, was confirmed by 21 out of 26 participants (80%). Within this overarching theme, initially, two subthemes emerged: Stuck in a Sidekick Role and Credential

Versus Merit. However, as more female participants started to share, it became evident that gender played a pervasive role in career advancement. A follow-up question on the effect of gender was added after the second semi-structured interview. Participants, both male and female, were asked if and how gender played a role in their advancement to the principalship; one subtheme emerged: Double Bamboo Ceiling. Participants were probed to explain how the bamboo ceiling played out in their own lives; 6 out of 21 participants (29%) shared experiences of feeling stuck in a sidekick role instead of a managerial one; 5 out of 21 participants (24%) highlighted the struggles of getting hired for the principalship, despite being overly credentialed and qualified; and ten out 21participants (48%) identified the double bamboo ceiling in place for women in leadership.

When analyzing focus group/interview participant responses based on generation, gender, and role, there were differences. Five participants, mainly the first and one and a half generation, did not resonate with the bamboo ceiling in place. This may suggest that Asian Americans who immigrated before their early teens (one and a half generation) or during adulthood (first generation) do not perceive barriers when advancing to higher leadership positions, especially the principalship. Additionally, focus group/interview participants, mainly women, identified the extra layer of challenges they must navigate as female Asian American leaders. Although the male participants largely agreed that their gender advantaged them, this subtheme was primarily identified by women, who felt that their gender played a more pervasive barrier in their advancement than their Asian American identity. Lastly, five focus group/interview participants, mainly assistant principals, noted the term "sidekick" role when explaining how Asian Americans are viewed as highly task-oriented and competent; and, therefore, kept in these roles.

This may essentially suggest that assistant principals may have a more difficult time than principals in advancing to the next step.

Item Four

The fourth item on the focus group/interview protocol asked participants to identify the motivating factor to transition into the role. The fourth coded theme, Leadership That Is Impactful and Sustainable, was confirmed by 26 out of 26 participants (100%). Within this overarching theme, two subthemes were identified: Creating Bigger Change and a Sustainable Salary to support their family. The majority, 21 out of 26 participants (81%), spoke about their ability to impact education on a larger scale. Additionally, five out of 26 participants (19%) were motivated by the increase in salary and the ability to provide for their loved ones.

Although no discrepancies emerged when examining role or generation distinctions, it is essential to note the differences when analyzing participant responses based on gender. Five participants, all-male, identified the increase in salary as the motivating factor. This may suggest that men were more motivated to advance due to the rise in pay than women.

Item Five

The fifth item on the focus group/interview protocol asked participants to identify the contributing factors of being a successful Asian American principal. The fifth coded theme, Leadership That Embraces the Balance of Our Nuanced Identities, was confirmed by 22 out of 26 participants (85%). Within this overarching theme, two subthemes emerged: Shedding Yourself and Knowing Your Audience. When asked a follow-up question as to what piece of advice participants would give to aspiring Asian American principals, 12 out of 22 focus group/interview participants (55%) advised to shed the pieces of yourself that may be self-

limiting barriers; 10 out of 22 participants (45%) highlighted the importance of knowing and adjusting to your audience.

There were no differences concerning role or generation. The majority of participants believed that it was critical to break out of culturally learned habits and to adapt to your audience; however, four participants, all-male, highlighted the importance of remaining true to yourself and not compromising any parts of yourself. This may suggest that women are expected to compromise more parts of their identity than men.

Item Six

The sixth item on the focus group/interview protocol asked participants to identify when they felt mainly supported while pursuing the principalship. The sixth coded theme, Leadership That Uplifts Our Asian American Educators, was confirmed by 23 out of 26 participants (88%). Within this overarching theme, two subthemes emerged: Invitation to Lead and Permission to Lead. Many participants noted the arduous route of the principalship; 9 out of 24 participants (38%) discussed the importance of intentionally inviting other Asian American educators into spaces of leadership; and 15 out of 22 participants (68%) mentioned the importance of acknowledging, encouraging, and granting permission to other Asian Americans to be leaders. There were no discrepancies between participants' responses across gender, role, or generation.

Table 18

Confirmed Themes and Subthemes for Focus Groups and Interviews by Challenges

Themes	Frequency of participants	Subthemes	Frequency of participants
Reluctant to Lead	23	Feelings of Inadequacy	13
		Honing the Craft	6
		Complex Nature of Role	7
Immigrant Guilt	18	Overt Pressure to Pursue Traditional Asian Careers	3
		Covert Pressure to Pursue Traditional Asian Careers	15
Bamboo Ceiling	21	Stuck in a Sidekick Role	6
		Credential Versus Merit	5
		Double Bamboo Ceiling	10

Note. n = 26

Table 19

Confirmed Themes and Subthemes for Focus Groups and Interviews by Opportunities

Themes	Frequency of participants	Subthemes	Frequency of participants
Leadership That Is Impactful and Sustainable	26	Creating Bigger Change	21
		Sustainable Salary	5
Leadership That Embraces the Balance of Our Nuanced Identities	22	Shedding Yourself	12
		Knowing Your Audience	10
Leadership That Uplifts Our Asian American Educators	24	Invitation to Lead	9
		Permission to Lead	15

Note. n = 26

Summary of the Themes

The findings of this mixed methods research study are organized by two major

categories: Perceived Challenges and Perceived Opportunities (Table 20). Themes under

Challenges included the Reluctance to Lead, Immigrant Guilt, and Bamboo Ceiling. Themes

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under Opportunities included Leadership That Is Impactful and Sustainable, Leadership That Embraces the Balance of Our Nuanced Identities, and Leadership That Uplifts Our Asian American Educators. The quantitative data consisted of the questionnaire, while the qualitative data consisted of the focus group and semi-structured interviews. Because this is an explanatory, sequential design, the questionnaire data analysis proceeded the focus groups and interviews. The responses from the questionnaire informed the focus group interview protocol, and participants, purposefully selected based on their profile of characteristics and responses to the questionnaire. While the questionnaire identified the emerging themes, the qualitative data (interviews/focus groups) validated and extended them. Participants began to unpack their experiences and share their stories, confirming the overarching themes coded in the questionnaire data. The participants confirmed the validity of the six themes through their stories. They also refined them: their answers to follow-up questions provided subthemes. From these subthemes emerged a thorough, in-depth analysis.

Table 20

Themes and Subthemes

Challenges	Opportunities
Reluctance to Lead ● Feelings of inadequacy ● Honing the craft ● The complex nature of the role Immigrant Guilt ● Pressure to pursue traditional Asian careers Bamboo Ceiling ● Stuck in a sidekick role ● Credentialing v. merit ● Double Bamboo Ceiling	Leadership That Impacts and Sustains ● Creating bigger change ● Sustainable salary Leadership That Embraces the Balance of Our Nuanced Identities ● Shedding yourself ● Knowing your audience Leadership That Uplifts Our Asian American Educators ● Invitation to lead ● Permission to lead

Perceived Challenges for Asian American Principals

Even though Asian Americans are stereotyped as the "model minority" and often coined as wealthy and successful, Asian Americans continue to face many barriers to leadership positions—despite higher education and qualifications (Johnson & Sy, 2016). Research has shown this group has been disproportionately left out of leadership spaces in different sectors, specifically principalship (Wong, 2011). The challenges they face keep many from being able to break through the bamboo ceiling successfully. This study revealed a set of themes that represent the challenges that most impact Asian American principals in the role.

Theme 1: Reluctance to Lead

The first theme to emerge as a challenge for Asian American principals was the initial Reluctance to Lead. In his interview, Principal H, a 1.5 generation Chinese American, used the phrase "The nail that sticks up must be struck down" to describe an overall reluctance to lead.

"The nail that sticks up must be struck down" is an Eastern proverb that warns against extreme differences: those who are different are viewed unfavorably. Principal H's use of this proverb helps us to understand why people raised with these values may be reluctant to lead first. Many principals expressed strong feelings of hesitancy before stepping into the role. Within this theme, the subthemes that emerged allow for a holistic understanding of why principals experienced feelings of reluctance. Those subthemes are: Feelings of Inadequacy, Honing the Craft, and The Complex Nature of The Role. The first three items on the questionnaire asked participants to reflect on their Career Aspirations and interests growing up.

Item one asked participants to indicate if they ever wanted to become (or thought about becoming) a principal. This feeling was strongly held that they did not, with 80% of participants *disagreeing* or *strongly disagreeing*, yielding a mean score of 1.85 (*SD* = 1.06). Additionally, 56% of participants *agreed or strongly agreed* when asked if, growing up, they were encouraged by their parents to pursue traditional Asian careers.

However, during the interviews, participants noted that although not encouraged to pursue fields such as medicine or law, they were pressured to explore more prestigious, lucrative fields. When asked to indicate if they wanted to pursue a career in education when entering college, 52% of participants *disagreed or strongly disagreed* and 32% *agreed or strongly agreed*. In comparison, the remaining 16% *neither disagreed or agreed*. This item yielded a mean of 2.76 (*SD* = 1.39). The means for each question for this theme were lower than 4.0 (i.e., *agree*); therefore, these questionnaire results broadly indicated that principals were not initially drawn to the field of education but, more specifically, the principalship. In sum, the first section

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of the questionnaire, Career Aspirations, suggests that most participants did not aspire to pursue the principalship, and therefore may have felt an initial hesitancy or reluctance to lead.

Growing up, Assistant Principal G, second-generation, Taiwanese-American, remembered her Asian parents advising her to be like "the soy sauce in a black bottle," which meant to never "show your full deck of cards." As a high school counselor at the time, Assistant Principal G was strongly encouraged by her mentors to step up as an assistant principal but remembers "kicking and screaming." Not only was she unattracted to such a demanding role; Principal G did not think that she could succeed. To further illustrate this common theme of reluctance, Principal H shared his failed attempts to recruit Asian American educators into any leadership position—despite his intentional efforts:

> I notice the adults, for instance, my teachers, there's a strong tradition of teacher leadership in my school. And I see first year Black, Latinx teachers volunteering to be teacher leaders after just one year. Whereas my veteran Asian teachers, goodness gracious, you know. I sense that they always asked me, "Okay, so what exactly is involved in this?" I say, "Look, leadership is messy . . . I can't tell you all of the boundaries, but they kind of want the box, they want to know exactly what the box is going to look like.

Assistant Principal J, a fourth generation Japanese American, *[nodded in affirmation]* shared that his Asian American veteran teachers both exhibited the expertise and the experience to be successful leaders, but were often the last ones to volunteer to take on leadership roles or to put themselves "out there." When asked to describe their journey and what led them to the principalship, 23 out of 26 participants (88%) expressed some feelings of initial hesitancy or reluctance when stepping into the principalship—despite being encouraged by a mentor or superior. Many expressed they lacked the confidence to believe they would be able to successfully fill the role. There was a common language of "not being good enough," which was

reported, directly and indirectly, throughout conversations with focus group and interview participants. Participants reported experiencing feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt when first stepping into the leadership role. A compounding factor for many participants in this study was the inherent aversion to risk that was somehow intrinsically tied to the Asian culture. Many participants forfeited opportunities for advancement because they wanted to perfect or hone their craft before stepping into leadership roles. The participants also identified the complex nature of the role: the principalship may be time-consuming, filled with pressure, and heavily influenced by politics.

Feelings of Inadequacy. The first subtheme to emerge for 13 out of 23 focus group/interview participants (56%) of this study was the pervasive feelings of inadequacy and not being good enough. Participants were asked to elaborate on their career trajectory and route to the principalship. Many reported a similar journey: starting in the classroom, being noticed for their outstanding work ethics, and eventually being encouraged by others to step into different leadership roles. Despite being personally recruited (or "tapped," as those in education circles would say) for leadership roles, participants reported lacking the confidence to take the next step forward. Principal Q, a third-generation Chinese American, recalled thinking to herself if she was ever going to be "good enough." She elaborated by discussing the similar conversations she had within her Asian American Pacific Islanders affinity group in her organization. Without pinpointing the reason precisely, there was a shared sense of feeling inadequate or unfit to lead.

These sentiments of not being good enough permeated the interviews and focus groups. Participants either questioned their leadership abilities or lacked the self-confidence to believe they can fulfill all the responsibilities of such a role. Principal V, who identifies as one and a half

generation Korean American, remembered the internal battle she experienced when moving into her current administrative role. She stated:

> I do remember instances where I really struggled. I mean, I was always a very confident person. However, moving into the administrative role, I remember being very hesitant. Looking back, I probably should have entered it earlier because I could have done it. And there's a side of me that really loves challenges and taking that risk. One side of me was unsure, well, I really wanted to get good at this [current job] before I take that next step. And then the other side of me thought, you know, you're not going to know until you just—you just go and take that step of faith. So, I think in the end, that second side won me out.

When asked a follow-up question as to why there were feelings of doubt and questioning their leadership abilities, Assistant Principal T, a second-generation Chinese American, shared that the most challenging part of her job was not proving herself to others; it was convincing herself. Her internal struggle to building self-confidence was apparent when she stated:

> I don't think I'm able to convince myself. . . . That has always been my internal battle, you know, building my confidence and knowing that I am good enough.

Principal S, a second-generation South Asian American, shared similar sentiments when he fondly reflected on his former teaching years. He described feeling guilty for being in the position he was in as if he did not really "earn it." Despite what caused it, most participants in the study felt a constant urge to have to prove their worth and identity.

Honing the Craft. Another subtheme that emerged in this section for 6 out of 23 focus group/interview participants (26%) was Honing the Craft, tied to perfectionism and an averseness to risk. When participants were further probed as to why these pervasive feelings of inadequacy continued to persist despite receiving affirmation and support from superiors, Principal N, a third-generation Japanese American, reflected on her many years serving as an assistant principal. She said:

> I always wondered if I was good enough to be the principal, I figured I had to learn all the nuances of being an assistant principal. I felt there was something more I had to learn, like, what else do I need to learn? Finally, the principal I worked under told me the only difference between you and me is this chair.

Principal N's story is not uncommon; others similarly wanted to learn as much about the role as possible before stepping in. When asked a follow-up question about why participants did not step into these roles sooner, Principal H expressed how his primary focus was to hone his teaching skills and be the best teacher he could be. He further reflected upon his formal teaching years and concluded that the Asian culture was inherently risk averse. This aversion to risk was evident not only in adults but also in his Asian American students. He stated:

> I noticed that my Asian students, many times, knew the answer when I posed a question. But they were very hesitant to express their thoughts and would very rarely raise their hands. My Black students, conversely—they just reflexively raised their hands, and then they're thinking of the answer as they're raising their hands. Then if I call on them, they say, let me think about that for a second.

Many participants in focus group B resonated with his statement by nodding in agreement. Within the culture, there was a particular element of risk averseness that was somehow inherently ingrained. Principal H correlated risk averseness to perfectionism. Principal I jumped in sharing her own experiences with avoiding risk and the self-limitations of perfectionism. She reflectively stated:

> Totally agree with you. Even though my personality might not be mousy or quiet, there is still that . . . "Oh, if I take this risk and if I'm not going to succeed, that's not going to be good news, so I'm just not going to go there." I think that is definitely cultural and puts the brakes on a lot of things.

Principal H further attested to this by sharing the strong reluctance when recruiting Asian American teachers into the principalship. He stated:

> I notice the adults—for instance, my teachers—there's a strong tradition of teacher leadership in my school. And I see first year Black, Latinx teachers volunteering to be

teacher leaders after just one year. Whereas my veteran Asian teachers, goodness gracious, you know. I sense that they always asked me, "Okay, so what exactly is involved in this?" I say, "Look, leadership is messy . . . I can't tell you all of the boundaries," but they kind of want the box; they want to know exactly what the box is going to look like.

Principal E, second-generation Filipino American, shared that as an administrator, he is often "building the plane as you're flying it." There are inherent risks, such as failure and navigating the unknown, that are involved when stepping into leadership roles, especially ones as complex as the principalship. Principal V and Principal P shared similar sentiments that this role was definitely "not for everyone."

The complex nature of the role. The final subtheme to emerge for 7 out of the 23 participants in the focus groups and interviews (30%) was the principalship's undeniably complex nature. When asked why there were pervasive feelings of hesitancy, participants unanimously identified three factors: the time commitment and demand of the role, the immense pressure of the role, and the nuances of navigating politics in the public school sector. Six out of the seven participants (86%) detailed the immense hours that went into the role; however, there was a clear distinction between the number of hours in the high school setting versus the elementary/middle school.

Principal P, a one and a half generation Korean American, worked at a high school before deciding to transition to the elementary setting due to the demanding after-work hours. She explained that the high school is a "mini-company or business," where academics were just half of it. Assistant Principal O, a second-generation Filipino American, agreed that the role required a time commitment and elaborated that at his stage of life, he prioritizes his family and kids. In

addition to time, Principal E described the immense pressure he faced as a site principal. He

detailed:

> The buck stops with you. Along with all the good that happens, all the negative things that happen stop with you as well. I don't think everybody is built for that. You have to be able to have that mental and emotional, and even that spiritual fortitude to not take things personally.

Assistant Principal G, who was a previous school counselor at the time, shared similar feelings

of hesitancy to move into a leadership role and complacency with the role she had occupied for

many years. When probed as to why she did not want to step into the assistant principal role, she

paused. Then she stated:

> I just saw the title of assistant principal as being someone that's going to be that point person–people are either going to try to shoot you down, or you're going to be blamed for all sorts of stuff. And I just didn't think that I wanted that position.

In interviews, four out of the seven participants (57%) spoke about the pressure of being in the

role. While some identified time or pressure as the most difficult parts of the job, two out of the

seven participants (29%) shared that navigating politics was one of the most challenging aspects

of the role. It was an aspect, they noted, that might even deter someone from pursuing this route.

Principal L, a one and a half generation Korean American, stated:

> It's at the state level and the federal level—there's a lot of policy that has really great intent when created. But then, it's trickled down to school sites and districts and that's the really hard part about this job. It's navigating the policy to implement it and fit it for your community in a way that doesn't interfere with the school's vision or the district's vision or parent's personal beliefs or anything like that.

Theme 2: Immigrant Guilt

The second theme to emerge for the participants under the challenges experienced by

principals and assistant principals was managing Immigrant Guilt, or "ethnic guilt," as Principal

S called it. Throughout the study, participants expressed feeling pressure—whether overt or

covert—from their parents, friends, or community to meet the cultural expectations of what it means to be a successful Asian American. Many participants set high expectations for themselves, always feeling like there was something more to do. The subthemes to emerge were: Overt Pressure to Pursue Traditional Asian Careers and Covert Pressure to Pursue Traditional Asian Careers. When asked to indicate if cultural values growing up influenced their decision to pursue a career as a principal, 34% of questionnaire participants indicated *agree or strongly agree,* yielding a mean score of 2.97 ($SD = 1.66$). Item 6 and 7 on the questionnaire broadly measured participants' perceptions regarding the status of a teacher and principal. When asked if the status of a teacher was viewed as an honorable position, 67 participants (73%) *agreed or strongly agreed*. When asked about the status of a principal, 87 participants (95%) indicated they *agree or strongly agree* that the principalship was perceived as an honorable position. These results indicate that the role of the teacher and principal were honorable positions. However, in the interviews and focus groups, many participants revealed that although seen as respectable, neither role was viewed as upwardly mobile.

Eighteen out of 26 focus group/interview participants (69%) recounted multiple experiences of immigrant guilt. Whether consciously or subconsciously, participants felt the need to provide security and stability for their family, specifically for their parents. For example, in the interview, Principal B shared her parents' expectations:

> My parents would never have told me not to be a teacher. It's a very noble profession, but it's not very upwardly mobile, right? I'm never going to get rich being a teacher. I think there is some kind of feelings of . . . I'm an immigrant. I brought you over here. You better do better than me.

Furthermore, Principal N expressed similar sentiments that there were a lot of things that are not overtly said in the Asian culture. She explained *[smiling]:*

There's an undercurrent, you know, it's like you can be anything you want. But if you're going to be a trash collector, be the best damn trash collector, which means don't be a trash collector.

Overt Pressure to Pursue Traditional Asian Careers. The first subtheme to emerge for 3 out of 18 focus group/interview participants (17%) of this study was the Overt Pressure to Pursue an Asian career. Principal A, a second-generation Vietnamese American, shared that she majored in biology because there was a parental expectation to pursue the prestigious and lucrative fields of medicine or law. Only after she started to mentor others in college did she fall in love with teaching and began to explore the field of education. The pressure that Principal A faced to pursue *"stereotypically Asian"* careers is not uncommon. Similarly, Principal H explained the strong resistance his father had toward his career choice. He shared:

> My father literally said to me, what a waste of your education for you to just be a teacher. In fact, he said educators are those who can't make it in the industry. And so they become like a college professor because they just can't hack it in industry. So, if you're going to be in education, at least be a college professor. . . But just the thought of being a high school teacher, he just couldn't accept that. And he literally did threaten to hurt himself.

Other participants in focus group B empathetically listened and, after Principal H finished sharing, opened up about their own experiences navigating the pressures of high expectations and immigrant guilt. While a few participants dealt with overt pressure, often from their parents, others experienced covert pressure.

Covert Pressure to Pursue Traditional Asian Careers. 15 out of 18 focus group/interview participants (83%) shared their experiences of constant looming pressure—often more subtle and overt. Principal K, a second-generation Korean American, offered an unpopular perspective —he experienced pressure not from his parents but from his friends. He recounted his college experiences when everyone else figured out what they were going to do. Although

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most of his friends were going to go into the lucrative and stereotypical "Asian" fields (e.g., law school, engineering firms, accounting firms), he remembered having conversations in his head, feeling out of place and even ashamed. He explained that the negative sentiments still ring true today:

> Fast forward to now, having been in education for about 15 years, I look around at my friends that are really successful in some of these different fields. And you know, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't jealous sometimes of different things, different leadership roles they've had, or different compensation packages they have and things like that. And so, this is not something that for me died when I graduated college and became an educator. I mean, it still carries on today.

Principal I, also a second-generation Korean American, recalled a similar experience. Despite her immigrant parents' general support for her career choices, she felt a "hovering cloud" that insisted "being a doctor or a lawyer is better." She felt that this invisible cloud was reinforced not only by her parents but also by the entire Asian American community. Growing up in a predominantly Korean part of Orange County, Principal I saw most of her friends heading into higher, well-paying professions. She elaborated that this "hovering cloud," although nonviolent, stayed in the back of her mind.

Theme 3: Bamboo Ceiling

> I understand we have to be qualified. We are qualified. Quite frankly, people don't know what to do with us in terms of our intelligence because they fear a loss. They fear they will be toppled, they fear that they will be removed, they fear that they will be replaced.
> —Assistant Principal O, second-generation, Filipino American.

The third theme to emerge from the data under the challenges experienced by Asian American principals and assistant principals was Bamboo Ceiling. Participants felt that despite their qualifications and accolades, they were continually overlooked for various leadership positions. For many, it took multiple attempts and closed doors before there was an opportunity

that finally presented itself. Within this theme, three subthemes further highlighted the incredible challenges of being an Asian American principal: Stuck in a Sidekick Role, Credential Versus Merit, and the Double Bamboo Ceiling.

Item 11 asked participants to indicate if they were taught that hard work and humility would help them in life. Eighty-four out of 92 (91%) participants *agreed* or *strongly agreed.* Items 13-16 on the questionnaire broadly asked participants about their experiences, regarding discrimination, in the workplace. Item 13 asked participants to indicate if moments they ever experienced discrimination from their superiors; 25 out of 92 (27%) of participants *agreed* or *strongly agreed.* When asked if they had ever experienced discrimination from colleagues or community members, 32 out of 92 (35%) participants and 38 out of 92 (41%) of participants indicated *agree* or *strongly agree*. Several survey items asked principals to indicate if they had ever experienced discrimination from their superiors, colleagues, or community. The average mean score for these three items was 2.87. Because the means for all three items were either at a 3.0 (i.e., *neither disagree nor agree*) or lower, the results of this section broadly indicated the principals disagreed with experiencing discrimination in the workplace. However, participants shared in the focus groups and interviews that they did not experience overt discrimination but rather covert microaggressions. Item 16 on the questionnaire asked principals to indicate if they believed their gender was an advantage in being chosen for the principalship, yielding a mean score of 2.60 (*SD* = 0.86). Gender played a role in the way participants responded. Male principals yielded a mean score of 3.25 (*SD* = 0.83), indicating relative agreement with the statement. On the contrary, female principals yielded a mean score of 2.37 (*SD* = 0.75),

indicating disagreement with the statement. Nearly all female principals mentioned the challenges of a double ceiling.

The third theme, Bamboo Ceiling, was validated by 21 out of 26 focus group/interview participants (81%). During focus group A, Principal E shared how he believed his ethnicity benefitted him in the hiring process. He elaborated that sometimes, because of the color of our skin, "we can be pawns in that political game." When further inquiring about how he knew race was the determining factor of being chosen for the role, he cautiously paused before *[cautiously]* noting:

> I questioned [superintendent] why she chose me if this was the way we were going to interact with each other; she's not going to be available to me for support, you know? So that in itself is very telling. I think it felt like it landed in my lap at the time, but it was a political move in hindsight.

Principal S, a second-generation Asian Indian, shared that he also believed he was the right "fit" for his school; in this case, "fit" meant that the administration was looking for an Indian man to serve their population. Although grateful for this opportunity, Principal S could not help questioning if he had earned the position based on merit, or if it was the fact that he was Indian.

Participants overwhelmingly acknowledged the journey to the principalship was not an easy one. Throughout the interviews and focus groups, some principals felt repeatedly unacknowledged and unseen. Assistant Principal D, a fourth generation Japanese American, was interviewed eight different times before he was finally hired. He speculated that if the principal of the school that hired him had not been a Japanese American, he would not have been hired. Participants in the focus groups shared that they also had to endure multiple interviews before being hired. Principal E shared his experiences with interview biases and covert discrimination:

> You go in understanding what the community looks like, right? Then you go in and see that this panel doesn't look like the community. To me, I ask, "Who's in power?" Right? I'm closely watching people's reactions to my responses . . . I'm going to be honest with you. Right now, I picture two people that have never gone out of my mind because they looked like they were upset that I was even in the room. Not very subtle. So to me, what else could it be? Because they don't know me at all. And then when I get the calls afterward, telling me that they went with an internal person. Your curious nature researches that person, and then you find out that two out of the three interviewees were White. Do I know for sure? No, I don't, but I've been alive long enough.

Assistant Principal F, a third-generation Vietnamese American, shared that he underwent 13 grueling interviews before being finally hired as an assistant principal. He continued to elaborate, [*nervously chuckling*] that one of the interviews he went to had an all-White panel, which he claimed to have done the worst in. Encountering many closed doors was not an uncommon experience. Principal Q stated in her interview that her principal, a fellow Chinese American, took a leap of faith when she hired her—after the previous three candidates declined the assistant principal offer.

In addition to hiring biases, participants reported feelings of being stuck in a "sidekick" or "busy-bee worker" role. Because Asian Americans are often competent and diligent workers, many are kept in "sidekick" positions instead of being taken seriously for promotions, yet another manifestation of the model minority myth. Assistant principals also highlighted the pressure of getting extra credentials to be viewed as eligible to lead, compared to their White counterparts, who were often found eligible even without extra credentials. The two subthemes, Stuck in a Sidekick Role and Credentialing versus Merit, are discussed in the following section.

Stuck in a Sidekick Role. Six out of 21 focus group/interview participants (29%) largely acknowledged that even if they possessed experience, credentialing, and competence, their merit often did not speak for itself. No matter their accolades, Asian American principals were

overlooked for leadership positions. In the second focus group, Principal K, a second-generation

Korean American, spoke about his opinions about the danger of the sidekick role. He stated:

> When I see a school of predominantly White leaders, and you see that one or two Asian sidekicks. The term "sidekick" —I use that in a derogatory sense. It's not like that person is any less or any lesser, but they're relegated to sidekick roles.

He compared this "sidekick" image to doing a group project in high school. He continued:

> It's like, go find the smartest kid and make him do all the work. I see that in school leadership, and it really bothers me when I see it. I think one of the reasons why it perpetuates itself over and over again is because there's a great benefit to having your "busy-bee, sidekick" Asian American colleagues who are constantly doing the work behind the scenes, the busy work sometimes other people don't want to do, and often for the benefit of the school. Yet, they get looked over for higher positions of leadership. It happens time and time again.

> Others in the focus group were nodding in affirmation before Assistant Principal G

commented on her and her colleague's (also Asian American assistant principal) work habits.

She *[hesitated]* before stating:

> I do wonder. . . [*thought trails off*]. We [Asian American colleague] work crazy fast. We're doing things like 100 billion miles. Everything [tasks] is done in like a blink of an eye.

In her focus group, Principal B remembered that her dissertation chair had advised to get out of

her current school and position within a year or that she would be stuck. Principal B reflected:

> I didn't think that was going to happen. I have all these connections and I know all these people. But, my principal would not. . . like it was not even good to entertain the idea that I wanted to promote. Why? Because he needed me at that school. And I didn't mind because I liked my principal. But now that I'm thinking back at it, I would've been tapped sooner.

Credentialing versus Merit. The second subtheme, Credentialing versus Merit, was

identified by 5 out of 21 focus group/interview participants (24%). Although not initially part of

the focus group/interview protocol, after-conversations regarding highly credentialed Asians

with Focus Group A, officially added to the qualitative protocol. Assistant Principal U, a second-generation Vietnamese American, noted the clear difference of credentialing between the White administrators in her district and the administrators of color. When she directly asked her White colleagues if they had any ambition to pursue a doctorate, they responded that a doctorate would not make any difference in their role or mobility, that it was a waste of money. Assistant Principal U [*paused, collected her thought]* and continued, addressing the White administrators:

> You're [White administrators] in a position of privilege, where you don't have to consider that as an opportunity as a way to get yourself to move up, you know? There is a good chance of you moving up without that degree. You see, the Latino, Black, Asian administrators in my district, we only make up 20% of all the administrators, and we are highly credentialed. We're gonna make way for ourselves, we're going to move on up, but we're going to need to pay for a degree or work on a degree to get there.

Assistant Principal C, a one and a half generation Korean American, shared with the focus group that despite having a bilingual credential in Korean, two masters, and a counseling certificate, she still struggled to secure the assistant principal role. She [*defeatedly*] sighed:

> You can't just have one single subject teaching credential and hope that an opportunity is just going to come up, that's just not going to happen.

Assistant Principal F [*nodding in agreement*] jumped into the conversation by adding he held three single subject credentials in history, English, and science with biology, a master's degree, and an administration certificate. Even then, as an Asian American, he felt the extra credentials and certifications were sometimes not enough. Assistant Principal F shared *[while shaking his head in disbelief]:*

> I mean, those things just allow us to be considered, you know, without having to worry about a lot of the other kinds of accolades, or, just like I said, to just even get in the box.

Principal B suggested that the urge to acquire new credentials might be internalized. She shared that if she did get the job, she "always [thought]it's my fault." She felt these feelings were more

pertinent in the Asian culture, as compared to other cultural contexts. As a woman leader, Principal B also emphasized the Double Bamboo Ceiling, which is a term to describe the added layer of challenges that women in leadership have to overcome. The experiences of K-12 Asian American women principals and assistant principals are discussed in the following section, Double Bamboo Ceiling.

Double Bamboo Ceiling. The final subtheme to emerge for 10 out of 21 focus group/interview participants (48%) was the Double Bamboo Ceiling. The Double Bamboo Ceiling refers to a discriminatory phenomenon identified by many female participants, who shared that they faced more obstacles because of their gender. Many principals reported having to constantly prove themselves in the workplace while experiencing subtle sexism. In her focus group, Principal B identified her gender as a greater barrier than her ethnicity. She shared that in K-12 schooling, men were often placed in high school level roles while women were placed in elementary school level roles. Principal P, a one and a half generation Korean American, confirmed this as she explained the role that gender played at the elementary school level versus the high school. As a principal in both settings, she said that driving academics was only half of what her role entailed in high school. In the elementary setting, she explained, she was responsible for ensuring that "everyone felt okay." She focused mainly on managing the community and promoting academics. However, in the high school setting, which is more business-like and activities-oriented, she felt the need to work harder than her male counterparts to receive the same respect. As a current high school principal, Principal B shared her frustrations of having a heavier ceiling. She stated:

> I spent six years being an assistant principal, and maybe I only needed two. Here's my male assistant principal with no doctorate, without the skills that I even had at my two

years, just floating into positions and I don't see that happening for the female Latinas, though, as much. So, I do think that gender is like maybe first and then ethnicity second.

Assistant Principal J, who has been working in education for about 30 years, reflected on the conversations he would often have with his wife regarding gender and promotion opportunities. He said:

> I've been an elementary, middle, and high school principal, and I just hold a bachelors. I've also worked in a district office for a year, so I've had different opportunities without necessarily going through all the education like getting the masters, getting the Ph.D. I've been in education for about 30 years and made choices not to go back to school, and just kind of see how far this takes me. I think experience speaks for itself, but she [wife] felt that she would never have been able to get where she was, had she not gone back to school.

Subtle Sexism. Seven of the 9 female interviewees discussed their experiences of subtle sexism from their superiors, community members, and/or colleagues. In her interview, Principal B shared that parents who walked into the main office immediately assumed that the male secretary was the school principal. In her early years as principal, Principal B experienced great difficulty when she wanted others to take her opinions seriously. At that time, she sat in a construction meeting, and her supervisor had told her:

> The next time we're meeting with the construction guys, I want you to come in and don't sit down. I want you to pace the room and make yourself bigger because they're looking at you as a woman. And I never had to do that, right? But that's the kind of stuff that works. I now walk into a room and introduce myself as Dr. [participant's last name].

Whenever a police officer arrived at Principal B's school site, the officer would automatically refer to the assistant principals (male) and ask them to fill out the report, assuming that the males were the head of the school.Both Assistant Principal Z and Principal N attested to traces of the "good ole boy's club" still existing. Furthermore, Principal B shared in her interview that there

was a very clear gender difference and how her superintendent even interacted with male versus female principals. She explained:

> He [superintendent] would come, and he'll rub our shoulder and be like, hey, how are you doing? But, with the males, it's like, oh, we need to talk about this and this. I mean it was, it was very clear in the way he would interact with men versus women.

Pressure to Maintain Traditional Roles. When asked about how gender played a role in leading as a principal, Principal W, a first generation South Asian Indian, hesitated before speaking about her unique experiences in an arranged marriage. She shared how she had married a first generation Asian Indian man, who was a senior vice president in a big company in Silicon Valley. She candidly spoke about her marriage, saying:

> I was married for 25 years, but it was a very, very dysfunctional, toxic, and abusive relationship. And to him, like, my being a teacher was very humiliating. For him, you know, if you're not an engineer or a doctor, you really, so it was a constant struggle for me to have a profession, which I loved. And I was constantly put down.

She continued to share her growth and journey once coming out of that relationship. Since then, Principal W transitioned from being a classroom teacher to an instructional coach; then eventually being tapped for the principal position. While reflecting on her personal growth, she thought back to her friends who are currently in situations where they are married to successful men and continue to have smaller positions in the industry. Before continuing, she paused and shared the double layer of expectations she faced- as both a South Asian American and a womanshe said:

> Then there's that pressure to be a mother and not being too ambitious. [In South Asian cultures] Even your intellect is kind of associated with the kind of job you do. So as a teacher, you're not supposed to have too much intelligence. So all that was, you know, a lot. And I know, it happens, it is there, I think I can say, for the South Asian community a lot. And that really plays a role. So, I think there are so many layers. I mean, being an Asian, being South Asian, being a woman. There are many, many things that you have to navigate.

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Perceived Opportunities for Asian American Principals

Asian American principals and assistant principals must occupy leadership spaces in order for the growing Asian student population to themselves feel empowered. As school leaders prepare to reopen schools after the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to create safe spaces for our Asian American students–especially in light of the recent rise of attacks on our community. Furthermore, it is important to remember the power of representation and the positive impact on all students (Boisrond, 2017). Unpacking how principals perceived their role and actualized their work led to the discovery of three following themes related to opportunities: Leadership That Impacts and Sustains, Leadership That Embraces the Balance of Our Nuanced Identities and Leadership That Uplifts Our Asian American Educators. These opportunities allowed principals to successfully break through the bamboo ceiling.

Theme 4: Leadership That Impacts and Sustains

The fourth theme to emerge and the first as an opportunity for Asian American principals and assistant principals was Leadership That Impacts and Sustains. Many participants identified sustainable and impactful leadership as motivating factors for pursuing the principalship. In interviews and focus groups, participants believed that a principal's salary was much more sustainable than a teacher's salary. Along with the principalship's financial benefits, principals spoke of its ability to make a larger impact in education. Every participant mentioned the everyday joys of their job, such as making a greater change with students, teachers, and community members. The subthemes to emerge were: Ability to Create Bigger Change and Sustainable Salary.

The questionnaire asked principals to indicate if they believed the pay rate of teachers is decent compared to other professional jobs, yielding a mean score of 2.55 (*SD* = 1.11). Item eight and nine on the questionnaire broadly measured participants' perceptions regarding pay rate. When asked about the pay rate of teachers, 53 participants (58%) *disagreed or strongly disagreed* that it was decent compared to other professions. When asked about the pay rate of principals, 34 participants (37%) answered *disagree or strongly disagree.* Furthermore, when asked to indicate if they grew up significantly valuing education as a vehicle for upward mobility, 92% of principals responded that they either *agree* or *strongly agree* with that statement, yielding the highest mean score of 4.54 (*SD* = 0.76). These results indicate that participants 1) did not believe cultural values greatly impacted their decision to pursue the profession and 2) did not view the teaching salary favorably when compared to other professions. However, in the interviews and focus groups, many participants revealed the pay raise of the principal as a motivating factor for taking the next step.

Ability to Create Bigger Change. When asked about motivating factors to transition into the principal role, 21 out of 26 focus group/interview participants (81%) either directly or indirectly stated they entered the role to make a larger impact. Principal R, one and a half generation Filipino American *[smiling cheerfully]*, described making an impact in a grander way, he shared: they trickled into the families, teachers, and the entire school. Principal V expressed similar sentiments and stated:

> The best part of the job is just to be able to be in a place where you can see the big picture, where you can see students learning and teachers growing and your school community coming together. There is no greater joy than to see all of that come together and know that you had a hand in it. And to also know, it wasn't me, it was the whole community, every single person is important in this. I think it is so rewarding that there's nothing like it.

Assistant Principal O, given his struggles as a minority, shared strong sentiments of wanting to educate others about Asian culture and who he is. He [*passionately*] exclaimed:

> Given that we are minorities, given that we are people of color, given that my mom and dad experienced racism when they got here. They still do despite being American citizens. But because of my experiences, I want to educate people on who my family is, and what the Filipino community has contributed to the American fabric.

Similar to other participants, Principal R saw his impact on a greater, mission-oriented scale. He described the best parts of his job: reminding staff members why they started and making a child feel safe and welcomed. He classified everything else as "background noise" to the greater mission.

Sustainable Salary. When further they were asked about what factors motivated them to take the next step (whether it be from teacher to assistant principal or from assistant principal to principal), 5 out of 26 focus group/interview participants (19%) identified the raise in salary as the motivating factor. Principal E shared with his focus group that he and his wife had been expecting a child, and they had decided it was a good move to pursue the principalship. Assistant Principal F added to the discussion by frankly stating:

> I was having a kid, a newborn, and we're renting a place, and to buy a house in California, you definitely need more than a teacher salary [*chuckling*].

Theme 5: Leadership That Embraces the Balance of Our Nuanced Identities

> Being Asian American is sometimes like a paradox, right? Like, you have to go against yourself to be what you aspire to be.—Principal K, second-generation, Korean American.

The fifth theme to emerge and second as an opportunity for Asian American principals and assistant principals was Leadership That Embraces the Balance of Nuanced Our Identities. Many participants felt they had to manage or balance their identities and personalities at times.

Participants highlighted the importance of adapting who you are as a leader to cater to your audience; yet, still authentically remain true to yourself. Principals reported having to constantly find the right balance when leading. The subthemes that emerged were: Shedding Yourself and Knowing Your Audience.

Many participants either directly or indirectly acknowledged the pervasive role of culture on their journey to the principalship. Item 5 asked to indicate if participants' own career advancement goals influenced their decision to pursue the role; 77 out of 92 (84%) participants *agreed* or *strongly agreed.* Furthermore, when asked to indicate if there were times that they thought that they would not achieve the principal position due to either their culture or identity, 39 out of 92 (42%) of participants *agreed* or *strongly agreed.* The findings of this section indicate that despite the existing cultural barriers that may be self-limiting, participants were able to advance.

Shedding Yourself.

> That's how I was brought up, you know, if you're good, others will brag for you. And yet, if you want the job, you have to sell yourself. So that's a hard thing to learn.— Principal N, third-generation, Japanese American.

Twelve out of 22 focus group/interview participants (55%) identified the subtheme, Shedding Yourself to get the job. Reflecting on his journey, Principal K shared his first administrative interview experience as a teacher. Before applying for the role, the first thing he did was to seek the permission of those in those leadership spots already. Despite thinking he did fairly okay on his interview, one of his principals (from another school) said something to him that he will never forget.

> Other Principal: Hey, I talked to the people that interviewed you, and they said you
>
> > interviewed really well, maybe the best.
>
> Principal K: Well, that's funny, because I didn't get the job. So, it must not have been
>
> > that good, right? [*chuckling*]
>
> Other Principal: But you know, everyone said that you needed to toot your own horn a
>
> > little bit better.

As Principal K continued to reflect on this statement, he recalled another instance where he did not receive the job (outside of his current district), despite being encouraged and pushed to apply for the role. Although he made it to the final round, he discovered that the panel did not pick any candidate. He stated the most disheartening part of the experience was not that he did not get the job. It was what he heard through the grapevine: behind closed doors, the panelists privately discussed if he was "strong enough" to lead the school. He [*collecting his thoughts*] continued:

> When I heard that, I was so offended. What does that even mean? Is that a personality thing? Is that because when I'm in the interview room, I'm not jumping up on tables and slamming my fist on them? Because I'm not going to overdo it like that. And I don't know if somehow my "Asianness" qualities sometimes get interpreted as weaknesses.

Assistant Principal T shared the term "shedding yourself" made her think of her English language learner (ELL) students, who have to "shed themselves" of who they truly are to fit the mold of the public school's system. As we were talking about forcing her students to shed themselves, she came to a realization and said:

> In some ways, I definitely have had to shed some of the characteristics about me to become what I view as a good educational leader. I will say that the ways I act in front of my staff or colleagues are who I truly am. I'm not trying to be a fake person, but I will say it pushes me out of my comfort zone. Because if I were being my true self, I would be comfortable sitting in the back–not in the spotlight, not actively raising my hand, or being vocal about my opinion.

As someone who grew up valuing humility, Assistant Principal G shared her struggle to play a character with strong egos, which was the opposite of what she wanted. She [*sighing*] posed a question for the focus group, "Can that kind of leadership be valued in our schools right now?"

Assistant Principal D, [*nodding in affirmation*] faced the same internal conflict when comparing how he led versus what was expected of the position. The field notes indicated there was a moment of silence, solidarity, and empathy. Assistant Principal D shared that his leadership style, similar to many participants, did not concern being the "biggest voice or the biggest ego." As someone who was not as comfortable being upfront, most of his work was done behind the scenes. Furthermore, in his interview, Principal S recalled what he discovered his own leadership abilities:

> I learned at some point that I couldn't just be the data nerd, that I needed to find a way to be who I am. Outside of that specific context, you know what I mean? I had to manage my personality. And then, I figured out a personality and work personality that allowed me to look like this [*points to himself up and down*] and be cognitively accepted by people who didn't look like me.

Knowing Your Audience. Ten out of 22 focus group/interview participants (45%) alluded to negotiating some parts of their cultural identity. However, Principal R clarified that you do not need to change who you are; rather, you need to adopt the skills of what makes a successful principal, such as political intelligence, emotional intelligence, collaborative intelligence, and being able to understand where you are right in the space you are operating. Principal E compared being an administrator to a DJ, saying, "If nobody's dancing, you have to change the music." He believed his Eastern values of "family" are reflected in his leadership style and his approach to relationship building with his staff members.

Theme 6: Leadership That Uplifts Our Asian American Educators

> But what I noticed . . . at least in Taiwan and China...you don't assert yourself into or insinuate yourself into a leadership position. You have to be invited, particularly by the elders. And there is a sense of seniority, that it's the older educators who tend to be the leaders. Maybe that permeates the culture a bit because you don't just raise your hand and step up as a leader; you should be invited. And that's how I became a principal. Right? My former principal, my mentor, invited me to be and pushed me to get my licensure and everything. I don't think I would have done it on my own.—Principal H, one and a half generation, Chinese.

The sixth theme to emerge and the third for opportunities was Leadership That Uplifts Our Asian American Educators. Participants felt they lacked the affirmation they truly needed. Often, principals doubted their abilities despite their many qualifications. Many shared they needed someone to believe they were able to lead. The subthemes that emerged were an Invitation to Lead and Permission to Lead.

Almost all principals indicated they were "invited" into leadership roles by either their mentor or supervisor. The majority, 77% of the questionnaire participants, *agreed or strongly agreed* when asked if they had the support of their friends when pursuing the principalship (see Item 17). Furthermore, when asked to indicate if colleagues have supported their decision to pursue a career in the principalship, 93% of participants either responded as *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with that statement, yielding a slightly higher mean score of 4.38 (*SD* = 0.74). 81% of participants *agreed or strongly agreed* when asked about support from family. The final item on the questionnaire asked principals to indicate if they believed a mentor influenced them to pursue a career as a principal. Seventy-six percent of principals indicated they *agree* or *strongly agree* with that statement, yielding the lowest mean score of 4.16 (*SD* = 1.00).

During our interview, when asked about the influence of a mentor, Principal N shook her head and chuckled. She shared that she did not have a mentor while pursuing the role; ironically,

she developed mentors after she was settled into her role. However, from the observation of previous leaders, she learned along the way what not to do. Principal N discussed her learning experiences before becoming a principal, saying:

> I saw what he [principal at the time] did and always questioned it, but I never said anything. So I watched people learned what not to do. Some things I learned was. . . Okay, I'm not going to treat people like that, because I saw what he did. I'm not going to do that because that's what he did. So, I learned some of those kinds of things.

Principal N's experience was not uncommon; not all participants received the same level of support. During the interviews, three principals mentioned not having a mentor. Despite the varying levels of support, participants agreed upon the importance of having mentors and leaders guiding you on your journey.

Although it was critical to invite other Asian Americans into leadership spaces, Principal K believed that it was equally important for leaders to grant others the permission to lead, meaning encouraging and uplifting Asian Americans along the way. At a very young age, Principal K, a child of immigrants, vividly remembered rejecting validation for his hard work. He recounted:

> Like any summer day, I was doing what immigrant kids do and helping out my parents. After a hard day of work, my uncle came and handed me a 20-dollar bill. And, I don't know where I learned this from, but my initial response was, no, no, no, no, I don't need that. I kept saying no. Now, in my heart, it wasn't a no, I wanted the $20. But something . . . somewhere in my culture has taught me to reject that kind of validation. And at the end of the day, after three or four nos. I took it. And of course, I wanted it all along. I feel like that kind of plays out in a lot of places professionally, too.

Invitation to Lead. Nine out of 24 focus group/interview participants (38%) identified the importance of being invited to step into various leadership roles, specifically the principalship. Principal B, who did not plan on becoming an administrator at all, was unexpectedly visited by a superintendent one day. After another two years of walkthrough

classroom observation, the superintendent strongly encouraged Principal B to pursue her

administrative credentials. The superintendent had even offered her a program that would fully

fund her master's degree and administrative credentials. Principal B wonders if she would still be

in the classroom teaching if she had not received that invitation. During his focus group,

Assistant Principal J reflected on his experiences before sharing that Asian teachers generally do

not volunteer themselves as leaders, unless you welcome, invite and intentionally draw them in.

Permission to Lead. Fifteen out of 24 focus group/interview participants (63%)

acknowledged that it was important to invite Asian Americans to lead, and then to allow them to

lead and fail. In his focus group, Principal K underlined the importance of allowing those trying

to become leaders to simply be leaders. He explained the clear distinction between invitation and

permission: the latter focuses on encouraging, affirming, and building confidence within a

potential leader. He shared that he had to be "tapped" for the principal position before he could

transition from being an assistant principal to a principal. Principal K believed that regardless of

what he did to advance himself for the principal role, it was the people vouching for him that had

the greatest effect. Reflecting on his past interviews and remembering the feedback he received

from the panels, he shared his internal struggle:

> Just in the sense of self-marketing, I can't do it. But at the same time, I know that needs
> to happen or else people will label you as. . . distance, aloof, or like not into it. They
> [district] don't want those people as principles. So, the next best thing is to have people
> around you that you've worked with who will do that for you. And I know, I've had my
> share of people do that.

Principal K stated his journey would have looked a lot different had he been given the

permission to lead. Principal H concluded the focus group by reminding all leaders that leading

also means making mistakes. He closed with these words:

Asians need to be okay with making mistakes. That's the resiliency aspect. I find that for a lot of my very accomplished Asian teachers, it's a real barrier to leadership because they've been so successful all through their lives, you know, elementary, middle high school, they go to prestigious colleges like Harvard School of Education, and they're all so well-credentialed, and they're really well respected. So why, you know, take a risk if they're ready, well respected as an educator? And right off the bat, I just say to them, hey, look, you know, it's okay to make a mistake. You have to normalize mistakes.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter detailed the unique experiences of Asian American assistant principals and principals and their perceptions of becoming K-12 public school principals. The 92 participants in the quantitative portion of this study were instrumental in developing the overarching themes triangulated against the focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and field notes. The 26 participants in the qualitative portion of the study willingly elected to participate in a focus group or interview because they believed this work matters. The assistant principals and principals of the study were optimistic about the future path of K-12 education as a whole. Many acknowledged that the world they lead was not a perfectly equitable one but remained hopeful for positive change. Every day, they face challenges that make them question their abilities and doubt who they are as leaders. Yet they choose to trudge through, staying hopeful while persevering. They recognize that Asian American leaders can shift the landscape of education for the better and our Asian American students and educators. The opportunities for Asian American principals are rooted in bringing equitable change and growth in representation. I thank the 92 assistant principals and principals of this study and those who came before us for paving the path for others to step into the light. Chapter 5 will discuss conclusions based on the findings related to the global research question. Lastly, in my discussion and recommendations, I used the
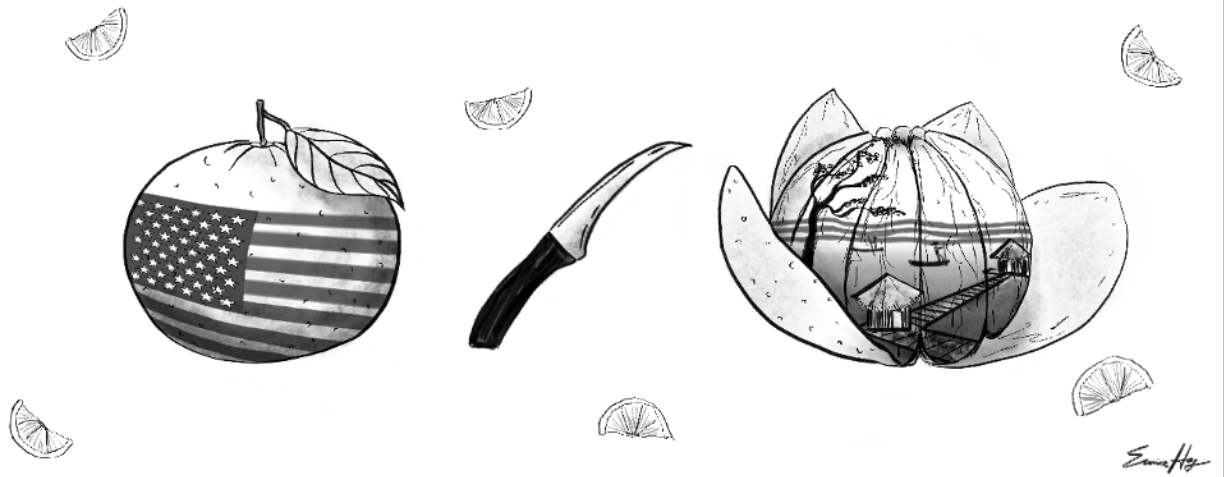
pronoun "us," "our," and "we," because I acknowledge and resonate with Asian American

leaders' experiences as an ally and an aspiring Asian American leader myself.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Figure 5.

Double Edge Soliloquy

Note. "Double Edge Soliloquy" by Eunice Hong (2021). Used with permission.

their stories are not mine to tell
but   *english majors write don't they*
                                      did your parents really let you major
        then no one tells them
                                      in english
so we just flip through photo albums
reading The End before the beginning

"before we came to America"
feels like a hollywood movie
pick it apart like the oranges we buy
from Đà Lạt   *no, not vietnam, you immigrant,*
                      i mean the american
                Supermarket
                      wait what are you anyway
Westminster, California, Asian Town, America: American,
                      land of the free, home of the
though to be honest, sometimes i don't feel that   *brave*

heartbreak and jail cells
the jack and rose to my American dream
　　　　　　that's right, speak in metaphors i can understand
bony bodies, a pinch of salt
hide the jewelry in the baby's diaper
hope the soldier doesn't check
it's like Nazi Germany, see
　　　　　　no, it's not
no, it's not
we should never have gotten involved in that war
　　　　　　we the people of the united states
that's what i argued in my history class
　　　　　　in order to form a more perfect union
i was assigned to the Nixon table to
　　　　　　establish justice
challenge the world that
my family fought for
　　　　　　the blessings of liberty, our posterity
who am i to do that, tell me
who are you to ask that of me

they used to recount stories but
just when i became old enough
they stopped i don't know why
and now i ask i ask i
feel i am prying into a past that is not mine
what happens next, my little hollywood movie
　　　　　　exposition, climax, resolution
i hate that i love to hear
　　　　　　the story of survival, a New York Times
　　　　　　Bestselling Novel
about their sufferings as if
they were my own stories

　　　　　but *then*

　　　　　　　　　　　　if no one tells them
　　　　　　　　　　we will just flip through photo albums
　　　　　　　　reading The End before the beginning, reading
　　　　　　they live happily ever after
　　　　　　　　　　　　over and over again, reading

> without remembering why we even started.

> –Kaitlan Bui, Vietnamese American, third-generation

Asian American voices have long been absent in education. Not only has research on Asian Americans in the principalship been historically lacking; the literature on Asian American principals and assistant principals that does exist has been traditionally assessed from White and other non-Asian perspectives. This mixed methods study seeks to reevaluate how we think of traditional leadership by inviting Asian American principals and assistant principals to share their stories of success, struggle, and liberation. From these stories, we derive actionable ideas for developing emancipatory processes of recruitment for more Asian American educators, and specifically for Asian Americans in higher positions of education leadership. Satisfying this representational gap also ensures that students have access to relevant models of success. This chapter is divided into three parts: (1) a summary of the dissertation's purpose and its major quantitative and qualitative findings, (2) a discussion of implications for policy and practice, and (3) conclusory recommendations for future study. Findings from the questionnaire, focus group, field notes, and interviews reveal significant factors, both internal and external, regarding how participants perceive the principalship and their experiences with it.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how the general perceptions of Asian Americans have influenced their journey to becoming a K-12 public school principals and vice principals. Subresearch addresses differences in the way groups have perceived challenges and opportunities, especially in terms of the following divisions: (a) first generation, one and a half

generation, second-generation, and third-generation and beyond participants, (b) male and female participants, and (c) assistant principals and principals. The data was collected across multiple school districts. It thus provides a framework for stakeholders, policymakers, and future Asian American principals to support Asian Americans in the principal pipeline.

Additionally, this study attempts to understand stories from a non-deficit point of view. While I acknowledge the negative challenges Asian American face, I shed equal light on participant successes, especially when it concerns breaking societal perception. A considerable section of this chapter discusses those who successfully broke through the bamboo ceilings. To conclude, the study provides practical recommendations for increasing Asian American leadership representation, supporting our current administrators, uplifting aspiring Asian American principals, and ultimately creating a more equitable and just education system.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study can inform those in hiring processes of how to better acknowledge, support, and recruit Asian American aspiring leaders. Principal M had revealed that as of 2021, Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) are the only minority group without a state-wide administrative organization (in California).

Although in the grassroots stages, Principal M and his team are relentlessly working with the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) to create this much-needed and desired support group. This study allowed networks to form that didn't exist before. More assistant principals and principals became aware that such a network was being formed. Two participants, Principal N and Principal S, wanted to personally get involved in the work and were introduced to Principal M via email.

Additionally, participants in focus groups A and B began to network and built organic relationships with one another. Principal L in focus group A wrote down all names and districts of those in his group to reach out afterward and continue building unity in this work. Participants in focus group B were also able to make deeper connections; Principal H from the East Coast offered suggestions on how to get a state-wide organization for administrators off the ground. Since then, Principal H was able to connect with other principals from this study, mainly from California, in hopes of collaborating on a nationwide organization or pipeline for Asian Americans in the future.

Examining Challenges and Opportunities Through Theoretical Framework:

Asian Critical Race Theory

Once a text passes from its author to a reader, it takes on a life of its own; what interpretations the text will plausibly bear are legitimate whether or not the author intended them.—Burbules, 1986, p. 241.

In the United States, public schools are assimilation engines, meaning that they prioritize Anglocentric norms through structures and policies at the expense of culturally diverse students (Cooper, 2009). This phenomenon disregards the assets of diverse representation and marginalizes students of color. As AsianCrit acknowledges, race oppression occurs when there is an uneven distribution of resources and access. In other words, race oppression is exacerbated by capitalism and unequal privilege. It affects our student population and encourages the underrepresentation of K-12 Asian American principals.

The four tenets of Asian Crit examine how Asian Americans perceive the challenges and opportunities of K-12 public school principalship (Chang, 1993) (Asianization, Transnational Contexts, Intersectionality, and Story, Theory, and Praxis). The findings from the questionnaire

reveal six emerging themes regarding the Asian American principal and assistant principal experience. The three themes under Perceived Challenges are: (a) Reluctance to Lead (b) Immigrant Guilt; (c) Bamboo Ceiling. The three themes under Perceived Opportunities are: (d) Leadership That Is Impactful and Sustainable; (e) Leadership That Embraces the Balance of Our Nuanced Identities; (f) Leadership That Uplifts Our Asian American Educators. The coded responses from the focus groups, field notes, and interviews confirm the six themes and extend them through open dialogue and discussions with participants, which yielded multiple subthemes. The analysis of salient themes and subthemes, through the lens of AsianCrit's four tenets, addresses the continued absence of Asian American principals and assistant principals in K-12 public education.

Asianization/Intersectionality

The AsianCrit tenets of Asianization and Intersectionality (Iftikar & Museus, 2013) informs the research questions, methodology, and data analysis. The analysis of the challenges and opportunities of K-12 principals and assistant principals, through the lens of Asianization, reinforce the racialized narratives and experiences of Asian Americans. Asianization illuminates the ways in which society reduced this ethnic group as a monolith, racializing Asians as either overachieving model minorities, foreigners in their own country, or threatening yellow perils. Iftikar & Museus (2013) further posited that these extreme designations are commonly used to portray Asian men and women as unthreatening, effeminate, asexual, socially awkward (Iftikar & Museus, 2013, Chang, 1993). Such labels are often untrue and always have damaging consequences. For example, the participants in my study—despite their high credentials, professional experiences, and good education—were constantly overlooked for the principalship.

The biases and perceptions, either conscious or subconscious, were held by the interview participants themselves and reinforced the bamboo ceiling. This may further explain why participants were often overlooked for the principal role and deemed not fit to lead; some were even intentionally kept in the sidekick role (assistant principal) due to their strong work ethic. If they were promoted, who would be able to do the job as well as them?

The findings revealed the detrimental and long- lasting effects of multiple job rejections and the impact on participants' sense of self. Many participants admitted to constantly questioning their own competence and leadership abilities. In other words, they shared persistent feelings of inadequacy, which often evolved into a reluctance to step into leadership positions.

Additionally, the Intersectionality tenet suggests that multiple systems of oppression or social categories (gender, race, etc.) affect participants, and whether or not they are. chosen to lead their schools and organizations. We thus analyze the intersection between race and gender in order to better understand why both male and female Asian American principals and assistant principals are perceived by others as unqualified to lead. Regardless of their gender, Asian Americans are often racialized as either an imminent threat or token minority–the specific designation depends on the shifting context of the White majority. The dominant racial group (historically White) utilized emasculating stereotypes to keep Asian men from "stealing" White women (Cheng, 2019). This emasculation of Asian men continues to manifest itself in society today, as evidenced by the lack of Asian male leads in media. Many male participants spoke about the difficulties and pressures of mirroring the Western charismatic styles of leadership, in contrast to the traditional Asian stoicism. This may explain the various reasons why the male

participants in my study attested to not being seen as "dominant" or "assertive" enough during their interviews.

For Asian American women, the intersections of gender and race can produce Orientalist stereotypes of hypersexual and submissive sex objects (Cho, 2003; Prasso, 2005) such as the "lotus blossom" and "China doll," both embodiments of docility and subservence (Cheng, 2019, Chung, 1999). Notably, while silence is expected of Asian women, anger is not. Ruth Chung (1999), a Korean American professor, explained, "My assertiveness and articulateness seem to surprise and threaten some because I don't fit their stereotype of an Asian woman" (p. 67). The hypersexualization of Asian women (referring to AsianCrit's tenet Asianization) is contrasted by the invisibility of Asian female voices. This mismatch shapes how women in my study were perceived by others (interview panels, employees, superiors, etc.) in spaces of higher leadership. This may explain why female participants, in contrast to their male counterparts, were met with a double bamboo ceiling: as Asian American women, they were forced into a predominantly White male space. This may explain the reasons why female participants faced more overall challenges in becoming a K-12 principal, compared to their male counterparts. Many spoke about "finding the right balance" between assertiveness and gentleness when leading, a task that they referred to as a constant battle.

The concept of Intersectionality also speaks to the subtle sexism that female participants experienced in the workplace. Despite the added layer of barriers for female participants, many turned their challenges into new opportunities. Some female participants admitted to being recognized as "honorary members" of the "good ol' boys' club" and therefore having more inside knowledge of district information. Some participants recalled having to "schmooze" and

become "buddy-buddy" with men in higher positions of leadership at the district. Only by doing so, some of them shared, could they open more doors. Ultimately, we see that the emasculation of Asian men and the objectification of Asian women provoke their disproportionate underrepresentation in public K-12 leadership. Thus, all of these findings do tie into transnational contexts. Intersectional analysis, in light of AsianCrit matters: our identities, like our experiences, are nuanced and not monolithic. Our transnational ancestral histories are a part of our identity and contribute to understanding our racial realities today, as well as how others may perceive us.

Transnational Contexts

According to Chang (1993), CRT claims that race matters but fails to acknowledge how various races matter differently. Chang (1993) points out that Asians in America comprise a multitude of ethnicities, most of whom are recent immigrants; therefore, racism in the Asian context has different ramifications compared to other racial contexts. As previously mentioned, Asian Americans are an American anomaly– never seen as "fully belonging" in their own country. "Asian Americans" is a catch-all phrase, one that does not distinguish the differences between East, South, and Southeast Asians. Unlike European Americans or African Americans, Asian Americans are not a largely homogeneous racial or ethnic group. Unlike Hispanics, they are not bonded by a common language or religion (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Asians do have a foundational set of values and philosophy, forged by a common history and shared immigrant story, but such commonalities are nuanced and complicated by war, region, and other historical factors.

It is therefore critical to consider the importance of historical, national, and transnational contexts when analyzing the impacts of racism on Asian Americans. During focus groups and interviews, many participants shared their parents' immigration experiences and even their own stories; a few mentioned the 1965 changes in immigration laws and the opportunity that provided their family. The objective of the *Immigration and Nationality Act* of 1965 sought to attract highly-educated immigrants from Asia, who were needed for the nation's demanding job market and technology advances. Principal L shared that she inherited her extremely strong work ethic and business mindset from her immigrant father, who ran a small business. Assistant Principal Z, a first generation Korean American, half-jokingly stated that "Asians don't even like one another!" She then disclosed the nuances of Asian history, mentioning the still existing tensions between the Japanese and Korean people. Such comments demonstrate that transnational historical contexts must be accounted for when holistically analyzing the underrepresentation of Asian American principals and assistant principals in K-12 public education.

Story, Theory, and Praxis

The Story, Theory, and Praxis (Iftikar & Museus, 2013) contains intertwined elements that allow for a more holistic analysis of the Asian American experiences. In other words, stories inform theory, and theory informs praxis. This tenet acknowledges the work of Asian American scholars in order to elevate future Asian American principals, who in turn will advocate for Asian American students and the larger community. To understand the needs of the growing Asian American student population, it is critical to first understand the difficulties that Asian American principals navigate (Kim-Qvale, 2012). Through counter-storytelling, principal and assistant principals expose the inequalities shouldered by Asian Americans in the K-12

recruitment process, and specifically how race and culture shape those inequalities. The Story, Theory, and Praxis tenet justifies the use of Asian American stories, voices, and scholarship in this study. For instance, in addition to the participants of this study, the researcher, as well as two out of three dissertation committee members, identify as Asian American. In alignment with this tenet, four conclusions emerged from the findings: a) it is possible to be Asian American and a good leader, b) Asian American principal representation is an urgent need, c) an Asian American principal organization is needed, and d) Asian American students must be supported inside and outside of the classroom.

Conclusion of Findings

Four major conclusions, in alignment with AsianCrit, emerge from the themes and subthemes in the data. Firstly, it is still a challenge today to be seen as a qualified, "good," Asian American leader. Evidenced by participants' reluctance to lead and/or a desire to "learn more" before fully committing to leadership roles, Asian Americans experience pervasive feelings of inadequacy In addition to feelings of initial hesitancy, participants experience feelings of dissonance—they are forced to balance their Asian Americanness with their Westernized leadership roles. Female participants struggled against a double bamboo ceiling—in other words, the need to prove their leadership competence not only as Asian Americans but also women. Although not an emerging theme, the intersection of gender and age was also briefly discussed.

Secondly, there is an urgent need to increase Asian American leadership representation in K-12 public schools. Findings, supported by literature (Johnson & Sy, 2016), reveal that the majority of questionnaire participants ($n = 92$) did not have early career aspirations to pursue the principalship. Focus group/interview participants did not explore the field until they were in

college. Most shared common feelings of pressure from parents, both overt and covert, to pursue traditional Asian careers (i.e., medicine, law, engineering). The community, and especially the Asian American population, suffers from the lack of Asian American principals. In order to provide role models for students, teachers, and community members alike, it is critical to recruit more Asian American principals. This recruitment may alter normative understanding of what constitutes a good leader. It thus can pave the path for more Asian Americans to enter the field of education.

Therefore, the third conclusion revealed the need for a principal networking group for Asian Americans in K-12 public education. The principal role will continue to have its unique challenges; however, the questionnaire participants unanimously agreed that having a support network was instrumental in their journey. Despite feeling supported by friends, colleagues, and mentors, focus group/interview participants mentioned a lack of an organized support group for administrators. This observation is also supported by my lack of a consolidated Asian American group sample. Asian American educators desire intentional mentoring, fostered relationships, and invitation to collaborate. An organized support group would support their journey and ultimately encourage others to follow in their footsteps.

Finally, it is critical to affirm Asian American students, who will undoubtedly have to navigate racial politics when returning to school. Findings indicated that most principals pursued their positions in order to provide impactful leadership. 100% of the focus group/interview participants noted their ability to make a larger change, whether in the lives of students, staff members, or the school community at large.

Being Both Asian American and a "Good Leader" Is Possible

The findings of this study affirmed that it is difficult to be seen as a "good," qualified

Asian American leader, as suggested by the narratives told by multiple focus group/interview

participants and supported by literature (Johnson & Sy, 2016). The questionnaire findings largely

indicated that most participants did not experience discrimination in the workplace; however,

based on focus group and interview conversations, it was evident that participants experienced

covert microaggressions, mainly in interview panels.

Acknowledge the Presence of the Bamboo Ceiling. Although the majority, 61 out of 92

participants (67%), had mentors vouch for them, such support was not enough to advance them

to the principalship. Principal M, an internal candidate at the time of applying for the principal

role, believed he "had somewhat of a leg up knowing the culture, knowing the dynamics, and

knowing the players." Principal M even proved himself capable when he stepped in as the

"substitute principal." He proved his leadership abilities to the district leaders and even acted as a

stand-in principal, but was still not chosen for the role. Although his principal recommended him

to the superintendent and put him in various spotlight situations, Principal M still found it

difficult to pass the first round. He admitted that even after incorporating the panel feedback and

making changes based on their suggestions, he still could not break their negative perception of

him. He shared his eye-opening experience:

> It was heartbreaking. . . . It sort of goes back to even my own district that I had spent so
> many years in, who knew the quality of work that I could produce and provide…
> And maybe this is something in terms of an Asian perspective. . . that if you put in the
> hard work, you remain loyal, and you show results, it should have meant something. And
> unfortunately, it didn't. So, whether those were preconceived notions, like 'Hey, you
> know what, he seems like he can do everything else, but just doesn't seem like he could
> lead. He just doesn't fit the mold.' That, for me, was honestly heartbreaking and a hard
> pill to swallow.

Principal M's story was not an uncommon one; various principals and assistant principals continually knocked on doors that did not open. Assistant Principal D shared that he had attended 11 job interviews before being hired in his current role. In the same focus group, Assistant Principal F stated that he attended 13 interviews before an opportunity had finally opened. Field notes indicated nonverbal cues such as head nodding, emphasizing participants' agreement with another. On average, participants in this focus group needed to attend nine job interviews to land a position. Such hardship only reflects the general lack of Asian Americans in higher leadership and management positions. Participants needed to prove and re-prove their credibility to others in order to get the job, as if proving themselves once was not enough (Johnson & Sy, 2016). In the words of Congresswoman Meng, we Asian Americans are "perpetually made to feel like foreigners in our own country" (NPR, 2021). Despite how many generations our families have resided in the United States, we are never viewed as fully American (NPR, 2021) or fully assimilated into American society, and we are never fully accepted as "good leaders," despite often being more qualified than our White colleagues.

The bamboo ceiling maintains a strong presence and, in the education field, deters Asian American candidates from being properly considered for principalships. It is no surprise that participants had feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt from these experiences. Principal M shared the damaging repercussions of the bamboo ceiling on his perception of self:

> It's been a long journey. . . Others have asked why it's taken me so long to become a principal, and it's not for lack of trying. I've been looking, I've been trying because I was an assistant principal for over six years. And I'm talking to some other assistant principals that are Asian American as well, we felt the same experience because they've been as assistant principals for just as long as I was . . . 5, 6, 7 years. It's also been a challenge for them to take that next step and get that role. And we're scratching our heads, like, why is it? We have the experience. Um, what is it that we're lacking? And it does get into our heads, at times, to be very frank with you . . . we start questioning ourselves.

Unlike the overt racism Andrew Yang (2020) denounced in his controversial Washington opinion editorial, "We Asian Americans are not the virus but we can be part of the cure," the nature of the bamboo ceiling is more subtle, making it more ominous and harmful.

    Find the Right Balance in Leading. Furthermore, there has been a large difference in the way others perceive Asian Americans and the traits people tend to gravitate towards in a leader (Johnson & Sy, 2016). While Western leaders are expected to be competent, charismatic, and masculine; Eastern cultural norms teach humility and deference to authority (Hyun, 2007). These conflicting leadership expectations have put participants in the study at a great disadvantage, often keeping them in sidekick or mid-level management positions instead of top-level leadership ones. Participants in this study all had unique styles of leadership that were shaped by their personal values and experiences; culture inevitably played a role in shaping their pedagogical decisions. Most focus group/interview participants identified with servant leadership; others viewed themselves more as a transformational leader. Participants' leadership styles varied, but the one thing that they shared was the struggle to balance their complex, nuanced identities as Asian American educators. They faced a double-bind: if they were too reserved, they were seen as unassertive or indecisive; if they adjusted and acted charismatic, they were viewed as inauthentic or overbearing. Similar to Johnson and Sy's study (2016), which measured perceived characteristics, Asian Americans were less liked when acting dominant. However, if they did not project enough dominance, they were not viewed as good leaders. When stepping into a predominantly White male role, female participants' experiences affirmed a sexist trend: women experienced greater difficulty than Asian men in being promoted to executive positions (Johnson & Sy, 2016).

Being Credible Female and Credible Asian American Leaders. Questionnaire findings of this study confirmed that female principals and assistant principals faced an added layer as they were expected to operate within a "good leader" prototype of finding the fine balance between competent and assertive (Johnson & Sy, 2016). The majority of female participants (60%) disagreed or strongly disagreed when asked if gender was an advantage of being chosen for the principalship role, yielding a mean score of 2.37 (*SD = 0.75).* Focus group and interview findings suggested that most female participants (63%) perceived more existing barriers than men—reinforcing the glass ceiling. According to these findings, Asian American men enjoy a more linear trajectory and fewer barriers compared to Asian American women. On the other hand, there was not a significant difference between male and female responses when it came to perceived support. This observation may show a growing acceptance of women in higher leadership positions.

Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling. Many participants were initially reluctant to lead. However, even when those doubts abated, external factors still hindered their professional advancement, again reinforcing the presence of the bamboo ceiling. As Hyun (2007) suggests, breaking the ceiling takes personal initiative, networking, self-promotion, and self-assertion. Asian American principals in this study who broke through the bamboo ceiling did so by successfully balancing their Asian American identities, an emerging theme identified in the questionnaire data. Principals in the focus groups and interviews identified the importance of finding that balance–what Principal G calls a "fine-line." The driving factor for most participants to pursue leadership positions was their desire to make a lasting impact. They wanted to put students and community at the forefront of the education battle and provide lasting change from

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a big picture approach. Regardless of the work and time it took, the principals in the study broke through the bamboo ceiling, demonstrating to other Asian Americans what is possible. Findings that emerged from this study are supported by literature and have highlighted the importance of mentorship and having a support network.

There Must Be Urgency in Increasing the Asian American Principal Pipeline

The findings of this study revealed the overall lack of urgency when it came to increasing the numbers of Asian American principals in K-12 public schools. Findings revealed that most participants ($n = 92$) did not have early career aspirations to pursue the principalship. Alongside existing literature, the focus group and interview participants confirm these sentiments. They highlight that most Asian Americans, growing up, feel parental pressure from parents to pursue traditional Asian careers that yield higher social capital (i.e., medicine, law, engineering). When unpacking these themes further, most focus group/interview participants admitted to not wanting to explore the field of education until later in college. Similarly, participants did not want to pursue the principalship until later in their professional work experiences. Feelings of doubt and inadequacy were shared across the board. There must be more overall concern for Asian American administrators and their lack of representation.

Debunking the Model Minority Myth. To this day, Asian Americans continue to be the supposed model minority. This damaging stereotype erroneously paints all Asian Americans as naturally successful. In other words, it invalidates stories of hardship and struggle, such as those of Principal M, Assistant Principal D, and Assistant Principal F, among others. The most concerning problem is the absence of a larger AAPI administrative network. Despite the obvious need and desire for such a network there exists a lack of support and funding. To compound this

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issue, some participants in the study lacked a sense of urgency themselves. A few questioned the

sustainability of an AAPI organization, while others openly admitted that they would not join

due to their already busy schedule and other priorities (i.e., family, children). Principal B recalled

recently attending an AAPI networking event hosted by the Association for School

Administrators and finding it disappointing—there were not even enough attendees to fill one

Zoom screen. She was shocked that a state-advertised networking event did not garnish more

interest within the Asian American community. She concluded with these sentiments: "It kind of

made me sad… because I thought, well, no wonder I feel kind of alone." Principal H likewise

reflected on a lack of urgent community collectiveness, saying:

> Asian educators did graduate from very prestigious colleges and have been doing well. I
> mean, most are solidly middle class/upper-middle class. In some ways, when you're not
> at that . . . life and death level, the urgency just isn't organically there.

Principal B reiterated the role of the model minority myth in encouraging a lack of community

agency. Because Asian Americans are perceived as the successful or token minority, this kind of

organization or pipeline will not exist unless it is intentionally created. She shared:

> The pipeline is not the same [referring to minority groups]. It's almost like. . . we have to
> do it on our own merit. And that we have to work hard, right? It's not going to be handed
> to us. And I feel like the other groups are like, "Look, you've been shut out because of
> discrimination, so I'm going to give you a leg up."

The Need for an AAPI Organization.

The principalship is an arduous, complex role, as described by participants of this study

and Pierce (1935), and it can be isolating, full of pressure, and lead to feelings of self-doubt and

uncertainty. The small sample size ($n = 92$) of Asian American assistant principals and principals

in K-12 public schools was telling in itself. There were many roadblocks when seeking out a

single, consolidated Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) administrative group in California,

where the study predominantly took place. Although there do exist smaller pockets of AAPI administrative support groups (in San Francisco and Los Angeles), most are either larger district based or grouped by specific ethnicity or geographic location.

Assistant principals and principals who broke through the bamboo ceiling identified that a support organization played a crucial role in their success. Additionally, the questionnaire findings highlight the need for a support network that expands beyond family, friends, and a mentor. Focus group/interview participants in the study believed Asian Americans, as educators, can tremendously impact the next generation of Asian American students and better their own community and better the world. Participants largely agreed that an Asian American principalship pipeline or organization should be in place. Some principals and assistant principals have already started collaborating to create a California state-wide organization called California Association of Asian and Pacific Leaders in Education (CAAPLE), which aims to connect future Asian American administrators and educators to establish a pipeline that may lead to greater representation in the principalship role. The future vision is to take this network nationwide.

We Must Be Driven by a Collective, Greater Vision. Field notes reveal participants' enthusiasm and excitement regarding the possibility of an administrative organization. While most were compelled to learn more or help out in any way that they could, some expressed concerns over the sustainability and purpose of an organization. These valid concerns further address the need to be collectively driven by a united vision or an ideological commitment, something bigger than the individual. Principle (H) posited:

> [The unity not just within the education sector, but just society at large] And maybe that's what our Latin and Black fellow school leaders instinctively know, you know, like, for

instance, black educators, from teachers to administrator, they're very tied in with the Black Lives Matter movement. Right? So in some ways, they're all very much political leaders, as well as education leaders. And I think there's again, certain averseness of the [Asian] culture to being politically involved. Again, the nail that sticks up shall be struck down.

To mobilize different Asian groups of people, there must be a collective drive that firstly unites them together, and secondly propels them forward as a community. Because the term "Asian American" is a monolith, the assumption is that all Asian Americans can seamlessly band together. The truth is that this is not a simple task. Within different subgroups, generations of history and context complicate identity and culture.

The principals and assistant principals in the study held differing ideological views and pedagogical leadership. But even with varying experiences, backgrounds, life stories, and skills, all participants were connected by the greater commitment to serving students and positively impacting the school community. Thus, the diversity of experiences enriches the shared vision of Asian American educators to inspire and serve. Grace Lee Boggs (1941) stated:

People are aware that they cannot continue in the same old way but are immobilized because they cannot imagine an alternative. We need a vision that recognizes that we are at one of the great turning points in human history when the survival of our planet and the restoration of our humanity require a great sea change in our ecological, economic, political, and spiritual values.

Our Asian American Students Need to be Affirmed

When asked if they ever wanted to become a school principal growing up, the majority of questionnaire participants (73%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Focus group and interview participants reflected back on their early K-12 school experiences. Principal B candidly shared

the internal trauma she still had from having to navigate her dual identity as a South Asian

student:

> I was really [a] shamed in middle school and high school [of] my culture. I remember the henna tattoos, which everybody gets now, I used to come to school with that, and I got made fun of. And then Madonna did it, and it was okay . . . So I've got these real kinds of . . . like I don't even know that I want to go to an Asian American group because of the trauma attached to what happened to me. It's like, oh, I'm gonna go eat Indian. Oh, here's the sari and all this stuff that I was like, wow, I got made fun of because of that. I just wonder, did we kind of just moving through life, learning how to be invisible?

Principal B could only recall one teacher who showed some interest in her and had called home, reporting to her mom that she had "looked sad" that day. After her mom replied that she was fine, Principal B remembered being scolded and told not to "embarrass her in front of her teacher." Findings suggest these cultural sentiments of "saving face" and "self-hatred" are intricately tied together and often shaped the way participants operationalized their role as a school principal. Even now, Principal B ensures that she is checking on her gifted students. As educators and leaders, it is essential to affirm, acknowledge, and uplift students—in hopes to shatter even our own perpetuation of the model minority within our schools.

Encouraging Our Asian American Girls to Take Risks

An emerging theme from the questionnaire was an overall reluctance to lead. Participants in focus groups and interviews recognized that some of the reasons might be related to risk aversion, perfectionism, and self-doubt. Female participants expressed mutual feelings of constantly proving their credibility, despite their merit. These sentiments were not shared unanimously among male participants. Although not explicitly identified as an emerging theme or subtheme, three female participants alluded to fulfilling some childhood expectations of what it meant to be an "Asian girl." Principal L spoke about the importance of reconceptualizing the

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traditional role of an Asian mother, wife, and daughter. Asian girls are often taught to be, or perceived as, submissive. In households with traditionally Confucian values, they are not encouraged to be loud or outspoken. She shared her observations when walking into teachers' classrooms with many Asian students:

> None of the [Asian] girls are talking. And I think, yes, that's normal in many cultures, and we live in a very male-dominated world, but especially in the Asian culture, it's high, right?

Educators must create safe spaces for all our students, especially Asian girls, to step out of their comfort zone, especially if the comfort zone is rooted in silence. Reshma Saujani (2016), founder of Girls Who Code, fostered a risk-taking environment for young girls through programming. She quickly discovered that it was not enough to teach her girls to be good at coding. Her friend, Lev Brie, a computer science professor at Columbia University, told a story about his office hours:

> The guys who are struggling with an assignment will come in and say, "Professor, there's something wrong with my code." The girls will come in and say, "Professor, there is something wrong with *me*" (Saujani, 2016).

If the goal is to see more women in the principalship, an intense role that requires leveraging conflict, the U.S. socialization of perfection has to be reversed. Only when girls learn that failure and imperfection are natural and necessary can an environment of growth and bravery flourish.

Limitations and Delineations

This seeks to compensate for the lack of research on the representation of Asian American principals in K-12 education; however, there are several potential limitations to consider. First, only a small number of public school principals and assistant principals ($N = 100$) were invited to complete the questionnaire in this study. Ninety-two out of 100 participants

completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 92%. Most participants worked in K-12 schools on the West Coast, specifically California. As such, findings may not apply to other Asian Americans in the principalship in other states or countries or private schools. Additionally, participants were chosen through purposeful snowball sampling. Although conscious efforts were made to gather as many participants as possible, accessing a consolidated database of K-12 Asian American principals was extremely difficult–mainly because it did not exist. Due to these limitations, insights that emerged from the study may not be generalizable to all Asian Americans who aspire to be principals.

Secondly, items on the questionnaire assumed that all participants had a foundational understanding of what it means to be "Asian American," and some language may have been confusing to principals and assistant principals. The wording of questions may have affected their responses and the questionnaire results.

Further, the questionnaire requires respondents to be vulnerable. In other words, it may have unintentionally threatened participants' sense of validity and self-affirmation. Participants were asked questions regarding discrimination in the workplace, influences of cultures, etc. I made efforts to build rapport beforehand for the focus groups and interviews by sending introductions via email, but the interviews were, for the most part, our first real-time interaction with each other. I also disclosed potential risks involved in the study and sent questions to participants beforehand, if requested. To further mitigate these limitations, the questionnaire was completely anonymous. Despite conscious efforts to ensure external validity, I felt some participants were still holding back on their responses or hesitated to elaborate. During focus groups, field notes revealed moments where participants looked like they wanted to say more,

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but stopped themselves. Thus, not all participants may have been as forthcoming or transparent with their responses.

Finally, at the time of the study, the COVID-19 global pandemic had taken its toll. All participants were principals or assistant principals who had to adapt to navigating the virtual world for students and staff. With some schools adopting a hybrid model, this shift in learning, while others remained virtual, was novel and constantly in flux. Preparing for reopening schools amid the unknown demanded time and energy from already busy principals. Therefore, participants may have been emotionally exhausted or drained when taking the questionnaire or participating in a focus group or interview. A handful of participants even commented on how "cathartic" this process was, just to be able to share their experiences–unfiltered and anonymously, with no repercussions to their job. Participants in this study were incredibly generous with their time, and most seemed genuinely interested in advancing the cause and learning more about this study. Some even stayed after the official interview had concluded to ask questions about my journey, and what led me to this research.

Positionality and Assumptions

I am a product of K-12 public school education. I have served as an educator for the past five years and have also been very active in race, equity, and inclusion issues. As such, my professional and personal experience has contributed to my positionality. It is essential to acknowledge that I hold several assumptions about the factors that affect representation and Asian Americans in the principalship. Through my first five years of teaching, I experienced racialized moments, both of racist love and racist hate (Chin & Chan, 1972). From West Philly to Rhode Island, I have witnessed the damaging effects of students who have never even seen an

Asian person. Behind the "Ching-Chong" accents and slanted eye gestures, my students, like many today, were uneducated about Asian Americans and Asian American history in general. This became all too evident when a senior, whom I had been working with since the beginning of 11th grade, looked up astonished and replied, "Ms. Yoon, you're Korean? I thought you were Asian?" This was after I revealed that my parents were South Korean immigrants. That day, instead of teaching English, I gave a lesson on geography. I provide this example not to ridicule or shame but to create urgency on the importance of representation. These experiences have undeniably shaped me as an Asian American educator and a female leader. They reveal my biases, but they also affirm my assumptions. I know that for Asian Americans in the principalship in K-12 education, even more hardships exist, and the array of experiences and emotions when it comes to representation and race are surely diverse.

Recommendations

Quantitative and qualitative findings of this study, along with the available literature (Pierce, 1935, Kafka, 2009;), support the school principal's undeniably crucial role and impact. Principals can create lasting change; they create solutions, integrate policy, and positively affect school climate and culture (Pierce, 1935). The principal's ability to be adaptable and address teacher concerns, community requests, and student needs are critical factors behind the success of a school. Those in the principalship are in the best position to shift the school culture, redefine the narrative, and affect student learning and motivation. The ability to make impactful change is

even more true for Asian Americans in the principalship in providing a role model for teachers and students and the greater community.

As previously mentioned, the importance of having a culturally responsive role model has its benefits in the classroom (Boisrond, 2017). Without a collective organization, a shared vision, or authentic support propelling Asian educators forward, it will be challenging become a K-12 public school principal. Unfortunately, until intentional pipelines or official organizations are established and funded, there is no guarantee that there will be more Asian Americans in leadership positions. Although the need and desire for greater Asian American representation are there, the lack of an administrative network for Asian American educators suggests that Asian Americans are still invisible. This study clearly demonstrated that principals require support to both enter their leadership roles and sustain their positions. They need assistance, support, and training. I thus make specific recommendations for policymakers and district leaders to assist those impacted by the K-12 public school principalship pipeline.

Recommendations for Policy Makers and District Leaders

Although the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1992) has acknowledged the AAPI community as the fabric of our nation and has improved efforts to ensure equality in the workplace, more work needs to be done. As Daniel Dae Kim, a Korean American actor and producer, testified before the U.S Congress on March 19, 2021, "We are 23 million strong, we are united, and we are waking up" (2021). According to Pew Research (Kochhar, & Cilluffo, 2020), AAPIs are the fastest-growing demographic group in the U.S.—making up about one-third of the 1 million annual incoming immigrants. It is estimated that by 2050, AAPIs will constitute 9.7% of the total U.S. population, or around 40 million people (Budiman & Ruiz,

2021). It has been great to see active participants in the White House Initiative on AAPI and fighting for AAPI equal employment opportunities; however, it does not always work that way in educational leadership. Although the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1992) is responsible for upholding laws, such as Title VII of the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964, which prohibits employment discrimination based on race and origin, it is often difficult to see these laws materialize in the workplace.

Redefining Who Can Lead

The traditional role of the principal has historically been filled by a White male (Pierce 1935). Even today, Whites make up almost 80% of the K-12 principalship pipeline (NCES, 2018). Many assistant principals and principals acknowledge the bamboo ceiling and noted the challenges of being an Asian American and the accompanying perceptions. Western leadership styles are often viewed as strengths, while "Asianness" is not usually viewed as favorably in higher leadership spaces (Johnson & Sy, 2016). Women face an additional barrier: the gender inequality, exacerbated by racism and subtle sexism (Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2016). A handful of female participants noted in their interviews that there was still "traces of the good ole boys club." Principal V, an assistant principal at the time, shared her experiences working on a four-member team with three other men. She shared:

> But because we were so close, they would share some of the information available within their little network with me. You know, like you have your chat rooms, you have your buddies that you hang out with and share information, whether it's rumored or just 'Hey, did you hear this? This position opened up. So, you know, that kind of Intel I was privy to because of my connection with my team. If I were a principal at another site, that probably wouldn't have happened.

Principal N, who described herself as an affiliate member of the "boys' club," reflected on her involvement in sports, and especially how often she played basketball with the boys. She

hypothesized that such involvement allowed her to be more "accepted." Although she herself could jive well with her male colleagues, Principal N shared that her female principal friends weren't viewed in the same light. She stated:

> I'm kind of in a weird place. You know, you can grow up in the locker room. You can talk locker room with the guys. But I noticed like some of my friends who are [female] principals can't. And if they try to speak locker room, they are viewed as you know, 'Oh women shouldn't talk like that–that kind of a thing.'

It is vital to reconceptualize the role and redefine who can lead. Participants in this study, those who have broken through the bamboo ceiling, authentically embraced who they were while leveraging their culture. Nearly all participants spoke about the importance of remaining true to who you are; however, it is just as important to adapt to your audience accordingly.

Intentionally Recruiting AAPI Principals and Leaders

Most participants in this study mentioned the importance of mentorship to their success in the role. Questionnaire findings revealed the overall importance of having a support network in place; all items pertaining to this section, yielding a mean score of over 4.00 (*agree or strongly agree*). To elaborate, focus group and interview participants affirmed that those in higher positions of leadership could use their leverage to uplift, support, and bring others into these spaces. It was also noted that Asian Americans are far too often comfortable staying in their lane. They tend not to want to "rock the boat" (Principal M) or cause too much attention to themselves. However, it is critical for those in positions of hiring and recruitment to be purposefully investing in Asian American leaders. Such investments could even create a domino effect of positive affirmation and representation.

Recommendations for Aspiring Asian American Principals

The overall findings, supported by Boisrond (2017), highlighted the importance of increasing Asian American numbers in the principal role, providing representation for all students. Questionnaire findings suggested that various factors may inhibit one from embarking on this arduous route of obtaining a principalship. Despite these roadblocks, nearly every interview participant in the study spoke about the importance of having someone to encourage them. Principal E stated:

> It's a difficult road, and it's not going to be easy. Like I said before, I interview four times before I got the position. One thing is, you cannot let that get you down because the right opportunity will be there. It's a matter of staying focused, staying true to who you are, and understanding the profound impact you can have on students of color or students who look like you. So, it's just understanding that any roadblock that's put in front of you is not meant to stop you. It's just meant for you to figure out how to get over it, around it, or through it. And that's it.

Be Water, My Friend

The majority (78%) of questionnaire participants *agreed or strongly agreed* that their own career aspirations contributed to their ability to secure the role. Focus group and interview participants, who have successfully achieved the assistant principal or principal role, further advised those coming into administration to be adaptable and willing to take on any opportunity, even if it's not the exact one desired. Participants even advise others to be adaptable and flexible. This reflects Bruce Lee's description of water as *formless*: people shouldn't allow themselves to be stuck in a certain mindset or perspective (Lee, 2020). In the same way, aspiring principals must adapt to specific situations, grow, and change.

Actively Seek Out Mentorship

Reflective of trends in literature (Hyun, 2007), most participants (69%) indicated the importance of mentorship for Asian Americans going into a principalship role. When asked about the importance of mentoring, focus group and interview participants spoke about somebody who either strongly encouraged them along the way to the principal role or was in their corner for support as they sought out different leadership roles. Many participants had initially been reluctant to lead, but despite their feelings of inadequacy, their mentors pushed them to consider the position. Female participants were particularly encouraged by mentors who pushed them into the role. They wanted others to take advantage of mentorship and advised that they actively seek someone out. Principal L believed that by nature, women tend to gravitate towards support and guidance because we are always seeking to improve. Most women shared these sentiments; they actively sought to improve and hone their craft before jumping into a position.

Shatter Perceptions, Remain Authentic

Like Hyun (2007), focus group and interview participants suggested that Asian Americans needed to reflect upon how their own culture or self-limitations may impose barriers to advancement. Principal L offered an example of Asians who do not speak up. She believed that, even at the site level, you must navigate different views and voice your opinions to others as a teacher. Similarly, Yang (2020) posited that it is not sufficient to denounce these unfair biases, and participants agreed that Asian Americans are responsible for reversing these perceptions. Echoing Principal L, interview participants noted the importance of remaining authentic to your true self (Principal Z) because others will quickly realize "when you are trying to be something

or someone you're not" (Assistant Principal X). Findings support the critical need to shatter perceptions while remaining authentic by suggesting that Asian American leaders become aware of the connections between values, behaviors, and perceptions.

Get the Extra Credentials

While merit speaks volumes for others, Asian Americans must continue to prove their status in the United States and their ability to be competent leaders. This remains true when entering higher positions of leadership. Despite experience and qualifications, findings revealed participants were continually overlooked for leadership positions. Despite preconceived notions that others may hold, participants suggested remaining steadfast and getting the doctorate or additional certifications to boost up your resume. Women in focus group one all agreed that the extra degrees came in handy. Three of the six focus group participants were women; two female principals held doctorate degrees (Principal A, Principal B), while all the men held master's degrees. The third female participant, Assistant Principal C, commented that she felt she needed a doctorate to be considered for the principalship role.

Future Research Recommendations

This study focused on the impact of being an Asian American on becoming a K-12 public school principal. The study addressed the global research question and three sub-questions:

- How do Asian Americans perceive the challenges and opportunities of becoming a K-12 public school principal?

  - Are gender differences correlated with the way that principals perceived their challenges and opportunities?

- Are role distinctions (i.e., assistant principal versus principal) correlated with the way principals perceived their challenges and opportunities?

- Are generational differences correlated with the way that principals perceived their challenges and opportunities?

First and foremost, an area for future research is to further explore intersections between gender and age. While age was mentioned a few times during the study, these elements were not controlled as a part of this study and may be necessary for future research. A handful of participants, mostly younger, identified age as a prevailing challenge over ethnicity. Asian American female principals who started their careers younger felt a greater need to prove their credibility.

Second, further research could reveal barriers women have overcome and the various factors that facilitated their climb to the upper strata of leadership positions in educational organizations. This study confirmed mentorship as one of the most influential factors in career advancement for women (Connell et al., 2015). Additional research on the role of mentorship is necessary and a concerted effort from educational organizations to recruit and retain more women.

Additionally, principals all noted initial support and mentorship as key factors contributing to their success. While many recalled receiving initial support when transitioning to the role, they could not recall having a robust support system once in the position. Findings demonstrated that receiving mentorship and successfully networking were necessary to enter principalship. Interestingly, once secured in the role, both seem to dwindle significantly. Further

consideration of the impact of ongoing mentorship may contribute to a better understanding of the role's sustainability.

Fourth, future research is needed to explore the broad, pan-ethnic term, Asian American (including Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders), who makeup roughly 9% of the U.S population and represent over 30 countries, with 100 different languages. The umbrella term is often used to erroneously lump multiple Asian subgroups into one category. Although this was not something explicitly brought up by many, a few participants did highlight the necessity to research particular Asian subgroups (e.g., East Asian, South Asian) due to their distinct differences.

Fifth, further research on the impact of creating a state-wide organization may lead to additional findings on ways to recruit more Asian Americans into teaching and eventually increase the principalship pipeline nationwide.

Finally, given the 2021 political climate and events related to rising hate crimes against Asian Americans in the United States (Yang, 2020), additional research on the impact of discrimination due to the COVID-19 pandemic on Asian American leaders and lasting effects on their sense of self may be impactful to the field.

Conclusion

> Progress far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness. . . .Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.—Philosopher George Santayana, (Santayana & Gouinlock, 1904, p. 284

As we progress towards a more equitable education system, Asian Americans must be represented in leadership circles, and especially the principalship. This study aims to identify the perceived challenges and opportunities of Asian Americans seeking to pursue or maintain

principal positions, and how their endeavors impact professional mobility and presence in K-12 public education. The study's conceptual framework, AsianCrit, centers the authentic, racialized experiences of Asian Americans in the United States, allowing us to see principals and assistant principals in fuller light. This work is ultimately in service to all Asian Americans in the principalship, who have for so long been unnoticed for their efforts and often unacknowledged as strong and competent leaders. Their story, their voices, and their contributions must be celebrated and lifted.

Findings suggest that Asian Americans face a plethora of barriers, which affect both their leadership performance and others' assessment of their leadership performance. Examples include Reluctance to Lead, Immigrant Guilt, and the presence of the Bamboo Ceiling, which worsens when leaders are women. These identified challenges may be contributing factors to Asian Americans' absence in the principalship. Despite the existing barriers, internal self-limiting ones, and managing negative perceptions, participants remained hopeful for a better future. Opportunities for Asian American principals are rooted in Leadership That Is Impactful and Sustainable, Leadership that Embraces the Balance of our Nuanced Identities, and Leadership That Uplifts Our Asian American Educators.

Ultimately, if Asian Americans are kept from leading, the bamboo ceiling will remain in place. Education leaders have a shared responsibility to build a racially just education system for all children in the United States, ensuring that schools are safe, inclusive, and filled with joy. As Grace Lee Boggs (1998) stated, "You cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it unless you see yourself as belonging to it and responsible for changing it." The principals in this study have committed to driving change. I am responsible to do so as well.

We are eternally grateful to the forerunners of Asian America, who incited change through Asian

American movements and blazed the path before. We will continue to hold the torch high,

standing side-by-side with other communities of color and building your legacy.

Afterthought

> Can I write honestly? Not only about how much I've been hurt but how I have hurt
> others? And can I do it without steeping myself in guilt, since guilt demands absolution
> and is therefore self-serving? In other words, can I apologize without demanding your
> forgiveness? Where do I begin?—Cathy Park Hong, 2021, p. 109

While I was reading *Minor Feelings* by Cathy Park Hong (2021), Black Lives Matter

protests were taking place in nearby cities every week. I thought of George Floyd, his neck

pressed against the ground, and I couldn't help but sink in shame. I believe that as a middle class

East Asian American doctorate student, I am privileged, and the recognition of that privilege

makes me feel that shame all the deeper. Perhaps Hong articulated these feelings of inner turmoil

best when she wrote, "Isn't it indulgent for Asians, a minority that has been handed advantages

over others, to take up so much space?" I had similar sentiments when confronting my own

Asian identity in relation to other minority groups.

It was the same shame I felt when I learned about the verdict of Soon Ja Dun, a Korean

store owner who shot and killed Latasha Harling. It was the same shame I felt when I had asked

my parents of their interpretation of the 1992 riots and the burning of Koreatown– a place we

called home, and where my father had business at the time. Soon Ja Dun's face is like mine, but

also it is not. Likewise, Latasha Harling's face is like mine, but also, it is very much not. The

thing about racism is that it makes us forget our similarities. We instead focus on our differences.

In "White Flights," Jess Row, stated that "America's great and possibly catastrophic failure is its

failure to imagine what it means to live together." Perhaps it's finally time to reimagine the racial

discourse in this country, which for a long time has been binary. While at the same time, we have to reckon with the fact that by 2050, the bulk of the population will consist of immigrants–Brown, East Asian, along with indigenous people. So where do we all fit? And how do we all learn to co-exist?

If our hope is found in dismantling America's inequities, we must first reconcile our biases and shame. Asian American educators like myself must realize that while education can lead to reconciliation, it can also wedge our Asian American community against other communities of color. It can wedge us against white society; it can wedge us against ourselves. But it can also save us, functioning as an instrument of freedom (Freire, 1970). When Asian Americans are silent to the issues that plague our Black brothers and sisters, we are silent to issues that also plague us. It is imperative to understand our complex, transnational history (both in the United States and through the colonialist past), have difficult conversations with those within our community circles, and acknowledge how we have benefitted from Black liberation movements and the initiative of those who came before us.

I remind myself that advocating for my own race means advocating for other races too. Comedian Kamau Bell in NPR's (2020*) All Things Considered*, Bell stated, "Being against racism means being against racism. And it means being against racism when it isn't convenient, or easy, or fun, or even when the person you are trying to help doesn't consider you one of their people, or one of their allies, or doesn't even *see you at all*." Somewhere along the way, we've fallen for the harmful rhetoric that in order to dismantle white supremacy, we must choose whose humanity matters more. We must choose between ourselves and our brothers and sisters around us who are hurting as well. But why do we have to choose? Because the truth is, as long as

inequities exist, it impacts us all. Dismantling racism will require our united efforts. It is not an "us versus them." We must stand with other communities of color, empathizing with our brothers' heartache, fighting for our sisters' voices, and celebrating each other's gains. If we hope to truly heal, we must reckon with our own complicity and own our responsibility to dismantle it. When this work seems insurmountable, I think of Yuri Kochiyama standing beside Malcom X, leading the Blank Panther movement with grit and grace. And then I believe it is possible.

An Anecdote: Heaven, Hell, and Humanity

Once upon a time, in a temple nestled in the misty end of south hill, lived a pair of monks. One monk was old, the other young.

"What are the differences between Heaven and Hell?" the young monk asked his old master one day.

"There are no material differences," replied the old monk.

"None at all?" asked the confused young monk.

The old monk only smiled, and when he spoke, his eyes closed peacefully.
"Both Heaven and Hell look the same," he said. "Both have dining halls, and both dining halls have big hot pots, and in both pots you will find boiled noodles, appetizing in smell and taste."

"After death, you are given a pair of meter-long chopsticks to eat these noodles. And to eat the noodles, you must hold the chopsticks properly at their ends. Cheating is impossible."

The old monk continued, "In the case of Hell, people are always starved. No matter how hard they try, they fail to slip the noodles into their mouths. The chopsticks are too long."
"But does not the same thing happen in Heaven?" the young monk questioned. "No," said his old master. "They can eat, even with meter-long chopsticks, because they each feed the people sitting opposite them. You see, that is the difference between Heaven and Hell." (Lau, 2019, p. 1).

Figure 6.

Heaven, Hell, and Humanity Parable

Note. "Heaven, Hell, and Humanity" by Eunice Hong (2021). Used with permission.

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For most of my life, I believed that racial differences were divisive. But the truth is that race does not keep us from loving—perception and judgment do. And I have learned, through intentional and difficult conversation, that vulnerability, authenticity, and humility—regardless of race—break those damaging perceptions and judgments. I have received such deep love from my brothers and sisters of all races. And if we continue this work of community empathy, we can learn to glory in the ways of heaven, ways that will free and feed us all.

To My Parents:

I recently learned that the Korean language has 19 consonants, and that at least 12 English consonants that do not exist in the Korean language. Sounds such as: /f/, /v/, /th/ /z/, /sh/, /ch/, /zh/, /j/, /r/ don't exist. Consonants /b, d/ and /g/ are often unvoiced. I wish I had known this information sooner– maybe I would have had more compassion for my non-fluent parents. I find such lack of compassion ironic, because English is my second language, just as it was for my parents. By the third grade, I spoke like a, "true American", my umma would proudly say. She

wanted me to fully assimilate into American culture, just as she wanted for herself. But despite my parents' efforts to learn English and attain citizenship, their pronunciation remains rudimentary, even after 25 years. I cannot count the number of times my parents were demeaned because of their broken English, completely powerless and unable to defend themselves. As "American" as she knows herself to be, she continues to live under the gaze of a country who views her as the other. Whether it was the condescending cashiers at supermarkets or rude restaurant servers, one thing became very clear—people would rather speak to a child than an adult with broken English. Language, I realized, was power.

As I conclude this study, I find myself reminiscing on my relationship with umma and appa—my parents. I am their only daughter, yet I do not really know them. Over the years, an emotional gap emerged from our cultural barriers and the physical distances. *What is their story?* It is both strange and sad that I know the stories of the 26 participants in my study, and the stories of my many students, without knowing the stories of my own parents. When I say "sad," I also mean disappointed; I don't know their story but I want to. I wonder, whether in Korean or English, if there is a word that conveys both remorse and hope.

"Why don't I know their stories?" I think to myself. "*Have I earnestly asked? Have I carefully listened?"* Perhaps this is my next mission. Or perhaps it was always the mission. Perhaps it is the reason I am writing any of this.

Imago Dei

I am fearfully and wonderfully made. (Psalms 139:14)

There were parts of this study that made me cry. The stories shared by participants affirmed my own fraught experiences, in both childhood and adulthood. *Guilt. Shame. Self-*

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doubt. Inadequacy. Will I ever be good enough? Repeated thoughts that won't stop shouting. The scary, sobering realization of this study is that such stories of belonging and unbelonging are not uncommon. My Asian American experience is a rather common one.

For most of my K-12 public school experience, I wanted to strip myself of everything "Asian": changing the way I spoke to avoid having an accent in elementary school, asking my mom to pack me sandwiches instead of my smelly Korean food, intentionally associating myself with peers who didn't look like me in high school so I wouldn't be associated with "the Asians." I was ashamed of myself and my Korean heritage. I hated the way I sounded and the way I looked. It took me too long to realize that being American didn't mean I had to shed my "Asianness," and that the values my parents, aunts, and grandparents taught me are holistic. They are not weak, submissive or docile (even if deemed as such by society). Rather, they impart resilience and strength, love and community. When I realized that my Asian identity was a blessing rather than a burden—a gift from God—I became free.

God created me, black hair, small brown eyes, and pale skin. He placed me in a Korean household, planted me in Southern California, watering and nurturing me through interracial community and a multi-ethnic, multi-generational church I call home I write these words to remind myself that the Lord will provide, restore, and sustain me. I write these words to remind me that God made me this way, in His image– *I am fearfully and wonderfully made*. I am Asian American, and also so much more. I am His precious child.

APPENDIX A

Demographics Questionnaire.

1. Which Asian American group do you identify with?
   a. Asian Indian
   b. Bangladeshi
   c. Cambodian
   d. Chinese
   e. Filipino
   f. Hmong
   g. Indonesian
   h. Japanese
   i. Korean
   j. Laotian
   k. Malaysian
   l. Pakistani
   m. Sri Lankan
   n. Taiwanese
   o. Thai
   p. Vietnamese
   q. Bhutanese
   r. Burmese
   s. Indochinese
   t. Iwo Jiman
   u. Madagascar
   v. Maldivian
   w. Nepalese
   x. Okinawan
   y. Singaporean
   z. other Asian (please specify) _____

2.   Gender
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Other (please specify) _____
   d. Choose not to identify

3.   What is your job position?
   a. Principal
   b. Assistant Principal
   c. Other (please specify) _____

4. I am an administrator at a(n)_____?
   a. Elementary School
   b. Middle School
   c. High School

5. At the end of the 2020-2021 school year, how many years will you have been in yourcurrent position?
   a. 1 – 2 years
   b. 3 – 5 years
   c. 6 – 10 years
   d. 10 or more years

6. Which of the following educational jobs have you held in your career? (check all theapply)
   a. Assistant Principal
   b. Administrative Role (Dean of students, etc.)
   c. Teacher Leader
   d. Teacher
   e. District Office
   f. Other (please specify) _____

7. Which immigrant generation do you most identify with?
   a. First generation (born and raised outside of U.S.)
   b. 1.5 generation (born outside, and mostly raised in the U.S.)
   c. Second generation (born in U.S., at least one parent born outside)
   d. Third generation (self and parents born and raised in U.S., grandparents born andraised outside)
   e. Other (please specify): _____

8. Which of the following is your highest degree earned?
   a. Bachelor's
   b. Master's
   c. L.L.B.,J.D.
   d. M.D., D.D.S., or equivalent
   e. Ed.D.
   f. Ph.D.
   g. Other degree (please identify)

Career Aspirations

1. Growing up, I wanted to become (or thought about becoming) a principal.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree

- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

2. Growing up, I was encouraged by my parents to pursue "typical Asian careers" such asdoctors, lawyers, and engineers.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither Agree nor Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

3. When I entered college, I wanted to pursue a career in education.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither Agree nor Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

4. My cultural values growing up influenced my decision to pursue a career as a principal.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither Agree nor Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

5. My own career advancement goals influenced me in deciding to pursue a career as aprincipal.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither Agree nor Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

Cultural Influences

6. In my culture, the status of a teacher is viewed as an honorable position.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neither Agree nor Disagree
   - Agree

- Strongly Agree

7. In my culture, the status of a principal is viewed as an honorable position.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither Agree nor Disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly Agree

8. The pay rate of teachers is decent compared to other professional jobs.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither Agree nor Disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly Agree

9. The pay rate of principals is decent compared to other professional jobs.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither Agree nor Disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly Agree

10. I grew up significantly valuing education as a vehicle for upward mobility.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither Agree nor Disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly Agree

11. I was taught that traits such as hard work and humility would help me in life.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Neither Agree nor Disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly Agree

Experiences in the Workplace

12. Throughout my career, there were times that I thought I would not achieve my careergoals (or the principal position) due to my culture or Asian American identity.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree

- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

13. As an Asian American principal, I've experienced discrimination from my superiors.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

14. As an Asian American principal, I've experienced discrimination from my colleagues.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

15. As an Asian American principal, I've experienced discrimination from my communitymembers.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

16. I've found my gender to be an advantage in being chosen for the principalship.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Support Networks

17. My friends have supported my decision to pursue a career as a principal.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

18. My colleagues have supported my decision to pursue a career as a principal.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

19. My family has supported my decision to pursue a career as a principal.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

20. A mentor influenced me in deciding to pursue a career as a principal.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I will be interviewing Asian American principals and assistant principals to learn more about their experiences on the way to the principalship and/or in the role of principal. I will be invitinga subset of survey participants to participate in Zoom interviews or focus groups. Would you be interested in learning more about this opportunity?
a. Yes
b. No

APPENDIX B

Focus Group & Semistructured Interview Protocol

Introduction: My dissertation is on Asian Americans' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities of becoming a K-12 public school principal. Research points out that many Asian Americans are absent in educational leadership positions, especially the principalship. There maybe many different factors that influence their presence in the K-12 public school setting.

1. Describe your journey to the principalship

2. Have your cultural values impacted your decision to be a principal? If so, how?

3. Describe a moment either before becoming a principal or during your principalship whereyour Asian American identity or culture hindered your advancement.

4. What was the motivating factor to transition into the principal role?

5. What contributes most to being a successful Asian American principal?

6. When was a time you felt particularly supported while pursuing the principalship?

APPENDIX C

Field Notes Template

| Date: |
| Site: |
| Activity: |
| Participants |
| Length of Activity: |

General Notes:

Question	Highlights	Observations (Nonverbals)	Researcher' Connections

APPENDIX D

Experimental Subjects Bill of Rights

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Pursuant to California Health and Safety Code §24172, I understand that I have the following rights as a participant in a research study:

1. I will be informed of the nature and purpose of the experiment.

2. I will be given an explanation of the procedures to be followed in the medical experiment, and any drug or device to be utilized.

3. I will be given a description of any attendant discomforts and risks to be reasonably expected from the study.

4. I will be given an explanation of any benefits to be expected from the study, if applicable.

5. I will be given a disclosure of any appropriate alternative procedures, drugs or devices that might be advantageous and their relative risks and benefits.

6. I will be informed of the avenues of medical treatment, if any, available after the study is completed if complications should arise.

7. I will be given an opportunity to ask any questions concerning the study or the procedures involved.

8. I will be instructed that consent to participate in the research study may be withdrawn at any time and that I may discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

9. I will be given a copy of the signed and dated written consent form.

10. I will be given the opportunity to decide to consent or not to consent to the study
without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, coercion, or
undue influence on my decision.

Informed Consent Form

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

TITLE: Speaking Ourselves into History: Asian American
Educators' Pathways to the Principalship in K-12 Public Schools

INVESTIGATOR: Lisa Yoon, Educational Leadership, Loyola Marymount University,
and (714) 614-1717

ADVISOR: Martha McCarthy, Educational Leadership, Loyola Marymount
University

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to
investigate the challenges and opportunities of becoming an Asian
American principal in K-12 public schools. You will be asked to
complete a questionnaire, which consists of a 10-minute
questionnaire consisting of basic demographic questions, followed by
20 Likert Scale questions. 5-6 individuals will be chosen for two
focus groups, followed by 15 semi structured interviews. Due to
unprecedented circumstances, as of now, participants will be meeting
via Zoom for the focus group and interviews.

RISKS: The researcher has made conscious efforts to ensure confidentiality
and anonymity in the research process. The focus group and semi
structured interviews will ask participants to self-report their
experiences in regards to discrimination, self-worth, and cultural
impacts. Due to the sensitive nature of these questions, participants
may feel some discomfort and an invasion of privacy.

BENEFITS: The findings of this study would benefit individuals who want to
make changes in the Asian American recruitment and hiring
processes and address the salient issue of underrepresentation. The
individuals who take part in the hiring processes may include, but not
limited to superintendents, superintendent's cabinets, principals, and
other high level administrative officials. The findings will also assist
in diversifying the presence of Asian Americans in the educational
realm along with the greater Asian American community.

INCENTIVES:	Focus group and interview participants will receive an Amazon gift card of $10. Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.
CONFIDENTIALITY:	You will take a questionnaire which will include demographic information, such as: (a) Asian identity, (b) role identification, (c) gender identification, (d) generation identification, (e) years of experience, (f) school information, and (g) highest degree. Your name will never be used in any public dissemination of these data (publications, presentations, etc.) All research materials and consent forms will be stored in a password-protected computer which will be kept in a locked room. The transcription service Temi will be used. This transcription service has a data protection contract, which guarantees that all transcriptions will not be used for any other purposes. When the research study ends, any identifying information will be removed from the data, or it will be destroyed. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a focus group setting; however, we ask all participants to respect other participant's privacy and keep all information shared confidential.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: Your participation in this study is *voluntary*. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty. Your withdrawal will not influence any other services to which you may be otherwise entitled, your class standing or relationship with Loyola Marymount University.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request. Results of the study will be available before publication to participants for review.
Contact Info: **Lisa Yoon and lyoon3@lion.lmu.edu.**

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. If the study design or use of the information is changed I will be informed and my consent reobtained. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that if I have any further questions, comments or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact Dr. David Moffet, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Loyola Marymount University, 1 LMU Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045-2659 or by email at David.Moffet@lmu.edu.

_____

Participant's Signature   Date

CONSENT TO USE IDENTIFYING INFORMATION:
I give my permission for my name**,** institution, affiliation, and direct quotes, etc. to be used in any presentations, publications, or other public dissemination of the research findings of this study.

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   **Date**

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