

Asian American Community College Presidents:
An AsianCrit Analysis of their Approaches to Leadership

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences of five current and former Asian American community college presidents including their career transitions into executive leadership using an AsianCrit analysis for framing their narrative experiences. The literature review situates the experiences of Asian American community college presidents in various contexts by providing a brief summary of several historical moments and political movements that have shaped the realities they currently confront as higher education leaders. This study employed a Critical Race Theory (CRT) approach to counter storytelling to analyze the participants' narratives both individually and thematically based on their social identities as Asian Americans and as people of color. The findings revealed that their approaches to leadership have been influenced by several sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts that are directly linked to their racialized identities as Asian Americans. The results also highlighted the value of leadership strategies and techniques to navigate whiteness in the workplace and the intersectional impacts of gender, generation, and race on approaches to leadership. The participants shared advice for aspiring Asian American leaders such as creating spaces Asian American employees through affinity groups and providing ongoing trainings to inform others about the unique experiences of Asian American professionals in higher education. This study ends with implications for practice and theory.

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Education has always been an important part of my life. I was raised by my Chinese-speaking grandparents, who brought me to the U.S. in order for me to have a quality education and opportunities for future success. Growing up as a 1.5 generation Taiwanese American male in suburban Seattle, I enjoyed attending school. Like many young Asian Americans from immigrant families, getting good grades and being accepted to college was an expected outcome. However, despite doing well academically, in college and graduate school, I struggled to find mentors and role models who shared a similar cultural or racial background as me. Being an undergraduate student was first time that I realized that the low numbers of faculty and staff of color in higher education, specifically Asian Americans, negatively impacted my college experience. After completing my master's degree, I began working as a part-time community college math faculty member in January 2010, which resulted in a full-time tenure-track math faculty position in September 2011.

My journey into community college administration started two years after I began the tenure process when I was honored with the college's 2013 full-time faculty excellence award. After giving my acceptance speech to the campus community, a custodial staff member who is of South Asian descent came up to me afterwards and stated, "finally one of *us* got this award." His words inspired me to reflect deeply about the impact of representation in leadership positions. A year later, I was able to attend a leadership development program through the organization Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics (LEAP), where I learned about the severe underrepresentation of Asian American community college presidents in the U.S. These two experiences helped pave the way to my current position as an academic administrator and interest in the experiences and challenges of Asian American community college leaders.

Data from the American Association of Community Colleges indicate that out of 1,067 known community college presidents, only 27 are of Asian descent (National Asian Pacific Islander Council, 2017). Of the other presidents who are indigenous or of color in the same data set, 93 identified as Black, 43 identified as Latinx, and 26 identified as Native American. In all, there is a higher proportion of Asian American college students compared to the number of Asian American community college administrators and faculty, which suggests an equity gap where Asian Americans are underrepresented at multiple institutional levels (Fujimoto, 1996; Liang, Lee, & Ting, 2002; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Nakanishi, 1993; Neilson & Suyemoto, 2009; Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, & Parker, 2009). In 2016-17, approximately 6 percent of all U.S. community college students identified as Asian American (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). The underrepresentation of Asian Americans' presence in community college leadership is concerning and worth exploring to better understand their perspectives regarding issues of educational access and leadership pathways for Asian Americans and other underrepresented population.

Rationale and Overview

This project identifies the experiences of five Asian American community college presidents as they transitioned into higher positions of leadership including barriers, challenges, and some of their successes. Confronted with distinct challenges that mirrors the literature on the experiences of Asian Americans in the workplace, I will explore how five Asian American community college presidents negotiate their racial and other social identities including cultural contexts, gender, and generation in white-dominant spaces.

Asian American community college leadership are an important group to explore in greater details because Asian Americans in higher education are often excluded from educational

research despite the growing number of Asian American students in higher education institutions (Museus & Kiang, 2009). The low numbers of Asian American community college presidents in relation to white presidents and other racial groups indicate that this population lacks a significant voice in determining or shaping institutional policies and decisions (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Fujimoto, 1996). Much of the research on higher education personnel also does not specifically address barriers faced by Asian Americans, but rather, combines their experiences under the general umbrella of faculty and staff of color, or compares Asian American leaders to white American leaders (Turner, González, & Wood, 2008; Levin, Haberler, Walker, & Jackson-Boothby, 2013; Turner, Myers, & Creswell, 1999; Fujii, 2014).

Furthermore, much of the research on higher education faculty and staff of color tends to focus on those who are employed in four-year universities at the neglect of two-year colleges (Lum, 2008; Nakanishi, 1993; Turner et al., 2008). There are some unique aspects of working in a two-year setting. For example, as a former community college faculty, my main objective was teaching in the classroom, and overall, my work as faculty was much different than if I were at a four-year university. Specifically, career advancement and promotions were based on quality teaching, college service, curriculum development, assessment of student learning outcomes, and community engagement (Whatcom Community College, n.d.). There was little or no emphasis placed on research and scholarship. In addition to differences in faculty expectations, the pathway to the presidency is more varied at the two-year level compared to four-year universities. While presidents from four-year schools typically come from within the ranks of faculty, community college presidents have much more varied backgrounds, including in academic affairs, student services, finance, and industry (Jensen & Giles, 2002). As a result, my research on the experiences and perspectives of Asian American community college presidents

will fill a key gap in the existing scholarly work that tends to predominantly focus on four-year university leaders.

Another goal of this project is that the stories of current and past Asian American community college presidents might inspire others from similar backgrounds to seek leadership positions, especially executive positions in higher education. The Asian American community college presidents who contributed to this study also offered Asian American professionals with advice on navigating institutional barriers in the workplace, strategies in terms of dealing with racialized incidents, and general insights on professional development and networking that they believe will allow them to advance in their careers more seamlessly. Thus, affirming and centering Asian American voices within the community college leadership is significant, given the growth of Asian American students at college campuses, and the need for more diverse faculty, staff, and leaders at all levels (Museus & Kiang, 2009).

On a local level, another intended outcome of this project is to provide a roadmap to build relationships and spaces for Asian American administrators, faculty, and staff within the Washington State Community and Technical College system. I hope to promote a pathway to executive leadership for future Asian American leaders by offering firsthand narratives from those who have been successful in their positions and who offer their own advice on navigating executive leadership at this level. Many of the groups that currently support Asian American community college leaders are based in California (Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, Inc, n.d; Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education, n.d). While there are conferences and programs for supporting community college faculty and staff of color within Washington State, none exist specifically for Asian Americans (Faculty and Staff of Color Conference, 2017; Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, n.d.).

The literature review situates the experiences of Asian American community college presidents in various contexts by providing a brief summary of several historical moments and political movements that have shaped the realities they currently confront as higher education leaders. An overview of key leadership theories will also reveal how and why Asian American leaders are represented or omitted from these frameworks. This project also employs a Critical Race Theory (CRT) approach to counter storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), which is a method for marginalized individuals to share their own experiences and to name their truths. Through a legacy of racial domination and white supremacy, the narratives, experiences, and cultural understandings of white persons, called majoritarian stories (or master narratives), are normalized (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Majoritarian stories justify the status quo and silence the experiences the experiences of people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). Counter stories are significant because they challenge majoritarian stories through personal narratives (first person), other people's narratives (third person), and composite narratives (multiple perspectives) (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Derived from the voices of the oppressed, disenfranchised, and marginalized, counter stories also interrogate the perceived realities dictated by master narratives that tend to essentialize and typecast racialized groups (Zamudio et al., 2011). By naming one's own reality, counter stories contest dominant ideologies of racism, colonialization, and oppression that dehumanize and simplify the experiences and identities of people of color (Milner & Howard, 2013; Zamudio et al., 2011). A CRT approach to counter storytelling provides a method for Asian American community college leaders to speak openly about their experiences and to draw out first-person narratives that contest or in some cases reinforce dominant narratives of their experiences.

Terminology

The terms Asian Americans (AA), Pacific Islanders (PI), and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) are distinct demographic categories that have emerged from complex political and historical movements (Poon, Squire, Kodama, & Byrd, 2015; Perez, 2002). Hune and Takeuchi (2008) define Asian Americans as “persons with ancestry from countries on the Asian continent and islands in the Pacific Rim who live in and call the United States their home” (p. 5). The label Asian American originated during the civil rights movement that sought to combat and end racial discrimination (Hune, 2002). In higher education, this label of Asian American helped promote campus movements for Asian American studies and ethnic studies programs, which first appeared at San Francisco State University in the late 1960s, and to protest anti-Asian bias and violence (Park, 2008). Although Pacific Islanders and some other indigenous groups fall within the AAPI category, their experiences are uniquely different from other Asian American ethnic groups such as those from east Asian backgrounds. Specifically, issues involving persons who are Pacific Islanders have been entangled in a history of colonialism and conquest, resulting in a distinct history of racialization (Perez, 2002). As a result, compared to more socially advantaged Asian American subgroups, Pacific Islanders still experience a substantial gap in educational outcomes such as rates of college access, retention and persistence, and degree attainment (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2016; Benham, 2006). Thus, usage of the stand-alone term Asian American is problematic without some context and framing because it often ignores the existence of Pacific Islanders and indigenous groups; in particular, the “experiences and interests of less socially recognizable ethnic subgroups are often subsumed under the experiences and stereotypes of more recognizable groups within the racial and ethnic category” (Perez, 2002, p. 469). However, acknowledging this narrowed definition of Asian Americans and building upon the strategic

(anti)essentialism tenet of AsianCrit (Museus, 2013), as well as the severe underrepresentation of Pacific Islander higher education leaders, this project intentionally focuses on the experiences of five Asian American community college leaders who are not Pacific Islanders.

Moreover, there are many terms used to describe persons of European ancestry in the United States. For instance, white (Inkelas, 2003; Poon et al., 2015), European American (Lee, Haught, Chen, & Chan, 2013), and western (Lee, Haught, Chen, & Chan, 2013; Sy et al., 2010) are all terms often used interchangeably to refer to this population. For the purposes of this project, I will use the racial term white because it is regionally neutral and more widely recognized in research on diversity and equity issues in higher education. Also, I will use the word white-dominant to represent the assumed or real cultural norms associated with people who are white. For instance, a white-dominant space refers to a workplace where the majority of employees are white, and also reference specific ideologies that manifest in an institution's policies and practices irrespective of an organization's racial demographics. Furthermore, I will use the term non-dominant to refer to social identities that are not associated with white, heterosexual, and middle/upper class males or females.

There are other types of terminology used in the community and technical college (CTC) system that may be different from four-year institutions. A president or chancellor is the chief executive officer (CEO) of the community college or district, generally reporting to a state-appointed or locally elected board of trustees. In a multi-college district, the president of a college reports to the district chancellor (Jensen & Giles, 2002). Some colleges and districts use these two terms interchangeably. I will use the term president to refer to the roles of a chancellor of a district or a president of a college.

Literature Review

The following literature review provides a brief overview of some of the topics related to my study. I will begin by providing some background information on Asian American students in higher education. I will then discuss some of the barriers faced by Asian American leaders. Finally, I conclude with an overview of some relevant leadership theories, followed by how Critical Race Theory and AsianCrit serve as frameworks for my project.

Asian American Students in Higher Education

As one of the fastest growing racial groups in higher education, Asian American and Pacific Islander students in colleges and universities grew from 235,000 enrolled individuals in 1979 to 1.3 million in 2009 (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2011). From 1980 to 2000, AAPI enrollment at two-year colleges increased from 124,000 to 402,000 students (Harvey, 2003). Approximately 40 percent of all AAPI students enrolled in higher education in the United States attend community colleges (Lew, Chang, & Wang, 2005). In Fall 2014, 11.6 percent of all students enrolled in Washington State's Community and Technical Colleges identified as persons of Asian origin and 1.2 percent identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2016).

The experiences of Asian American community college students tend to differ by geographical location and the demographics of individual two-year colleges (Lew, Chang, & Wang, 2005). For example, the authors note that recent Asian immigrants are less likely than native-born students to have the social capital needed to navigate the U.S. higher education system due to factors such as limited English proficiency. They also articulate how Asian American students from different ethnic and generational have varied educational goals and motivations for enrolling into various college programs. Overall, AAPI students represent a

diverse group in higher education. There are close to 50 different AAPI ethnic subgroups in the U.S. with unique histories, languages, cultures, and immigration patterns (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2016).

In Washington State, one in five community or technical college student who is of Asian origin is from an immigrant or refugee backgrounds, and moreover, 16 percent of these students are identified as having limited English proficiency (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2016). These numbers do not include Asian international students who are generally more economically advantaged who come to the U.S. to specifically for educational purposes (Hune, 2002). Although Washington State AAPI students as whole have the highest bachelor's degree attainment of any ethnic group, disaggregated data show that Southeast Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students are more likely to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds compared to East Asian and South Asian groups (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2016).

In 2007, Congress established the Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI) designation, one of eight federally designated Minority Serving Institution (MSI) programs, to provide higher education institutions grant funding to improve and expand their capacity to serve AAPI and Native American and low-income students (Nguyen, 2019). Two-year colleges and four-year universities with at least 10 percent AANAPISI student enrollment and at least 50 percent of the students receive federal financial aid are eligible to apply for the grant (AANAPISI, n.d.). These grants have helped create initiatives at college campuses to better support AAPI students through campus programming, the development of new inclusive curriculum, and other student support structures (Nguyen, Nguyen, Nguyen, Gasman, & Conrad, 2018).

Barriers and Realities for Asian American Leaders

There are many contexts and realities that affect the personal and professional lives of Asian American leaders that are similar to but distinct from Asian American faculty, staff, and students. This section discusses the impacts that the model-minority stereotype, microaggressions, and the bamboo ceiling phenomenon have on Asian Americans in higher education, research, and within the workplace. I end by discussing common leadership frameworks including how they differently represent or outright omit Asian American leaders.

Model-minority stereotype.

Poon et al. (2015) describe the model-minority stereotype as a middleperson minority state that exploits Asian Americans by placing them in a racial bind between whites and other people of color. The stereotype centers assimilation or encouraging Asian Americans to adopt to white-dominant cultural norms to experience success, as a racial narrative to uphold and justify white supremacy (Kim, 2007). This in-between status is further elaborated with the theory of racial triangulation coined by Kim (1999), which labels Asian Americans as an economically and socially successful minority group but who are ultimately constrained by white supremacy as an outside group with limited civic and political voice to engage social change (Poon et al., 2015). Furthermore, Chang (1993) equates the model-minority stereotype to a form of nativist racism, which further exacerbates the racialization of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners within the United States. Lee, Park, and Wong (2017) classify this form of racialization as second-class citizenship that hinges upon the approval of Asian Americans by whites. For example, on the one hand, Asian American professionals are often praised by whites for having a strong work ethic and thus capable of upward mobility, but on the other hand, are generally not seen by their white colleagues as leaders and thus may be passed up for career advancement including leadership

positions (Zhou, 2004). Kim further (2007) discusses the model-minority image using the racial assimilation thesis, arguing that Asian Americans have been racially subordinated along the lines of citizenship and thus challenges the notation that Asian Americans' experiences align with white people because they ultimately are not viewed as "American."

The most common portrayals of Asian Americans as a model minority began in the mid-1960s during the civil rights era (Suzuki, 1999). Publications such as *The New York Times* and *U.S. News & World Report* praised Asian Americans for overcoming adversities through their assumed or real cultural values; that is, through hard work and perseverance, the narrative claims that Asian Americans have become accepted into a white-dominated society, even after decades of experiencing legal and systemic racial discrimination (Suzuki, 1977). This problematic narrative also has denied the racism experienced by other people of color including Black Americans. For instance, many white Americans and even some people of color who subscribe to dominant norms have misconstrued the perceived success of Asian Americans by claiming that hard work can minimize the effects of systemic racism experienced by for centuries by Black Americans (Kim, 1999). Indeed, while both groups have experienced systemic racism in the U.S, the historical and prior experiences faced by Asian Americans and Black Americans are different and should not be conflated.

By the late-1960s, Asian American activists began countering the model-minority stereotype and charged that the actual lived experiences of Asian Americans were more complex because Asian American people experience many forms of institutional and societal racism (Suzuki, 1977; Kim, 2007). Furthermore, activists began to describe how the model-minority image became a master narrative used to minimize the systemic barriers that Asian Americans

continue to experience in education, healthcare, and other realms, and was also used to discredit other social justice movements during the civil rights era (Suzuki, 1977).

In higher education and other social institutions, it is often unclear where Asian Americans are situated in conversation regarding race relations in the United States because of the persistence of the black-white racial narrative (Kim, 1999). As Wu (2002) states:

Asian Americans have been excluded by the very terms used to conceptualize race.

People speak of “American” as if it means “white” and “minority” as if it means “Black.”

In that semantic formula, Asian Americans, neither Black nor white, consequently are neither American nor minority (p. 20).

The model-minority stereotype thus positions Asian Americans in a way that denies racial reality and paints a false narrative of universal success for the entire group (Sue et al., 2007). For instance, although Asian Americans statistically have the highest median household income in the U.S. including white Americans (U.S. Census, 2018), Asian Americans also have the largest income disparity of any racial or ethnic group as individuals in the 90th percentile of their income distribution had incomes 10.7 times greater than those at the 10th percentile of their income distribution (Kochhar & Cilluffo, 2018). As Chang (1993) states, “Asian Americans suffer from discrimination, much of which is quantitatively and qualitatively different from that suffered by other disempowered groups” (p. 1247).

One consequence of the model-minority stereotype is that Asian Americans are often excluded from educational research or racialized as model minorities, even though their representation in higher education institutions has increased over time (Lee, Park, & Wong, 2017; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Poon et al., 2015). This invisibility is exacerbated when Asian Americans are viewed by institutions as a monolith, which neglects to affirm and respond to the

diverse identities, educational needs, and experiences of Asian Americans such as Southeast Asian Americans from refugee backgrounds (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007). Consequently, model-minority theories may not be meaningful when conducting research on topics that concern Asian Americans such as their experiences in higher education. The continued discussion of counter-model minority stories in research on AAPIs in higher education is problematic and privileges narratives of what AAPIs are not, rather than who they actually represent (Poon et al., 2015).

The model-minority stereotype also leads to negative consequences for Asian American higher education faculty, staff, and leaders. A study by Neilson and Suyemoto (2009) found that due to the persistence of white-framed view of leadership in higher education that privileges traits such as competition and individualism (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Jensen & Giles, 2002), Asian American administrators who either possess dominant leadership styles such as assertiveness or non-dominant styles such as humility believed that their opportunities for professional advancement were hindered, perhaps because there is such a stronghold of dominant stereotypes about Asian American leaders in the absence of their presence and visibility in major leadership positions. In contrast to white Americans who are overrepresented at all levels of leadership, Asian American representation in higher education follows an academic pyramid in which the proportion of Asian Americans decreases as one moves from the level of graduate student, to faculty, and finally into administration (Nakanishi, 1993). The lack of representation is a detriment to developing mentoring opportunities to promote new diverse leadership (Irey, 2013). Within white-dominant spaces, Asian American faculty and staff are often not recognized as potential administrators, as they are often characterized by their white and other colleagues as being, passive, foreign, hardworking, and thus incapable of becoming effective leaders (Ng et al., 2007).

Microaggressions and the bamboo ceiling.

While the model-minority stereotype remains one of the primary master narratives about Asian Americans in the United States, Asian Americans also face racial microaggressions in the workplace and in various social settings. The term microaggression was first introduced by Pierce (1970) to provide a framework to discuss how Black Americans experience everyday racism by white Americans (Huber & Solórzano, 2014). Racial microaggressions are nonverbal and/or verbal assaults, often subtle, automatic, or unconscious, used by white Americans and sometimes people of color to discredit and marginalize other people of color (Huber & Solórzano, 2014). However, for this project, I primarily focus on the types of racial microaggressions that white Americans direct toward Asian Americans. Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, and Torino (2007) define microaggressions as “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group” (p. 72) and classify them into three forms:

1. *Microassaults* are “explicit racial derogations that are verbal, nonverbal, or environmental attacks meant to hurt the person of color” (p. 73). For example, a white person calls an Asian American person a “chink.”
2. A *microinsult* is “a behavioral action or verbal remark that conveys rudeness, insensitivity, or demeans a person’s racial identity or heritage” (p. 73). For instance, an Asian American person is praised by a white American for “speaking perfect English.”
3. *Microinvalidations* are actions that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color (p. 73). For example, a white teacher fails to acknowledge an Asian American student in class who attempts to share personal

experiences with racism because the instructor does not believe that Asian Americans experience racial discrimination.

Furthermore, Sue et al. (2007, p. 72) identified eight microaggressive themes that are uniquely directed towards Asian Americans as follows: (1) alien in own land; (2) ascription of intelligence; (3) exoticization of Asian women; (4) invalidation of interethnic differences; (5) denial of racial reality; (6) pathologizing cultural values/communication styles; (7) second class citizenship; (8) invisibility. In their study, the researchers found strong support that microaggressions create detrimental consequences for the Asian Americans' psychological well-being. That is, the individuals in the study believed that most of the microaggressions directed to them were unintentional and also were difficult to determine or pinpoint. Thus, these eight types of microaggressions may lead white Americans to believe that Asian Americans are largely immune from racism because these acts are often framed as coming from good intentions without consideration of the cumulative negative impact to Asian Americans who are on the receiving end of these slights (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Chang 1993). Specifically, the model-minority stereotype ties closely with the microaggressive theme of denial of racial reality, which suggests that Asian Americans do not experience inequities and discrimination because of the belief that their experiences are similar to white Americans (Sue et al., 2007).

Stereotypes and microaggressions also contribute to what is colloquially known as a bamboo ceiling (which is analogous to the term glass ceiling) for aspiring and current Asian American leaders (Kawahara, n.d.). The term glass ceiling often refers to artificial barriers and biases that may delay or prevent qualified employees from underrepresented backgrounds from experiencing the types of upward mobility that white men and many white women typically experience within organizations (Lee, 2002). Similarly, the bamboo ceiling denotes the lack of

representation of Asian Americans in leadership and management positions, even though as a group, Asian Americans are more likely to be college educated compared to the rest of the U.S. population (Kawahara, n.d.). For example, a recent study of Asian American immigrant scientists in the pharmaceutical industry found that white employees' perception of the scientists' foreignness prevented the Asian American scientists from attaining leadership positions (Chen, Rao, & Ren, 2013). Such beliefs could be explained by "negative stereotypes about Asian Americans such as social introversion, emotional withdrawal, verbal inhibition, passivity, a quiet demeanor, and a reserved manner are not considered ideal for certain leadership positions" (Kawahara, Pal, & Chin, 2013, p. 241). In a study on leadership perceptions between Asian American and white engineers and salespeople, Sy et al. (2010) found that Asian Americans were perceived by white Americans to have better technical competence rather than leadership potential. In a white-dominant context, the agentic leader is idealized; that is, one who is assertive, competitive, and respected by subordinates, which are stereotypically not associated as strengths of Asian and Asian American leaders (Sy et al., 2010).

The phenomenon of the bamboo ceiling in higher education has also been challenged, primarily by Asian American scholars. Using faculty salaries as a baseline, Lee (2002) found that Asian American higher education faculty did not appear to face a glass ceiling in the workplace; in other words, the author "did not observe any penalty to earnings associated with being Asian... regardless of whether Asian faculty were native or foreign born" (Lee, 2002, p. 718). However, despite this observation that Asian Americans in higher education are generally compensated fairly, this study also found that white faculty generally had more opportunities to increase their earnings through advancement opportunities, which suggests that institutional barriers against Asian Americans still exist within U.S. colleges and universities.

The bamboo ceiling is also influenced by institutional barriers and microaggressions. For example, Asian American leaders are not seen as effective leaders due to the types of microaggressions they face in the workplace that influence how others view them (Sue et al., 2007). As a result, they are often denied advancement opportunities which may lead to diminished institutional influence and lost earnings over time (Kawahara, n.d.). Moreover, barriers continue as Asian Americans advance into leadership positions. Asian American leaders who have achieved positions of leadership are often seen as foreigners unfit for their jobs or are ignored for their expertise. Thus, they are sometimes known as “outsiders without standing” (Kim, 1999, p. 127). Therefore, despite having similar accomplishments to white leaders, many Asian American leaders are overlooked for promotions due to negative stereotypes. According to Chin (2018), Asian Americans only consist of 2% of executive leaders and 2.6% of board members of *Fortune 500* companies, which suggest that organizational and systemic barriers for aspiring and current Asian American leaders persist.

Asian American Leaders and Leadership Theories

Specific research on Asian American leadership frameworks and leaders was challenging to find, which may be a consequence of a narrow pipeline, as well as racial stereotypes that Asian Americans are not effective leaders or leadership material (Sy et al., 2010; Kawahara, Pal, & Chin, 2013). Common theories of leadership in the U.S. context tend to focus on the strengths of individuals, usually white American leaders, who create effective organizational changes or who are perceived to lead effectively. For example, Bolman and Deal (2008) describes a four-frame model that all successful leaders are encouraged to adopt; Kotter (2012) provides an eight-step model for leaders to promote institutional change; and Lencioni (2002) discusses key characteristics of building strong teams based on trust building. While some of these frameworks

may be relevant for understanding the characteristics of leaders of color including Asian Americans, they do not consider the sociocultural contexts that leaders from non-dominant backgrounds often negotiate or are expected to display such as developing meaningful relationships, listening, and community building. These theories also tend to center white American leaders as the norm for effective leaders.

Some scholars have focused on comparing and contrasting Asian American and white leaders using theories of cultural difference. For example, Chin (2013) claims that Asian American leaders tend to value collectivism, interdependence, respect for authority, and family orientation compared to white leaders. Sue (2001) also found that Asian Americans tend to value interpersonal embeddedness, indirectness in approaching problems, and restraint in expressing strong outward emotions, and stronger reliance on nonverbal versus verbal communications, which contrast with dominant values that are associated with qualities of strong (or white) leaders such as assertiveness, directness, and freely verbalizing emotions.

Lee, Haught, Chen, & Chan (2013) also propose a cultural leadership model for Asian Americans based on the elements of the Daoist Big Five: altruism, modesty, flexibility, honesty, and perseverance. While the authors note that many Asian American leaders are influenced by the dominant culture's traits such as aggression, control, and dominance, Daoist leadership principles are said to reaffirm their cultural identities by focusing on developing equitable relationships between individuals, role modeling, and servant leadership. In another model, Marginson (2011) analyzed a Confucian model used in several east Asian higher education institutions. Specifically, this model includes nation-state policy drivers who shape institutional structures and funding priorities, which influences a faster pace of change in a competitive global market. However, one downside of this model is the discouragement of campus-wide

participation, which may indicate the absence of a shared governance model commonly expected and experienced in the U.S.

Despite having been developed by Asian American scholars, some of these cultural models of leadership may not apply to all Asian American ethnic groups or individuals. They could be seen as problematic for reinforcing racial stereotypes as well. For instance, these frameworks neglect the diverse experiences and realities of Asian American leaders by implying that all Asian Americans share similar cultural values and behaviors despite the great ethnic, generational, and linguistic diversity within this population. Moreover, generalizations from these theories such as that Asian Americans are aggregable or passive may perpetuate stereotypes about Asian American leaders (Kim, 2007). Furthermore, there are successful Asian American leaders who possess varying leadership traits that may align with their racial and ethnic backgrounds. For example, Les Wong, president of San Francisco State University, tells his mentees to honor their Asian cultural values when advancing into higher-level administrative roles. According to Wong, skillsets that may be culturally-based including: listening to others, respect for elders, and the ability to decipher important information are important traits for college presidents (Prinster, 2016).

Other major leadership styles that have been widely discussed in the field of educational leadership include transformational and authentic leadership frameworks. While not mutually exclusive styles, these two leadership frameworks are thought to positively influence organizational cultures regardless of one's background. According to Burns (1978), "the transforming leader recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower" (p. 4). Transformational leaders, by exhibiting the traits of charisma to inspire others, move their employees beyond their own self-interests and help guide others to improving the organization

(Bass, 1999). Avolio and Gardner (2005) define authentic leaders as “those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others’ values” (p. 321). Authentic leaders are said to be true to themselves, motivated by personal convictions, and lead from their own personal values (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Burriss, Ayman, Che, and Min (2013, p. 260) summarize authentic leadership into four components:

1. *Self-awareness* refers to demonstrating one’s own strengths and weaknesses and being aware of one’s own complex characteristics.
2. *Balanced processing* is the notion of being objective when analyzing data.
3. *Relational transparency* occurs when one expresses their genuine thoughts and feelings without inappropriate emotions.
4. Individuals with an *internalized moral perspective* make decisions that are consistent with moral values and societal standards.

Although transformational or authentic leaders, these models tend to exclude Asian American leaders. In a study of both white and Asian American managers, Burriss et al. (2013) found that white employees generally perceived Asian Americans to be as equally competent as white American leaders, but less transformational and authentic due to stereotypes that Asian Americans are antisocial, passive, and not willing to take risks. One explanation the authors speculated was the fact that most white American respondents in the study never had an Asian American supervisor and therefore have not developed meaningful relationships with Asian American leaders to understand the complexities of their experiences. Furthermore, transformational and authentic leadership are frameworks that leaders can aspire to achieve under ideal circumstances. Due to institutional and political barriers, many leaders will unlikely become fully transformational or authentic.

Overall, it is impossible to generalize one's leadership style or potential based on race or cultural values. However, what is evident from a review of the literature is that Asian American leaders are often excluded from leadership studies and theories of leadership. Racial discourse in the U.S. are often presented in terms of a black and white binary, which excludes the experiences of Asian Americans (Kim, 2007). Studies of other community college presidents of color show similar barriers to Asian American leaders. For example, Black American (Phelps, Taber, & Smith, 1997; Waring, 2003) and Latinx (Munoz, 2010) presidents are both underrepresented compared to the student populations served by higher education institutions, particularly women of color. Non-Asian American presidents of color also face institutional racism that can be countered through mentorship and support from a supportive and inclusive board of trustees (Munoz, 2010). As a result, presidents of color often need to strategically approach issues differently compared to their white colleagues due to their racialized experiences in predominantly white workplaces (Waring, 2003). While they have some similar experiences to other leaders of color such as Latinx leaders being perceived as foreigners (Munoz, 2010), Asian American leaders have distinct barriers such as the bamboo ceiling (Kawahara, n.d.) and unique racial microaggressions as a result of one's Asian American identity (Sue et al., 2007) that other individuals of color do not encounter.

AsianCrit and Critical Race Theory

Originally constructed as a legal framework, Critical Race Theory (CRT) frames how dominant structures maintain whiteness, racial inequalities, and oppression in various sociopolitical contexts (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Zamudio et al., 2011). CRT is used in higher education research "to identify, analyze, and transform those cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom" (Solórzano &

Yosso, 2002, p. 25). CRT challenges dominant ideologies such as colorblind racism and the myth of meritocracy (Poon et al., 2015). For example, in U.S. higher education, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were created to serve Black students due the exclusionary policies that denied them equitable access to mainstream institutions of higher education. (Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2010). The need for HBCUs is another example that demonstrates that meritocracy only benefits certain dominant, generally white, groups. Colorblind racism maintains white supremacy by claiming a state where racial categories are not connected to a person's access to advancement opportunities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). While CRT emphasizes racism as its central focus, it also recognizes intersectionality in other oppressive systems such as sexism and classism that target systemically disadvantage and marginalize non-dominant groups such as women of color (Poon et al., 2015).

Some of the other core tenets of CRT include these components: (1) racism is salient in everyday life and thus accepted by society, (2) interest convergence, which suggests that white Americans and those in power create laws and policies that support people of color only if dominant groups benefit and systemically advantages themselves as well, and (3) race is a social construction that is not dictated by biological attributes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Theorizing Asian American experiences through CRT provides a more complex view of Asian Americans, as much of the conversations on race in the U.S. historically and presently have focused on black-white racial narratives and relationships (Pyke & Dang, 2003). Consequently, Asian Americans are either absent or problematically represented in discussions around race and race relations in the U.S. One explanation for this disconnect is the concept of racial triangulation, which Kim (1999) argues is a phenomenon where white Americans and its institutions pit Asian Americans against Black Americans and other people of color to maintain

systems of white supremacy by detracting attention away from legitimate group-specific concerns about racial discrimination. On the one hand, Asian Americans are valorized by white people (the dominant group) over Black people. For examples, Asian Americans are often praised by white Americans for their perceived work ethic while Black Americans are often described in highly deficit terms. On the other hand, Asian Americans are still viewed as foreigners in U.S. society, and therefore, are often ostracized as un-American and treated as second-class citizens. Due to the racial construct of racial triangulation, coupled with the model-minority stereotype, Asian Americans' perspectives are often not valued by dominant culture as narratives of racial marginalization.

To re-center Asian Americans in educational research, Museus (2013) expands the tenets of CRT through an Asian American Critical Race Theory framework, also known as AsianCrit. While CRT is a legal framework that analyzes how race is constructed predominantly through a black-white racial narrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), AsianCrit was developed as a scholarly intervention to better understand the specific racialized realities of Asian Americans. I briefly summarize the seven interconnected tenets of AsianCrit below (Museus, 2013, p. 23):

1. *Asianization* refers to the notion that Asian Americans experience nativistic racism within US society, 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” (Museus, 2013, p. 23).
2. *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, 2007).

3. *(Re)constructive history* emphasizes reanalyzing history to expose racism toward Asian Americans. In addition, this tenet advocates for the construction of a collective narrative formed by Asian Americans in the U.S.
4. *Strategic (anti)essentialism* builds on the CRT tenet that race is a social construction shaped by economic, political, and social influences. It acknowledges that Asian Americans are racially categorized by an oppressor (white Americans) and that a singular Asian American experience does not exist. Due to the diverse backgrounds of Asian Americans, this tenet further underscores the importance making purposeful decisions about which Asian Americans subgroups to include or exclude when conducting research.
5. *Intersectionality* discusses the notion that racism and other systems of oppression come together to shape the lived experiences of Asian Americans.
6. *Story, Theory, and Praxis* is the idea that counter stories, theoretical frameworks, research, and practice are intertwined elements in the analysis of Asian American experiences and in advocacy efforts for Asian American communities. This tenet recognizes the work of Asian American scholars whose work should inform theory and practice.
7. *Commitment to Social Justice* advocates for the elimination of racism, sexism, heterosexism, capitalism, and other forms of oppression.

My study specifically centers on how five current or former Asian American community college presidents describe their approaches to leadership and experiences as executive leaders in

the two-year system. Given each participant's unique background and sociocultural context, it is not expected that an AsianCrit framework will be used as an aspirational model for the participants to lead effectively or in a transformative manner. Instead, AsianCrit provides a framework to analyze each president's unique experiences and identities including spotlighting contradictions, disconfirming evidence, and dissonances that emerged in self-reported analyses of leadership styles.

Research Design

The goal of this project is to counter one-dimensional stereotypes about Asian American leaders by centering the complex narratives of five Asian American community college presidents. Through one-on-one semi structured interviews using the CRT tenet of counter storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic, 2002), I explored the following research questions:

1. What experiences including barriers, challenges, and opportunities did Asian American community college presidents experience as they transitioned into executive levels of leadership?
2. How do the Asian American community college presidents describe their leadership style?

The AsianCrit tenets of Asianization and intersectionality (Museus, 2013) shaped the research questions as well as the data analysis. The Asianization tenet analyzed if the barriers, challenges, and opportunities of Asian American leaders reinforce dominant racialized narratives of Asian Americans. In addition, the intersectionality tenet considers how other systems of oppression such as sexism, ableism, and heterosexism (in addition to racism) shaped the lived experiences of the interviewees and their abilities to lead their organizations in an equitable manner. The story, theory, and praxis (Museus, 2013) tenet justifies the use of Asian American

voices and scholarship in this study. For instance, in addition to the participants of this study, the researcher and all dissertation committee members are Asian American. Finally, the results of the study align with the commitment to social justice (Museus, 2013) tenet, with the goal to reduce barriers for future Asian American community college leaders.

This study drew on a CRT approach to counter storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic, 2002) using a semi-structured interview protocol to interview five Asian American community college presidents. The project followed a modified standardized open-ended interview approach, where a predetermined list of questions was used for each interview (Martella, Nelson, Morgan, & Marchand-Martella, 2013). See Appendix A for the interview protocol. Interview questions focused on the participants' past experiences, behaviors, opinions, and values, as well as their prior knowledge as it relates to factors influencing their approaches to leadership. Demographic and background data were also collected such as: ethnicity, age, gender, years of experience, generation, language(s), and work history. Other sources of data used include institutional and historical documents to provide additional evidence of each president's professional background.

Methodology

The CRT counter storytelling approach was employed to enable each participant to share their experiences being an Asian American executive leader in the two-year college system (Neilson & Suyemoto, 2009; Lum, 2008). This approach centers each participant's perspectives, legitimizes the embodied knowledge of Asian American leaders, and in many instances, challenges dominant racial narratives that tend to perpetuate racialized stereotypes of Asian Americans such as the imagery of the model minority and perpetual foreigner (Zamudio et al., 2011). For example, Asian American leaders are often viewed by white Americans and other groups as quiet and submissive (Kim, 1999). The narratives of different Asian American

community college presidents brought out common themes resulting from experiencing and responding to white dominance and institutional racism, which offers some insights into prospective Asian American leaders in terms of identifying institutional barriers to career progression. CRT counter storytelling also allowed the participants to dismantle the psychic and emotional barriers caused by racial typecasting (Love, 2004).

AsianCrit also challenges the black-white racial discourse by bringing Asian American experiences into the foreground (Kim, 1999; Museus, 2013). AsianCrit and CRT are used because Asian American experiences are uniquely different from majoritarian narratives as well as of the experiences of other groups of color (Museus, 2013). CRT storytelling connects each individual's experiences to the sociocultural contexts of being Asian American in a racialized society. Expanding on the tenets of CRT, AsianCrit specifically highlights and interrogates the dominant racial constructions of Asian Americans in the U.S.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants were selected using a purposeful sampling of Asian American community college presidents in the west coast. Five current and former Asian American community college presidents selected from Washington State, Oregon, and California were interviewed during fall quarter 2018. The participants were chosen due to their availability and accessibility based in part due to the connections that I have with Asian American community college colleagues and organizations. Specifically, Presidents 1, 2, and 5 were recommended through professional contacts. Presidents 3 and 4 were contacted through professional organizations including Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education (APAHE) and Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics (LEAP).

An initial e-mail was sent to each president inviting participation in the study and included Institutional Review Process (IRB) information (see Appendix B). The identities of the individuals in the study were protected using the guidelines established by the University of Washington's IRB process. A consent form consisting of my research statement, purpose of the study, study procedures, risks, benefits of the study, and confidentiality of the research information was distributed and signed by each participant prior to interviews taking place. I also sent each participant a list of guiding interview questions prior to the interview to allow them time to review and reflect prior to the discussion. Thereafter, I conducted two face-to-face interviews and three virtual interviews using Zoom and FaceTime. Each interview ranged from 60-90 minutes in length. Interviews were then transcribed using a transcription service. Transcripts ranged in length from 8-18 single-spaced pages. All five participants received copies of the interview transcripts to review for accuracy. Two of the participants provided additional comments and corrections as they saw appropriate; the other three individuals did not comment or had no corrections.

I used the qualitative software program Quirkos to code and organize my results. Initially, I analyzed each transcript by initially grouping participants' quotes that had similar themes using keywords such as: microaggressions, barriers, gender, leadership, job searches, advice for future leaders, strengths of Asian American leaders, and navigating whiteness. After rereading each transcript several times, I grouped several words together to generate both common and disconfirming themes and inferences. Finally, I reviewed the biographies of each of the participants available on their institutions' websites to verify their work history and backgrounds.

Participant Profiles

Five Asian American community college presidents participated in this study. Three of the participants identified as male and two as female. All individuals are current or retired presidents at community colleges located on the west coast of the U.S. I present their profiles in the order that the participants were interviewed. The purpose of each profile is to provide a snapshot of each participant's career history including key moments in their personal and professional lives that shaped their approaches to leadership. Table 1 lists an overview of each participant's demographic information.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Years of CC Experience	Generation	First Presidency
President 1	Female	Filipina American/Pinay	18	2	Yes
President 2	Male	Chinese	25	1	No
President 3	Female	Filipina American	23	1.5	Yes
President 4	Male	Chinese American	29	1	No/Retired in 2015
President 5	Male	Japanese American	30	3	No

President 1

President 1 is in the first year of her first presidency at an urban community college that serves approximately 8,000 students every quarter. The institution is part of a three-college district that is overseen by a district chancellor. She has 18 years of community college experience, all at the same institution. Her previous roles include vice president for student services, associate dean, and various leadership positions in student retention, outreach, and

TRIO. Prior to her career working in community colleges, she was a certificated secondary school teacher in the same urban city. She holds a bachelor's degree in English, a master's degree in public administration, and a doctorate in higher education administration.

President 1 identifies as a cisgender female, second generation Filipina American or Pinay. Her parents immigrated to the United States from the Philippines in the 1960s. Growing up in the east coast as part of a middle-class military family, President 1 felt close affinities to the Filipino American community affiliated with the naval bases. However, she and her siblings only spoke English and never learned Tagalog or Ilocano, her parents' native languages and dialects. She describes the experience moving to the west coast for the first time:

When I came out to the west coast, I would meet all these Filipinos who did know the language, and they looked at me funny like, "What? You don't speak? You don't understand?" Almost like they were disappointed in me. I was not Filipino enough because I didn't speak the language. My mom will say to this day that it was her big regret that she didn't, but she also says it was a different time and a different place. They weren't on the west coast where it was more common for folks to retain their language. They really felt pressured to assimilate in those ways when we were living out there back then.

Regarding her own leadership trajectory, President 1 never thought of herself as a leader, although she was encouraged by others to take on leadership roles. As a youth, she was encouraged by middle and high school counselors and teachers to run for class office. Similarly, later in her career, she was encouraged by colleagues and supervisors to apply for higher-level administrative positions at her present workplace, including the presidency. When considering her first director-level position, President 1 states:

Eventually I agreed. I took the position. I became the director of outreach. Then, each job after that I was essentially encouraged to apply for. I never really charted out a path and had a vision for becoming a president back then. From there... I helped write the first AANAPISI grant. Actually, that might have been the only time I really self-advocated because this grant I was super excited about... I really connected with the story of what we wanted to do with that grant. I felt really excited about it.

President 1 faced multiple barriers when applying for higher-level positions both within the college and the district. A year before she became president at her college, she applied for the interim position. Despite having more experience as a vice president and higher educational credentials than the other candidates, the chancellor appointed a white male colleague to the position. During the search process, she felt there was a bias against her candidacy as a woman of color. In particular, President 1 felt that the committee “was pretty rigid and traditional in its thoughts” in terms of wanting an instructional person as president as opposed to someone from student services, even though she was able to demonstrate and exceed the required job qualifications. The hierarchy between academic and student affairs has been longstanding in higher education. Within an institution, leaders of academic affairs and the faculty, who are both predominantly white, are the main drivers of institutional change since they control the curriculum and have significant influence in terms of how shared governance operates (Hiraldo, 2010; Phelps et al., 1997). In contrast, student affairs staff are often tracked into support roles for faculty and thus do not have possess the same influence as leaders who come from the faculty ranks (Patton, McEwen, Rendon, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007). There is also evidence showing that many people of color earn their doctorates in education, which limits their opportunities to practitioner versus faculty roles, especially if they do not have traditional backgrounds required

of most faculty or leadership positions (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Another example involves salary differentials. Within my district, academic administrators are paid at a higher salary compared to student services professionals with the same title such as dean or director. Thus, as most community college presidents rise from leadership positions in academic affairs versus in student affairs (Amey, Vanderlinden, & Brown, 2002), there are fewer presidents of color. Individuals who have careers in student affairs can challenge this type of institutional tracking and advance to the presidency, but their opportunities for advancement are limited. Thus, it is important for board of trustee members and other hiring authorities to recognize the value in hiring practitioners like President 1 to increase the number of presidents of color overall.

Several months later, President 1 applied for a districtwide vice chancellor position that oversees academic and student affairs. She was one of two finalists. The other candidate was a white male with a finance background who previously had served in short terms as interim vice president over instruction or of student services. The outcome of this search reinforced her belief that the hiring process for executive leadership in the community and technical system is not equitable:

I had served as the VP of student services for six solid years even at that point. When I wasn't selected for that again I felt like once again even with the credential, even with the most experience, even with the most direct experience I was not good enough. I remember having an awkward conversation with the chancellor as he was giving me notice. Both of those were fairly small not very well-developed search processes [interim president and vice chancellor searches]. They were internal only. They had small committees. There was not clarity on how the committees would function. It really wasn't a well-designed search process.

President 1 attributes the encouragement from her peers, mostly people of color, as the reason that she is currently president. Having been through two unsuccessful job searches, President 1 was looking to leave the college in order to further advance her career. After not being named interim president, one of the search committee members told her that if she ever wanted to become president, she would have to leave the district:

I decided not to apply for the presidency at that point. I thought, okay, I will see this through bringing up the new permanent president. I will help that person get a footing and get successful, and then at that point I'll start looking for how I want to move on from here. I was looking at things like, oh, maybe a senior program officer position at a non-profit organization or just starting to think outside of community colleges.

However, a conversation with a fellow woman of color encouraged her to apply for the position.

Refocused and reenergized, she decided to apply and prepared extensively for the process:

So really through the mentorship of colleagues got in touch with who I really was as a candidate and put myself forth as such. Then when it was a very well-designed search, this committee had a search advocate. It was a representative from many areas around the college, not just a few. It was co-led by another president and a faculty member. It utilized the Aspen presidential qualities framework. When it came to a really well-designed and transparent and accountable search, I prevailed through as a candidate. The finalist pool was diverse, three women of color, one white male. So, I felt that that was a much better application of a search process that would be inclusive of people of color and didn't allow personalities or things like that to take precedence over qualification.

The guidance that President 1 received from her peers and colleagues connects with the AsianCrit tenet of commitment to social justice (Museus, 2013). Through the encouragement and

advocacy of faculty and staff, President 1 was able to obtain the presidency at the college where she has worked at for close to two decades. However, President 1 continues to grapple with the challenges and opportunities of being a new community college president. She is developing her own leadership style and culture on campus, despite having served on the previous president's cabinet for several years as a vice president.

President 2

President 2 is the chancellor of a multi-college district in an urban city and has led the district for almost three years. Prior to his current position, he was president of a community college in the southwest, a position he held for eight years. His other administrative posts include provost, executive dean, and dean of instruction and student services at various community colleges throughout the U.S. He also spent one year as an assistant professor of educational psychology at a four-year university. He fell in love with the open access mission of community colleges after assuming his first position as a residence hall director at a community college in the southwest: "All through my life, even today, I'm one of those individuals that tried to root for the underdogs, people who have less resources who want to put their straps up in success and change their luck so to speak." Altogether, President 2 has over 25 years of experience working in several community college systems.

Born and raised in China, President 2 identifies Mandarin Chinese as his native language and English as his second language. He came to the U.S. in the mid-1980s on an exchange program after finishing his bachelor's degree in English. Although his original plan was to return to China after completing his studies, he was recruited into a graduate program where he earned a master's program in college student personnel administration. Intrigued by his graduate studies

and professional experiences, he went on to complete a doctorate in higher education several years later.

Early on his administrative career while serving as dean of students in the mid 1990s, President 2's supervisor recommended him to participate in a leadership development program. The program sparked his interest in pursuing higher-level leadership positions as it helped him examine his own career aspirations and goals. The experience also provided him mentorship and access to other community college leaders around the country:

The experience told me, yeah, if my supervisors felt I could continue to move up take on more responsibility and gave me the confidence, the exposure with other leaders similar to my situation, age, aspiration, felt yeah, this is something I could do. That leadership training gave me confidence.

After several administrative positions, including five years serving as provost, President 2 was recruited by a search firm to apply for the presidency of a community college in the southwest. Initially, he was a finalist for the position, but the search was called off because the college could not agree on which candidate to hire. Several months later, the search firm reached out again and convinced him to reapply. He was selected for the position after going through the search process a second time. When President 2 was appointed president of a community college in the southwest, he also became the college's first leader of Asian descent. Immediately after securing his post, several faculty, staff, and community members, the majority white, appeared to question his leadership abilities. For example, a religious group which had great influence in the area appeared to have hesitations about the district appointing an Asian leader:

Some from the religious group really petitioned against me [because I'm] Asian. They wanted to have a typical white [person]. But in the end, I was a finalist. I did well and

become a college president knowing that into the job... and I made lots of effort to reach out to the religious group to build trust. In fact, across the college is one of their churches. My college is just across that way. Every semester, they invite me to go over to give a speech to the students. It's every year. So, I developed very good credibility with them, and every year, they invite me to go over.

Initially, the religious group's leaders ignored President 2's qualifications and experiences and deliberately racialized him as an incompetent foreigner and outsider. These overt acts of racism connect with the AsianCrit tenet of Asianization (Museus, 2013) by casting all Asian American leaders as threatening yellow perils.

President 2 continues to make a positive impact in his current role as chancellor of a multi-campus district. For instance, he has been hard at work trying to integrate some of the district's key services including IT support, advancement/fundraising, and human resources. Despite some progress, he has also been challenged by a constantly changing executive cabinet consisting of several interim appointments. The demands of his job appear to be quite extensive.

President 3

President 3 serves as the president of a college in a multi-college district located in a suburban city near a major research university. She is in her first presidency and has held her current position for three years. Previously, she spent 20 years in multiple roles at another nearby institution including tenured faculty, department chair, dean, director, and associate vice president of instruction. She holds bachelor's and master's degrees in English and a doctorate in international/multicultural education.

President 3 was born in the Philippines and identifies ethnically and culturally as a 1.5 generation Filipina American female. She immigrated to the U.S. when she was five years old

and grew up speaking Tagalog and English and learned Spanish and French in college and in graduate school. She has a multiethnic and multiracial background. On her father's side, she is also Chinese-Filipino. On her mother's side, due to European colonialism, she is also part Spanish.

Like President 1, the only other female president interviewed in this study, President 3 was initially reluctant to take on leadership roles. As a tenured English faculty, she enjoyed "being in the classroom and having that direct impact on learning and student success with a whole range of students, especially students of color." However, as she became involved in several campus-wide initiatives that focused on college and community engagement. Recognizing the positive impact that she made across the campus, her colleagues and campus leaders encouraged her to apply for leadership roles in academic affairs. After serving for several years as a department chair and a dean, and understanding the larger systemic impact that she can have outside of the classroom, she applied for and obtained an associate vice president position:

I thought hard about that role because it meant that if I got the role, I would be leaving the faculty ranks and moving into full time administration and being part of the management unit. So, I thought, well I had been at the College for a number of years already and I already saw the fruits of my efforts at transforming the institution and working with my colleagues. We had multicultural curriculum. We had community engagement and civic engagement curriculum in place. I had gotten the institute up and running. Equity, hiring, all of this stuff. And so, I said to myself, "Hey when you really look at all the work that you've done at the college, you really can keep impacting the transformation and keep progressing it if you joined executive cabinet in this position."

However, she also experienced several barriers throughout her academic training and career. President 3 experienced differential treatment during her graduate studies, prior to her community college career. She shares the following:

So even before I took on the tenure track faculty role, I had already experienced the discrimination and marginalization of students of color in my first graduate program [in English]. So, in the department, there were definitely different expectations set for students to adopt and lead behind, at least my experience, my own sense of voice and interest in doing cultural studies, critical race theory in literature. There was more of a privileging of the European, of the white canon. And also, there wasn't a welcoming during the time that I was in grad school, of other scholars of color. That they were not considered to be true, academic, rigorous scholars. So those were some of the experiences that led me to leave my doctoral program early, a year after the master's [program]. And then I started teaching community college.

President 3's experience during graduate school is an example of how higher education institutions overall are not structurally designed to support students of color due to factors such as the lack of a culturally relevant curriculum and a predominantly-white faculty (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Despite the overall lack of support from her professors in her graduate program, President 3 was able to discover her passion for cultural studies, which eventually led to her community college teaching career.

The differential treatment against President 3 continued as a tenure-track faculty member. During a tenure meeting, a white male faculty member accused her of engaging in grade inflation. Another example involved a senior white faculty member who did not agree with her course content and gave President 3 a negative evaluation of her teaching. Fortunately, the vice

president at the time supported President 3's rebuttal and teaching methods. Furthermore, some colleagues, particularly white men and women, did not feel comfortable with her assertiveness as she transitioned into higher levels of leadership:

As I started assuming leadership roles, faculty leadership roles, I did experience different treatment or some of those stereotypes about Asians. So, when I would be vocal in meetings, then people would be taken aback by it because they really expected me to just be very quiet and just go with the flow. But I was very vocal, for example, with any of the deans that I worked with. Especially around multicultural issues. If something was not right or if I saw that there was unconscious bias in hiring committees, I would call it out. Some of those experiences were very contentious. I ended up losing, or not really losing but having strained relations. Professional relations with some of the white faculty, especially white males in my home division, in my home department. Because I, as well as some other colleagues would call out when we saw there was bias happening in terms of hiring and then also just even meetings. People joking around about LGBTQ populations and making such a big deal about race issues.

As the leader of her current institution, President 3 is deeply invested in her college and community. Her leadership style as she describes it focuses on building relationships:

I think that the reason why I'm able to succeed in building relationships and making people feel like I really am invested in the community. That the community that I choose to engage in. I think it comes from being my values and cultural values. Because that idea of family and community is a central value in my Filipino cultural identity. An Asian American broadly, not to generalize. But a sense of family and having that loyalty and care for your community and extended family members. I think is definitely something

that I bring in to the leadership role. I brought that into the faculty role. But in a leadership role as a college president, I'm always thinking of the welfare of everybody at my college and my colleagues, and the different groups districtwide.

Although President 3 is still early in her presidency, she has demonstrated a deep commitment to engaging many different stakeholders on and off campus. In addition, she is active in several mentoring programs to support faculty and staff of color and stays connected with her constituents using social media. Influenced by her personal and professional experiences as a woman of color, her commitment to equity as a college president is particularly noteworthy. Examples of her work include initiatives to support undocumented students within her community and partnering with her local school district to create a scholarship program to help provide Black American and Latinx students access to higher education.

President 4

President 4 is the only retired president interviewed in this study. Prior to his retirement in 2015, he served as the president at two different community colleges in a western U.S. state, spending nine years at each school. He also spent 10 years as dean at large urban community college district located in the same state. After retirement, he was interim president at another institution for several months to help the institution during a period of transition. Over his four-decade career in higher education, he spent 29 years in community college administration. President 4 was also a faculty member at both two and four-year institutions.

President 4 identifies as a Chinese American immigrant male. Although his father was a U.S. citizen by birth, President 4 grew up in Hong Kong and did not arrive to the U.S. until after high school. He describes his upbringing and the desire to Hong Kong to seek new opportunities and adventures:

The shaping of [my background] actually has to do with, I think, with my growing up in Hong Kong. Also, and the kind of time that we went through, the 60s and the 70s, where there was a lot of social awakening. Even for us and for me when I was growing up in Hong Kong, I was very much attracted to the new ideas that were emerging around the world. And I was really looking forward to coming to the United States and getting out of Hong Kong. I felt Hong Kong was stifling in those days, especially under the British rule then, under which I had experienced a lot of ... not a lot, but significant episodes of discrimination. So, I definitely felt that as... and felt that the U.S. was the place you go to, and then you're free again.

After high school, he enrolled in a community college and went on to receive bachelor's and doctorate degrees in linguistics. While he was trained as an academic scholar, he did not find the work in his field of study fulfilling. He decided to leave academia to serve as director of a nonprofit organization helping immigrants and refugees with career, language, and skills training. His career in this role connected him to many of the political and social activists of the city and provided foundational leadership training that would serve useful in his presidential positions.

As a retired executive leader, President 4 continues to give back by serving as a mentor to other community college professionals. He also presents workshops on leadership at conferences and works with other colleges on strategic planning and accreditation initiatives.

President 5

President 5 is currently serving as the chancellor of an urban multi-campus community college district. Previously, he served as the president of an urban community college, vice president of student services, assistant dean, and director. He has also worked for the U.S.

Department of Education. He began his community college career in 1988 as a faculty member at a technical college:

I loved teaching. I really fell in love with the art and craft and profession of adult education. My student average age was 27, 28, which is the typical community college age. What drew me to this work, really, is the transformative power of education, particularly for secondary education.

He has a bachelor's degree in physical education and completed a master's degree and doctoral studies in education.

President 5 identifies as a third-generation, Japanese American (or *sansei*) male with he/his pronouns. His parents' lived history had a profound impact on his view of education. His mother and father met in college after they were incarcerated during World War II. As a result of his parents' journeys from concentration camps to college life at a university, he felt that "college had this aura around it, this almost mythical quality that it's a place where your life was transformed, and the secrets of the universe are unveiled." As faculty, he also experienced first-hand the power of education:

And then when I started teaching, of course, I had the opportunity to see lives transformed and to see students... many of whom were homeless or had housing insecurity, food insecurity, many first-generation college students, low income, recently dislocated workers, and folks going through a lot of transition... gain confidence, begin to develop skills and experiences. And I would watch their demeanor and their confidence level grow and change. And then of course when they got hired, everything came together for them.

President 5 notes that he does not fit the “stereotypes around what a leader in this predominantly-white culture in the United States should look like and act like.” For instance, he is “not tall, not hierarchical, and does not pound his fists on the table.” While President 5 sees aspects of his communication style as a strength, others may see it differently. President 5 states the following:

I think that there also are times when I might hear through the grapevine that there's a perception that I wasn't going to be a good candidate because I couldn't do X, Y or Z. And often times, it had to do with communication or a perceived inability to communicate. Which I actually think is a strength that I've been able to demonstrate over time, but when I was first beginning to move up, there were a lot of doubters. There were a lot of folks who didn't believe that I would be able to do what I've been able to do. And I think part of it has to do with me wanting to be a thoughtful leader and wanting to be an active listener. And I have found that there... well, a lot of people don't equate that with leadership. It's really what I do most of the time. And I think it's what a lot of leaders do much of the time.

Like the other Asian American president participants, listening strongly influences President 5's leadership style as he describes it. He seeks to first understand the other person's viewpoint, and listening helps him learn more about the complexities of a certain situation or issue. Listening also helps inform his vision for a project or initiative:

Through listening, I have found that it helps to defuse the situation and make possible, then, solutions or creative solutions that may not have been talked of before. I think also remaining optimistic in looking at the horizon. There's a lot of temptation to dive into the details of an initiative or a problem, and at the same time there's a desire in most

institutions to have a vision. And to be thinking about where it is we want to go. I try to divide my time between the larger visionary work and also the more managerial aspects of leadership. In politics, they say you campaign on poetry, but you administer with prose. And I think there's a parallel in higher ed. leadership where you move an institution with poetry, but in order to get there, you have to have some real hard prose. Clear facts, a strategic goal, a plan to get there, the resources allocated to do it, all of those have to be there in order to actualize that vision.

Findings

This section will outline the major themes that emerged across the interviews. The two research questions in this study focus on the experiences of Asian American community college presidents in their roles as executive leaders and how they describe their leadership frameworks and perspectives. Connections to the major tenets of AsianCrit will be used to analyze the results, which expands on the notion of CRT to center the racialized realities of Asian Americans in analyzing their experiences (Museus, 2013). The findings affirmed that the participants faced several individual and institutional barriers and challenges related to their Asian American identity and the intersections of their other identities such as gender and generation. The results also suggested that some participants may have unconsciously internalized dominant messages including racialized stereotypes that Asian Americans are not assertive and thus are largely responsible for their collective underrepresentation in leadership positions.

For the first research question, the participants discuss challenges and opportunities in their leadership roles; in particular, the themes of racism and microaggressions in the workplace were salient. The second research question focuses on the leadership styles of the participants narrated from their own perspectives. The results highlight the value of leadership strategies and

techniques to navigate whiteness in the workplace for the participants that connect back to AsianCrit tenets of Asianization and intersectionality (Museus, 2013).

Racism and Microaggressions in the Workplace

The AsianCrit tenets of Asianization and intersectionality (Museus, 2013) summarize the results of this section. All five presidents revealed that they have experienced varying degrees of racism and microaggressions from both faculty and staff, primarily white Americans, at their respective institutions. From the interviews, Asian American leaders are aware of how they have been racialized by their subordinates, particularly white Americans, as incompetent or less capable leaders than white leaders due to their racial and gender identities. Furthermore, some participants believed they have been viewed by both their constituents and subordinates as model minorities and perpetual foreigners, and also, racially typecast in other ways.

First-generation Asian American leaders as perpetual foreigners.

As first-generation Chinese immigrants, Presidents 2 and 4 encountered overtly racist comments from mostly white faculty and staff as result of their perceived foreignness as Asian Americans. Consequences of the perpetual foreigner stereotype include: participants' conflict between their ethnic/national and racial identities, a lack of sense of belonging in the U.S., and in some cases, the development of internalized oppression where they may valorize whiteness (Huynh, Devos, & Smalarz, 2011). During his first presidency, President 4 describes working with a faculty union dominated by older white male faculty:

There were some outright racist people. I remember going to an academic senate meeting, and I had presented my five-year plan. And someone mentioned that the writing here is not good. It's basically because of my background. It's just insulting. They have read this stuff. It just... ridiculous. And so, they asked me to change the plan. And I told

them that, well, I'm not changing the plan, but you have any suggestions, write them up and send them to me. Nothing, nothing came through. And the academic senate president finally, in the board meeting, endorsed the plan, and said that it's a very good plan. That's the same one that they criticized. It's the kind of outrageous racism that still existed in the faculty at that time in ways that not necessarily used only against me. It was a way of denigrating any administration in any way that they could... I remember someone dug up my dissertation to see what I wrote about. And of course, they couldn't understand... And they couldn't make anything out of it. They tried everything to undermine the credibility of the person. So, a lot of that, in my case, was because, hey, I was obviously, I'm the guy from Hong Kong, and I'm not ... I spoke with a little bit of accent and I looked different. So that became a basis for some of their attacks.

Although he reported that his second presidency had fewer racist attacks against him, President 4 still believed he experienced microaggressions due to his racial identity. As a Chinese-born male who speaks English with what is perceived as a noticeable accent, some of his white colleagues perceived and portrayed him as disloyal and foreign leader. However, at the same time, there is a contradiction in that it appears that he also sees himself as a foreigner and not American. The following is another example of President 4 being racialized as a foreigner:

One time I had hired someone who had experience in working in Beijing before. It was not an Asian woman. It was an American woman. I mean a white, Caucasian woman. And somehow in the description, my assistant wrote down that she was fluent in Chinese and all of that stuff. And someone wrote to the board saying that I'm getting the gang of Chinese coming, we're going to take over, and sent that to the board as their comment.

Throughout his various leadership roles, President 2 received comments from his colleagues and direct reports who claimed that he got his positions due to his race and not because of his abilities to do the job. As an Asian American male, he was seen as a foreigner who did not possess the leadership qualities of what many of his subordinates would view as a typical white leader. Despite having an extensive work experience and professional accomplishments, his colleagues did not view him as a legitimate leader based solely on his appearance, spoken accent, and racial identity. A recent example occurred in his current role as district chancellor during the district's strategic planning session. He spoke passionately about the encounter:

We were doing strategic planning. We did a simultaneous using internet connection to do a three-campus forum simultaneously. It was a strategic planning and talking about proposing the mission and vision. Obviously, as the chancellor, I have to kick it off. One person was walking away, made a comment that President 2, can't even pronounce some words right. How can he lead? This was heard by the former president [a white man]. He didn't say anything, but he went came back to me. Now, I don't think that... When I heard it, yeah, my heart wasn't too happy, but I didn't take it personally. Yes. I speak with accent. I didn't grow up here. I don't speak perfect oral English, but my writing is probably better than a lot of people including Americans. Yes, I speak with accent. I never hide it, right? I came to interview. You heard me. Plus, I have been a provost, the vice president 10 plus years. You stood out my ability. That's always something will always follow you, because in people's mind, we're hiring a chancellor, college president. In their mind, there's an image who he, she looks like, who she sounds like, how he talks. That's unfortunately even in 2018, that is still true. As a minority candidate, whether you

apply for a dean, VP, college president, you just need to be aware someone, somewhere will find fault just because of the way you speak, the way you look like, and you have to be willing to be out there. Otherwise, don't do it. If you have a thin skin, you can't do it.

President 2's experience connects with the AsianCrit tenets of Asianization and transnational contexts (Museus, 2013). Seen as a perpetual foreigner due to his spoken accent and physical appearance, President 2's accomplishments and authority were largely dismissed by his mostly white subordinates and colleagues. Faced with microaggressions categorized under the themes alien in own land, ascription of intelligence, and pathologizing cultural values (Sue et al., 2007), President 2 also implies that presidents of color must endure racially based criticism and scrutiny that white presidents do not experience.

Navigating white-dominant spaces.

Although President 1 is still in the early stages of her presidency, she already has encountered microaggressive reactions due to her position as an Asian American female president, particularly while working within predominantly white spaces. The microaggressions resulting from the intersectionality of her identities aligns with the tenets of ascription of intelligence and invisibility as outlined in Sue et al. (2007), which also reinforces the model-minority stereotype. President 1 describes an encounter when several elected officials reacted with surprise after meeting an Asian American woman president, presumably for the first time in their professional careers:

On the second week on the job there was a group of [state] senators were getting a tour in apprenticeships. When I met them, each of them had [a reaction]... I've had this reaction so many times since. I even had it when I was a VP. I share my name and I share my title, and there's this surprise. There's this like, "Oh, that's wonderful. Good for you." Almost

like against the odds, you know? They almost can't help but acknowledge how unusual and unexpected it is that somebody with this face is in that role. They literally can't mask their surprise. I've had that experience over and over again, but when I get it from people of color it's different.

During a summer kickoff retreat, President 1 had a demeaning encounter with a senior white male president from within the community college system at the statewide president's group meeting. The interaction with her fellow colleague made her feel invisible, disrespected, and dehumanized:

I remember at the time the head of the group was doing the introduction. He's one of the presidents, a big, robust white dude. He let me know, "President 1, I'm going to be introducing you." I had come late because of something, I can't remember why. "Oh, we introduced the others this morning. If you don't mind, I want to introduce you when we come back from the break." I'm like, "Sure thing." I remember I was in conversation with someone else during the break at the little snack table, and he just sort of barks at me from across the room. "Hey, President 1, you ready? I'm going to do that thing. You ready?" Had I known him and had I had a rapport with him I probably wouldn't have been uncomfortable with being addressed like that. But it felt so overly casual to the point of feeling disrespectful. Sure, in my mind I could probably imagine this guy is like that with everybody. In that moment it was just this sense of disrespect. I was being summoned and had to snap to. I had to end my conversation to be in there for when I was expected, so that was a small experience, but it was sort of a reminder.

She added additional insights about how the dynamics within the statewide president's group impacted decision-making:

What's been interesting is experiencing now the white supremacy of decision making in president's group is for all the group's talk about being equity minded, and they are talking a lot about those, which is great. The way we make decisions and the things we struggle over are so rife with white male patriarchy that I see other experienced women of color struggle up through that, and I also see how other women and other women of color have actually also internalized that a bit. That's something that I'm noticing now. I'll be navigating it more in the coming years. You know, I knew it would be challenging in that way. So now I'll be building strategies around how to do that better. I see it, it's there, and it'll be something I'll be wrestling with.

President 1's interactions with her statewide white male colleagues shows the systemic nature of white supremacy within the community and technical college system, and her awareness of how she has been positioned in these contexts as an Asian American woman. Her comments imply that longtime presidents of color within the system have had to assimilate into a culture of whiteness in order to maintain their positions of influence. Therefore, as an Asian American female, she must find a way to navigate the statewide system typically designed for white men, while also trying to influence policies that connect to her core values and advocate for her institution.

Finally, President 3 summarizes her experience as a community college leader with the following statement:

From a student, to a faculty member, to an administrator, to an executive leader. I have experienced intersectionality issues all the time. And then I haven't even talked about the immigrant background as well, because people perceive Asians as always being the perpetual foreigner. So, I'm very conscious of coming into being perceived as an

immigrant, even if technically I've been in the United States since I was five and have even lost some of the fluency in Tagalog, in my home language because I've been here for 45 years already.

Like several of the participants, President 3 recognizes that being an Asian American leader requires navigating other people's perceptions and stereotypes, especially views by white Americans who are often a dominant majority in institutions of higher education. Although the intersectionality of her various identities presents both challenges in her role as president, they also present opportunities to be able to outreach and connect with many different groups of people on campus and within the surrounding communities. For example, she approaches difficult budget decisions with empathy, facts, and transparency. As a result of her cultural values as she describes it, she treats her college community as an extended family through an authentic and relational leadership style.

Multiple Ways of Being and Leading

Countering and reaffirming white-dominant frames of leadership, the participants discussed how their Asian and ethnic-specific cultural values both influence and strengthen their leadership styles. Common themes about what defines their leadership styles include listening to others; consensus building and teamwork; and being relational. These results connect to the story, theory, and praxis and strategic (anti)essentialism tenets of AsianCrit (Museus, 2013) because they showcase diverse and effective leadership styles that differ from dominant norms such as that strong leaders must be competitive and hierarchical. In addition, the participants' experiences and perspectives counter the narrative of a singular Asian American experience and leadership framework, but also, suggest that they have internalized some common stereotypes that a fixed set of Asian cultural values exist.

Dominant concepts of leadership suggest that a leader must have the final say or make the ultimate decision to be seen as a competent and effective leader (Burriss, et al., 2013). Several Asian American community college presidents commented about the importance of building relationships when it comes to leading their respective institutions, which contrasts with how they have interacted with white leaders who they see as working in competition with others or in isolation. For example, President 4 describes having an open leadership style. By “bringing people into the problem and solving it together as much as possible... the team feels stronger, and there's a lot more trust.” Similarly, President 5 “seeks first to understand” by listening to his colleagues and direct reports. President 2 states that listening as a leadership characteristic is influenced by his cultural background:

I don't change the way I lead just because someone criticized me. I change because when I see the need or it's not because of my Asian background. However, would my Asian background influence my leadership style? Absolutely. Absolutely. I try to listen a lot. That comes with the background. I don't jump into conclusions. I don't offer my solution right away because I want to mull it over. I want to consider other people. I want to consult. That clearly has to do with my upbringing and my cultural background... I try to listen as much as I can. I try to be a supervisor that really does not meddle with people doing their job... I have always tried to be very careful to enable people to do their job. The feedback I've got over the years is people say, "Yeah. We really appreciate working for you. You don't micromanage us."... Sometimes I don't have to everything be in upfront to make the decision. Someone else can make the decision. It's totally fine. Someone can take the credit absolutely fine. Fine with me so long the work gets done, the institution benefits, the students benefit. That has to do with my background. In some

ways, who we are, our cultural background, our ethnicity invariably, silently affects how we approach a task, how we interact in problem solving. That's clearly the case.

President 2's narrative implies that Asian American leaders tend to be better collaborators due to their cultural backgrounds. It is difficult to determine the validity of this argument, as leaders from varied backgrounds would also describe their leadership styles as collaborative. Moreover, President 2 seems to imply that certain traits, such as listening and consulting with others are the result of his cultural background. Although many Asian Americans may possess these characteristics, one cannot generalize all Asian American leaders as a monolithic group, which connects with the AsianCrit tenet of Asianization (Museus, 2013). President 2 also describes himself as having a collaborative leadership style that involves listening, shared decision making, and letting his subordinates complete their best work without constant direct oversight. He shares that he does not like to micromanage his staff and allows his team complete tasks without constant oversight.

President 5 also seeks to break down traditional leadership norms through consensus building. He frames his leadership style as more collaborative rather than hierarchical. Thus, he believes he is able to gather input and buy-in would eventually result in the completion of successful initiatives:

I think to a certain extent, when I was growing up, there was a lot of discussion, a lot of consensus building within the communities that I was a part of. And I saw it worked, and I could sense that there was an interest, even a yearning, for that in the different institutions that I worked in. Because it wasn't the predominant mode of decision making. It was very hierarchical, it was very top down, when I started. So, I think that maybe it was a good consequence of readiness of institutions to have a more collaborative

approach to leadership. And my interest in being authentic, and also wanting to lead in that way.

Several respondents emphasized the importance of building relationships on their campuses and within the community to advance institutional initiatives. President 3 believes developing relationships is rooted in her cultural values, specifically the idea of family and community that she connects to her Filipino background. She believes that her success comes from being invested in the community she serves. Using this lens as a community college president, she is “always thinking of the welfare of everybody at my college and my colleagues, and the different groups districtwide.” She adds:

I'm really interested in developing and building relationships with whatever group that I choose to participate in. If it's a priority for the college or if it's a priority for my professional own development, that I go into that space wanting to establish relationships. And you really can only establish relationships if you bring your authentic self into the group. So, I'm very comfortable sharing my personal experiences, sharing about my family.

President 1 also sees herself as a relational leader. She likes to “decide and build things with people through conversation and through relationship.” One drawback to a having a relational style of leadership is time management interacting with various constituents, which has been something that President 1 has struggled with during her first year as president due to her many meetings on campus and commitments off campus. She states the following:

Literally, time management is one of my biggest challenges because there's not enough time in the world for being the kind of leader that I am. I'm highly relational. I like to decide and build things with people through conversation and through relationships. It

means it requires face time and engagement time. I had otherwise envisioned this fall quarter being a quarter where I was getting deeply engaged with faculty because I knew that that's an area where I needed to reach out to a little more deeply because I didn't have the instruction background and also finding ways to engage with admin services, like the two major areas of the college where I didn't already have many, many existing relationships. The fact that I wasn't able to do that because there were so many meetings off campus with this group, with that group, with the district, that really was a challenge for me because it does challenge my ability to be present.

President 1 also describes herself as an interpersonal and community-oriented based leader. She enjoys working and interacting with colleagues on the ground level and would often have lunch with staff in her previous position as vice president. In her new role, President 1 finds the nature of the presidency to be very isolating and the job often counters against her preferred leadership style of getting to know faculty and staff on an individual-level.

President 4 describes his leadership style as one that is open and based on the principles of listening, collaboration, and teamwork:

The more successful leader I become, the more I know that I don't know a lot. I become less smart as I become a better leader. And then I need to bring more people onto the team to help come up with the solution and empowering them to do it. And getting to the point where it's like I can talk... a very highly functioning team is that we can talk about an issue and then they all run up to provide some solutions. And it's a very deep understanding of the common direction that we're driving at. And that works very well in a complex place, like when you run a 20,000-people operation.

Overall, the participants discussed common leadership themes such as collaboration, relationship-building, and teamwork as central to their own leadership styles. Some of the participants emphasized that their cultural backgrounds influenced their leadership style, while others did not, which connects with the Asianization tenet of AsianCrit (Museus, 2013) since the participants had different responses. Their varied responses ultimately contradict the stereotype that Asian Americans act and behave like a monolithic group. Furthermore, although several of the participants stated that they did not employ a hierarchical leadership style, their positions as community college presidents and chancellors makes it challenging to avoid a top-down leadership approach, particularly in large and complex community college districts with rigid regulations and rules.

Although each participant emphasized the importance of equity and inclusion in their approach to leadership, it is difficult to determine if they can implement an AsianCrit framework (Museus, 2013) as part of their work. As public figures, community college presidents must interact with several external stakeholders including community members, board of trustee members, campus constituents, government officials, and other groups who may have competing interests and may prevent the participants from leading towards social justice. It is important to recognize both the limitations of the role of the community college presidency and its potential for driving institutional and cultural changes. Therefore, given the complexities of their roles, and the sociopolitical climates that they must navigate in mostly white-dominated systems, Asian American community college presidents cannot easily, even if they desire to do so, adopt all of the tenets of the AsianCrit framework in all aspects of their work (Museus, 2013). For instance, racial stereotypes against Asian American leaders may fuel their reluctance to lead from an

AsianCrit lens. Furthermore, leaders may also face backlash from challenging board of trustee members who challenge equity and inclusion efforts within an institution.

Navigating Whiteness in the Workplace

One of the barriers for Asian Americans and other leaders of color to leading authentically involves the challenges of navigating white-dominant spaces without experiencing significant backlash. Cross-cultural codeswitching, which is the act of purposely modifying one's behavior in order to accommodate different cultural norms (Molinsky, 2007), was another salient theme from the interviews that allowed them to navigate these spaces of whiteness. The theme ties closely to the AsianCrit tenet of Asianization (Museus, 2013) since cross-cultural codeswitching connects to the participants' differential and racialized treatment that led them to believe they could not fully articulate their true beliefs or feelings without experiencing backlash. Presidents 1, 3, and 4 all discussed situations for when cross-cultural codeswitching has been necessary in their roles as executive leaders. President 1 has had to engage in this type of codeswitching throughout her professional life. However, in the process, she believes that one can also build relationships with white colleagues to move forward on important campus-wide, equity-based initiatives and also help them grow and understand their privileges:

I would say in cabinet one of my goals is to normalize conversations about race. You'll hear me talking about race very regularly and eventually we got to the point where I established dynamics with my white colleagues. A former colleague [vice president] was notorious for [mansplaining]. I would tell him, "Dude, you have got to stop." I just want you to know that you tend to mansplain things sometimes. I had a gift of a colleague in him because here was a white male of privilege in positions of power who because of his white male privilege never had to think about these things but was so openly curious and

desiring to learn and do better that he let me tell him whatever I needed to tell him.

Having that level of interaction with him gave me a comfort level to do that with other white males I work with. I've seen some of the white males I've worked with some real growth and development in their own self-identity, but their whole cultural competency as they've sort of risen to the challenge that I've provided them in being a woman of color in a position of power, being their supervisor or being their cabinet colleague or being assertive in arguments or debates around decision making. I've sort of forced them to both reckon with me but also because they've developed a respect for me that is forces them to reckon with themselves.

As a vice president, President 1 was able to build a relationship with her colleague to be able to actively resist "white mansplaining" and help him understand how his white male privilege negatively impacts others' ability to contribute and participate in shared spaces. She also believes she helped normalize conversations around race on cabinet and among her direct reports. Now as president, she has the opportunity to assert her authority and power to continue having challenging conversations. It is still too early in her presidency to determine whether her efforts will result in meaningful institutional changes, but her willingness to engage in these courageous conversations is noteworthy given that there are risks in publicly centering race and racism in everyday conversations.

President 3 engages in codeswitching depending on the context or situation presented throughout her various levels of leadership. She provides the following advice to other women of color on how to navigate different situational barriers, particularly in a white and male dominated work environment:

What I tell other women of color who are aspiring to leadership positions is that we need to develop those code-switching navigation skills when we're in those meetings. Then we have to learn how to stay calm in those settings and then approach trying to have a positive discussion in terms of bringing out bias or those issues. So, one example I can give you is from the executive role to now being a president because it's still an executive role. I'm in many meetings in the community, and some of the meetings that I'm in, I'm one of few women. Then, I'm one of few leaders of color in the meeting space. So there have been examples where people, the jokes have come about around, "Here are the women talking about women's issues again," or, "Why are they bringing up race again?" So, I think in those settings as a leader, you need to be able to approach other leaders in your community in that meeting to say that, "I'm perceiving your comment to be one of this. Let's have a discussion about it if we're really trying to have an inclusive space that those comments and that type of joking is not appropriate in this meeting."

She adds that leaders should exhibit "cultural humility" and to "not be quick to judgment or to dismiss perspectives" because everyone comes from their own "cultural framework."

In addition, President 4 adds the following analysis of cross-cultural codeswitching:

It's not like you have one personality, then you have to change your personality. I think you add to your personality. We all have a core, and when you have other responsibilities, you only add to yourself. And then you call upon different skills at different time to behave. And in some cases, you switch. In-group, out-group, that kind of situation. That's part of you. But doesn't mean that you are not yourself.

As one of the few individuals of color working in white-dominant spaces at their institutions, Asian American community college presidents appear to have a physical distinction

that separates them from their white colleagues. As a result, some Asian American leaders adopt cross-cultural codeswitching techniques in order to effectively lead across assumed or real differences. Some of the participants intentionally use their positional authority to educate others whenever possible around issues of equity and inclusion. Others feel that all college presidents must have multiple personalities due to the political nature of the job, regardless of one's racial background. Despite varying perspectives, a president's role is complex, as the position must work effectively with many constituents on-campus and within the community. As self-described relational leaders, Asian American community college presidents also have the potential to increase community engagement and build social movements across different interest groups. Therefore, one can conclude that code-switching is not a sign of being not authentic, but a tool that Asian American leaders use to work within systems designed primarily for white leaders.

Discussion

The personal narratives of the five participants of this study highlighted salient examples of the barriers, challenges, and opportunities they faced as Asian American community college presidents. Data from this study provided some core insights to each participant's career trajectory, leadership style, and experiences leading in predominantly white two-year institutions of higher learning. I connected the findings to the AsianCrit tenets of Asianization, transnational contexts, and intersectionality (Museus, 2013), and also focused on the value of counter storytelling for analyzing their experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2002). This section will discuss the significance of the findings as they relate to the experiences of Asian American college leaders. I will also highlight some limitations to this study. Finally, I will conclude by sharing the participants' advice for future Asian American leaders, along implications for future practice and research.

Navigating Individual and Institutional Racism

The results of the study confirmed that Asian American community college presidents experience several types of racism and racial microaggressions in the workplace that are different from other racialized and marginalized groups. This study also clearly distinguishes their experiences from white leaders. Through counter storytelling, the five participants largely countered dominant narratives of Asian Americans as passive model minorities and thus incapable of serving as effective college leaders (Fujimoto, 1996). Using Sue et al.'s (2007) framework, the participants encountered several microaggressions such as being depicted as aliens in their own land and the pathologizing of their cultural values/communication styles. For example, as first-generation Asian American immigrants, Presidents 2 and 4 experienced overt racism in the workplace, primarily because they speak English with perceived foreign accents and since they were born outside of the U.S. Their experiences also connect with the AsianCrit tenets of Asianization and transnational contexts (Museus, 2013), as their perceived foreignness gives the impression to other racial groups, particularly white Americans, that they are ineffective leaders because they do not look or sound like what is associated with typical leadership: native-born white American leaders. Despite these setbacks, both Presidents 2 and 4 have had successful presidencies at multiple community colleges because of their abilities to navigate and internalize microaggressions and racism within their workplaces.

Institutional Barriers to Leading

One of my initial interests in completing this project was to consider Asian American leaders' ability to demonstrate authentic leadership, particularly within predominantly white institutions where they are in the numeric minority. Authentic leaders are said to be true to themselves, motivated by their personal convictions, and able and willing to lead from their own

personal values (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). However, I have seen in my experience that many Asian American leaders and leaders of color adopt dominant leadership traits when ascending to higher levels of community college leadership. These traits are described by Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005), which emphasize that effective leaders should be forward thinking, honest, and establish clear organizational values and vision to succeed in their roles. Although successful leaders may very well adopt these characteristics, these specific traits do not always speak to the traits that the participants of this study value such as relationship building and listening, which are also some of the fundamental tools used for institutional change to occur.

In this study, all five participants identified themselves as authentic leaders. Their universal affirmation was not unexpected, as most leaders would probably not be able or willing to identify themselves as being inauthentic. It is also difficult to define and measure one's authenticity. I was not able to clearly answer my original wondering of whether Asian American community college presidents are able to lead authentically, but I was able to gather more insights into the complexities of their experiences and leadership styles that were shaped by a variety of individual and sociocultural contexts.

Despite each participant's belief that they are leading or have led their organizations authentically, there was some evidence to the contrary. For example, as was noted in the results section, several presidents discussed the need to engage in cross-cultural codeswitching (Molinsky, 2007) to do their jobs effectively. One explanation for having multiple work personalities and needing to engage in this type of codeswitching is the highly political nature of the community college presidency (Jensen & Giles, 2006). As the leader of a higher education institution or district, one must work with constituents within the college (e.g., board of trustees, faculty, staff, and administrators) and community members who may not share one's core values,

particularly in rural or other geographically homogeneous or isolated communities. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2002), institutions of higher education also systemically center the values of white Americans as normative. Despite their best efforts, Asian Americans may struggle to feel affirmed and supported as leaders because they are up against predominantly white workforce and trustee boards. Thus, when confronted with hostility or resistance, Asian American leaders are often forced to maintain or publicly support the status quo at their institutions such as promoting white employees or not actively being able to promote racial equity due to the structural barriers in place that would prevent them from enacting change. Ultimately, what I gathered from their narratives is that directly challenging a system that upholds white supremacy may result in retaliation or being dismissed from one's job.

Building upon the AsianCrit tenet of intersectionality (Museus, 2013), in addition to their Asian American and racialized identities, gender appeared to play a role in the barriers experienced by both men and women presidents. In addition to her racial identity, President 1 emphasized the role that her gender has in terms of her leadership style. For example, she discussed the need to balance the demands of motherhood, family, and work while navigating the role as president:

It's this idea that as women we are constantly juggling many balls. We have a lot of balls in the air and that the important thing to remember is that most of the balls are made of rubber and some of them are made from glass. Your job is to keep all the glass balls in the air because if they fall they will shatter, but that most of the balls, if you happen to drop them, they will bounce and either somebody else will pick it up or you'll pick it up later. For me, I've used that as a way to talk to other people about how to balance this and

to treat the level of pressure they feel at work. For me, it really helps me maintain that authenticity even when I feel really challenged.

Another observation from the interviews was the fact that the two female participants did not initially view themselves as natural leaders. Both participants indicated in their responses that they did not aspire to become executive leaders earlier in their careers, but they were encouraged by others to take on higher leadership roles, which eventually led them to their first community college presidency. As women presidents, it appeared that they went through extensive efforts to establish and then prove themselves as legitimate leaders, primarily around white men and other individuals who struggled to accept that highly qualified Asian American women could be effective chief executive officers.

Similarly, it is significant to note that the Asian American male leaders of this study also do not enjoy the same benefits as white male or even white female leaders. Narratives from the male participants showed that they faced microaggressions in the workplace due to their smaller physical size, and since they do not have the traits that resemble white, heterosexual hegemonic masculinity norms such as competitiveness and self-reliance (Lu & Wong, 2013). Their white colleagues and subordinates also criticized them for having poor communication skills due to perceptions that they spoke with foreign accents and for having a quieter demeanor. As a result, many leaders and subordinates at predominantly white institutions racialize Asian Americans as either non-leaders or poor leaders. Thus, these negative stereotypes and beliefs impose systemic barriers for Asian American leaders from moving into higher-level positions. (Chin, 2018).

Limitations

This study analyzed the experiences of five current or former Asian American community college presidents who have worked or are currently working on the west coast of

the United States. Their experiences likely differ from Asian American from other regions of the country due to factors such as of the location and each institution/system's cultural impact on the nature and role of the presidency. The term Asian American also captures a large demographic of individuals whose experiences were not be expressed in my study. The underrepresentation of certain Asian American ethnic groups such as Southeast Asian Americans from refugee backgrounds in higher education also translates to a narrow pipeline of executive leaders. Specifically, out of the five Asian American participants of this study, only three ethnicities were represented: Chinese, Filipina, and Japanese. As a result, the study's conclusions may not be generalizable due to the small sample size.

There are also limitations of interviewing just the participants versus a broad range of their constituents such as board members, community members, faculty, and their subordinates. The main limitation is that the participants are self-reporting their own approaches to leadership without additional data sources to confirm or disconfirm their self-analyses. Regarding the interview results, the participants may have been reluctant to speak candidly about their experiences due to factors such as concern for compromising their positions or confirmation bias. Furthermore, in general, the validity of interview results may be altered by distortions in perspectives due to their relationships with and perceptions of the interviewer (Martella et al., 2013). For example, I know several of the participants through my connections and networks as an Asian American leader in the community and technical college system. Thus, due to our previously established relationships and sampling method, the participants may have emphasized or discussed certain topics where they may have provided another interviewer, whether Asian American or not, with different information. Furthermore, except for a few documents posted on

each institutions' website, the results relied almost entirely on interview data. Therefore, there is an overall lack of triangulation of data sources to confirm the results.

Another consideration is my own positionality. Since I identify as an Asian American, I share the same racial background as the participants of this study and similar experiences with racialization, although there are differences in our experiences and identities that include factors such as gender, generation, and language. While our commonalities may have led to more candid conversations than if the interviewer were not Asian American, I do not assume that the participants fully identified with me because of some of our shared experiences and identities.

Implications for Future Practice and Advice for Future Asian American Leaders

This section highlights the participants' advice for future Asian American leaders who are interested in seeking the community college presidency in the future. The AsianCrit tenet of strategic (anti)essentialism (Museus, 2013) acknowledges that a singular Asian American lived experience does not exist, but rather, that a shared Asian American identity exists because its members share many racialized experiences in institutional contexts that continually centers whiteness. Furthermore, some of the themes from the narratives also align with the AsianCrit commitment to social justice (Museus, 2013) tenet as most of the participants appear to be deeply invested in helping future leaders of color navigate potential barriers to career advancement. Overall themes in this section include overcoming stereotypes, seeking out mentors, and building a support network.

Overcoming Stereotypes

Presidents 4 and 2 both recognize that dominant racial stereotypes exist for Asian American leaders that make it challenging for many of them to feel fully respected in their roles. Examples of such stereotypes include being perceived by their constituents and subordinates as

the antithesis of an imagined white male leader and also racially stereotyped as foreigners and model minorities. Rather than let the negativity detract from one's work, President 4 encourages potential Asian American leaders to look past the others' ignorance and racism:

You don't have to state the obvious. We are different. And so, for anybody who wants to go into these leadership positions, just realize that, yes, that's the case. So what? Are you going to cry foul? Or you say it's not fair? Yeah, it's not fair. So, what do you do? You just stay home and cry over it, or are you going to do it? You just overcome it, and know that that's a part of the game, and you do what you can to overcome it and you call it out when it's obvious. And the other times, you just deal with it and be strong. And knowing that that is a part of it, and that's part of the strength that one has to have, and not be too sensitive about it, that, yeah, this is unfair world, and therefore you cannot move forward. Yeah, it's an unfair world. But you want to move forward? Just suck it up. Because I think that's very important, that we can examine all we can about this kind of stuff. But really, you need to be able to confront it and deal with it and accept that racism in all forms still exists. It's not because you get to a certain point, you're not ethnic anymore. You still are it. Other people still look at you as what you appear to be. And it will always be the case. But you need to forget about being too sensitive of how you deal with things (as a racial minority) but react to things and just deal with them in a way that... what makes sense as an American, as individuals in a society that is supposed to treat everyone with equality.

By suggesting that Asian American leaders benefit by dismissing ignorant and racist comments in the workplace, President 4's advice appears to contradict the commitment to social justice tenet of AsianCrit (Museus, 2013). In some respects, his advice may reinforce dominant

stereotypes about Asian Americans as being passive and quiet model minorities. It also unintentionally ignores the larger issue that white racism cannot be overcome by simply disregarding it. Despite these challenges, it should be acknowledged that President 4 may not be able to publicly call out acts of racism in his high-profile, public-facing position, as doing so may lead to career suicide or other challenges such as retaliation. However, at the same time, President 4's message can also be regarded as a counter story because in order to move forward on initiatives in systems that promote white supremacy, a leader of color may benefit from not investing a great amount of time in countering racist messaging and instead focusing on initiatives that actually promote racial equity.

President 2 shares a similar message. He suggests that Asian American leaders must work hard to overcome negative stereotypes imposed by white-dominant and mainstream narratives:

Sometimes we enter a job with a doubt, with a deficit. How you approach it? You work hard. You have to overcome. You'd be willing to be out there to be vulnerable, right? You can't withhold yourself. You have to be willing to be out there, to be vulnerable, to be questioned. Those people have doubts, and then you have an opportunity to overcome that. My experience tells me most people are reasonable. They just don't know you. What they read, what they see on TV or the media portrayed Asian leaders cannot make decision. They are indecisive. They are reserved. My experience clearly tells me that if we enter into a job, sometimes we have to prove ourselves. You got to be willing to accept the challenge because people don't know us very well. Is there bigotry in our society who just don't like Asians? Perhaps. I would have been in that very minority, small group of people. Good people, they don't know us. It's incumbent for us to understand there are stereotypes. We have a responsibility. That's one of the reasons I

decided to apply for the presidency. I said, I'm going to go through this. If I was selected, great. If I'm not selected, I at least went through the process. I have a responsibility to other upcoming Asians, so I did that job.

Connected with the AsianCrit tenet of Asianization (Museus, 2013), President 2's narrative underscores the reality and challenges that many Asian American community college presidents face in their daily work. Unlike white Americans, Asian American leaders must overcome setbacks, microaggressions, and stereotypes imposed by other colleagues and popular culture that typecasts them as reserved or mostly followers rather than leaders. Thus, Asian Americans must work harder than white Americans to achieve the same level of success and acceptance by their peers. Despite facing many challenges and barriers, President 2 states that it is still imperative for Asian American executives to pay it forward and create new pathways to help build the leadership pipeline for future leaders. He also appears committed to serving as a role model for the Asian American higher education community.

The underrepresentation of Asian Americans in community college leadership positions has been well-documented (Fujimoto, 1996; Liang, Lee, & Ting, 2002; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Nakanishi, 1993; Neilson & Suyemoto, 2009; Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, & Parker, 2009). Despite experiencing multiple barriers and challenges in their own advancement trajectories, several participants believe it is imperative that future Asian American leaders step up and increase the pan-ethnic community's representation in positions of executive leadership. For instance, President 5 states the following:

I would first encourage folks to really strongly consider this. And not to be deterred by negative stories or situations that they may hear. Certainly, be aware of the challenges,

but know that everybody encounters them and surmounts them. I think the Asian American candidates for presidency need to know that they're needed, too.

President 5 acknowledges that although aspiring Asian American community college leaders will certainly encounter challenges as they move up into higher-level positions, the setbacks are not unconquerable. The need for more Asian American presidents shows that there's a representation gap within higher education institutions.

Despite negative stereotypes about Asian Americans as leaders that primarily derive from white-dominant institutions, President 4 states that Asians and Asian Americans value education as a cultural tradition, which can translate to positive outcomes in terms of their pursuit of leadership opportunities in educational institutions. Education is a fundamental part of the value system in many Asian American communities and a reason why community college leadership would seem like a good fit. According to President 4, "teaching is revered traditionally in many Asian countries. There should be no reason for [Asian Americans] to not pursue [higher education administration] and become the best that they can be in this field based on their traditional values." The presence of more Asian Americans in leadership positions can help provide much needed voices to positively affect policies to support diverse student populations. These values align well with the AsianCrit tenets of commitment to social justice and story, theory, and praxis (Museus, 2013).

Furthermore, President 5 discusses the importance of Asian American leaders participating in role modeling (Wing, 2007; Museus, 2013), particularly for Asian American students. He believes serving as a role model paves the way for future Asian American leaders:

I underestimated the influence that being a role model can have on students. So, we have student trustees, and last year our student trustee was an Asian American student. And

about halfway through the year, he let me know his career goal is to become a community college president. And we hadn't specifically talked about it, but yes, seeing an Asian American in this position got him to thinking that maybe he could do that, too. So, even though that certainly wasn't anything I had talked specifically about, it was something that he thought. So, you can have an impact, and you can have an impact of scale. And that's a really important thing to think about in terms of why you should pursue this [community college presidency].

The positive impact of increased Asian American representation transcends many levels, on campus and within the communities in which they serve. Being in a highly visible and public role can also inspire future leaders and to advance the mission of serving students with diverse backgrounds at higher education institutions.

Mentors and Support Network

Several participants discussed the importance of aspiring Asian American leaders to find mentors to support one's professional growth. In the classical sense, mentoring refers to a relationship between a mentor who helps a mentee learn how to navigate the world of work (Kram, 1985). Compared to coaching, which focuses on the preparing an individual for a performance event such as a job interview, mentoring involves longer lasting relationships which focuses on a deeper development and growth of the mentee (Irby, 2012; Ireby, 2013). According to Chang, Longman, and Franco (2014), the benefits of mentoring can be identified in three areas: personal growth, career advancement, and psychosocial support. The underrepresentation of Asian American and other administrators of color makes mentoring a crucial aspect for improving overall recruitment and retention of diverse leaders in higher education.

President 2 recommends having several mentors, each serving a different purpose for the aspiring leader:

The mentors can be in a different level, different category. Someone you can go and just cry and just let out your steam. The person can give you honest feedback. There are some mentors who can just mentor on one aspect about it. You go to different mentors for different purposes.

In addition, President 1 advocates for an informal support network. She has a group of colleagues of color who she connects with regularly after the workday. It is important to, as she notes, to “still have folks that are in your corner who can see you apart from how you see yourself and give you encouragement or help you contextualize your experience.” Affinity groups are an example of creating such a contextualized space with a group of individuals with shared experiences at work. Affinity groups began in the 1960s during the Civil Rights era as raced-based employee gathering spaces (Douglas, 2008). They unite people with shared experiences and social identities, as these spaces allow the members to solve problems, and also, advocate for institutional change and awareness (Van Aken, Monetta, & Sink, 1994). For example, I am involved in two Asian American affinity groups: one within my college district that meets quarterly and another through the annual Washington State Faculty and Staff of Color Conference (2017). These forums provide me with spaces to connect with other Asian American colleagues but also allows me to serve as an advocate and mentor for our collective community on a statewide basis. Through these venues, I meet other Asian American colleagues in a supportive space and share strategies for negotiating whiteness in our roles within and outside the workplace.

There are also several formal professional organizations for Asian American higher education leaders. Based in California, Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics (LEAP) is a national organization whose mission is “to achieve full participation and equality for Asian Pacific Islanders (API) through leadership, empowerment, and policy” (n.p.). The group sponsors an annual leadership development program for API higher education professionals where current and former API presidents, vice presidents, deans, and faculty serve as faculty and mentors to help encourage future leaders. Although not specific to Asian Americans, there are also mentoring programs for faculty and staff of color within the Washington State Community and Technical Colleges system. Programs such as the Faculty of Color Mentoring Program, the Administrators of Color Mentoring Program, and the Social Justice Leadership Institute provide spaces for aspiring and current leaders of color to receive support from senior leaders of color and to strategically think through their own career trajectories. Finally, I am currently working with a group of Asian American leaders to create an API-focused leadership development program for our Washington State higher education colleagues.

The advice shared by the participants appeared to have differences in terms of gender. As first-generation Asian American males, Presidents 2 and 4 invoked some of their male privilege by emphasizing that one can become a successful leader simply through hard work and ignoring negative stereotypes and racism exhibited by white colleagues and subordinates. On the other hand, female participants focused more on formal and informal mentoring programs, recognizing the need to build community to succeed and thrive in their roles. These differences may also be because both Presidents 2 and 4, first-generation Chinese American immigrants, may not fully understand the experiences of Asian Americans who grew up in the U.S. like the other participants.

System-wide advocacy

It is vital for community college board of trustee members, white administrators, as well as the general public, to recognize the importance of having more leaders of color generally and Asian American leaders specifically. Diverse leaders are needed to advocate for a rapidly changing student demographic within two-year colleges that already are or will soon become predominantly students of color (Museus & Kiang, 2009). Administrators of color and white allies who value social justice and equity are needed to recruit more faculty and staff of color to educate and support current and future students.

In addition to increasing the number of Asian American leaders within the Washington State CTC system, raising awareness of Asian American experiences and identities is needed through professional development and training. I recommend integrating concepts such as the model-minority stereotype (Poon et al., 2015), bamboo ceiling (Kawahara, n.d.), and racial microaggressions experienced by Asian Americans (Sue et al., 2007) into existing statewide meetings, trainings, and conferences that specifically focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. These specific topics highlight the unique barriers that Asian American leaders face and counters against the dominant narrative of the black and white binary when discussing race relations in the U.S. Furthermore, the stories shared by the participants in this project can be used as a resource to help inform others that Asian American leaders do in fact face barriers to career progression and provide advice for aspiring Asian American leaders on how to mitigate challenges and setbacks.

Recently, there has been an increase in new presidents of color within Washington State's community and technical colleges, including three new Asian American presidents during the 2018-2019 academic year. However, additional work needs to be done to develop new leaders

from the middle-levels to upper management. Currently, community and technical college deans and vice presidents remain predominantly white, particularly within academic affairs. For example, at a recent statewide transfer deans meeting, I was the only dean of color represented among the Washington State's 34 community and technical colleges. Recruiting more Asian American leaders in the executive ranks of academic and student affairs leadership positions would develop a broader pool of applicants to potentially fill community and technical college presidencies in the future.

Conclusion

While working on this project, I was reminded of the symbolic frame as outlined by Bolman and Deal (2008). The symbolic leader provides employees a sense of purpose in their work and inspires innovation within an organization. As an Asian American student, former faculty member, and now community college administrator, there was a perpetual lack of role models in executive leadership for me to look up to as I moved into higher-level positions. This project gave me an opportunity to learn about the experiences of individuals who share similar cultural backgrounds and racialized experiences. I related personally to some of the barriers that they faced and learned about ways to navigate future setbacks that I will eventually face in my career. Most importantly, I learned that Asian Americans are and can be excellent leaders and that there are role models who I can look up to and aspire to become. The Asian American leaders I interviewed pride themselves on modeling culturally specific values such as listening, group consensus-building, and relationship building. They all modeled valuable leadership skills that can transform an institution. Many also have courageously challenged institutional inequities and personal or institutional acts of racism because they are actively committed to paving the way for future generations of Asian American community college presidents. The participants in

this study also reinforced the need to pay it forward and acknowledged the larger social responsibility of mentoring, encouraging, and empowering Asian Americans to pursue executive leadership roles in higher education. They also reiterated the importance of creating more seamless pathways for Asian Americans to obtain the experiences and skills needed to become community college presidents and succeed in these demanding roles.

As an Asian American male, I have had several mentors who have been instrumental to my growth as a community college faculty member and administrator. Through their guidance and my own self-motivation, I have participated in mentoring programs and conferences, expanded my professional networks, and connected with other Asian American community college leaders. These opportunities have provided me with communities that I can turn to when I need support.

However, as an academic administrator, my job feels very isolating. At statewide meetings and gatherings, I am often the only administrator of color in the room and usually the only Asian American. Clearly, institutional efforts have not resulted in more racially diverse instructional deans across Washington State. For example, at my institution, I am the only Asian American male instructional dean. Furthermore, men of color on my campus typically are overrepresented student services roles at the assistant director level and below such as in advising and outreach. Thus, I do not have any male of color peers to connect with that share the same job responsibilities as me. Therefore, using my positional privilege, it is my responsibility to help create pathways for Asian American professionals and faculty and staff of color to move into leadership positions, starting with encouraging individuals at entry-level positions to consider leadership opportunities. At last year's Washington State Faculty and Staff of Color Conference, I was able to co-facilitate the first-ever statewide Asian American Affinity Group.

Consisting of Asian Americans from across Washington State's community and technical college system, participants wanted mentorship to advance into higher-level positions. Thus, I hope that I can use this project and my own personal experiences to help others within our community to consider executive leadership positions within our state's community and technical college system. I also hope to mentor and promote future leaders who will break down systemic barriers and transform our colleges to help close racial equity gaps and support diverse faculty, staff, and students, particularly those who are Asian American.

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Appendix A

Guiding Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your background and identity? For example: disability, ethnicity, gender, language, nationality, race, sexual orientation, etc. (*Asianization*)
2. Please share your background and work history. Why did you decide to become a leader? (*Asianization, (Re)constructive history*)
3. Discuss any barriers or challenges that you have faced during your career? How have these barriers influenced your leadership style? (*Asianization, Intersectionality*)
4. Describe your experiences as a leader at your current institution. (*Asianization*)
 - a. Do you feel you are able to be your authentic self at this institution?
 - b. Have you been able to push forth the initiatives that matter to you?
 - c. Are diversity and equity initiatives a key priority for your institution? If so, please provide examples.
5. What advice would you offer other present and future Asian American community college professionals who would like to advance in leadership roles? (*Commitment to Social Justice*)
6. Please describe what leadership means to you. What makes a successful leader? (*Asianization*)
7. Describe your leadership style. (*Asianization*)
8. Define what *authentic leadership* looks like to you as an Asian American community college leader. (*Asianization*)
9. What are your self-perceptions of your abilities of being an *authentic leader* at your institution? (*Asianization*)

10. Provide 1-2 examples of initiatives or accomplishments that you are most proud of during your presidency. Explain why. (*Asianization*)

Appendix B

Consent Form

W UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON | TACOMA

DOCTORATE (Ed.D.) IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

CONSENT LETTER

TITLE OF THE STUDY:

Asian American Community College Presidents: An AsianCrit Analysis of their Approaches to Leadership

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Researcher: Johnny Hu, Ed.D. candidate in Educational Leadership, UW Tacoma,
johnnyhu@uw.edu

Capstone Chair: Dr. Rachel Endo, Dean and Professor, School of Education, UW Tacoma,
rendo@uw.edu

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The purpose of this study is to counter the dominant narratives imposed by one-dimensional stereotypes about Asian American leaders through centering the complex narratives of Asian American community college presidents. Through one-on-one interviews, I will explore the following research questions:

1. What experiences including barriers, challenges, and opportunities did Asian American community college presidents experience as they transitioned into executive levels of leadership?
2. How do Asian American community college presidents lead? Specifically, do they see themselves as being able to lead authentically?

STUDY PROCEDURES:

I will schedule an interview with you, either at your workplace or a location of your choosing, with the modality of your choice (in-person, virtual, or telephone). The interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes. Prior to the interview, a set of interview questions will be e-mailed to you for review. The interview will be taped and transcribed. Afterwards, you will be invited to review my write-up to make sure that your ideas are accurately represented and to provide additional written feedback.

Some of the interview questions may be sensitive. There will be questions asking about your work history and the challenges that you faced during your career. As a result, you may feel some discomfort in answering them. Responses to interview questions will be kept confidential from public access.

PARTICIPATION:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the study or opt-out at any time without penalty by contacting me directly.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY:

There are no direct benefits from participating in this study. However, your responses may help future Asian American community college leaders recognize institutional barriers and provide opportunities for mentorship.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION:

Data collected from the interviews will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the study and your name will not be used when I share my findings. I will not include personally identifiable information about you in my presentations and publications. If you think you have been harmed from being in this research, please contact the researcher and/or the capstone chair.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER:

Johnny Hu is currently a doctoral candidate in the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership program at University of Washington, Tacoma. Professionally, he serves as Associate Dean of Math, Science, and Business at South Seattle College. Prior to his administrative role, Johnny was a tenured professor of Mathematics at Whatcom Community College, with previous appointments at Highline College and Green River College. At Whatcom, he served as chair of the Mathematics Department (2014-2016) and was the founding member and chair of the Campus Diversity Committee (2013-2017). As an Asian-American higher education professional, he is dedicated to supporting the recruitment, retention, and completion of students, particularly those marginalized by systemic and institutional barriers. He is passionate about social justice, building and maintaining meaningful relationships with students and colleagues, and helping others grow through mentorship. His capstone topic looks at identifying systemic barriers faced by Asian American community college presidents, using Critical Race Theory and AsianCrit frameworks.

SUBJECT'S STATEMENT:

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, or if I have been harmed by participating in this study, I can contact one of the researchers listed on the first page of this consent form. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098 or call collect at (206) 221-5940. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

 Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

Date