LEADERSHIP JOURNEYS OF ASIAN WOMEN IN US HIGHER EDUCATION:
A NARRATIVE RESEARCH STUDY EXPLORING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES THROUGH CRITICAL REFLECTION

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Abstract

The pace of change in the diversity of executive leadership teams in US higher education institutions has been slow. In particular, women are underrepresented and Asian women are acutely underrepresented compared to the potential candidate population. At the same time, articles and research highlighting important performance and financial benefits from increasing women in executive teams continues to emerge. This study focused on insights from the leadership development journeys of five successful Asian women executives in US higher education. The purpose of this narrative study was to examine how these women described their leadership development journeys and whether critical reflection impacted their leadership development. Key insights from their stories were highlighted from interviews for aspiring Asian women candidates to better prepare for their career advancement. These insights include practical advice on mentor and network strategies as well as behavioral advice for aspiring candidates to develop skills to be more assertive and take calculated risks in reaching for stretch positions. Insights are also documented for academic institutions to improve their leadership development construct, including improved training formats, development programs and selection processes. There are many research reports which explore gender differences in leadership and a few that focus on minority challenges. However, the discussion of Asian women in the context of educational leadership is limited and this research will contribute to leadership studies.

Key words: Asian women executives, leadership development, critical reflection
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing family:

My beautiful children, Ken and Joh, and my incredible husband, Chip, who have been patient
and supportive every step of my doctorate journey

and

My parents who provided spiritual support from across the ocean
Acknowledgements

I never dreamed of completing my doctorate when I first travelled to the USA as an exchange student in high school. I am very thankful for this opportunity to pursue a terminal degree and for the support from many people around me.

To Northwood University officers who encouraged me to pursue my doctorate to enhance my professional horizon in higher education.

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To the Asian women leaders who participated in my study. I respect each one of them and hope readers will find a piece of wisdom from their stories.

To my neighbors and friends who encouraged me to keep going so we can celebrate together at the end of this journey.

To my Northeastern University classmates, Viviane Lopuch and Rae Lenway, for their friendship and for listening and for pushing each other towards completion.

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CHAPTER 1

The purpose of Chapter 1 is to introduce the dissertation topic including a statement of the problem and a description of its significance. The main research question and a sub-question are presented. The theoretical framework, assumptions, delimitations and limitations of the research are also discussed.

Introduction

Asian women are underrepresented in US higher education leadership roles in proportion to the potential, qualified candidate population (American Council of Education, 2007). The Asian population in the USA is around 6% and the percentage of faculty members in higher education is also around 6%, but when it comes to executive leadership positions, Asians represent only 1.5%, and Asian women executive leaders represents only around 0.2% (Teranishi, 2010). US higher education institutions may be missing an opportunity by not having Asian women leaders as a part of their executive teams to provide different perspectives on student policies as well as operational management decisions. A McKinsey report (2012) concluded that having women in executive leadership roles improves a company’s financial performance. Factors that contribute to underrepresentation have not been identified nor documented in a way that uncovers leadership development opportunities to benefit aspiring candidates or to help institutions implement successful diversification programs. One way to better understand the opportunity is to analyze the success stories of Asian women leaders who have ascended to executive positions despite the odds. The stories of Asian women leaders heighten awareness of issues and create dialogue within leadership literature on this understudied group.
With increasing collaboration and globalization, effective leadership styles are evolving from traditional directive approaches to styles that apply more emotional intelligence (American Management Association, 2005, p.45). In fact, having cross-cultural sensitivity and a global perspective to problem solving are becoming critical skills for leaders (Justin, 2010). While Western philosophies have dominated 20th Century leadership theory, Eastern philosophies, once central to trade and commerce, are gaining a resurgence of relevance to modern business management (Gardiner, 2012). The role of women leaders practicing more servant, emotive and consensual leadership styles have recently been demonstrated to have a significant positive impact on financial results of companies with gender diversified executive teams (McKinsey 2012). These same dynamics may point to potential value in incorporating women and Asian perspectives in the executive teams of institutions in US higher education.

**Statement of the Problem**

Recent studies on effective leadership in business that deliver increased financial performance and highly engaged teams point to women (McKinsey, 2012) and Asian perspectives (George, 2010) as powerful components of diversifying management teams. The McKinsey report found that “the particular ways in which female leaders behave, such as emphasizing people development and collaboration, can benefit a company’s organizational health and financial performance” (McKinsey, 2012). Nast and Pulido (2000) warned that change would not happen with dominant groups remaining in leadership positions, and this is why it is important to have a broader representation in leadership. As academic institutions are increasingly operating similar to corporations, the benefits of women in leadership roles could result in positive changes in performance. It is interesting to consider the potential effects of the combined experience of bringing Asian women leaders into US higher education executive
teams. Institutional practice in leader development and selection as well as candidate motivation and preparation can be assessed for clues that contribute to current practice and outcomes.

There are many research reports that explore gender differences in leadership (Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Cullen & Luna, 1993; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Rosener, 1990) and a few that highlight minority challenges (Burns & Martin, 2010; Kim-Puri 2005); however, the discussion of Asian women in the context of higher educational leadership is limited. The exploration of this topic will contribute to the study of leadership. Articles related to women of color have often been discussed from the perspectives of critical theory or feminist theory (Mayuzumi, 2008; Poole & Hollingshead, 2005). Articles on women of color tend to focus on a victimized view of ethnic groups or gender. Rather than a discussion of oppression or socialization, this study utilizes a theoretical lens of reflection and examines the stories of successful Asian women executive leaders.

Most articles and dissertations on Asian women leadership have approached this issue using phenomenology research (Irey, 2013; Torne, 2013). Limited dissertations have attempted to uncover issues of Asian women leaders’ under-representation in management (Irey, 2013; Naber-Fisher, 2009; Torne, 2013). In this research, a narrative approach was taken to capture the stories of Asian executive women as their experience provided insights and brought out common themes for structural or contextual changes. Interviews were conducted asking Asian women executives to reflect and describe their personal, social and contextual experiences which may have affected their leadership development.

**Significance of Research Problem**

Insights from this doctoral thesis impact both practices for aspiring candidates and academic institutions seeking more diversity in executive leadership. For aspiring candidates the
research attempts to address three key areas. First, findings inform the kinds of leadership development programs which may be most beneficial in preparing for executive candidacy. Second, drawing from personal stories, the study will highlight insights on building successful support networks. Third, the research seeks to provide advice on behavioral changes and thought processes which have proven helpful for successful Asian women executives.

For academic institutions the doctoral thesis will also address three key areas. First, the study will suggest ideas for structuring networking programs and career development options based on the input from current executives. Second, insights for executive selection processes and criteria will be made that incorporate alternative leadership theories and models. Third, the study will identify the structure and format of effective leadership development training to inform future program development.

The study will contribute to leadership literature by evaluating alternative leadership models and theories by capturing the narrative stories of this small population of Asian women executives.

**Research Central Question and Sub-Question**

The central research question was “How do Asian women leaders in US higher education describe their leadership development journey?” The sub-question was “What are Asian women leaders’ perceptions of any social, structural, or contextual influences that enhanced or hindered their developmental experience?”

**Theoretical Framework**

The phenomenon of interest for this study is Asian women leaders’ perception of their leadership development experiences. Mezirow’s (2003) Critical Reflection Theory was used as a primary lens as a way to guide the retrospective story-telling process that was used by the
participants. Mezirow’s theory is grounded in the notion that critical self-reflection inspires new meaning schemes to emerge which results in learners seeing the world differently from what was previously experienced (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Mezirow’s Critical Reflection Theoretical Framework (1990)

To critically self-reflect and engage in reflective discourse with others requires a high level of cognitive functioning (Merriam, 2004). Schwandt (2007) posits the importance of linkage between adult learner and reflective processes. In order for an adult learner to grow, develop, and change, they need to go through a reflective learning process. Schwandt (2007) explains that in order for an adult learner, or in this case, leaders, to learn, it is important for them to understand “how information is given meaning and become useful knowledge” (117p) and to increase awareness of their cognitive and reflective learning processes. Through interviews, the researcher asked Asian women leaders to recall their past experiences to tell their story. Since it was not possible for the researcher to follow women over the span of their career
to see their choices and experience, it was best for interviewees to recount their experience. Mezirow’s Critical Reflection Theory (1987) was used because it allowed for inquiry into retrospective views of journeys to the executive office. Mezirow’s framework helped provide a way to explain why the participants consciously or unconsciously thought of their past choices and current actions.

The study also explored Asian women’s perception of the social, structural, and contextual influences that may have hindered or enhanced their developmental experiences. Wang & King (2008) articulated that there are differences in learning among people from different social contexts. Experience becomes the source of meaning for the individual and reflection is the method for deriving insight.

Vaughan (1990) indicated the highest cognitively developed adult learners typically respond by creating meaning through existing frames of reference. When new information does not fit into the previous frame of reference, adult learners often reflect on its contradiction to make sense of the phenomenon (Vaughan, 1990). This study analyzed the narrative stories of five Asian women leaders in US higher education. Through their stories of personal, social and contextual experience new insights emerged.

Through the primary lens of critical reflection, analysis of interviews uncovered whether Asian women executives experienced critical incidents, and if so, how they describe their experience in the context of their leadership development. A survey of leadership theories, connections between reflection and learning, and a discussion of leadership development is introduced in Chapter 2. For enhanced contextual understanding, the landscape of higher education administration and Asian women’s social context was also explored as related topics.
in the literature review. This research connects how Asian women executives’ experience and skills relate to these frameworks and provides direction for career development and advancement.

**Overview of Research**

The purpose of this study was to uncover the stories of Higher Education Asian women leaders’ journeys and therefore qualitative, narrative research was selected as the methodology. Narrative research allowed the researcher to focus on the phenomenon of interest; reflections about leadership development journeys, with a group of Asian women leaders.

**Research Methods: Qualitative Research**

Creswell (2007) indicated that qualitative research is a “means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.” Merriam (2002) explained the unique characteristic of qualitative research as “meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (p. 3). Qualitative studies also “collected data through examining documents, observing behavior or interviewing participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 175) to learn the “meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issues” (p. 175). Since this research focused on understanding the lived experiences of Asian women executives in US higher education, a qualitative research method was used as it valued the context and generation of meaning. Merriam (1998) posited that qualitative research captures the experiences of subjects and indicates that one of the important characteristics of interpretive qualitative research is to uncover how people construct meaning about their views and experiences. “There are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time” (Merriam, 2002, p. 4). Qualitative research also involved a cultural lens to conduct studies and requires interpretive inquiry.
Research Tradition: A Narrative Approach

This doctoral thesis employed a narrative research methodology to capture the stories of Asian Women leaders’ perceptions of their leadership development experiences. Narrative research has “linked the sciences with history, literature and everyday life to reflect the increasing reflexivity that characterizes contemporary inquiry” (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 161). A narrative approach “reveals the discontinuities between story and experience and focus on discourse: on the telling themselves and the devices individuals use to make meaning in stories” (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 162). The key element of a narrative approach is the “use of stories as data, and more specifically, first person accounts of experience told in story form” (Merriam, 2002, p. 9). Given the very small population of existing Asian women executives in US higher education institutions, a qualitative, narrative approach to research best fit the population. Asian women executives’ critical reflections provided insights on how they made sense of their experience and how new perspectives emerged that have helped them in their development as leaders.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) indicated that the strength of narrative research is that interviewees’ voices can be heard authentically as it focuses on local, personal and subjective information. It is often captured chronologically and interviewees provide past, current and future stories. In this study, Asian women executives’ narrative stories were captured while they reflected on their past, exploring critical incidents, talking about their current role and providing suggestions and advice for future Asian women candidates.

Creswell (2012) described that an effective researcher using narrative studies: 1) collects information about the context of stories including personal, historical, and cultural contexts, 2) takes an active role to “restory” the story into a framework, and 3) collaborates with participants.
by actively involving them in the research (p. 74-75). Capturing in-depth stories from interviewing Asian women executives in US higher education provided insights and future career planning direction for aspiring Asian women in higher education. Interviews were conducted and documents were analyzed in an attempt to highlight common themes among Asian women leaders’ experiences. From the analysis, recommendations were made to increase diversity in US higher education and encourage aspiring candidates to achieve their career goals.

This study took a constructivist worldview which was formed through human interaction, social context and through “historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). The spirit of qualitative research was to understand the “meaning people have constructed about the world and their experiences; that is, how do people make sense of their experiences?” (Merriam, 2002, p.5). It was critical that the researcher was aware of her own bias as the researcher’s background and experience may have influenced the interpretation of interviewees’ personal, cultural, and historical experiences.

Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategy for Qualitative Research*, introduced inductive and deductive thinking into the world of research. They promoted systematic theory generation from data and creating hypotheses based on various data and documents in which the analysis was likely to be guided by specific evaluation objectives” (p. 238). Trochim (2006) described that an inductive approach in a qualitative study was often used as it focused on observation and explored similar experiences to develop theory. In this study, inductive reasoning was used to examine experiences and reflections of Asian women executives. Merriam (2002) indicated that inductive reasoning allowed researchers to understand “how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon” (p. 6) and obtain a descriptive outcome. In this case, new themes and insight emerged from the critical reflections
and stories of Asian women executives. Interviews were conducted and documents were analyzed in an attempt to highlight common themes among Asian women leaders’ experiences.

The alignment of purpose statement, research question and theoretical framework is shown in the Table 1.

Table 1: Purpose Statement, Research Question and Theoretical Framework Alignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose Statement</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Framework</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| To capture the leadership development journey of successful Asian women leaders in US Higher Education. | **Research Q:** How do Asian women leaders in US higher education describe their leadership development journey? | Reflection Theory (Mezirow, 2003)
Leadership theory, Leadership development theory; Reflection and self-awareness being an important foundation of leadership development (Dewey, 1997; Denton, 2011; Schwandt, 2005) |
| **Sub Q:** What are Asian women leaders’ perceptions of any social, structural, or contextual influences that enhanced or hindered their developmental experience? | Reflection Theory (Mezirow, 2003)
Leadership is socially constructed among people and the interpretation of leadership fluctuates depending on cultural context or groups (Calas & Smirich, 1996) |

Assumptions

The following assumptions shaped the course of this study:

1) Better understanding the Asian women executives’ experiences will be valuable to uncover opportunities for aspiring candidates and academic institutions trying to diversify leadership talent.
2) Critical reflection is a useful tool for leader development

3) Interviewees will share their experience and insights openly with the researcher

**Delimitations**

1) The small population of Asian women executives in higher education is a natural delimiting factor

2) Study focused on women who are currently holding executive positions in US higher education as of 2014

3) Geographical location is limited to the United States

4) Interview length was 60-90 minutes on the video conference or on the phone

5) Narrative approach is used to highlight stories of Asian women

6) Interviewees work for variety of institutional types and their ethnicity is different

**Limitations**

1) Due to the small number of Asian women executives in U.S. higher education, generalizations to a larger population will require further validations.

2) The context of participants in this study is limited to higher education and conclusions may not be transferable to other industries.

3) Researcher’s bias may be significant as the author is part of the target population of the study.

4) Amount of the time for interview was limited to 60-90 minutes and stories shared did not cover the entire life history. There are missing pieces that did not surfaced in their stories due to limited time for the interview.
Positionality Statement

As a Japanese national working in a higher education administration role, my curiosity was piqued by the low number of Asian women leaders in US higher education compared to the base population of Asian women with graduate level training. My personal experience regarding pre-conceived notions about my age and my appearance also made me question the experience of other Asian women. I faced challenges in being considered as a candidate for a volunteer board member position for a non-profit organization and was told that I was too young to be considered when I was already in my late 30s, similar to other board members. I was also told that it was very unusual for a person of my age to be selected as the Dean of International Programs when I was in my mid-40s. This experience provided me with a critical reflection opportunity and raised questions about how perceptual assumptions may be impacting other Asians for advancement opportunities.

Another critical reflection moment was when I attended a conference for minority women. I was one of two Asians out of 250 minority women and so I felt like a “minority of the minority” during the conference. Similarly, another conference held breakout sessions to discuss diversity with one group for Caucasians and the other for women of color. I felt out of place in either group as I did not find anyone who looked like me. I became interested in the topic of Asian women out of curiosity of how other Asian professional women were feeling in their respective industries in the context of leadership.

When I attended the Leadership Program for Asian Pacifics in higher education in July 2013, I met many competent, effective and authentic Asian women leaders. They were all academically and professionally qualified to serve as executive leaders in US higher education and affirmed that there were many more Asian candidates who could move up the career ladder.
In the context of increasing multicultural student populations including an especially high number of Asians and with the growing importance of Asian influence in the world economy, it seemed unfortunate that more Asians were not in executive leader roles in higher education. Further, with increasing needs for collaboration and partnerships within and across educational institutions, it seemed unusual that more women with facilitative and flexible styles of leadership were not emerging at the helm of these institutions. These paradigms and biases shaped the researcher’s viewpoint.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to provide an overview of literature to support the research questions. It “facilitates theory development, closes areas where a plethora of research exists, and uncovers areas where research is needed” (Webster & Watson, 2002, p. 13). This literature review focuses on five main topics: 1) Leadership theory 2) Leadership development 3) Reflection 4) Landscape of Higher education administration and 5) Contextual Background: Gender, minority women’s career development and Asian women’s career development.

Research on Asian women in higher education is still limited. Future studies on this topic, especially in the area of leadership, will add new dimensions to the body of existing work on minority and women leadership in higher education. While several resources from the 1990’s were found, the majority of research is from the post-2000 timeframe as minority leadership in higher education is a relatively recent development.

The hypothesized connection and relevance of these topics to the core research questions are depicted in Table 2.
Table 2: Relationship of Literature Review Topics to Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Hypothesized Relevant Literature Topics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do Asian women describe their leadership development journey?</td>
<td>Traditional Leadership Theories</td>
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<td>Recent Leadership Theories</td>
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<td>Critical Reflection Theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are Asian women leaders’ perceptions of any social, structural, or contextual</td>
<td>Leadership Development Tools and Interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>influences that enhanced or hindered their developmental experience?</td>
<td>Administration Landscape</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gender Perceptions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Minority Women Career Advancement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Asian Women Social Context</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Brief Overview of Leadership Theory**

Leadership is often talked about in business and educational circles, and a key determinant of organizational success or failure. When searching on the Amazon website for books titled “leadership”, 108,984 titles were found as of August 2013. As for leadership development programs or training programs, a Forbes article indicated that over 170 billion dollars are spent on leadership-based curriculum and the majority is spent on leadership training programs (Myatt, 2012). These numbers indicate a high level of interest on the subjects of leadership and leadership development. Bennis (2007) highlights challenges of recent leaders to think about “leadership in the context of globalization and instant communication” (p. 5). Schwandt and Szabla (2007) informs that connecting theory and practice is an important part of understanding changing leadership discourse, and understanding retrospective perspective...
patterns will contribute to the study of leadership. In this section of the literature review, a brief historic overview of leadership theory and leadership development discussion will be introduced.

**Traditional Leadership Theory**

**Great Man Theory and Trait Theory.** Carlyle’s (1841) mention of “hero” started the concept of “Great Man” theory that leaders are born and not made, and great leaders possessed extraordinary traits. An example of Great Man could be a war hero or famous politician or rich and successful businessman. In the early 1900s, as an extension of the Great Man theory, Trait theory became mainstream and extensively discussed by various theorists (Allport, 1937; Goldberg, 1981). Trait theorists believed that leaders are born with certain personalities and leadership qualities cannot be developed.

**Behavior Theory and Contingency Theory.** In the 40s and 50s, Stogdill (1948) introduced a new perspective into Trait theory that leadership can be learned and developed. He also stated in his article published in the *Journal of Psychology* that leadership may be situation dependent. He indicated that just because a leader is great in one organization does not guarantee that he would be the same in another organization. Fred Fielder’s (1964) article extended the concept of Trait theory and put more focus on situational context in the 60s and 70s. His findings showed that directive and task oriented leadership styles are appropriate when an organization has an orderly situation. However, when unpredictable situations are present, followers prefer to have leaders with steady influence and clear direction. In both cases, interpersonal, relational skills were required to effectively influence others. Hersey and Blanchard (1969) contributed in spreading the situational (contingency) theory through their book, *The Situational Leader*, indicating that in addition to leadership styles and behaviors, the maturity level of the group (of followers) is a critical factor for effective leadership.
Culture Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory. In the mid 70s and 80s, some of gender and cultural related leadership theories started to appear (Schein, 1973; Deaux, 1984; Eagly & Johnson, 1990) comparing women and men’s leadership style differences. Until then, most leadership theories were based on male leadership. Virginia Schein’s (1973) work is often referred to as one of the seminal women’s leadership studies where she conducted empirical studies of 300 middle managers’ leadership styles. Her study concluded that successful women leaders utilized more styles similar to male leadership such as being emotionally stable, demonstrating self-reliance, and acting aggressively (Schein, 1973). Eagly & Johnson’s (1990) meta-analysis revealed that there were no differences between women and men when comparing an interpersonal approach vs. a task oriented approach. The biggest differences, however, were women used more democratic and participatory leadership styles rather than autocratic and directive styles.

Another distinct theory that appeared during this period is Transformational Leadership Theory. Transformational Leadership Theory became part of contemporary leadership theory in the 70s after James Burns (1978) introduced the Transformation and Transactional Leadership Theory and defined “transformational leadership as a process where leaders and followers engage in a mutual process of raising one another to higher levels of morality and motivation”. On the other hand, transactional leadership focuses more on exchanges of tasks and rewards between leaders and followers (Burns, 1987). Bass (1985) developed transformational leadership theory further and introduced the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to measure transactional and transformational factors. The MLQ is one of the most common questionnaires used to measure leadership factors.
Recent leadership theories

Recent economic downturns and an increasing number of scandals in business, government, and education have led to a “loss of public trust in leaders and corporations and to a degradation of social capital” (Voegtlin, Patzer & Scherer, 2012). Traditional leadership styles focusing on leadership behaviors have come under intensified scrutiny. An inclusive leadership style is extensively discussed recently as one of the successful components of future leaders as the world gets smaller and technology advances. Kurtzman (2010) states in his book, Common Purpose, that creating a feeling of “we” among team members (or an audience) and aligning them around common goals or a shared mission will empower a team to achieve the extraordinary. Some of the most recent leadership theories include Flexible theory (Yukl, 2010) and Culturally Endorsed Implicit Leadership theory (Javidan et al., 2010). Flexible leadership is also referred to as Integrative leadership theory and it assesses the environment, interprets implications and “involves changing behavior in appropriate ways as the situation changes” (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010, p.81). The culturally endorsed implicit leadership theory is a theoretical framework “linking national culture, organizational culture and leadership” (Javidan, et al., 2010, p. 336) and analyzes leadership from personal traits, behaviors and social contexts.

A third recent leadership theory worth mentioning is Servant Leadership Theory. Servant Leadership theory, which was originally introduced by Robert Greenleaf in 1977, has also regained popularity recently due to scandals and corruption associated with traditional dominating leadership behaviors. Servant leadership focuses more on nurturing and developing followers rather than a leader’s own style or behavior (Greenleaf, 1977). While other theories focus on a leader’s behavior and traits or context, servant leadership focuses more on a leader’s principles, values, and beliefs (Melchar & Bosco, 2010; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002; Walker, 2003).
What recent leadership theories have in common is a focus on power distribution, shared responsibilities, interdependencies and diverse follower populations. The potential fit of Asian women executive leaders with these recent leadership theories will be discussed in the third section of this literature review.

**Leadership Development**

Many news articles and publications discuss a shortage of leadership talent in government and business sectors with the lack of competent human capital “becoming a common lament among executives” (Bennis & Nanus, 1997; Conger, 2010; Jing, 2013; World Economic Forum, 2013). Given the demographic changes of university leadership positions, one of the top strategic priorities of US higher education may also be to develop future leaders. Many organizations discuss the importance of leadership development. However, the concept of leadership development takes many forms and there are few universal understandings or applications of the concept. Leadership education in the 80s consisted of workshops provided by professional training companies, in-house training divisions or a human resources department. Conger (2010) explained that leadership education had a “dual role” where “one was to help managers transition into upcoming roles by broadening their understanding of the business disciplines, and the other was to reward high potential employees” (p. 711). With increasing globalization and market uncertainties, many organizations realized that leadership development needed to encompass more than learning new business disciplines. Leadership development initiatives need to consider various organization structures, usage of technology and geographical challenges such as time, language and culture (Friedman, 2000). Leadership development has also become a more continuous, lifelong process rather than a single event or program.
Leadership development definition

Van Velsor and McCauley (2004) of the Center for Creative Leadership posited that making a distinction between Leader development and Leadership development is an important step to understand the development process. Leader development is “the expansion of a person’s capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes” (Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004, p. 2) and it promotes individual development and personal growth. On the other hand, leadership development is defined as “the expansion of an organization’s capacity to enact the basic leadership tasks needed for collective work; setting goals, creating alignment, and maintaining commitment” (p. 18). Brungardt (1996) defined leadership development as “every form of growth or stage of development in the life cycle that promotes, encourages, and assists the expansion of knowledge and expertise required to optimize one’s leadership potential and performance” (p. 83) to improve organization performance. In short, leader development’s focus is on individual human capital while leadership development focuses on social capital.

Yukl (1989) once described the field of leadership being “in a state of ferment and confusion”. Lynham (2000) criticized that leader education, which is a one-time developmental program is confused with long term leader development. Oftentimes, “leadership has been conceptualized as an individual level skill” (Day, 2001) and not having consistent usage of terminology and different interpretations could be one of the reasons why the articles on leadership development have not been streamlined. Day (2001) supports the idea distinguishing leader development from leadership development. He states that “the preferred approach is to link leader development with leadership development such that the development of leadership transcends but does not replace the development of individual leaders” (p. 605).
Leadership development tools and interventions

The most common approaches of leader development and leadership development include 360 degree feedback, executive coaching, mentoring, and action learning (Day, 2001; Conger and Fulmer, 2003). Each program’s description with pros and cons are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparison of Leadership Development Tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership development tools</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>360 degree feedback</td>
<td>A multi-source feedback systematically collecting perceptions and evaluations of an individual's performance from the entire circle of relevant viewpoint (Warech, et al. 1998). Usually collected from supervisor, peers and subordinates.</td>
<td>*Opportunity to observe multiple aspects of an individual's performance. *Increased level of self-awareness</td>
<td>*Recipient could become defensive when given feedback *Measuring change using 360 degree feedback is difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive coaching</td>
<td>One on one coaching sessions to facilitate learning and move executives from excellent performance to peak performance (Feldman &amp; Lankau, 2005).</td>
<td>*Empirical data showing productivity improvement</td>
<td>*Possible stigma for having a coach or perception of favoritism *Typical motives can be remedial in nature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Leadership development tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Mentoring     | A professional relationship in which an experienced person (the mentor) assists another (the mentee) in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance the less-experienced person’s professional and personal growth. (Kram, 1985) | * Improvement of employee knowledge, skills and ability as well as improvement in retention  
* Long lasting relationships between mentor and mentee (for successful mentoring)  
* Could be informal or formal | * Some mentoring arrangements could be short-lived and superficial if not implemented well |
| Action learning | A generative practice in which participants collectively construct social meanings and shared realities in a community of practice (Drath, 1998) | * The activity is real and related to workplace issues | * Difficult to create a micro world (Senge, 1990) for simulation  
* Lack of formal assessment |

Some of the prominent leadership development programs for higher education are listed below in Table 4.
### Table 4: Examples of Prominent Leadership Development Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of the Program</th>
<th>Brief Description of the Leadership Development Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Council of Education Fellows Program</td>
<td>ACE fellow program allows senior leaders to explore opportunities of culture, politics and decision making processes at another institution under the mentorship of system leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Council of Education Institute for New Chief Academic Officers</td>
<td>ACE Institute for new CAO program provides practical leadership training for CAOs who are in the first three years on the job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvard Seminar for New Presidents</td>
<td>Harvard University Graduate School offers a specific program for first year presidents to explore critical topics such as governance, fund raising, academic leadership, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Resources Services (HERS) Wellesley Institute for Women in Higher Education Administration</td>
<td>HERS is a non-profit organization providing opportunities for women with leadership development programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Education for Asian Pacific’s, Inc. (LEAP): Leadership Development Program for Higher Education (LDPHE)</td>
<td>LDPHE is designed to enhance the professional development of Asian Pacific faculty and administrators to move into leadership positions in higher education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One important common factor about leadership development tools and interventions is to give learners a chance to reflect and enhance their level of self-awareness. Reflection is a powerful element of the adult learning process and having a strong ability to critically reflect on experiences and apply new knowledge will have an impact on leadership development. The importance of reflection in adult learning processes will be discussed in the next section of literature review.
Reflection

Dewey’s (1910) book, *How We Think*, is often referred to as a seminal work when reflection and reflective thought are discussed. He defined reflective thought as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 5). He posits the importance of experience in the learning process. He also indicates that the elements of reflective thinking includes 1) uncertainty which makes people perplexed, hesitate and doubt the status quo and 2) search or investigate toward bringing to light further facts which serve to corroborate or nullify a suggested belief (p. 9).

The notion of reflection and learning are connected to adult learning theory and the discussion is spread among biological, cognitive, psychological and sociological literature. Traditional adult learning theory includes: Behaviorists (Skinner, 1962, 1974), Cognitivist (Piaget, 1966; Bruner, 1965; Kegan, 1982); Humanist (Maslow, 1987, Rogers, 1983) and Social learning (Bandura, 1977, 1986) and Constructivist (Brookfield, 1986; Dewey, 1933; Mezirow, 1991; Schon, 1983). This study will focus primarily on the constructivists’ approach and investigate psychological and sociological changes that impacted Asian women leaders to capture their experiences and how they made sense of their leadership journeys. Constructivists posit that knowledge is constructed based on personal experience and their own interpretation. Past experience and cultural context are also considered to be critical factors. (Brookfield, 1986). Many researchers also discuss reflection and self-awareness as being an important foundation of leadership development (Dewey, 1997; Denton, 2011; Schwandt, 2005).
Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle

Reflection requires higher-order thinking, and promotes and reinforces connection between experience and meaning (Denton, 2011). Dewey’s concept of reflective thought was expanded by theorists including Kolb (1984), Schon (1983), Boud (1985), Brookfield (1992) and Mezirow (1985, 1991) in the mid-80s and early 90s. Kolb (1984) defined learning as “a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38). He established a four stage experiential learning cycle (figure 2). In his model, he indicated that a new, concrete experience will draw reflective thoughts and observation. Adults will then create meaning by conceptualization of the experience. The fourth stage will be an active experimentation where learners apply what they have learned into action.

![Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle](http://www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html)

Schon’s Reflection-in-action and Reflection-on-action

In 1983, Donald Schon had written a book, *Reflective Practitioner*, highlighting that the “reflective practitioner” brings a broad range of previous thinking or knowledge to make sense of past or future knowledge. He identified two concepts of “reflection-in-action” and “reflection...
on-action”. The former is sometimes described as ‘thinking on our feet’ and reflection-in-action happens while experience is in progress (Schon, 1983). The problems are often unpredictable, uncertain and situation context is changing constantly. On the other hand, the role of “reflection-on-action” is not only one of learning and informing action, but also the building of theory. It involves looking to our experiences, connecting with our feelings, and attending to our theories in use. It entails building new understandings to inform our actions in the situation that is unfolding (Figure 3). Van Manen (1991) and Court (1988) both criticized Schon’ reflection-in-action indicating that the concept is similar to deliberation as it is a process of decision making.

![Reflection Diagram](http://constructivisminelt.wikispaces.com/Constructivism+and+language+teacher)

Figure 3: Schon’s reflection in action and reflection on action diagram

http://constructivisminelt.wikispaces.com/Constructivism+and+language+teacher

**Other Experiential Learning Theorists**

David Boud and his associates (1991) have also discussed the importance of experiential learning in the adult learning process. They posited that learners actively pursue new knowledge and construction of knowledge happens in variety of situations. Boud (1991) mentions the knowledge construction process is an intentional act even though “incidental learning” happens once in a while unconsciously. Brookfield (1986) takes a similar view to Boud indicating that
self-direction learning and critical thinking on individual experience do not happen automatically. He indicates that the process needs to be nurtured and empowered. He defined critical reflection as “reflecting on the assumptions underlying ours and others’ ideas and actions, and contemplating alternative ways of thinking and living” (Brookfield, 1986, p. 87).

**Mezirow’s Critical Reflection Theory (Transformational Learning Theory)**

In the 1970s, Jack Mezirow introduced Critical Reflection Theory, better known as Transformational Learning Theory, into the study of adult learning theory. This theoretical lens is the primary lens selected for this study given the assumption that critical incidents may have shaped the leadership development experience of successful Asian women executives. Mezirow (1997) believed that adult learners must make their own interpretations of phenomenon or experience rather than being told or explained by others. He took a constructivist view positioning learning as a social construction of reality worldview (Berger & Luckman, 1966) and what becomes “facts are grounded in the orientation and frame of reference of the learner” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 25). He applied the word “transformational learning” when he conducted a qualitative study working with U. S. women who were returning to post-secondary study or the workplace after an extended time of absence from work or university studies (Kitchenham, 2008).

Mezirow (1978) conducted a survey of 12 re-entry programs with 83 women as well as a follow up study which included 846 colleges and 314 sponsored re-entry programs. He concluded that surveyed women went through a personal transformation process and identified shared experience such as having disorienting dilemma, critically self-reflecting and changing their frame of reference.

Dewey’s work was the foundation of Mezirow’s Transformational Learning Theory in which reflective thinking on experience was the essential component. Transformative learning
involves gaining information that disrupts prior learning and knowledge, and facilitates adult learners to reshape one’s ideas and perceptions (Davis, 2006). In order for this reshaping to happen, Mezirow (1998) believes that critical self-reflection of deeply held assumptions and rational/reflective discourse needs to occur. He indicates that critical self-reflection “involves critique of a premise upon which the learner has defined a problem” (Mezirow, 1998, p. 186) and explores alternative perspectives to make sense of the phenomenon or experience. The rate of this shift of perspective can be gradual or sudden as people experience cognitive restructuring and reflective discourse (Stansberry & Kymes, 2007). Merriam & Cafarella (1999) indicated that reflecting on fundamental beliefs and ideas can take years before people can accept new perspectives. The process can be difficult and uncomfortable for the individual as they struggle to explore alternative interpretations within them and see the world differently from before (Davis, 2006). On this particular point, Mezirow differs from Schon’s (1983) concept of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action.

Mezirow was influenced by two theorists, Paulo Freire (1973) and Habermas (1971). Fiere (1970) posited that traditional education lacked free thinking and put emphasis of “conscientization” as being important. He defines conscientization as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions-developing a critical awareness-so that individuals can take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 19). He categorized consciousness growth in three stages 1) intransitive thought 2) semitransitive and 3) critical transivity. Intransitive thought will tell oneself that a situation is out of control and there is nothing he (she) can do to change. They often rely on a higher power to take care of the matter and no proactive action would be taken at an individual level. The second stage, Semitransitive thought, relies on a strong leader to fix the problem and little action would be taken by the
individual. The third stage of thought, which is similar to Mezirow’s critical reflection, is critical transitivity. Individuals in this thought process will think critically and globally about their situation and feel empowered to make changes (Fiere, 1973).

As for Habermas (1971), he influenced Mezirow from the perspective of learning domains. He researched three domains of learning 1) technical, rote memorization 2) practical and 3) emancipatory. He indicated that emancipatory learning is much more introspective and encourages understanding of what, when and why (Habermas, 1971). Incorporating Fiere and Habermas theories, Mezirow (1985) further developed his theory and proposed three learning stages; 1) instrumental 2) dialogic and 3) self-reflective. The foundation of these three types of learning includes meaning perspectives and the meaning schemes. Meaning perspective is “the structure of cultural and psychological assumptions within our past experience (that) assimilates and transforms new experience” (Mezirow, 1985, p. 21) and meaning schemes is defined as “the constellation of concept, belief, judgment, and feeling which shapes a particular interpretation” (Mezirow, 1994, p. 223.) Multiple meaning schemes create meaning perspectives and Mezirow (1991) believes that this will affect “how we think, believe, and feel and what, when, and why we learn” (p. 99).
From the first time Mezirow introduced critical reflection and transformational learning in 1978, his theory evolved over the years and Mezirow made some modification (Kitchenham, 2008). Mezirow (1998) initially suggested the following 10 stages for critical reflection,
transformational learning process. He indicated that individuals go through the processes below in order to “transform” their perspectives.

- Experiencing a disconcerting dilemma
- Performing an examination of self
- Critically assessing assumptions
- Recognizing that others share similar experiences
- Exploring options for action
- Building self-confidence
- Forming a plan of action
- Acquiring skills and information for implementation
- Practicing a new plan and roles
- Reintegrating into society with a new perspective

Often, a change process is not linear and an individual needs to increase meaning perspectives, or self-awareness. The adult learning process becomes deeper and transformative when one makes sense of the meaning through “reflection, discourse and action” (Mezirow, 1990). According to Mezirow (2000), these perspective shifts occur in two ways: Epochal transformation and incidental transformation. Epochal transformation happens from sudden, dramatic, reorienting insights which raise adult learners “disconcerting dilemma” (Mezirow, 2000). On the other hand, incidental transformation happens more gradually (Mezirow, 2000). Perspective change could happen from major life events or critical incidents which make adult learners critically reflect on their own perceptions.

Reflection is the key component of transformative learning. Mezirow (1997) suggested three types of reflection: content reflection, process reflection and premise reflection. In content
reflection, learners evaluate and consider the content of issues while process reflection considers options of strategies that may solve problems. Premise reflection, according to Mezirow, leads to transformative learning as it makes learners question the importance of the issues and evaluate assumptions and underlying problems (Mezirow, 1997).

Mezirow indicates that critical reflection and rational/reflective discourse are the core of transformational learning and part of the important development phase for adult learners (Merriam, 2004). Schwandt (2005) asserts that “critical reflection on prior interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future actions becomes a transformational learning process that leads to individual perspective change” (p. 178). Discourse is defined as “a process
in which we have an active dialogue with others to better understand the meaning of an experience, weighing evidence and assessing the cogency of supporting arguments” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 26). In order for transformative learning to be complete, adult learners requires taking action based on the reflection and discourse. Action could be changing a behavior based on new perspectives or it could also be reaffirming the previous perspectives by creating more awareness of the decision making process. This research will explore the relevancy of Asian women leaders’ experience and test if critical reflection played any role in their leadership development journeys.

**Landscape of Higher Education Administration: Faculty and Study Body Profile**

There may be an opportunity to leverage the ascent of Asian women in U.S. higher education leadership, which is expected to undergo a significant demographic change due to projected retirements (American Council of Education, 2007). Considering the increase in diverse student populations and contextual changes, developing and appointing a new generation of higher education leaders is critical. Research related to minority leaders shows that there are less than 1% of Asians appointed as presidents in U. S. higher education among 4,488 degree granting institutions (American Council of Education, 2007). Further, only 0.2% of presidents are represented by Asian women (Teranishi, 2010). Leaders will be required to demonstrate abilities to see things from multiple perspectives and motivate constituencies beyond their own cultural borders (Justin, 2010). Justin (2010) posits that successfully navigating intercultural communication among students, faculty and staff is also a critical skill for future global leaders.

According to Harvey and Anderson (2005), more than 7% of PhD recipients are Asians and 6.7% of total faculty members are Asians (Selingo, 2005) in US higher education. These numbers are consistent with the general population of Asians in the United States which is
around 5.6% (Census Brief, 2010). However, Asians accounted for only 2.4% of executive, administrative and managerial employees in colleges and universities (Selingo, 2005). Table 5 shows the distribution of full-time, tenured faculty and senior administrators by race and ethnicity. Analyzing these data indicates there are very few Asian women achieving positions in higher education leadership despite affirmative action and women’s professional advancement in other industries.

Table 5: Distribution of Full-Time, Tenured Faculty and Senior Administrators by Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Faculty*</th>
<th>Dean**</th>
<th>CAO***</th>
<th>President****</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>82.90%</td>
<td>85.80%</td>
<td>85.40%</td>
<td>87.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Pacific Islander American</td>
<td>7.00%</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
<td>2.40%</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
<td>7.20%</td>
<td>6.10%</td>
<td>5.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
<td>2.40%</td>
<td>4.10%</td>
<td>3.80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total Percentages are less than 100 due to an additional category of "Other" or "Foreign Born" which is not represented in the table


In addition to the fact that there are increasing numbers of students from different backgrounds in U. S. higher education, an article in The American College President (American Council of Education, 2007) also indicated another critical demographic change; there would be many presidents retiring from US institutions in the next few years. The data showed that 49% of university presidents were 61 or older and predicted high turnover in U. S. higher education leadership (American Council of Education, 2007). The American Association of Community Colleges highlighted an alarming 84% of community college presidents would retire by 2016 (American Association of Community Colleges, 2001). There is an immediate need to develop the next generation of education leaders who can serve diverse constituencies. Examining
stories from some of the very few Asian women who obtained executive positions in US higher education reveals challenges and opportunities for aspiring minority candidates. Chao and Tian (2011) posit most leadership research is centered on Eurocentric leadership theory and cultural context. They argue an Asian context should also be considered when discussing leadership development (Chao & Tian, 2011). Since there is limited literature on Asian women leaders in US higher education, this research intends to add value to leadership development of women of color. Aspiring candidates can benefit from this research by understanding potential career development gaps and needs that influence their potential attractiveness as candidates. Further, candidates can increase their awareness of common structural and contextual barriers to navigate in pursuit of US higher education leadership positions. Institutions can benefit from better perspective on the range of structural and contextual issues that may be limiting their view and development of candidates from within this demographic group.

**Contextual Background: Gender, Minority Women and Asian women’s career development**

**Gender Perceptions**

Coogan and Chen (2007) posit that “women’s career development is more complex than that of men due to a number of internal and external barriers, including early gender-role orientation, employment inequities and family responsibilities” (p. 191). Schreiber (1998) supports their views indicating the socialization process makes it more complex when it comes to women’s career development. Many researchers have found the career path into executive positions in higher education is based on a traditional male model. Women are expected to function like men (Stelter, 2001; White et al., 2010), rather than be “valued for what they will bring to the field” (Austin, 2008, p. 288). Cullen and Luna (1993) identify the lack of female
role models and mentors in higher education as part of the issue. Gallos (1989) highlights five areas for consideration when discussing women’s career development: career preparation, societal opportunities, impact of marriage/pregnancy/children, timing and age.

Brint (2006) asserts that gender is a declining divide in driving educational inequality. Contrary to the stereotype, Lepkowski (2009) concluded that female administrators are not any different from men in their aspirations for leadership positions or personal and professional assets, except the personal variable that women felt more constrained on geographic mobility. (Lepkowski, 2009). Her research compared career aspirations, professional assets and personal variables among men and women holding administrative positions of deans or higher (excluding presidents) in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system.

Research indicates that women and men have different leadership styles when leading organizations (Austin, 2008; Chliwniak, L. 1997; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Lepkowski, 2009; Morris, 2011; White et al. 2010) Women tend to use more transformative, empowering, democratic and collaborative styles of leadership while men are more transactional, directive and authoritarian (Austin, 2008; Cubillo et al., 2003). Austin (2008) posits that women educational leaders are better at group decision making, delegation, listening, taking criticism and implementations of good suggestions and affirmation. White et al. (2010) believe women bring creativity, communication and interpersonal skills, authenticity, consistency and focus. Different skills and perspectives should make an organization stronger, however, women are perceived to lack self-confidence and career aspiration. These perceptions stem from stereotyped images of women being traditional, supportive, and submissive (Austin, 2008; Growe & Montgomery, 2000). This societal attitude and stereotype towards male and female roles is another obstacle for women to take leadership in higher education. (Growe & Montgomery, 2000).
Some articles discuss structural inequalities in the hiring process between men and women (Borkowski, 1988; Chronicle of Higher Education, 2005; Lindsay, 1999). For example, candidate development and selection processes for university presidents are often not transparent. Exploring fundamental issues with hiring of university presidents may contribute to illuminating steps that potential candidates can take to advance their attractiveness for the role (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2005).

Leadership positions in higher education are dominated by white males. (Austin, 2008; Blackmore, 2010; Mayuzumi, 2008; Stelter, 2002; White et al., 2010) The stereotypical views are often held from an external perception basis, while the intrinsic motivation of women who seek leadership in education is much more equalized with male viewpoints (Turner, 2007).

**Minority Women’s Career Advancement**

Research on the advancement of minority women (Poole & Hollingshead, 2005) discusses challenges and opportunities related to obtaining leadership positions in higher education. The American Council on Education published data in their 2007 Edition of *The American College President* that a typical profile of a U.S. college president is a 60 year old Caucasian male (American Council on Education, 2007). The American Council on Education report in 2010 found that 60% of undergraduate degree holders and 45% of doctorate degree recipients were women (American Council on Education, 2010). However, a broader survey of literature suggests that may not be true within minority populations where numbers of women degree holders are less (American Council on Education, 2007; Li & Beckett, 2006; Mayuzumi, 2008). Despite the advancement of equal opportunity between men and women and considering the number of graduates from higher education, there is still a large gender disparity when it comes to leadership positions in higher education.
Triniad and Normore (2004) posit that the “process of selection, recruitment and promotion in educational organization is in need of an overhaul” (p. 584) and recommend a “new leadership paradigm should be developed to consider educational leaders as change agents with a scope of influence larger than the school premises” (p. 582). Lack of networking opportunities also makes it difficult for minority women to obtain leadership positions at universities. (Cullen & Luna, 1993; White et al. 2010).

Hune (1997) promotes the establishment of a structural “pipeline” and “mentorship” for Asian women to minimize the disparity in educational leadership positions and increase the diversity. She explains one major obstacle is that academic careers are exclusive and “traditionally apprenticeships (“old boys’ network”) where doctorate students are selected and ‘groomed’ as the next generation of scholars by mentors bent on replicating themselves” (Hune, p. 156). The selection process for higher education leadership positions also needs to be reviewed and critiqued. Search committees and boards of trustees are the ultimate decision makers placing presidents in U.S. higher education institutions and they are commonly dominated by historical ethnic representation (Hune, 1997).

In addition to structural obstacles, Asian women are marginalized from both physical and linguistic perspectives (Turner, 2007). Asian women tend to have a smaller physique and youthful appearance (Mayuzumi, 2008, Li & Beckett, 2006). These physical features lead to negative consequences in academia, such as being mistaken for a student or not appearing to have enough experience to lead. Mayuzumi (2008) notes speaking with an accent is also a “clear marker that draws a line between white and non-white, citizens and immigrants, competency and non-competency, and mainstream and periphery” (p.169).
Asian Women’s Social Context

Smith and Wolverton (2010) indicate in their research that the competencies of effective leaders in the future higher education include the ability to navigate politicized environments, maximize the allocation of resources, and have knowledge about academics. Additionally, they are expected to establish strategic planning, demonstrate life-long learning, show creativity, flexibility, risk taking, and adaptability, and articulate their missions (Smith & Wolverton, 2010). This section of the literature review revisits recent leadership theories in the context of Asian women leaders and also explores the historical background of Asians. Typical Asian family values are introduced to understand context and discuss existing issues of an invisible “glass ceiling” (Cotter, et al., 2001) for Asian minorities.

Recent Leadership Theory and Relevancy for Asian Women

Earlier in this literature review, Flexible Leadership (Yukl, 2004), Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and Culturally Endorsed Implicit Leadership (Javidan et al., 2006), were introduced. The leadership theory developed in the 50s mostly focused on a leader’s individual performance and was “hierarchical, authority-based, power and influence oriented” (Kezar, 2000). Later, researchers such as Hersey, Blanchard, Elmore and Yukl extended their theories indicating that leadership style can be impacted by context and situation (Doyle & Smith, 2001). Calas and Smirich (1992) asserted that leadership was socially constructed among people and the interpretation of leadership fluctuates depending on cultural context or groups. A cultural component is an important element when considering leadership styles and U.S. higher education leadership selection. As indicated in Chapter 1, there are less than 0.2% of Asian women in executive leadership positions in US higher education, understanding the voice of successful
Asian women and capturing their experiences has uncovered new insights that are described in Chapter 5.

**Flexible Leadership.** Flexible leadership assesses the environment, interprets implications and “involves changing behavior in appropriate ways as the situation changes” (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010, p.81). Successful leaders tend to adapt to changing conditions and strong cognitive skills are required for both critical reflection and flexible leadership. Yukl and Mahsud (2010) posit most leaders have diverse tasks and situations which require shifts in behavior. Leaders are also expected to have selective behavior towards their subordinates depending on their skills, abilities and experiences. Yukl and Mahsud (2010) highlighted seven streams of leadership theory and research that were relevant to flexible leadership. These studies include: 1) Contingency theory 2) essential roles and behaviors for different types of leadership positions, 3) manager’s successful position transition 4) response of leaders to crises and disruptions 5) adaptive strategic leadership for emerging threats and opportunities, 6) barriers for adaptive and flexible leadership, and 7) elements to promote flexibility and adaptability. They concluded effective leaders “understand the different contexts that require flexible and adaptive behavior” (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010, p.91) and balance competing values. How well leaders identify changes in the environment (or situation) and determine the appropriate action or responses will make or break an organization. Yukl (2010) also indicated “leaders need to appreciate and take advantage of opportunities to increase their self-awareness of relevant traits, skills, and behaviors and to develop necessary skills before they are needed” (p.91). Flexible leadership theory is useful as an analytical lens, given that critical reflection often leads to insight which requires adapting a leadership style or approach to be effective in a given context. Schon (1983) promoted the idea of professionals as reflective practitioners and Watkins, Lyso, and deMarrairs
(2011) also identified critical incidents as an important factor of new behavior in their article discussing Theory of Change during executive leadership programs. Flexible leadership capacity will be critical for the next generation of higher education executives, including Asian women leaders, to react effectively to the increasing pace of technology and social change.

**Servant Leadership.** Servant leadership was introduced as a leadership theory by Robert Greenleaf in 1977. Greenleaf (1977) stated in his original essay, that servant leaders put priorities of followers above their own (p. 13). Greenleaf (1996) presented the concept that effective leadership was to nurture others and to promote a more participatory leadership style. While other theories focus on a leader’s behavior and traits or context, servant leadership focuses more on a leader’s principles, values, and beliefs (Melchar & Bosco, 2010; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002; Walker, 2003) This servant leadership seemed like a contradicting concept at first but has slowly become accepted as a theory in the 80s and 90s.

A servant leadership style is in alignment with typical female leadership styles described in various articles (Stelter, 2002; Trinidad & Normore, 2004) and it also fits well with Asian cultural values represented by humility, collectivism and interdependence (Mayuzumi, 2008). Servant leadership theory provides a framework to view leadership from multiple perspectives. The multiple aspects can be represented as race, role within an organization, and cultural values. Servant leadership also has a foundation which encourages a “participatory leadership model” (Kezar, 2000, p. 728) and views the president as “a symbol of the new leadership culture in that the president acts as a facilitator and servant, empowering everyone to lead” (Kezar, 2000, p. 732). Servant leadership theory focuses on a holistic approach and promotes a sense of community and distributed decision making. (Smith, 2005) Additionally, the theory encourages “employee empowerment, teamwork and flatter organizational structure.” (Smith, 2005, p. 8)
Madden suggested using “metaphors of weaving, cultivating, and networking” (2005, p. 9) would provide a needed, different interpretation of executive leaders’ behavior rather than using “military, athletic, or construction metaphors.” The traits featured in servant leadership, such as “facilitative” and “collaborative”, are often used to describe feminine leadership styles (Madden, 2005; White, et al. 2010). Sense of community, encouraging participation and group priority align with Asian values (Mayuzumi, 2008). Servant leadership suggests that both genders and all races can be successful leading U. S. higher education based on their beliefs and values.

**Culturally Endorsed Implicit Leadership.** The culturally endorsed implicit leadership theory is a theoretical framework “linking national culture, organizational culture and leadership” (Javidan, et al., 2010, p. 336) and analyzes leadership from personal traits, behaviors and social contexts. This leadership theory has similar perspectives to the social role theory that gender gaps are created by the perception of societal roles (Carless, 1998). In Carless’ study, researchers found that national culture and organizational culture do affect leadership. For example, the results showed that Asian culture places higher value on face-saving leadership where people avoid embarrassing others in public and work to maintain long term relationships. In a typical “white” culture, “assertiveness, competitiveness, rough character, a can-do attitude, a sense of urgency, direct communication and achieving results” (House, et al., 2004, p. 351) are highly valued. This perspective suggests there could be a potential bias among current “white” leadership in U. S. higher education that an Asian leadership style may be considered too vague and unassertive, and thus not suitable for a university executive position.

Another research result revealed that bureaucratic leadership was considered to be a contributing factor for outstanding leadership in societies which value uncertainty avoidance,
high power distance and institutional collectivism (Javidan, et al., 2010). Uncertainty avoidance means that a culture has less tolerance for risk, new ideas and new ways of doing things. Higher power distance suggests a more hierarchical society.

**Asian Historical Background**

Asian immigrants were not documented until the first Asians arrived in the USA in 1848 during the gold rush (Lee, 1992). After long years of discrimination and segregation, the 1965 Immigration & Nationality Act abolished the country of origin restriction and emancipated Asian immigrants to become US citizens and permanent residents (Lee, 1992; Waters et al., 2007) The US government put priority on family reunification and many Asian workers could bring their family members to the USA. Asian immigrants and their family members realized very quickly the only way to become successful in the USA is to obtain credentials through education. Around the same timeframe, the women’s liberation movement in the United States advanced women’s rights dramatically (Morris, 2011; Watkins, 2009). In 1975, the equal rights amendment was passed and balanced access to the job market between genders. Given the opportunity for equal rights and legal status, many Asian families poured resources and energy into getting their children access to higher education. Recent census data shows that Asian Americans account for five percent of the US population (US census bureau, 2010) and among them, 66% hold higher education degrees (Pope, 2008). Most leadership positions in higher education prefer, if not require, a post graduate or terminal degree (Keim & Murray, 2008). If so, Asian Americans should have higher chances of being considered for leadership positions given the number of people completing post graduate degrees. It is puzzling that Asian woman leaders are underrepresented in higher education (Neilson & Suyemoto, 2009).
Model Minority Myth

Many Asian students are referred to as the “model minority” (Shrake, 2006). The terms “model minority” or “elite minority” potentially hinders Asian women’s advancement possible opportunities in U. S. higher education by blinding people to the struggles for fair representation in executive and leader roles. These terms create a perception that Asian Americans are doing fine as a class. Research into academic outcomes further challenges whether these terms are even statistically substantiated in the first place (Hune, 1997; Teranishi, 2010).

Understanding the similarities and differences of advancement among different minority groups may crystallize a particular dilemma for Asian women. An exploration of the terms “elite minority” and “model minority”, which are often used to describe Asians, may provide insight on a perceived bias. These terms reinforce perceptions that Asian minorities have disproportionate advantage in education and economic power compared to other minority groups (Teranishi, 2010).

Summary

Embracing diversity is becoming a popular phrase in academia, but it has not been applied at the executive leadership team levels proportionate to population of qualified individuals. Further research that analyzes minority participation and impact on leadership teams may encourage additional change. In this literature review, four primary topics were discussed including: 1) Leadership theory 2) Leadership development 3) Reflection and learning and 4) Contextual background: Gender, minority women’s career development and Asian women’s social context. It is important to distinguish the individual elements of leader development as well as the constructs and methods used in leadership development as these influence the experience of Asian women executives.
Mezirow’s Critical Reflection Theory was introduced as the primary lens of this study. Mezirow indicated that critical reflection is the foundation of transformational learning in adults (2000). Three leadership theories, including Flexible Leadership, Servant Leadership and Culturally Endorsed Implicit Leadership, were highlighted as secondary lenses. Typical leadership styles of Asian women may be evaluated through these lenses and compared with desired 21st century leadership traits and styles demanded by increasing student and faculty diversity along with the advancement of technology. Given the expected turn-over of presidents and executive leaders in the next few years, enhanced succession plans are necessary (Schmidt, 2007). Women’s career development literature has been discussed in this chapter to frame challenges and opportunities in leadership development and selection. In the social context section of this literature review, structural and contextual challenges were brought to the light which may be limiting the consideration of Asian women candidates. Research also highlighted physical and linguistic challenges for Asian women that hindered their career advancement.

Through critical reflection and understanding the experience and insight of existing Asian women leaders, changes and improvements to influence a more favorable context for future Asian women leader candidates can be envisioned. These changes may have important implications for expanding opportunities for other minority groups and highlighting important skill sets that are needed for all leaders in the growing multicultural and interconnected context of tomorrow’s institutions.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to describe the research methodology which includes research tradition and research design. Additionally, target population, sample design approach, recruitment and access to interviewees will be discussed under the sample design section. The overall plan and specific steps including data storage and the analysis approach are discussed. Finally, the researcher’s bias and assumptions are presented, and strategies to ensure trustworthiness and validity are defined in this chapter.

The purpose of this research was to uncover how Asian women serving as executive leaders in US higher education describe their leadership development experience. Specifically, this qualitative study explored Asian women leaders’ perceptions of any social, structural, or contextual influences that enhanced or hindered their leadership development experience.

Overview of Research Plan

This study, examining reflections of Asian women executives, was qualitative research using inductive reasoning to allow new themes to emerge from the data. A narrative approach was used to capture authentic experiences of Asian women executives’ leadership development journeys and how they constructed meaning from their experiences. Interpretive qualitative analysis was appropriate as Asian women leaders’ experiences and stories were captured as the main source of data collection and interviewees constructed their own meanings or interpretations of their life experiences (Creswell, 2013).

A semi-structured interview protocol was applied exploring leadership development perspectives with five Asian women currently in executive leadership roles at US higher education institutions. The detailed selection process for interviewees will be discussed in the “Recruitment and Selection” section of this chapter. The researcher played the role of an
unobtrusive interviewer. There were three research phases. Table 6 below shows the phases of data collection and data analysis.

Table 6: Data Collection and Data Analysis Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Sent introductory letters, interview requests and followed up with phone calls, Obtained agreements and set interview dates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Collection Document Review</td>
<td>Collected resumes. Conducted document review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Data Collection Interviews</td>
<td>Collected informed consent forms. Conducted interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transcription Member Check</td>
<td>Transcribed interviews. Sent transcription back to interviewees for an accuracy check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>Open coding of interviews, developed individual profiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>Analyzed data, categorized based on theme, documented findings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase 1 was a document review phase where resumes were requested from selected participants and collected data was organized. In addition to submitted resumes, documents were also collected through internet search. Leadership background information was highlighted such as current position, past positions, training, education, etc. Phase 2 was the main interviews (60-90 minutes) with participants. The purpose of the interview was to obtain a sense of any critical events, people, training or experiences that shaped personal leadership development. More in-depth questions were asked regarding past paths and turns that may have affected career path. Interviewees’ perceptions of leadership development and their own leadership styles were also discussed. Interviewees were asked to provide development advice for other Asian women who aspire to obtain leadership positions in US higher education as well as insights for university human resources personnel and search committees. This phase also included a member check.
Transcription files were sent to each interviewee to check for accuracy along with sample narrative quotes. Phase 3 included the coding and data analysis phase. The process for analysis is described in the “Data Analysis” section later in this chapter.

Sample Design

Target Population

The target population for interviews was Asian women executives in US higher education roles including President, Provost, Chancellor, Vice President, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Academic Officer, and Chief Financial Officer. The researcher selected interview candidates currently serving in executive roles. The geographical location was limited to the United States as the research focused on Asian women leaders in US higher education.

Finding Asian women executive candidates in US higher education for interviews was difficult given the small population. Table 7 shows the representation of full-time, tenured faculty and senior administrators of Asian Pacific Islander American decent among 4,488 US higher education institutions. The percentages below include both men and women and the target population of women is less than half of these numbers.

Table 7: Target Population (excerpt from Table 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Faculty*</th>
<th>Dean**</th>
<th>CAO***</th>
<th>President****</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian Pacific Islander American</td>
<td>7.00%</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
<td>2.40%</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


An issue that often complicates studies related to Asian women is defining the term Asian. “Asian Women” is used very differently among research papers (Mayuzumi, 2008). For example, US Census data categorizes Asian Pacific Islander as one group which includes countries such as China, Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines, Tahiti and Samoa. Each
country has a different cultural heritage, educational attainment, socioeconomic status and language (Nomura, 2003) and it is difficult to narrow the definition of Asian women when discussing the topic. In this regard, narrative research was considered the best approach as its strength was to allow samples to have varied backgrounds. In this narrative study, diverse candidates among Asian women were interviewed. The varying experience, background and geographical locations provided diversity for the study.

The researcher contacted the American Council of Education (ACE), the National Asian/Pacific Council within the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics (LEAP) and Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education (APAHE) to obtain women executives’ names that may qualify for the study. The researcher identified 15 possible candidates through referrals from ACE, AACC, LEAP and APAHE.

The criteria for selection are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8: Interviewee Selection Criteria Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>President, Provost, Chancellor, Vice President, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Academic Officer, and Chief Financial Officer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Actively serving in executive role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution Types</td>
<td>4 Year, 2 Year, Public and Private (Targeting a mixed representation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Based in United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Broad Asian definition (Targeting a diverse balance and representation of Asian nations)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recruitment and Access

Several steps were taken to identify qualified participants who were willing to engage in the research. One of the primary sources for potential participants was the American Council of Education to obtain references to potential interviewees. The Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education (APAHE) and Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics (LEAP) were also identified as target organizations and several individual names were given as referrals. From this first stage, 15 individuals were identified as possible candidates. Then, the researcher organized a list with Institution served, nationality, and geographic region of the institution as the example shown below in Table 9.

Table 9: Sample Interviewee Candidate List (content is not representative of actual data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Institutional types</th>
<th>School Location</th>
<th>Heritage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aileen</td>
<td>VP of Student Services</td>
<td>ABC University</td>
<td>4 year, private</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>DEF community College</td>
<td>community college</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherry</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Univ. of [State]</td>
<td>4 year, public</td>
<td>IL</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dora</td>
<td>Provost</td>
<td>HIJ College</td>
<td>4 year, private</td>
<td>MI</td>
<td>Korean</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher took special care to have various representations from multiple geographical locations and heritage background. In order to protect the identity of the Asian women interviewees, pseudonyms were used for their names. The specific academic institution’s names, the location of the school and the specific heritage background of candidates were not revealed for this study. The list was prioritized based on the mix of positions, institutional types, geographic locations and heritage to provide diverse background among the interviewees.
In the next step the researcher looked up executive leaders’ contact information and their administrative assistant’s contact information including emails and phone numbers and added these to the list. Interview requests with an executive summary of the research study (Appendix A) were sent through emails to five Asian women executives. If the interview candidates’ direct emails were not found through web search, the requests were sent to their administrative assistants or the school’s Office of President.

A couple of days after emails were sent, the researcher followed up by phone calls. Two executive women responded positively in a two day timeframe and one accepted after the researcher followed up with a phone call to her administrative assistant. Two interview candidates turned down participation in the research. The researcher referred back to the list of interview candidates and two additional requests were sent to Asian women executives, followed by phone calls to secure positive responses. One executive could not be reached for two weeks due to business travel. In the end, the researcher obtained agreements from five executives to participate in the interviews.

Finally, the researcher worked with interviewees’ administrative assistants to identify interview dates. Scheduling interviews with plenty of advance notice and preparing to have alternative interview dates were necessary to accommodate last minute changes. Some interviewees could only be available two months ahead. Informed consent forms were sent to each interviewee and administrative assistant. In case of an unexpected cancellation, the administrative assistants set up back up dates for two candidates.

The summary of recruitment process is shown in Table 10.
Table 10: Steps for Recruitment and Access

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps for Recruitment and Access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong> Contacted organizations for referrals; created initial list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong> Prioritized list and organized it by institution types, location of institution, ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3</strong> Found contact information of Asian women leaders or their administrative assistants. Sent Interview request with an executive summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 4</strong> Made follow up calls to the email and obtained agreements; When turned down, went down the list to obtain additional agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 5</strong> Set up interview dates (including back up dates)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**General profile characteristics**

The five interviewees came from two year public universities, four year private universities and four year public universities. This variety allowed a rich collection of narrative stories from Asian executive leaders who serve in different types of institutions. The institution types of interviewees are categorized in Table 11.

Table 11: Institution Type of Interviewees:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 year public</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 year private</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 year public</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The current positions of interviewees included President, Vice President and Provost as shown in Table 12.

Table 12: Current Position Titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provost</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A summary of study participants is listed in Table 13. An introduction of each participant can be found in Chapter 4 under Research Participants.

Table 13: Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Institutional Types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>4 year, public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>community college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>VP of Student Affairs</td>
<td>4 year, public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>4 year, private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisabeth</td>
<td>Provost</td>
<td>4 year, private</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Central Question and Sub Question

The central research question was “How do Asian women leaders in US higher education describe their leadership development journey?” The sub-question was: “What are Asian women’s’ perceptions of the social, structural, and contextual influences that hindered or enhanced their developmental experiences?” Along with these questions, some analytical questions were used to guide the process, and these are further illustrated in Table 14.

Analytical questions were:

a) How do Asian women leaders describe critical incidents that may have disrupted previous beliefs and knowledge?

b) How do they describe intentional leadership development activity? i.e. mentors, training, etc.

c) How do they describe experiences in their career where heritage and/or cultural context may have impacted their belief, behavior and decision making in the context of leadership development?
Table 14: Alignment between Analytical Questions and Conceptual Frame Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytical Questions</th>
<th>Conceptual Framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q 1) How do Asian women leaders describe critical incidents that may have disrupted previous beliefs and knowledge?</td>
<td>Reflection Theory (Mezirow, 2003): When new information does not fit into the previous frame of reference, adult learners often reflect on its contradiction to make sense of the phenomenon (Vaughan, 1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 2) How do Asian women leaders describe intentional leadership development activity?</td>
<td>Leadership development theory (Van Velsor and McCauley, 2004) Reflection is a powerful element of the adult learning process and having a strong ability to critically reflect on experiences and apply new knowledge will have an impact on leadership development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 3) How do Asian women leaders describe experiences in their career where heritage and/or cultural context may have impacted their belief, behavior and decision making in the context of leadership development?</td>
<td>Asian women's social context Leadership is socially constructed among people and the interpretation of leadership fluctuates depending on cultural context or groups (Calas &amp; Smirich, 1996)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Document Review

This study was designed to “gain insight into the unique and distinct experiences” (Creswell, 2012) of the leadership development journeys of current Asian women leaders in US higher education using a narrative approach. Merriam (1998) indicated that the three main sources of data in qualitative research were gathered through observations, documents and interviews. The data collection for this research was done mainly through two sources: 1) document review and 2) semi-structured interviews.

The first phase was “familiarization” which consisted of document review. The interviewees’ resumes were requested and collected as part of the document review.
Additionally, web searches were conducted to find any documents related to the interviewees. Collected information were analyzed and organized in Chapter 4 as demographic information such as institution type, cultural background, current position, past positions, training, education, etc. The second phase of research yielded the main source of data through 60-90 minute interviews which captured the stories of Asian women executives’ leadership development journeys.

The researcher followed a planning protocol suggested by Creswell (2012) for conducting interviews: 1) Decide on the research questions, 2) Identify interviewees, 3) Determine what type of interview is practical, 4) Use adequate recording procedures, 5) Design and use an interview protocol, 6) Refine the interview questions and procedures, 7) Determine the place for interviews, 8) Obtain consent from the interviewee to participate in the study and 9) Use good interview procedure (Creswell, 2012, pp. 163-166). As shown in Table 15, the interview formats were determined based on the preference of the executive women after the research dates were set up.

Table 15: Interview format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Interview format</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>video conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>video conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>phone call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>video conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisabeth</td>
<td>phone call</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Adequate Recording System.** Initially, the researcher selected Go-to-meeting as a video conference method as the researcher was familiar with the application. Recording devices were tested multiple times using family members’ help. However, none of the interviewees or their assistants was familiar with the Go-to-meeting system and they alternatively suggested the use of
systems familiar to interviewees. Amy’s assistant requested that the researcher use “Fuse” application. Several days before the interview, Amy’s administrative assistant and the researcher tested the application. Despite several attempts, the audio did not work well. In the end, the Skype® system was selected as the mode of connection. The researcher purchased a RCA digital recorder as a recording device and used an Apple iPhone® recording function as a backup. Both devices were tested prior to the actual interviews. Barbara and Debbie were both familiar with the Skype system and their administrative assistants requested that researcher use Skype for their interview sessions. Cindy felt more comfortable with a phone interview and Elisabeth needed to use a phone line as she was not going to be in her regular office and had no access to her computer for a video conference. In all cases, the RCA recorder and iPhone were used as recording devices.

As interview candidates were executives, it was important to maintain a professional and credible power balance during interviews. Creswell (2012) discussed “power asymmetry” between an interviewer and an interviewee exploring areas of considerations as we conduct interviews (p. 173). He indicated that the “nature of the interviewer-interviewee relationship could not be easily answered with pragmatic decisions that encompass all interview situations” (p. 173). The intent during the interviews was to establish a professional rapport and a trusted relationship to effectively uncover key insights. Seidman (1998) indicated that interviewing high powered executives may require special consideration.

**Refining Interview Questions.** Interview questions needed to be carefully developed and tested. The interviews employed a semi-structured approach. Merriam (2002) defined a semi-structured style as when an “interview contained a mix of more and less structured questions” (p. 13). Follow up questions or modifications to prepared questions were used as
needed. These questions were sent to a couple of retired Asian executives for review. The interview questions are shown in Appendix C. Interview questions were tested for clarity and effectiveness with former Asian women university executives to receive their feedback. Possible follow up questions were prepared through these mock interviews.

Feedback was provided from volunteer executives and the researcher made changes to the interview questions below shown in Table 16. One retired executive indicated that examples of formal leadership development should be included as a part of the question so interviewees would not misunderstand what was meant by formal leadership training. Additional feedback was provided to include balanced questions when asking about women’s experience both negative and positive.

Table 16: Changes to Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior to feedback</th>
<th>After feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you have any opportunity to participate in formal training? If so, what activities were helpful and why?</td>
<td>There are various training tools used for leadership development such as 360 degree feedback, coaching, mentoring, action learning, etc. Did you have any opportunity to participate in formal training? If so, what activities were helpful and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were there any challenges that you experienced because of your ethnic background or gender?</td>
<td>Were there any challenges or opportunities that you experienced because of your ethnic background or gender?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An additional insight for an improvement to an interview questions emerged after the completion of the research phase. Specifically, the insight suggested to better phrasing of one of the final questions as advice to institutions. By asking for advice for institutions to “diversify leadership,” the question led to more structural responses related to the processes. It could have been worded to ask for advice for institutions wanting to improve the development of leaders.
This may have led to more insight specific to “leadership development”. While this change could not be implemented for this study, researcher included it here as a reference for the future research design.

**Interviews**

Phase 2 of data collection focused on narrative stories of “leadership journey and critical reflection” through 60-90 minute interviews. Interviews were conducted via video conference or phone call as shown earlier in Table 14 with the purpose of obtaining a sense of any critical events, people or training experiences that shaped personal leadership development. The researcher had hoped to conduct face to face interviews to add “observations” to the data collection, but due to time constraints and scheduling difficulty, it was not possible.

The interview questions probed various aspects of the central research question on journey, the sub-question categories of social, structural and contextual perspectives and the category of advice for candidates and institutions. Table 17 shows the alignment of the interview questions to the research question categories. Questions related to their past journey and experiences were included in each category which related to their thoughts and beliefs.
Table 17: Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Question Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question Category Alignment</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductory/Structural</td>
<td>Could you please describe your current position, your role and responsibilities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>What is important to you as a leader of the US academic institution? What is your personal value that you bring to your workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>How do you describe your leadership style?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Were there any changes in your perspective on leadership styles based on your experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>Where there any memorable moments or critical incidents which affected your leadership development journey?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>How did your thoughts and beliefs change after the critical incidents? Did you make any behavioral changes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Was there anyone in particular who affected your decision to move up the career ladder?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>There are various training tools used for leadership development such as 360 degree feedback, coaching, mentoring, action learning, etc. Did you have any opportunity to participate in formal training? If so, what activities were helpful and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>Was your obtaining your current position intentional or was it relatively unplanned?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>What were some of your formal and informal leadership development training that helped you obtain your current position?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>What kind of training experiences prepared you for the current position?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>What thoughts or belief encouraged you to apply for your current position?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>What were some of the hard decisions that you had to make in obtaining the position?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>What were some of the messages you received from your family growing up? Did it affect you when you were making career choices?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>Model minority is a term used to describe certain ethnic minority group who is perceived to achieve educational and economic success compared with average population. Bamboo Ceiling is the word coined by Jane Hyun as a combination of individual, cultural, and organizational factors that impede Asian Americans’ career progress inside organizations. How relevant were these terms in your career?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>Were there any challenges or opportunities that you experienced because of your ethnic background or gender?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>How would you describe your relationship with your family of origin, spouse or your immediate family?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>What do you think is important component of formal or informal leadership development for Asian women candidates?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>What would be your advice on the aspiring women who would like to obtain executive position in US higher education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>What would you advise for US institution which would like to diversify their leadership make up in their organization?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transcriptions

Amy’s interview recording was transcribed by the researcher, but the other four interview audio recordings were sent to an online transcription company (www.rev.com). The recorded audio files were uploaded on the rev website to be transcribed. As a part of the selection of a transcription company, the researcher confirmed the company would protect confidentiality. The
transcribed documents were retrieved from the password protected web link. Then, the researcher listened to the recordings again to further refine the editing of the documents and filled in parts of the transcription which came back as “[inaudible]”. Some sections were kept as “[inaudible]” given the difficulty to understand the recording.

**Member Check**

The full transcription of each interview was sent to all five interviewees respectively to check accuracy as a part of a member check. The researcher sent an email asking interviewees to check the accuracy of transcription and respond back with any correction within two weeks. Only Debbie responded to inform the researcher that she had media training as a part of her leadership development training.

**Data Storage**

Audio recording devices, RCA recorder and the iPhone recording feature, were used to capture interviews so that transcription of the interviews could be done at later time. Both devices were used for each interview to ensure a back-up was in place. These devices were tested in advance several times to make sure the recording would last 60-90 minutes for in-depth interviews and would successfully store the data electronically as indicated earlier in this chapter. The data were downloaded and saved in a computer which has secured access. The saved file titles did not include the interviewee’s name to protect the anonymity of the participant and the computer was password protected. After each interview, the audio recordings were checked briefly to verify recording quality and later sent to a transcription company to be transcribed. The first interview was transcribed by the researcher. It was important to transcribe the interview in a timely manner so that non-verbal communication was captured in the transcription which may have an impact on interpretation. The researcher listened to the audio several times
after transcription was done and added non-verbal elements in the transcript such as “laughs” or “long pauses.”

**Data Analysis**

Creswell (2012) stated that the process of data analysis involved “organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the data base, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them” (p. 179). The researcher listened to each recorded interview a couple of times and read through the transcriptions multiple times to familiarize with the content of the interviews.

Miles & Huberman (1994) explained that the analysis phase should reduce and redefine data in a way that makes the interpretation clear and succinct. It was important to differentiate the analysis and interpretation phases. Seidman (1998) indicated that in-depth analysis of the data may be done after all the interviews were transcribed so that researcher could view the entire data as a whole and not in pieces. Gorman (2012) indicated that the analysis process involves reviewing the data collected using graphs and tables. Interpretation takes data and provides more “robust explanation” and “connects data to research questions using literature” (Gorman, 2012). Interpretation includes implications of the data and posits how to utilize data in context. The data analysis for this research followed Seidman’s approach transcribing all interviews before any analysis were done. Two sets of data analyses were conducted using an inductive approach to create themes and a third data analysis was conducted to verify the themes taking deductive approach. Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014, p. 81) indicate deductive coding followed by inductive coding can be used as a part of an overall inductive analysis approach.

For data analysis descriptive coding was used as the initial coding approach; summarizing the interviewees’ comments in short phrases (Saldana, 2012). The researcher went
through an iterative process using both audio recording and transcripts. Each interview audio recording and transcription was reviewed multiple times while writing short summaries and possible themes in handwritten format. Examples of the initial practice coding are shown in Table 18 and the full version can be seen in Appendix F. This process helped review the interview content and focus on combining similar messages by themes. The researcher came up with 14 possible themes through first data analysis.

Table 18: Initial Practice Data Coding and Combining into Possible Themes (example)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Initial organization</strong></th>
<th><strong>Manual process</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Short summary of comments</strong></td>
<td><strong>combining into possible themes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong belief in education (family)</td>
<td>Access to Education, expectation for going to University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going into HE was given</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to do something big</td>
<td>Ambition and passion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can do better than others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion for excellence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“work with others” important</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration with others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration = family influence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mentoring was helpful</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I call mentors when needed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple mentors are needed (various purpose, both gender)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study (crisis management) training was helpful</td>
<td>Formal leadership training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>media training was helpful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvard University President training (case study)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the second round of data analysis Nvivo software was downloaded and used for coding. Each interview was treated as one source and nodes were created. The word, “node” was used in the Nvivo software, but the researcher treated the same as “code.” The researcher copied relevant sentences or key sentences from the transcription documents and put them into each node theme. Nodes were reviewed carefully and similar nodes were combined as done in the initial manual data analysis. 21 nodes were created (Appendix G) and direct quotes were organized into each node for analysis. An example of the summary by node can be seen in Appendix H.

In the third round of data analysis, deductive coding organized the women’s comments by interview question in a spreadsheet format. A table was created to document interview responses with possible key theme words highlighted and summarized. An additional column was added for researcher notes on “commonalities” and “discrepancies”. An example of the third analysis is shown in Table 18. This cross case analysis enabled the researcher to compare interviewee responses and also helped the researcher think through the alignment of themes to categories reflected in the research question. Cross case analysis is a typical method of analysis for case studies, however, Yin (2009) highlights that unit of analysis for a case can be an individual, multiple people, or an event or organization. Given this research had five interviewees, within the cross case analysis it was appropriate to use each interviewee’s transcription as one case and compare it with other cases to examine similarities and differences. Direct words and quotes were categorized in the spreadsheet to mitigate researcher’s bias. Key words and phrases were highlighted to create a list of themes out of the coding.
Table 19: Key Comments from Interviews Aligned with the Research Question and Analytical Questions

| RQ                                       | Analytical Q                                                                 | Interview Q                                                                                           | Amy                                                                                     | Barb                                                                                   | Cindy                                                                                   | Debbie                                                                                   | Elisabeth                                                                                  | Commonality, discrepancies, etc.                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| How do Asian women describe their leadership development journey? | b) How do they describe intentional leadership development activity? i.e. mentors, training, etc. | Was your obtaining your current position intentional or was it relatively unplanned? | wanted to achieve something big, passionate, but situation was serendipitous. | looking for opportunity, but not intentional search for specific university, good search experience to gain confidence | people nominated me, my name was mentioned - wanted to make a bigger impact. | Search firm approached me. Friends’ friend approached me. Went into a mindset that I would serve as a consultant and I will land in the #1 position in 10 or so years. (used it as a practice). | The intention to change was there, but search firm friend brought an opportunity. Interested in getting back in the higher position, but open minded about specific position - faculty, provost, Dean, or president. | All were qualified and prepared for the position, but situation was serendipitous. All leads came from nominations from search firm or people they knew. |
|                                          |                                                                             | What were some of your formal and informal leadership development training that helped you obtain your current position? | networking, mentoring, Harvard crisis management case studies | mentors, previous experience creating training for faculty. | educational background, (role playing ACE fellowship), networking, political strategy | Informal training was to serve as a mentor for students working in the office. Working under the mentor was very helpful; media training | (Networking) I had someone who can call who was in the search firm. Need to be qualified and have to have experience, but knowing people helped. | Networking, 2 people - Harvard crisis management case study sessions, 2 people - media training |
|                                          |                                                                             | What kind of training experiences prepared you | Harvard New President program, crisis leadership in HE. Any opportunities come your way - it will be helpful in the future | Previous search process experience assured that I can do this | a role playing with ACE fellow program. Political strategy; learning which people have the power and how you need to work with them. | Working under president. Figuring out what needs to be done. | Formal training (with other presidents from other institutions), previous experience was helpful. | Not consistent, but included: 1) formal training experience 2) case studies on crisis management 3) working under president (fellowship program, etc.) |
Finally, themes from the three data analyses were compared to examine similarities and differences to establish common themes. Finally eight themes were organized by categories based on the research question and sub questions as discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Two of the emergent themes did not fit existing categories from the research questions. These themes were grouped into a new fourth category called “motivational” and represented inner thought processes and internal drive aspects highlighted by interviewees. An overview of the data analysis process and steps used follows in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Data Analysis Overview

Reflective Journal and Audit Trail

All memos and notes written by the researcher were kept in a file. Most reflective notes were kept in the hard copies of articles with questions, highlights and connecting thoughts. Some other notes include working draft outlines, references on the structure of dissertation chapters, etc. The researcher also kept concept maps of research questions and interview
questions (Appendix E). Journal notes were not necessarily kept chronologically as the process of reflection during this research was iterative and multidimensional.

**Trustworthiness**

Creswell (2012) recommended eight validation strategies as accepted approaches taken by qualitative researchers to increase accuracy and trustworthiness of studies: 1) Prolonged engagement and persistent observation, 2) Triangulation of data, 3) Peer review or debriefing, 4) negative case analysis, 5) Clarifying researcher bias, 6) Member checking, 7) Rich, thick description and 8) External audits (p. 250-252). Lincoln and Guba (1985) also provided constructs such as credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability to increase the level of trustworthiness to employ during the research process. In this study, trustworthiness was ensured by triangulation of data, peer review, member checking and rich, thick description. Prolonged engagement and persistent observations were not part of this research.

**Credibility.** Credibility includes elements such as 1) utilizing established research methods 2) the development of an early familiarity with the culture of participating organizations, 3) random sampling 4) triangulation 5) peer scrutiny of the research projects and 6) member checks (Shenton, 2004). In this study, the researcher used narrative research which had been established as a method to enhance understandings of interviewees’ lived experience and insights. Multiple Asian women leaders’ narrative stories also allowed for constant comparative analysis. In order to increase the validity of the findings and trustworthiness of the data, five participants were interviewed for this research out of the compiled list of fifteen Asian women executives. Consistent with triangulation, Brewer and Hunter (1989) noted supporting data would provide some additional background information to understand certain behaviors or attitudes of the interviewees. Obtaining a wide range of data sources was also part of triangulation (Shenton,
Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested “multiple sampling adds confidence in findings” (p.29).

A member check provided an opportunity for the interviewees to review the researchers’ interpretation of data collected and check the accuracy of their comments. A part of the member check was conducted during the interviews by asking clarifying questions, mirroring and summarizing comments. In addition, an external audit was conducted to check for researcher’s bias. The researcher asked two individuals who work in higher education to read the findings of the analysis and provide comments. These processes enhanced the trustworthiness of the study and helped establish credibility and accuracy.

**Transferability.** For a quantitative analysis to be representative and valid, a much larger population would be required. With emerging phenomenon represented by a small population, narrative research can establish hypothesized generalizations that set a foundation for later quantitative research when populations expand. The qualitative approach of narrative analysis can provide useful, directional insight and is a necessary part of investigating emerging trends from individual stories. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress presenting clear, contextual information to enable readers to make appropriate transfers, and the researcher should not make transferrable inferences. It was important during this research to recognize the limitations of narrative findings and not treat the outcomes as universal, but rather contextually relevant insight that could guide future investigations given the small size of the population and limited number of interviews.

**Dependability.** Dependability would suggest that if the research was repeated in the same context with the same methods and participants, the findings and interpretation of the study would be the same. Dependability is improved through triangulation, peer debriefs and member
checking of interpretations. Since most of the data came from interviewees’ direct past stories and experience in the leadership development journey, dependability will be high as long as the researcher captured their stories accurately.

**Confirmability.** Shenton (2004) described confirmability as the “qualitative investigator’s comparable concern to objectivity” (p. 72). Findings and interpretation need to be accurate representations of the interviewees and not based on the preferences or perceptions of the researcher. Triangulation through conducting members’ checks, reviewing researcher’s reflective comments, and implementing external audits will ensure confirmability of the study. A reflective journal was kept to ensure the researcher’s bias was in check towards interviewees’ attitudes, opinions and behaviors. Shenton (2004) recommended keeping an “audit trail” which “allows any observer to trace the course of the research step-by-step via the decisions made and procedures described” (p. 72). The researcher kept 1) the interview protocol, 2) pilot interview notes, 3) interview recordings, 4) interview notes and documents provided by interviewees (or their assistants), 5) a reflective journal, and 6) coding information. The researcher followed Shenton’s recommended protocol.

**Researcher Bias.** The researcher’s level of self-awareness of her bias was high. The similarity of the researcher to the interview subjects included having Asian cultural heritage, holding an administration role in higher education and being of the female gender. However, the Asian women’s experience and examples given during the interviews were different from what the researcher expected, which helped the researcher take a more neutral listening position and be open minded to any stories shared.

Given the cultural similarity, the researcher found it easier to gain access to interview candidates. For example, two candidates were found from being able to attend a specific
conference for Asian leaders in higher education. Also, the researcher experienced a 70% acceptance rate for interviews, which may have been influenced by the prospective interviewees’ comfort level in talking with a fellow Asian woman in higher education. Beyond the cultural similarity, since the researcher holds a Dean’s position and has higher education work context understanding, it was comfortable to establish a positive power balance and effective rapport in the interview to increase the level of interview effectiveness. Creswell (2012) notes that establishing an effective power balance is a key to successful interviews. Finally, since the researcher and interview subjects were of a common gender, it made discussing issues and topics specific to potential gender bias a more comfortable topic.

In balance to the positive effects of similarities, the researcher relied on professional training in counseling and a strong self-awareness of bias to maintain objectivity. Additional steps taken to mitigate bias that are described in more detail in other sections include: 1) external audit and feedback, 2) member checks for accuracy and 3) used verbatim responses in analysis.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

The ethical dimensions and protection of human subjects that need to be considered are confidentiality and researcher’s bias. Given the fact that there were a very small number of Asian women executives in US higher education, keeping identities confidential was challenging. Considering possible negative consequences in advance, setting realistic expectations and obtaining interviewee consent were critical processes. Care was taken to avoid specific examples and references that may easily be connected to a particular person or institution. The purpose of study, the interview process, intended use of the data, maintenance of confidentiality were disclosed up front in the “Information for Study Participant” document prior to the
interviews. Participation was voluntary and interviewees were asked to sign an informed consent form. A written consent form was sent to the interviewees describing confidentiality, potential risk and their rights and options. Each respondent was asked to sign the consent form before they participated in the interviews. Pseudonym and fictitious names were used in the findings to protect the participants’ identity and institutions were described by institutional types. After interviewee profiles were developed, the researcher conducted reverse internet searches to make sure it would not identify any of the interviewees. All raw data such as recordings, resume, journals and memos would not be made public and were kept in the locked cabinet which can only be accessed by the researcher.

Another component of ethical consideration was researcher’s bias. The researcher needed to be mindful and conscious of her own bias during interviewing, data collection and the analysis process. Remaining neutral when asking questions and responding without asserting personal opinions were keys to conducting unbiased interviews. The researcher’s counseling training served as a good foundation given experience in utilizing paraphrasing, parroting, using encouragers and summarizing without stating opinion.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of data collected from interviews of five Asian women executives in US higher education for this study. The narrative collected from interviews provided insight to their values and experiences in their leadership development journey. The research question of this study is “How do Asian women describe their leadership development experiences?” The sub-question is: “What are Asian women’s perceptions of the social, structural, and contextual influences that hindered or enhanced their developmental experiences?”

The chapter included exact quotes as well as paraphrased versions of interviewees’ stories and some background information. Since there were very small numbers of Asian women executives in US higher education, full biographical information was not be revealed and fictitious names were used to identify interviewees to protect their identities. General profiles of the executive women who participated were described in the next section. Any identifiable information was also removed from interview excerpts. The first part of the findings describes data profiles of interviewees based on document reviews. The second part of the chapter discusses themes which emerged from 60 minute interviews with each candidate.

The Research Participants

Amy

Amy is the executive leader of a mid-size, public university. The school has both graduate and undergraduate programs. Amy has been in the chief executive role for a couple of years. Prior to her current role, Amy had a successful progression of roles at another large public research university holding positions at the Dean and Vice President levels. Her career experience started with teaching and traversed many teaching and research roles at different
levels earning her a practitioner’s viewpoint in higher education leadership. Amy has been widely published and has consistently been active in organizations outside her university boundaries.

**Barbara**

Barbara is the President of a mid-size community college. She has been in her current role for over five years. Barbara’s career has progressed across several community colleges in roles from Dean to Vice President and to President. She has deep experience in instruction development and leads workshops on diversity and leadership. Barbara is an advocate for community college systems and is active in many organizations, often holding leadership roles.

**Cindy**

Cindy holds an executive position in a large, public university. Her career is grounded in counseling and experience as a faculty member. However, the majority of her career has been in administration and positions advocating for students. She carried this commitment to excellence in student support throughout her succession of career roles. Cindy is also involved in many regional and national associations. She has received numerous awards for excellence and diversity.

**Debbie**

Debbie is the President of a small, private college with undergraduate and graduate programs. Prior to this assignment, she worked at a large public university in the executive office. Debbie also led policy development and framed research initiatives at a research university. She has experience in government sector leadership roles and some international business experience as well. Debbie brings a strong analytical and strategy development experience set to her role.
Elisabeth

Elisabeth has held executive levels roles in higher education for over ten years and has a career in higher education that spans 30 years. She began her career in teaching and research roles. She also has board level experience in higher education. She works internationally to advance women as academic leaders.

Document Review Findings

The researcher collected resumes and professional history information from each Asian woman and through web search. The web search included background information as well as reviewing President’s messages on their respective school websites or video clips of their speeches and interviews, if any. Documents were carefully reviewed. Study participants’ general profiles were already introduced in Chapter 3, but additional interviewee profiles and leadership development training experience summaries are listed in Tables 20 and 21 below based on the document review.

Table 20: Summary of Interviewee’s Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Institutional Types</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Discipline of Terminal Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>4 year, public</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Social Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>community college</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>VP of Student Affairs</td>
<td>4 year, public</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>4 year, private</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Environmental Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisabeth</td>
<td>Provost</td>
<td>4 year, private</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 21: Summary of Interviewees’ Professional Experience in Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th># of years in Higher Education</th>
<th># of career titles</th>
<th>Average years in the same position</th>
<th>Leadership Development Training **</th>
<th>Experience outside of Higher Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>mentoring, (created LD program)</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>mentoring, media training</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisabeth</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>mentoring, case study (Harvard),</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Leadership development training includes 360 degree feedback, executive coaching, mentoring, and action learning and any other formal training

Two of the interviewees immigrated to the USA for graduate studies and stayed after completing graduate degrees to work. Two women are third generation Asian Americans and one woman is a fourth generation Asian American as shown in Table 22.

Table 22: Immigration History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st generation</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd generation</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd generation</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th generation</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four of the executive women worked in higher education in various capacities for more than 25 years as seen in Table 23.

Table 23: Years of Higher Education Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-15 years</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 years</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 years</td>
<td>4 (80%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Previous to holding current positions, they all have held other leadership positions in the same or different institutions. All interviewees taught classes in their respective subject matters at some point in their career as professors and three served as Deans. Two (60%) had served as Presidents previous to their current roles. Career titles held prior to current positions are presented in Table 24.

Table 24: Career Titles Held Previous to Current Positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>N(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>5 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>3 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special advisor to President</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President, Academics &amp; Student Affairs</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Chair</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provost</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President, Engagement</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Asian women executives changed positions various times before reaching their current positions, including job changes within the same institution. The average number of years in one position ranged from 2.33 to 6.75. A summary of the data is shown in Table 25.

Table 25: Number of Positions Held within Higher Education and Average Years in the Same Position (Some Positions Overlap)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Positions</th>
<th>Average Held (yrs)</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 positions</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 positions</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 positions</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 positions</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 positions</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As for leadership development training programs, informal mentorship was used by all interviewees. Two women attended formal workshops and executive coaching sessions. One executive participated in 360 feedback and action learning as a leadership development training program. A summary of leadership development by interviewee is shown in Table 26.

Table 26: Leadership Development Training Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
<th>Amy</th>
<th>Barbara</th>
<th>Cindy</th>
<th>Debbie</th>
<th>Elisabeth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>360degree feedback</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>executive coaching</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action learning</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media training</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis management training</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the findings from document review included: 1) All five interviewees had terminal degrees 2) All women worked as faculty members at one point in their career in higher education and 3) All interviewees held multiple positions and job titles within higher education. With the exception of Debbie, the other four Asian women executives worked in US higher education for over 25 years.

**Themes**

The following themes were developed from the interview transcriptions based on the central research question, “How do Asian women leaders in US higher education describe their leadership development journey?” and the sub question, “What are Asian women leaders’
perceptions of any social, structural, or contextual influences that enhanced or hindered their developmental experience?” The transcriptions resulted in an 86 page single space document and were analyzed using an interpretive, inductive approach to highlight common themes among Asian women leaders’ experiences. There was iterative processes that involved re-reading the transcripts, re-listening to the audio, and re-examining the interview notes and reflective journals for each of the participants. Once a complete analysis of each participant was completed, then three sets of analysis were done to look across common themes. A cross-case comparison was used to look across the five participants to find similarities and differences to draw themes and put into three categories; social, structural and context. There was one category emerged from the interviews which did not fit into three categories. The researcher created a forth category and titled it as motivational. For the purpose of this research paper, the social category was defined by people interactions and relationships. The structural category included formal, organized processes or protocols. The context category included demography, environment, culture or perceptions. The motivational category included internal thought process and internal drive.

Table 27 shows categories and themes as well as comments made by Asian women regarding what may have enhanced and hindered their leadership opportunities.

Table 27: Categories and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Enhanced</th>
<th>Hindered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social (people interaction)</td>
<td>Multiple mentors</td>
<td>Help process information, checks and balances</td>
<td>Lack of Asian mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Network</td>
<td>Knowing people outside of their institution</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family influence</td>
<td>Family value on education</td>
<td>Message from childhood, gender roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural (formal training)</td>
<td>Structured leadership development program</td>
<td>Crisis management, case studies, networking</td>
<td>Not given an opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection process</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional selection criteria, selection committee not being diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual (demography, environment, culture, and perception)</td>
<td>Leadership Style and Gender Bias</td>
<td>Wow factor by demonstrating leadership capacity</td>
<td>Strong leader expectation, small size, youthful appearance, pre-conceptions about model minority; Historical preference for typical male leadership profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational (Internal thought processes and internal drive)</td>
<td>Defining Moments and Reflection</td>
<td>Strong core value</td>
<td>Family balance; managing people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspiration and Determination</td>
<td>Being ethical, long term view, making difference</td>
<td></td>
<td>Support from others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Social Theme 1: Multiple Mentors**

A common theme among the five Asian women leaders interviewed was the importance of mentors. Four women mentioned they had multiple mentors that they reached out to when
they needed to consult or bounce ideas. The mentors were both men and women and interviewees talked about the importance of having multiple people as formal mentors.

I have collected, over the years, many, many mentors….most of them are women, some of them are men, and because they are not here, they are able to provide objective views. (Amy)

I have a multitude of mentors, and I really believe that people ought to be seeking more than just one person….there were moments working with various mentors that gave me insights that I thought provided me great training to be able to respond to situations (Barbara)

One of my closest, sort of mentors, was president of a university…..he is somebody I used to call quite regularly when I encountered challenges… I think most important is connecting with others who have been successful in the field. (Elisabeth)

Debbie spoke about one particular mentor having the strongest influence as well as her mother playing a role as an influential mentor. Amy shared how she reached out to establish mentoring relationships and asked questions to help her be better prepared for her presidency:

It is important to have mentoring and coaching…I intentionally met with two or three people who were university presidents and asked them what were their experiences in the first year, and what they will recommend to me…..I drove out to [location] and met with a president. Because she was relatively new, it was second or third year, so I asked her how she started her presidency and what she recommended. I called up another president, [Name]. I asked, “Do you mind having a conversation with me about what you would recommend for the first year, what you did, if you had an opportunity to change it, how you would change it?” (Amy)

In addition to asking for advice as Amy did above, each Asian woman utilized mentorship in different ways. For example, Barbara liked mentors who served as a sounding board while Cindy and Elisabeth identified mentors who provided honest feedback. Debbie valued support and encouragement from her mentor.

I find that when I work with some of my mentors in terms of trying to resolve issues or when I am challenged, I use them as a sounding board. I really need to be able to sit down with someone who is willing to listen, and to coach me on my processes of finding solutions rather than giving me an answer. So the people that I value as my mentor are the people who listen, who help me process, rather than someone who will tell me what to do…. There are other mentors who were important in terms of helping me decide on
my career options, who gave me personal advice about my career. There were others who helped me through challenges that I was facing as a professional. (Barbara)

…..who could be really be honest with you and teach you the ropes. (Cindy)

…..really connecting with people who can be good mentors to you and advisors who can actually support you and provide you with good council. … you are no burden when you call them. (Elisabeth)

He just threw me into things and said you can do this, you can figure out how to make this work, your job is to figure out how to make this work and come back to me when you do. (Debbie)

Barbara talked that sometimes these mentors are not necessarily people who have more experience, but rather, they could be someone who would serve as coaches or friends depending on the situation. She also indicated how conversations with mentors served as an informal training.

There were moments working with various mentors that gave me insights that I thought provided me with great training to be able to respond to situations, to think systematically about some issues. (Barbara)

A common issue highlighted was that there are not enough Asian women executive leaders in US higher education for young professionals to look up to as role models or mentors. In order to increase leaders among Asian women, or minority women, Amy mentioned it was important for executive leaders to mentor young employees and candidates. She described her experience as follows:

The woman who hosted the event did so much for me because she wants me to be successful. There was nothing in it for her. She is a very successful attorney. There is nothing she is going to gain from spending too much time with me. She is a professional, a supporter, a donor, and philanthropist. She wants to make sure for me to be successful. I think it is important to have professional family like that, colleagues who will help you along the way. But when there are opportunities, you help them as well…..I think we have to make the path better for other people that are coming through. I would say, unequivocally, that I would not be here without all those mentors. Never. I would never get here. (Amy)
Amy currently mentors three minority women. She started mentoring one of them as a freshman and the other two are professionals working towards their career goals to become a university president.

**Social Theme 2: Networks**

In addition to mentors, what interviewees had in common was wide ranging networks and most of their career opportunities came from external sources. All of the women were prepared to take positions or ready to apply for a position, but the circumstances of opportunity came serendipitously as described below. The only exception was Barbara who applied for the specific job and position because she was interested in moving back to that particular state to be close to her family.

Almost every position including this one, somebody said to me, you know what? You should apply for it. (Amy)

The firm approached me. Actually, a friend of hers approached me and said that [School name] is looking for a new president. And I said, I have 10 or 15 people I think you should consider. He said, “no, you.” (Debbie)

Primarily through a friend, when I mentioned my interest, he invited me to serve on the executive committee of International Association of the Universities Presidents.....I was able to call someone who was a good colleague and a friend, who happened to be a search agent. (Elisabeth)

I had never thought about going into administration, really. Somebody else sees the piece in you that you have never even considered. It gives you confidence about your ability, and as others taken interest in you and sees the possibilities, your own confidence grows. And that’s happened to me several times...... a dean took an interest in me. (Cindy)

The majority of executive women’s opportunities for advancement not only came from their superiors, but often from their network including colleagues and friends. It is important, however, the individual need to be fully prepared for a given position. Barbara summed it up by saying, “you have to be fully prepared yourself to meet the qualifications for the position, especially the minimum qualification. Especially, when you want to start applying for
presidency, you need to start doing your research about identifying what kinds of qualities people state they want in a presidential candidate. Be sure you meet or exceed those qualifications.”

Building networks may not come naturally to Asian women. Cindy noted that “you really have to push yourself to get out socially….to go to events and shake hands and meet people….fundraising is also important.” She also encouraged for Asian women to learn political strategy.

Political Strategy. I think that’s the part that we really don’t talk enough about, but it is really critical. Each of our institution, whatever environment we are working, is highly political. Learning which people have the power, and how you need to work with them. I do not know if we received any training or any of the fellowship workshops about this. In order to really talk about the strategic kind of political work, we need to build alliances, allies, if you want to get some policy packed, how you work to get that done. (Cindy)

On the other hand, given a lack of diversity in many institutions, there is a danger of the same people always being tapped for different committees. This can lead to many competing interests and distractions from core work. Cindy also cautioned candidates and institutions about possible hindrance for minority women’s career development:

I think that Asian American or other folks of color, you have to serve on more committee. You have to do more because there aren’t enough. If we want diversity, we need to serve on committees. All those extra things that are good and important, but they also make it harder for you to do a good work. (Cindy)

**Social Theme 3: Family Influence**

Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, Cox & Bradley (2003) reported that how a family perceives education is a critical component of academic success because it influences children’s attitudes toward education. All interviewees’ family of origin believed strongly in education and this influenced interviewees to obtain positions in higher education.

It is very clear to me that my family, my culture, and tradition of my culture is very critical because for one, there was a very, very strong ethos for excellence in my family…..Second of all, I think despite of the very limited resources, and it is true for
many Asian communities, there was such a passion for education….Nobody even said to me, “Are you going to go to college?” It was an assumption that everybody will go to college and all my brothers and sisters went to college. (Amy)

I think (family) had a huge impact. I really think they wanted to give me choices, so basically I was able to choose whether to stay in [hometown] to be educated or whether I wanted to go elsewhere. I was very fortunate to have both parents who wanted to give me the greatest exposure possible to the world….I think that I inherited that value of education. (Barbara)

(My mother) always made me very aware of the opportunities that (education) provided to her. My father also. The priority on education, not so much doing well in school, but getting the most that you can out of school, which is different, was always very much high on the list….The general sense of hard work and hard work not just for yourself, but for the betterment of society was always in the air and in the water. It was never all that explicit. (Debbie)

Some family expectations and messaging, however, created challenges for Asian executives during their careers. For example, Cindy’s father always said at the dinner table to respect elders and let them speak first. She struggled how to strike a balance between paying respect to elders and being assertive during meetings. One example revolved around weekly meetings scheduled by the president of her institution. When she was new to the role, she needed to arrange with her neighbor to take her children to school for over a year to meet early in the morning. Finally, she revealed that the time suggested did not work for her when the president asked the cabinet members if they should keep the meeting time the same for the following year. She gave credit to the president that he did not even question but asked what time would work for her. She felt relieved and that incident became a learning experience to be more assertive.

Elisabeth had challenges to think of herself as equal to men in social settings at times because the place she grew up was not supportive of equal rights for women at the time. She commented that she grew up in an environment where socially it was not equal, but academic
environment was quite different. She felt gender stereotyping was not part of the culture in academic world but sometimes “seemed contradictory as (I) was just wired.”

Amy talked about how having a close-knit family helped her with her career because as an administrator, building relationships is important. She values her professional family the same way as she values her family of origin. She does not believe it was possible for her to succeed if she did not have people who could motivate her or people who cared about her in a very tangible way, who wanted her to succeed.

**Structural Theme 1: Structured Leadership Development Programs**

In this study, four participants had experience in some form of structured leadership development program including the Harvard University President workshop and the American Council of Education Fellowship program. Amy believed in formal leadership development training and indicated that presidency is not an on-the-job training. Amy commented about the Harvard University President Workshop as follows:

…..there was a program on crisis leadership in higher education. With case studies on explosion, there was a case study of sexual assault hostage situation, there was a case study about a shooting at commencement, there was, I mean, there were different case studies.

She indicated that it was helpful to discuss various case studies as she has faced a serious crisis on her campus shortly after she had gone through these trainings. She was happy that she had attended the training sessions, had understood the protocols and had participated in the discussion.

Cindy indicated that she has been to many leadership programs including the Harvard leadership program, a yearlong management program provided by her university, and ACE fellowship programs. She reported that a role play exercise conducted during the ACE fellow program was one of the challenging, but very helpful experiences. Participants were provided
with a scenario with some type of crisis and they needed to act as if they were the president of an university. The participants were assumed to be at the public interview. The session was videotaped and all participants reviewed video to critique each other. Cindy indicated:

    The advice was to look more presidential and your hair should not touch your shoulder….Those kinds of really thinking about look at your image and your content….your lifestyle will be everything that you need to do to be successful. I thought that was really helpful

    On the other hand, a couple of interviewees indicated that they had not received any formal leadership training. Barbara mentioned that her learning was from being on the side of creating leadership programs. She had extensive experience putting together training programs for curriculum training, instructional design, organizational development throughout her career and she was “learning along with the participants.” Debbie mentioned formal media training had been helpful fulfilling her duty as the president. She indicated that she read some leadership books and took away one or two insights, but her training was mainly on the job training. What helped her was the experience as a boss and to mentor subordinates or students.

    Additionally, some pointed out that there were not many specific training programs for Asian professionals who work in US higher education. One special program that encompasses training for Asians in US higher education is LEAP (Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, Inc.), a non-profit organization that was established in 1982. This organization was established to develop leadership talent within the Asian Pacific demographic in the USA. A couple of interviewees referenced this particular organization as a formal, structured training opportunity for Asian candidates.

Elisabeth commented regarding formal training as follows:

    The formal training can be helpful because it puts you into a room with others who are also entering the same realm; the position of authority that you will be entering.....it also
gives you contacts with others who are switching to the same kind of transitional or transitioning into a role, just as you are. (Elisabeth)

Cindy commented:

360 review, executive coaching…I participated in all of those and they’ve been helpful in different ways and in different times in my career. (Cindy)

In summary, formal structured programs were noted by interviewees as helpful by creating a safe environment to experience practical executive leadership challenges, extending personal networks of contacts and informing self-awareness of development needs.

**Structural Theme 2: Selection Processes**

Fain (2010) reported that trustees of Universities and Colleges in US higher education have not made strides in diversifying executive teams based on the surveys conducted by Association of Governing Board of Universities and Colleges. Among 195 public and 507 private institutions, minority members represented 25.7% at public institution and 12.5% at private institutions in 2010, approximately 1.8% increase from 2004. A couple of Asian executives shared insights and concerns about selection processes of university presidents as follows:

People always talk about Asian Americans and women advancing, to become CEOs or be in the position of authority. But nobody ever asks the question. The people who appoint the CEO’s, the people who appoint the president….Is there a diversity of the board, because ultimately, the only governing body of an institution is the board. And that’s the invisible group behind organizations. Nobody really talks to. That group is a group that’s for inner circle. That’s the group that really needs to be dealt with first [for diversity]. If there is no diversity [at the board level], there is certainly no inclusion. So, mentioning connection with other Asian Americans who are in leadership positions, are very vital, because you are not always part of that circle. If more of us can get into those inner circles, the better our own lives will be. (Elisabeth)

I think trustees need to be move highly educated about [diversity.] We talked about having diversity to look at people different ways, different terms of leadership styles, different leaders, and yet when you look at presidential announcements, when people do recruiting, they all look alike. They haven’t changed over years. I just don’t get it. (Barbara)
Barbara reflected that she may have not been quite ready mentally when she applied for her first presidency. However, the interview experience taught her what needed to be done in order to go through a rigorous search process and how to prepare. Her attempt gave her the affirmation that she was ready for a presidency the next time. She proposes that institutions need to reframe how people think about the position. It is not about adding “more qualification,” but rather, it is “about institutional fit as well.”

I think there needs to be some more discussion and re-education of trustees, and their hiring practices of recruiting firms. How they go about hiring, and about the preparation, that career programs and curriculum that they set out for people who want to pursue these positions. Systematic change…is always slow. (Barbara)

Cindy also commented that institutions should have more “diverse committees at all levels.” She understands that it is hard to accomplish it as institutions hire search firms to look for senior position candidates and many search firm members do not come from diverse backgrounds. “Diversifying the leadership team is not always seen as the highest priority or a high priority” and thus, institutions should consider formally addressing the structure and diversity of the selection process. Elisabeth stated:

The student population in our universities is increasingly diverse, and if you want women and minorities to be successful and to be contributing members of the community, they need to have people they can look to as role models. (Elisabeth)

A final interesting insight on selection related to where to look for candidates. In a slightly unintuitive twist, the suggestion was made to look for candidates just beneath the visible leadership pool.

If you did a little digging, you would find there are a lot of right hand people (Asian women) that are not number one. They are not even number two. There are people as number one and there is number two, and then there’s the Asian woman off to the side helping and making things happen behind the scenes…..sometimes women in minorities need to be invited to tell you or show you that they have it. (leadership potential) I think
there are opportunities for institutions to do that in ways that are not condescending by just simply providing the opportunities. (Debbie)

**Contextual Theme 1: Leadership Style and Gender Bias**

All interviewees described their own leadership style as facilitative and collaborative. A couple of them indicated that their style is aligned with situational leadership where most of the times, it is facilitative and they believe in shared governance. However, in the case of crisis, they are comfortable changing their leadership styles to a more autocratic and decisive top down style to give necessary instructions and direction. They often used words such as “inclusive,” “flexible”, “collaborative” and “team based” to describe their leadership styles. Barbara also described herself as a “civic leader.”

I would describe myself as a civic leader. I strongly believe that my leadership style changes within the situation, so it is situational leadership, where leadership is needed in different forms depending on the situation which the organization is in or whether there is a situation that calls for me to be perhaps more proactive and assertive. Situational leadership is something that I do practice. A pretty no nonsense kind of leader. You get what you see. I am pretty frank with people about situations.

Debbie indicated that it was very important for her to position herself as a voice of faculty when she served as an administrator.

…to really be collaborative and cooperative and particularly in higher education to really let faculty know that you’re there to support them as opposed to tell them what to do. I think that helped me to develop a very particular kind of leadership style and team building style.

Elisabeth also described her style to be more facilitative, but she emphasizes that her style has transformed from her early years.

I’d say my leadership styles have changed …..My early years, I equated, perhaps leadership with position or place in the hierarchy….to great extent, leadership should be encouraging, coaxing, enabling others and empowering others. I am much more attuned to enabling, or facilitating others to see change….you’re taking more of an empowering role in facilitating others to fulfill their duties.
All interviewees’ comments align with recent leadership theory supporting Yukl’s (2010) Flexible Theory and Greenleaf’s (1977) Servant Leadership. As for relevant comments to culturally endorsed implicit leadership discussed in Chapter 2, there were a couple of interviewees who described their sense of a gender gap and how they overcame its challenges.

Debbie, Barbara and Cindy indicated that being a woman was more difficult than being Asian:

My experience at [location] was formative for me in understanding myself as a leader, understanding my own leadership style and my capabilities as a leader.…..when I worked at [location], I was younger then and I was one of very few women in my particular little group. It’s a very male culture. I was younger than most of the people who were reporting to me. I think [my challenge was] the gender and the age much more so than the ethnicity. (Debbie)

I can remember my first participation in the American Association of Community Colleges, the National Organization; it was an all-boys club. It’s primarily for men because men had all the president and powerful positions and I did not feel welcomed as a woman. (Barbara)

One time I was hired and my position was a more senior position. One of the people who reported to me, a white male, came in when I was with my direct reports. First thing he said to me was “Gosh, I was so disappointed. I couldn’t believe it that they hired you.” I was stunned. He said, “It’s not like it matters that I am older, I have more experience….I am male.” …. You have to constantly work with different people who have difficulties accepting you. It’s changing more, but it’s slow. (Cindy)

One interviewee also pointed out an example of a gender related issue during the job interview process. She raised a question of whether women should volunteer information about pregnancy during a job interview to the selection committee and how it might impact their decision.

…before showing, I started interviews in [month of the year] so I wasn’t showing yet. I did an informal survey of male and female mentors and said should I tell the search committee that I’m pregnant. The women, 2 to 1, said yes you should tell them. They’ll look back on it later and say you were dishonest or you were [inaudible] and you should tell them. The men, 2 to 1, said absolutely don’t tell them; it is not their business. If you were a man, you wouldn’t have to tell them that your wife was pregnant even if you were planning to be a primary care taker. Don’t you dare tell them. I went with the men on that one and I did not tell them and I think it was the right thing to do. (anonymous)
Interviewees talked about how they overcame these challenges and suggested other Asian female candidates consider ways to provide a “wow” factor with being Asian and a woman as advantages.

Make people sit up and take notes; maybe this is a different kind of Asian woman, maybe we should pay attention to her, maybe she has something to offer. Find a balance and know when you bring out which parts of your personality in order to move the room or the group where you want them …..you don’t have to talk about things that you’re not good at, but you have to build up to things that they don’t expect you to be good at. (Debbie)

Cindy shared her dilemma regarding this wow factor. “If we come across really strong, we’re like the dragon lady, were horrible, just so mean and all of that. If we don’t come across strong enough, it will work as the stereo type of Asian woman.” It was noted that recognizing their position as both a minority and woman, an adaptive style of leadership offered the most constructive way to selectively earn credibility and trust. Barbara made a comment that being an underrepresented group made her “a stronger person” and gave her “the ability to be more adept at responding to a changing landscape and to situations.”

I learned how to express myself that you provide strong leadership in spite of it (the minority position), so I had to be adaptable. Some may think of that as being too compromising, but I had to thrive in an environment that was unlike my own, so you just learn those survival skills….I think that going up professionally in an environment where I was always a minority, may have helped me, helped build character, helped to look at how to be adept at promoting change, and providing leadership when I was somewhat different than anyone else in the community. (Barbara)

Motivational Theme 1: Defining Moments and Reflection

Asian women interviewees described two main categories of challenging issues: balancing family and managing people. These challenges created an opportunity to reflect on their core values and one described this experience as a “defining moment”. Barbara, Cindy and
Elisabeth talked about relocating their families as one of the most difficult decisions they had to make in their careers. Balancing family life and keeping a high profile job was not an easy task.

The family issues are the most difficult to deal with, whether it’s children or whether it’s spouse, those are the hardest work to try to reconcile…..I don’t think I want to call it balanced, but how do you work with the family to make that adjustments…..(hardest) was having to deal with the issues with relocation. (Barbara)

In one of the cabinets that I served, I was the only female. I was the only one with school aged children at the time. The president always likes to have his cabinet meeting at seven in the morning. It’s really tough. When I first took this job and was in a new city, I had to ask a neighbor to take my children to school which they actually hated. (Cindy).

Moving (was the most difficult). My husband is employed in the [region] and that we were juggling family life and living myself in the [region], while my husband tried to relocate here, not knowing whether this would be a great place. (Elisabeth)

Another aspect of their reflection was related to their professional challenges in managing people. Three of them talked extensively about their experience in managing difficult colleagues or superiors. Amy shared in depth about her experiences working with faculty members who were not collaborative leading to the eventual need for her to formally write up one person. Her integrity and core values were tested when her superior asked her to remove the disciplinary write up from personnel files.

I learned a lot about myself and I also learned a lot about how to be a better leader. I would say this is probably a defining moment for me…..I had to think to myself what I would be prepared to do or not to do….if it came to pass, it came to be difficult, would I be willing to agree with the decision, or would I be feeling like I would be compromising my values…..I was prepared to leave the university if necessary even though I was there for many years….Do you value your job or do you value keeping your principle? (Amy)

Amy commented that sometimes people around her “do not understand the whole picture” and she needed to be patient. She posits that it takes “a level of maturity for the person and a level of maturity for the institution.”

You have to be able to 1) be mature enough to say that you are not agreeing with the decision and as a result of that, they are not liking me at the moment. But in the end,
people would be able to understand these are sound decisions, so you try to aim for being respected as supposed to being liked. (Amy)

Elisabeth had a similar experience when she was the Dean and had to take disciplinary actions on a faculty member which she remembers as a critical moment.

Personnel issues were challenging experiences, and the one that I learned to make the right decisions, but not everybody knows it’s the right decision. Sometimes you are handicapped by the situation, especially when it comes to personnel issues. Actually discussing situations, people don’t always know, or cannot always know about the reasons for the decisions you make. And sometimes it takes some time for some people to get to that stage or acknowledging it. (Elisabeth)

Elisabeth found that the very best thing an individual can do is “to follow process to the tee, so that everyone ultimately recognizes that you followed guidelines and processes and what is required of you.”

Debbie shared her challenging times when she needed to work with difficult superiors. Her comments below are similar to Barbara when she talked about learning from observation of good leadership and bad leadership.

I would say the most formative test experiences for me were to the leadership style, one was a negative experience so I had a boss with whom I did not get along very well. Figuring out with lots of help from various mentors how to make…. it’s not a positive experience at the time, something I could look back on and say I learned a lot about both how I want to be and how I do not want to be as a boss, as a leader, and what my values are through that experience….. I moved into a culture that was very much about managing up and really not enough in my view about managing down and out. (Debbie)

I do a lot of observations, so I’ve learned as much from people who I thought exhibited the poor leadership, as well as those who provided great leadership for organizations. I learned from best practices or worse practices, you might want to call. (Barbara)

In addition to reflective moments driven by situations involving people management, there were also examples of self-reflection at times when interviewees were contemplating future career directions. Debbie noted that her time spent as a doctoral student created a period for reflection on her career and development as a break from the pressures of an operational role.
I think it’s very unusual for me to admit that my time as being a student working on my doctorate was important to me, not because of the knowledge that I gained, but the fact that it gave me an opportunity to do some reflection about all of the things that have happened in my career, and the role models and mentors that I observed and worked with, and all of the experiences being a student provided me an opportunity to really think about my career, my aspirations, and those things that we ought to be learning and sharing. It wasn’t a single moment…(but) I really did appreciate being a graduate student. (Debbie)

**Motivational Theme 2: Aspiration and Determination**

All interviewees noted their thinking, desire, passion to “do something big” or “make a big impact” in the community, educational systems or in society. Amy passionately talked about not limiting ourselves as an important element of becoming successful.

I was always somebody who was ambitions, in other words, I was always aspired to be something or do something. If you have desire to do something, you can make it happen. If you start thinking that you can’t, then you can never make it happen. You are proven with your own limitation. If your aspiration is limited, then your accomplishment will be limited. You have to believe you can do it. This is something that is critical for women. What is the worst thing that would happen? (Amy)

Amy continues on to say that women require stretching and learning something new is good for the brain. She had taken opportunities that seemed unrelated at the time to her primary career goals which turned out to be valuable experiences when serving as a president later in her career. One of the examples was building facilities and overseeing construction projects. Through her experience in these projects she was better prepared as a president to understand and influence capital projects.

When I went to [university name], one of the first things that I needed to do was to renovate department offices. I thought, I do not know anything about construction. But you know what? I had to do it, so I may as well learn…..In 2004, I had another construction project, and 2010, I drove [a large scale] building for college. I learned so much about architecture and engineering…..When I arrived at [new university], we had [a significant amount, >100 million dollars] of deferred maintenance. The Board of Governors had a plan to build a new academic building. Do you think my construction experience was helpful? Absolutely! (Amy)
Some stretch appointments, however, came with challenging consequences. Elisabeth shared her “mistake” when taking the first presidency position as follows.

I asked about meeting with all the board members (during interviews). Even when you are a president, you report to the board; you report to the full board. And the executive committee which consisted of three members said, “Oh, no, you don’t need to worry about meeting the board members. We decide everything and the board accepts it.” That turned out to be unwise. (Elisabeth)

She indicated that she paid the price later on when she needed to navigate board meetings which consisted of difficult members with challenging issues.

While some stories were about aspiration and stretch positions that challenged thinking and helped develop skills, other stories also highlighted the importance of staying true to core personal values. Amy talked about the importance of commitment to excellence.

I have full commitment to excellence…not compromising commitment to excellence is important. If I go down that road (and compromise), there goes an integrity part as well. We have to draw that line. It is very important to decide that you adhere to values when you are making decisions. (Amy)

Barbara described her mindset as “set on a goal of doing the best job I could in a particular circumstance and I was not going to let anything get in my mind or step in my way.” Cindy and Elisabeth talked about their passion as follows:

I really value being able to contribute and make a difference. To influence in a positive way from my values and perspective. We are helping the institution adopt some of these values; to make sure that mission or policy become more and more selective, but stay true to what I see….the greater mission at the university to ensure access to all, not just to become a more and more excellent institution. You can’t separate the diversity from the excellence in my view. (Cindy)

Even though your capacity (is limited), but to actually commit to the things that mattered to your community locally, nationally and internationally, I think are important. (Elisabeth)

All interviewees had exhibited strong core values and personal vision. Their decisions are guided by personal principles. They believe in their contribution to society and commitment to
larger goals. As their aspirations and sense of determination grows, an increasing maturity of perspective and comfort with self seemed to emerge within interviewees. Amy described how challenges shape this maturity.

The higher you go, the harder it is because everything you do has consequences. There is a positive and there is a negative. If you are not getting negative consequences, you are probably not making big decisions. If you are making big decisions, there is always a small proportion of people who do not agree with you.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the findings of interviews conducted with five Asian women leaders in US higher education serving as Presidents, Provosts and Vice Presidents. Data from their resume was analyzed to extract demographic information as well as career history. A brief description of each of the interviewees was included using fictitious names to protect identities. Themes were developed based on the research question and sub-question. The research question of this study is “How do Asian women leaders in US higher education describe their leadership development journey?” The sub-question is: “What are Asian women’s perceptions of the social, structural, and contextual influences that hindered or enhanced their developmental experiences?

In the social influences, all participants talked about mentors being the most important component of informal and formal leadership development opportunities. Having multiple mentors enhanced their opportunities to get different perspectives depending on the situations. Family influence was also discussed as another social influence. As career enhancers, all talked about their family of origin supporting and encouraging them to stay in education and it was not even a debate whether to go to college. One of the factors hindering careers common to a couple of interviewees was receiving childhood messages that contradicted what was expected in their
roles. They struggled but made conscious decisions to change their behavior when those messages got in a way. Another social theme included developing a wide network of people. All interviewees had wide networks of colleagues and friends and many opportunities were brought to them through these networks. They were all qualified candidates, but career opportunities came serendipitously from their networks. Most importantly, interviewees were all ready to apply for the job when opportunities arose.

Two structural themes included one about formal leadership development training structure and the other about the selection process for leadership positions in US higher education. There were some leaders who had opportunities to go through formal training, but a couple of them had not received any formal training. Among the formal training, a couple of interviewees indicated that case studies and mock interviews were very helpful as to expand their comfort zone and stretch their ways of thinking through discussion. A couple of them also mentioned that training programs targeted for Asian Americans, such as LEAP, are beneficial for aspiring candidates. The leadership selection process was noted as an area for improvement within the structural theme. Many talked about the lack of diversity among board members as well as selection committees as a key challenge. Given the changing demographics of student populations, it will be important for students to see different types of leaders. Interviewees suggested that academic institutions consider diversifying board members who have the power to appoint university leaders. Within contextual themes, the majority talked about leadership style and gender bias. They all expressed that their leadership styles are inclusive and collaborative. They use facilitation and collaboration to move their agendas although in the case of emergencies, they are comfortable switching to autocratic and directive leadership styles since shared governance approaches would delay decision making.
Finally, two different themes emerged which did not quite fit into the social, structural and contextual categories. The motivational themes were documented to capture interviewees’ internal thought processes and inner drive. One of the interviewees indicated that she did not have a specific “a-ha” moment, but all had certain time periods thinking deeply about their core values; what is important to them and what are their guiding principles. Three women talked about their challenges in balancing family and work, especially relocation and settling into new cities. The other challenges were managing difficult employees, faculty members or superiors. They had to keep confidentiality and could not discuss with others freely when they had to take difficult disciplinary actions and, in some cases, were criticized later by subordinates or colleagues about their decisions. They found that time revealed their decisions were right and others came around and understood their decisions, but it was difficult and required maturity to not react to criticisms. All interviewees advised that decisions need to be aligned with core values. Four categories, eight emergent themes and examples are captured in the Table 28.
Table 28: Four Categories, Eight Emergent Themes and Examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Multiple mentors</td>
<td>• Collected many mentors over the years (Amy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• I have a multitude of mentors (Barbara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Networks</td>
<td>• The firm approached me (Debbie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• (Introduction) through a friend who happened to be a search agent (Elisabeth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Reached out to university presidents (Amy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family influence</td>
<td>• There was a strong ethos for excellence in my family (Amy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Family had a huge impact (Barbara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Structured leadership development</td>
<td>• Attended all (Amy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>program</td>
<td>• The advice was to look more presidential (after the video feedback) (Cindy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selection process</td>
<td>• No one talks about the group who selects presidents (Elisabeth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Trustees need more education on diversity (Barbara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>Leadership style and gender bias</td>
<td>• Situational (Amy, Barbara), Facilitative (Elisabeth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Inclusive (Cindy), Collaborative (Debbie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• WOW factor (Debbie), Too assertive → Dragon Lady (Cindy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>Defining moments and reflection</td>
<td>• Needed to fire a tenured faculty (Elisabeth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Relocation of family (Barbara, Elisabeth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Work with difficult boss (Debbie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aspiration and determination</td>
<td>• Conflicting messages from childhood (Cindy)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• I wanted to achieve something big (Amy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Committed to university mission (Barbara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Want to create access to education (Cindy)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final chapter will provide a discussion of above themes and recommendations for future research will be presented. Implications for practice and future research will also be presented in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to interpret key findings from the document review and interviews, and present conclusions. These interpretations and conclusions are presented in relation to the study purpose as stated in Chapter 1: to capture the leadership development journey of Asian women executives in US higher education. Specifically, a narrative research approach was used to uncover the stories of these women as they reflected on their leadership development journey. This chapter is divided into four sections: 1) Overview of study, 2) Interpretation and conclusions, 3) Implications for practice and 4) Recommendations for future research.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this narrative research was to explore the leadership journey of Asian women leaders in US higher education as there are proportionally a smaller number of Asian women who obtain executive positions despite articles and media highlighting the importance of diversity in leadership. Despite the recent reports and research indicating that diverse leadership provides strong institutional performance (McKinsey, 2012), academic institutions have been slow to change executive leadership composition. As discussed in Chapter 2, the American Council of Education’s (2012) data indicates that 87.2% of presidents in US higher education are white and 73% of them are men. When it comes to Asian women, they are underrepresented in proportion to the candidate population holding doctorate degrees and candidate population in faculty and administration positions. Since articles on Asian women leaders are limited, this research contributes to leadership literature, practice for aspiring candidates and direction for hiring institutions.

Narrative research was selected to best capture the stories of Asian women in US higher education. The findings of this research provide insights of specific formal and informal
leadership development opportunities for aspiring candidates. In addition, the findings also inform academic institutions on structural implications to consider appropriate training programs and leadership selection processes. Mezirow’s critical reflection theory was used to determine if critical self-reflection played a role in the Asian women’s leadership development journeys. The theory is grounded on the notion that transformational learning happens when learners experience life challenges or important issues that make them question their fundamental assumptions or values (Mezirow, 1997). Five Asian women leaders’ stories in US higher education were captured through interviews and analyzed to see if social, structural, and contextual influences may have hindered or enhanced their career opportunities.

The central research question was “How do Asian women leaders in US higher education describe their leadership development journey?” The research sub question was: “What are Asian women’s perceptions of any social, structural, and contextual influences that enhanced or hindered their development experiences?” Eight themes emerged from the interviews. They were assigned into social, structural and contextual categories from the research sub question plus a fourth category that emerged as motivational. The themes were described in Table 13 in Chapter 4.

Six actionable conclusions were drawn from the eight themes. The two themes of mentoring and networks were combined into a single conclusion and one of the themes, family influence, did not lead to a specific conclusion. Five of the six conclusions relate directly to leadership development and/or development program. One of the conclusions focuses on structural issues that potentially hinder the evaluation of Asian women candidates for executive leadership roles. The conclusions drawn from this research were organized by the same categories used in Chapter 4. First, from the social category, 1) Mentoring and networking are
important informal leadership development. From the structural category, 2) Formal leadership
development training that included practical case studies in crisis management, and media
training enhanced candidate readiness and confidence and 3) Structural changes are needed in
leadership selection processes. From the contextual category, 4) Develop the ability to articulate
and make assertive contributions may raise visibility and positive perceptions of aspiring
candidates for executive roles. Finally, from the motivation category, 5) Challenges provided
opportunities to reflect and confirm strong personal values and 6) Opportunities came through
willingness to take career risks by interviewing or accepting stretch positions to learn. Given the
small population of Asian women executives, the interpretation of the findings cannot be
generalized for a larger population. However, the findings support the notion of Mezirow’s
Critical Reflection Theory that premise reflection occurred during their leadership development
journeys. All women had encountered “disorienting dilemma” to critically self-reflect resulting
in new perspectives. In some cases, critical reflection reaffirmed their previous perspectives
when they made future decisions because of new self-awareness. It appears that reflection
occurred over period of time for all interviewees. As Mezirow (1997) indicated, for all
interviewees, premise reflection, which is transformative in nature, happened when they had to
consider important issues such as balancing family and work, and whether to bend their
principles or hold firm on their values. Thinking deeply about priorities in life and defining
aspirations both require reflection on personal values. The following section includes a summary
discussion of insights and interpretations in each category and frames the conclusions within
each category.
Interpretations and Conclusions

Social Category

This research opened doors to understanding the psychology of successful Asian women executives as they reflected on their leadership development journey. Within the social category, three themes emerged from the data. First, Asian women discussed having multiple mentors as extremely important to help process information or check ideas when they encountered challenges. Second, having a wide network of people in their social circle was helpful to expand opportunities and to develop broader perspectives on issues by interacting with diverse people. Third, interviewees described that their family of origin held a strong value towards education and there was no debate over obtaining degrees from higher education. They all received very strong support from family members. In some cases, they were strongly encouraged by their other relatives as well to pursue higher level degrees.

Conclusion 1: Mentors and personal networks are important informal leadership development for Asian women to achieve executive positions.

Multiple Mentors and Networks. In leadership development and leader development literature, mentors are always mentioned as one of the most important mechanisms of development activity. As mentioned in the literature review of this research, common factors among leadership development tools such as mentoring, 360 degree feedback, executive coaching and action learning are to provide opportunities to reflect and enhance the level of self-awareness. In this regard, mentoring fits within the theoretical frame of this research. Mentoring creates chances for self-reflection providing new insights or new ways of thinking. What was revealed through the Asian women’s stories was that all Asian executives talked about having multiple mentors when they needed to consult on various topics. They utilized their mentors to
not only ask for advice but also to help process their ideas. Amy’s approach of calling other presidents she did not know on the phone asking for their time to share their experience, in particular, provided an example how aspiring candidates can reach out to potential mentors. When a mentoring arrangement is too structured, or does not have good “fit,” the arrangement has a tendency to be short lived. The relationship requires nurturing and needs to have mutual respect. All Asian women executives had long term relationships with their mentors who were always ready to listen.

In addition, all interviewees indicated that having a wide range network helped in obtaining their executive role. “Network” is not limited to mentors, but also includes friends, personnel at search firms, bosses, colleagues, etc. In fact, these people in the network were some of the people who had brought all interviewees new career opportunities. In the majority of cases, interviewees were “tapped” for a position rather than looking for a specific position for advancement. Barbara indicated that it was important to have minimum qualifications, experience, skills and knowledge in order to “qualify” for the position and to be ready to apply when given a chance. However, the circumstances were all serendipitous. In some respects, an external “push” facilitated these Asian women to take the calculated risk in applying for their respective positions. Developing a broader network also required the women to get active outside from personal comfort zones of everyday interaction. In this sense, developing a network is an important leadership development journey.

**Family influence.** All Asian women executives interviewed commented that they came from a family of origin with a strong value on education. Madsen (2006) conducted phenomenological research exploring childhood influence on female university presidents’ leadership. Her research, involving 10 female university presidents, indicated that all
interviewees “loved learning, education and development” (p. 114) and were obedient as children. “They obeyed and respected their parents, teachers, religious leaders, neighbors and adult relatives and friends” (Madsen, 2006, p. 106) and such influence played an important role for their development of trust and confidence. Madsen’s research, along with Pope’s (2008) data introduced in Chapter 2 that 66% of Asians hold higher education degrees, is consistent with the Asian women’s stories. Their family’s value of education played an important role in support to obtain advanced degrees to qualify for executive positions. Although family support for education was a common theme among all women and it helped to create foundational qualifications, there was no evidence that this was directly related to career advancement. Further research is needed to explore a potential linkage.

**Structural Category**

In the structural category, two themes emerged from the interviews. One was a formal and structured leadership development consideration for aspiring candidates and the other is related to the selection processes for academic institutions seeking to diversify their executive leadership. Two conclusions were drawn from each theme and described in the following section.

**Conclusion 2:** Formal leadership development training that included practical case studies in crisis management, and media training enhanced candidate readiness and confidence.

Formal leadership development programs that were identified by Asian women to be helpful for their career development were crisis management case studies and media training. Case studies were done in group settings so they were able to explore various solutions and approaches. Going over different crisis situations that actually had taken place in US higher education provided interviewees opportunities to think through various scenarios and exchange
ideas. These discussions raised the level of preparedness and familiarity of a situation in case of emergency and also provided an opportunity to establish processes and communication protocol. Amy is a strong believer of formal training and indicated that crisis management training was critical to navigate crisis situations when they later occurred in her institution.

Three of the interviewees specifically talked about media training being helpful as a part of leadership training. Media training where Cindy was videotaped assuming the role of a president in a crisis and the subsequent critique session by participants gave her confidence. That said, Cindy confided that this was a stressful and uncomfortable process at the time. In addition, this training increased self-awareness of how she would appear on camera and how she needs to change certain looks and behavior. Cindy commented how feedback from the media training resulted in cutting her hair short to look older.

From Mezirow’s critical theory perspective, both crisis management training and media training provided Asian women with opportunities of content, process and premise reflection. In content reflection, interviewees evaluate a crisis situation (content issue) using their own frame of reference. In process reflection, interviewees explore options of strategies that they would use to solve issues surrounding a crisis. Transformative learning happens when participants are being critiqued or others provide different perspectives. It causes interviewees to evaluate the importance of issues and reflect on their own assumptions or question their own thought processes. Interviewees’ stories suggested that practice and role play oriented training created an artificial, but useful, critical incident in which to reflect, learn and gain confidence to deal with real situations.

Conclusion 3: Structural changes are needed in leadership selection processes.
Another conclusion within the structural category drawn from interviews was that structural changes are needed in leadership selection processes. This conclusion is not directly tied to personal leadership development. However, as successful leaders reflected on their experience, this theme emerged as a possible structural hindrance. Elisabeth and Barbara talked about search committees and board members not being representative of diverse populations. It was also articulated that most of the leadership position descriptions look the same. Interviewees’ comments were consistent with Hune’s (1997) articles introduced in Chapter 2. She indicated that ultimate decision makers for the selection of executive leadership teams were dominated by historical ethnic representation and need improvement.

**Contextual Category**

In the contextual category, one theme was developed in relation to leadership style and gender bias. All women described their leadership style to be facilitative and inclusive. They indicated that in some cases, preconceived notions of what strong leaders should look like and youthful looks hindered them from getting advancement opportunities. However, interviewees overcame perceptual hindrances by demonstrating their skills and knowledge. They also suggested using the perception of Asian women being submissive and quiet to their advantage by demonstrating more assertive behavior as the conclusion in the next section highlights.

Crippen states that “the old leadership paradigm of the 19th and early 20th centuries suggested three particular beliefs” (2004, p. 12). These three included the beliefs that 1) Leaders have profound impact on the success of organizations, 2) leaders are born, not made and 3) leaders shun mistakes (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997). Even though recent leadership theories still are aligned in the foundational belief that leadership has an impact on followers and
organizations, this traditional, mainstream leadership concept has shifted to consider alternative leadership styles which involved strong ethics, self-reflection and values.

The findings of this research uncovered the fit of flexible leadership, servant leadership and culturally implicit endorsed leadership with the profile of Asian women candidates for executive leadership roles. First, from a cultural perspective it was hypothesized that Asian women will typically act with humility and a service attitude that is cultivated from early learning experiences, both in education and personal life situations. Second, it was hypothesized that women may typically represent a more empathetic and indirect style than men when faced with challenges and crisis situations. Based on the interviews, all described their leadership style as “facilitative”, “inclusive”, or “collaborative.” Amy and Barbara specifically talked about “situational leadership” where they use different skills in different circumstances.

Javidan, et al (2010) indicated that cultural background impacts how people view outstanding leadership when discussing cultural endorsed implicit leadership theory. US higher education institutions have a tendency to prefer innovation, lower power distance and independent leaders. In a society with high power distance, such as Asian countries, people in positions of power are expected to provide decisions and direction for followers. This cultural expectation may be one of the reasons why it is difficult to cultivate top leaders among people with Asian cultural influence. Considering the concept of shared leadership, however, some researchers believe that shared leadership, focused on institutional collectivism, will positively impact organizational change (Kezar, 2000). If so, leaders from Asian cultures should perform well since Asians tend to focus more on institutional collectivist values and encourage harmony among people. Since cultural endorsed implicit leadership theory encourages the consideration of followers’ perceptions as part of measuring effective leaders, shared leadership may also be
valued in higher education working environments given the large numbers of constituencies served by a university president and executive leaders.

The cultural endorsed implicit leadership theory implies that there may be a bias towards Asian women that is blocking professional advancement. Asian women may be perceived to be small, quiet and younger or less experienced than their actual qualifications. Exploring the relationship among physical appearance, perceived cultural perception and leadership position may provide additional information that are not often discussed nor addressed.

In the literature review of this research, some articles discussed potential bias towards Asian women from linguistic and physical perspectives (Turner, 2007). None of the interviewees discussed challenges they faced due to language accent, but a couple of interviewees discussed a hindrance from youthful appearance. Accents and linguistic issues may not have been captured in this research due to the fact that three of the interviewees were Asian American born in the USA and the other two women came from Asian countries where English is used as one of the dominant languages.

What is the positive impact that Asian women could potentially add to the mix of an existing leadership team? Tjeldvoll (2010) indicates in his research on Confucian influence on leadership that Asians tend to “have deep respect for education as a value”, “assume to have more readiness and acceptance for competitive behavior in education” and “acceptance of hierarchy and orders from above which will bring efficiency”. Confucius belief is also considered to be the source of “cultural refinement, combining intellectual and moral virtues” (Garrett, 1993). Neilson and Suyemoto (2009) assert an “Asian work style has been described as contextual, indirect, inner directed and self-reliant, while the predominant work style among white males is hierarchical, controlling, aggressive and oriented towards win-lose outcomes”. As
globalization of education becomes more widespread and as many US institutions try to recruit international students from Asia, it is important for US higher education to embrace cultural diversity in the leadership team and include people who understand and support Asian cultural values (Tjelvoll, 2010).

Conclusion 4: Develop the ability to articulate and make assertive contributions may raise visibility and positive perceptions of aspiring candidates for executive roles.

A key differentiation of the interviewed candidates was their willingness and ability to contribute with articulate and assertive points, breaking expectations based on Asian women likely being quiet in group environments. Debbie even used the words “wow factor” to describe the impressions created when successfully interjecting in team meetings. Several interviewees noted their ability to flexibly shift to a more directive style when needed to address urgent issues and needs. Aspiring candidates should take note of the importance of demonstrating leadership potential through their active participation in groups, even if this means practicing behavior that may be uncomfortable at first. Stories from successful Asian women leaders stress the importance of being able to establish oneself as a confident and capable peer among other candidates.

This conclusion highlights an opportunity for aspiring candidates to reflect on their ability to constructively contribute. Whether a contribution is perceived as positive is directly related to the quality of the input. As a development exercise, candidates may reflect on their experience base to formulate the content of their comments. Effectively timed contributions can showcase the ability of a person to be facilitative, inclusive and collaborative leader.
Motivational Category

In the motivational category, internal thought processes were extracted from interviews demonstrating the interviewees’ reflection, determination and commitment. Two conclusions were drawn from two themes developed in this category.

Conclusion 5: Leadership challenges provided opportunities to reflect and confirm strong personal values.

Astin and Leland (1991) posited that “leaders emerge from the critical interplay of personal values and commitments, special circumstances or historical influences, and personal events that motivate and mobilize people’s actions.” (p. 66) The research findings support that Asian women leaders had strong core values. Three interviewees described defining moments when their values were tested in making difficult decisions when they had to confront their bosses or difficult colleagues. Amy, Debbie and Elisabeth talked about challenges when they had to stick to their values even though people around them did not agree or support their decision at the time. It required time and maturity to gain understanding from people around them as they were not able to discuss details on confidential personnel matters. Both interviewees highlighted that these experiences were defining moments where they repeatedly went back to confirm their personal values and guiding principles. In the case of Amy, she was ready to leave her position if it came to choosing between her principle and her job.

Barbara, Cindy and Elisabeth noted balancing family needs as one of the most challenging decisions in their careers. Lepkowski’s (2009) research introduced in Chapter 2 indicated that career aspirations for leadership positions between men and women have no difference, except that women felt more constrained on geographic mobility. Even though
Lepkowski’s research was conducted in the Minnesota Colleges and Universities system, interviewees’ comments had shown similar struggles.

In both cases, managing difficult people issues and balancing family needs, interviewees reflected and confirmed their personal values. Looking through Mezirow’s theoretical lens of reflection, critical reflection reaffirmed their values and helped them decide not to waiver on their guiding principles despite others’ criticism or surrounding situations.

**Conclusion 6: Leadership Development came through willingness to take career risks by interviewing or accepting stretch positions to learn.**

Another theme that emerged from interviews was that the majority of the Asian women leaders took risks by applying for stretch positions or new areas to expand their skills and knowledge. They all had big, audacious goals and shared high aspirations to make a difference in society or for education. Amy indicated that many women she has met talk about their fears and become imprisoned by their fears.

“What if I try and I am not successful?” I say to them, Eleanor Roosevelt says “you have to be fair and have fear and the faith.” You have to feel the fear and handle it head on. You have to think about what is the worst thing that would happen. She encouraged aspiring women not to get boxed in by fear nor perpetuate cultural stereotypes by denying their skills and ability.

Another example related to taking a risk to reach for a stretch position was when Barb took a presidency at a different university rather than waiting for the president to retire at her current university where she was serving as the Vice President. She did not get the presidency, but the experience gave her affirmation that she was ready for the job. It also gave her confidence and strategy to prepare for rigorous search processes. Similarly, Debbie decided to apply for a president’s position thinking that her interview experience may benefit her when she
would actually go for a number one position in the future. She prepared for the job, but she went into the interview knowing it was a stretch position. She actually was given the assignment, demonstrating the value of preparation and risk taking.

In almost every case where a stretch position was considered, the prospective candidate received encouragement from her mentors and personal networks. Candidates went through a period of self-reflection of their situations and readiness before entering the selection process. It is important for aspiring candidates to listen carefully for encouragement and direction to help build confidence that can overcome hesitancy as part of a successful leadership development journey.

**Mezirow’s Critical Reflection and Asian Women Executives’ Experience**

This research used Mezirow’s Critical Reflection as the primary lens to understand how Asian women executives described their leadership development experience. The key question was “Did critical reflection happen during the course of their leadership development journey?” McCall (2008) indicated that as a foundation of learning, one needs to have the “ability to learn and motivation to improve (p. 704). In this regards, all interviewees articulated their desire and passion for learning and improvement. Amy called it a “commitment to excellence.” Mezirow (1997) indicated that reflection processes tend not to be linear, but rather cyclical. The deeper self-awareness, which often follows by behavioral or attitudinal change, can be sudden and immediate or could be a slower process. As described in the literature review in Chapter 2, Mezirow described three types of reflection: content, process and premise.
The researcher found that levels of reflection did occur and were articulated during the interviews. Each interviewee provided comments related to experiences where they tried to make sense of a situation, weighing options, checking the situation against their personal values, and making decisions. Critical reflection often involves challenges which question basic values or social and cultural practice. In many cases, the interviewees described challenges as “defining” moment/experience, “formative” test experience or “very difficult situation [in my career]” where they internally struggled. A contextual example from each interviewee is shown in Table 27.

In the first row of the table, the disorienting dilemma is described. In Amy and Elisabeth’s case, they were faced with difficult personnel issues. Debbie also shared a similar challenge with managing her superior as one of her “formative” experiences. As for Barbara, she talked a couple of times during the interviews about how she learned a lot from observing both good and bad leadership and reflecting on that during her graduate studies. She took
information and reflected how it may apply to her career and the kind of leader she wanted to be. Cindy gave examples of deciding to be more assertive in meetings and with elder superiors even though that was in conflict with her upbringing. In all cases, interviewees experienced dilemma which caused emotional triggers to create new meaning to the situation they faced. While they did not name these as “critical reflection”, the dynamics of their thought processes and actions are consistent with Mezirow’s construct of reflection and transformative learning.
Table 29: Examples which support with Mezirow’s Critical Reflection Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mezirow's Critical Reflection examples</th>
<th>Amy</th>
<th>Barbara</th>
<th>Cindy</th>
<th>Debbie</th>
<th>Elisabeth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situation: Disorienting Dilemma</strong></td>
<td>Renowned faculty members were being divisive</td>
<td>Considering good and bad leadership examples during grad school experience</td>
<td>Deciding to be assertive in meetings and challenging superiors</td>
<td>Dealing with a difficult boss</td>
<td>Firing a tenured professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process Reflection</strong></td>
<td>Reflecting on whether action was necessary and possible implications</td>
<td>Learning from best practices or worse practices. Used mentors as a sounding board.</td>
<td>Whether to follow family values of letting elders speak first versus asserting perspectives;</td>
<td>Deciding whether to confront the situation; Reached out to lots of help from various mentors.</td>
<td>Reflecting on whether action was necessary and possible implications. Followed processes….there was a lot of alarm and a lot of anxiety in our faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Premise Reflection</strong></td>
<td>&quot;Compromising personal value was not acceptable for the sake of agreeing. I was ready to leave the university, if it came to that….In other words, you have to know inside of yourself.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I was never struck by lightning of &quot;ah-ha!&quot;. It gave me an opportunity to do some reflection about all of the things that have happened in my career and the role models and mentors that I observed and worked with.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;We have to develop a strategy, which sometimes goes against who we are and how we have been raised&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;It was not a positive experience at the time, but something I could look back on and say I learned a lot about both how I want to be and how I do not want to be as a boss, as a leader, and what my values are through that experience.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I struggled through the moments when I couldn't talk about it, I couldn't tell anybody about the reasons, and yet I had to take action….So the issue of making the right decision at the right time, even when it seems that the odds are against you, that you might make yourself unpopular, I think is a very important thing.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The six conclusions identified in this research were drawn from the data analysis of the narrative stories of leadership development journeys. All but one of them has an identifiable connection to Reflection Theory as summarized in Table 28. A common factor among several conclusions is the importance of self-awareness which can be evaluated through individual reflection, the feedback of mentors or the structured environment of leadership development training. Conclusion 3 highlights the potential need for change in selection criteria and process in executive search to affect change in diversity results. Conclusions 4 and 5 are experience-derived insights from the successful careers of interviewed Asian women executives and provide specific directive advice to aspiring candidates.
Table 30: Connections of Conclusions to Reflection Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Connection to Reflection Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Conclusion 1: Mentors and personal networks are important informal leadership development for Asian women to achieve executive positions.</td>
<td>Mentors create opportunities for self-reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Conclusion 2: Formal leadership development training that included practical case studies in crisis management, and media training enhanced candidate readiness and confidence</td>
<td>Effective leadership training creates opportunity for increasing self-awareness through feedback and reflection (learning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Conclusion 3: Structural changes are needed in leadership selection processes.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>Conclusion 4: Develop skills to articulate and make assertive contributions may raise visibility and positive perceptions of aspiring candidates for executive roles.</td>
<td>Requires understanding external perceptions and considering the impact of changing behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>Conclusion 5: Leadership challenges provided opportunities to reflect and confirm strong personal values</td>
<td>Reaffirmation of values after premise reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>Conclusion 6: Leadership development came through willingness to take career risks by interviewing or accepting stretch positions to learn</td>
<td>Content reflection to make sense of one’s readiness for an opportunity and/or from interview feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Amy’s interview comments summed up the leadership development journey and connection to critical reflection well.

The higher you go, the harder it is because everything you do has consequences. There is a positive and there is a negative. If you are not getting negative consequences, you are probably not making big decisions. If you are really making big decisions, there are always a small proportion of people who do not agree with you. I think the key here is that to be able to work with your patience and try to minimize your limitations…and
maximize your strength. It is like a balancing act and it is always very tough. (The) most difficult battle is the battle with yourself. (Amy)

**Implications for practice**

Findings from this doctoral thesis present two areas of implications for practice; one is for aspiring candidates for career advancement and the other is for institutions striving for executive leadership diversification. It is important to consider implications from both of these perspectives to cultivate an increased opportunity for transformative change.

The most important practice implication for aspiring candidates is to actively seek opportunities to increase self-awareness and perspective. Aspiring candidates can learn from the stories and guidance from successful Asian women as their examples and advice contain specific, actionable direction. Options identified in this research to increase awareness and perspective included self-reflection, mentor feedback and role playing-based training. Asian women executives suggested that leadership development training should include both formal and informal trainings. The most helpful leadership development training programs for aspiring executive candidates may be role playing simulations assuming crisis situations and media training since they create an opportunity for reflection and increasing self-awareness. Crisis management training appeared to be effective when conducted in group settings where participants shared different perspectives and explored best solutions. The training examples included videotaping and group feedback which served as a structured reflective moment.

Informal leadership development opportunities include expanding personal networks and creating informal mentoring relationships with multiple people. Interviewees indicated that mentors should not be limited to Asian women, but rather, should include different ethnicities and genders for broader insights and perspectives. Informal development opportunities can be established through personal or professional networks, but what is important is to maintain
regular contacts and nurture trusting, long-term relationships. Aspiring candidates need to take personal ownership for developing supportive relationships.

Another practice implication for aspiring candidates was to be more assertive in group and meeting contexts. In balance, though, there was a perspective to not be too assertive or risk being perceived as a “dragon lady”. The target is to become “constructively assertive”, where comments add valuable perspectives to discourse and increase the credibility of the speaker. For example, Asian women could use phrases like, “Another thing to consider is…” or “Another way to look at this is…” to demonstrate their ability to provide different perspectives. It may also be effective to say “From my experience (perspective)…..” to establish the value of one’s own experience. Finally, it is advisable for Asian women candidates to be prepared to take calculated career risks to test stretch opportunities where they meet minimum qualifications. It was suggested that mentor networks can help provide a “reality-check” on whether a stretch position is within current reach for an aspiring candidate. One interviewee encouraged candidates to articulate their aspirations and interests to their superiors to create awareness of their career ambitions.

Academic institutions must also take an active role in creating the context for cultivating future leaders with diverse backgrounds. While candidates own the accountability for their mentor relationships and networks, institutions can consider formalized programs and structures to make introductions and facilitate the process of mentor and network establishment for promising candidates. The engagement of early career candidates in broader networks may increase retention.

Academic institutions interested in diversifying their executive leadership demographics can also actively appoint search committee members with diversity to impact the direction of an
executive search. Reviewing job descriptions for candidates and discussing long term strategies on how to create leadership teams with diverse perspectives will be necessary to bring in better fitted candidates to fulfill the mission of universities. The selection criteria will also need to be evaluated to ensure that facilitative leadership skills and cross-cultural sensitivity are appropriately valued in balance with traditional models of leadership that may be biased towards a predominantly male perspective.

Academic institutions can also focus on improving leadership development training. Interviewees reinforced the most meaningful programs included significant role-playing and feedback mechanisms. These mechanisms create opportunities for reflection and increased self-awareness among aspiring candidates.

While the above implications for practice were drawn directly from interviewee input, the researcher also recognized the challenges in identifying women aspiring for these types of roles. Academic institutions may face similar challenges in identifying and recruiting Asian women candidates. From the researcher’s experience, organizations mentioned in this study such as LEAP and APAHE may be helpful resources for institutions and search firms to identify potential candidates. In the case of the LEAP conference for example, participants are required to gain endorsement from their university leadership as potential future leaders in order to attend the training conference.

Future research

The research on Asian women leaders in higher education is limited. Due to the small number of current Asian women executives in US higher education, it was difficult to generalize conclusions to a larger population. It may be beneficial to conduct similar research among Asian women in US higher education who are in dean, director, and department chair positions to
compare differences and similarities of their experiences. It may also be valuable to conduct a similar narrative study of Asian women in US higher education who are under the age of thirty five to understand their experiences and career ambitions and to identify candidates aspiring to executive positions for a longer term study. A further longitudinal study of these high potential, rising Asian candidates may provide useful insight by tracking the leadership development choices that they make and the related career outcomes over an extended period of time. Useful insights may also be gained from analyzing minority leadership populations and impacts in corporate settings in a comparative study to infer relevant implications for higher education leadership.

Additionally, this research is important for academic institutions to consider selection processes and the development of next generation leadership in US higher education. Some articles discuss structural inequalities in the hiring process between men and women (Borkowski, 1988; Chronicle of Higher Education, 2005; Lindsay, 1999). Candidate development and the exact selection processes for university presidents are often not transparent. As Barbara pointed out, most position descriptions for university president roles look very similar regardless of the institution. Research that identifies objective selection and recruitment strategies could help even the playing field for new entrants. That research could focus on analyzing the criteria and weighting of criteria used in executive leadership selection to identify if there are inherent biases that are propagated by the process itself. Another future research topic that may add useful insight could examine the impact of diverse board member profiles and diverse search committees on executive leader position selection outcomes in US higher education and compare these to traditional approaches.
While mentors and networks were noted as critically important to development, no one mentioned the role of emerging social networks to facilitate communication and relationship development. This could be related to the relatively recent emergence and use of these capabilities. It could be hypothesized that such online networks will play an increasingly important role. Future research that evaluates the power and influence of online communities in helping aspiring candidates prepare for executive roles would add perspective to existing research.

Finally, in the conclusions section of this chapter it was identified that future quantitative research could evaluate whether there is any linkage between family value of education and successful leadership development.
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Appendix A

Introduction Letter to Participant

Mamiko Reeves
Student Researcher, Northeastern University
Telephone: 989-859-5350 (cell)
Email: reeves.m@husky.neu.edu

Date
Recipient
Title
Address

Dear xxxxx,

I am a doctorate student pursuing an Ed. D. in Organizational Leadership and Communication from Northeastern University. I am conducting a doctoral dissertation study on the subject of Asian women executives in US higher education. Asian women are underrepresented in US higher education leadership roles in proportion to the potential, qualified candidate population. One way to address this gap is to capture stories of successful Asian women who have obtained executive positions despite the odds. I am interested in having you participate in this study. Enclosed is a summary sheet that provides an executive summary of my research.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. Even if you begin, you may quit at any time.

I will be in contact with your office during the next week to request your participation. Thank you so much for your consideration and I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,
Mamiko Reeves

Enclosure: Executive Summary of doctorate study
Executive summary

Principal Investigator: Dr. Margaret Gorman Kirchoff, Northeastern University
Student Researcher: Mamiko Reeves


Dissertation Purpose Statement: The purpose of this dissertation research is to capture the leadership development journeys of successful Asian women Higher Education Leaders. Specifically, a narrative research approach will be used to uncover the stories of these women as they reflect on their leadership paths.

Dissertation Research Question: How do Asian women leaders in US higher education describe their leadership development journey?

Problem Statement: The exploration of unrepresented groups into top management positions has been a focus for scholars for over 50 years, yet little new insights have been provided. In particular, the under-representation of Asian women leaders remains disproportional to the increase in advanced degrees by this group (American Council of Education, 2013). Understanding the journeys, choices, and perceived opportunities by successful Asian women leaders in Higher Education might provide new insights about ways to design developmental opportunities for future leaders.

Dissertation Theoretical Framework

This study will be conducted with a qualitative approach using Mezirow’s (2003) Critical Reflection Theory as a primary lens. Many researchers discuss reflection and self-awareness being an important foundation of leadership development (Dewey, 1997; Denton, 2011; Schwandt, 2005). Reflection requires higher-order thinking, and promotes and reinforces connection between experience and meaning (Denton, 2011). Mezirow indicates that “transformational learning is a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings and actions” (Transformative Learning Center, 2013) and critical self-reflection inspires new meaning schemes to emerge which will result in the learner seeing the world differently from what was previously experienced.

This research will examine whether critical reflection played a significant role in the leadership development of successful Asian women executives.

Interpretive qualitative analysis will be appropriate as Asian women leaders’ experience and stories will be captured as the main source of data collection and interviewees construct their own meanings or interpretations of their life experiences (Creswell, 2013). An inductive approach will be applied to allow new themes to emerge from the data.
**Research Design** Narrative Research will be conducted using a semi-structured three round interview protocol based on leadership development perspectives with five Asian women currently in executive leadership roles at US higher education institutions.

Phase I "Document review" – This initial data collection will include collection of resume to better understand background information such as current position, past positions, training, education, etc.

Phase II "Leadership Journey-critical events" – A second phase will be 60-90 minutes interviews with participants. This purpose is to obtain a sense of any critical events, people, training, experiences that shaped their personal leadership development. More in-depth questions will be asked regarding their past paths and turns that may have affected their career path.

Phase III "Reflections" – Individual profiles will be developed and shared during the third interview to receive feedback. Interviewees’ perceptions of leadership development and their leadership styles will be discussed. Interviewees will be asked to provide development advice for other Asian women who aspire to obtain leadership positions in US higher education.

Capturing in-depth stories from interviewing Asian women leaders will provide insights for future career planning among aspiring Asian women as well as provide insights for university human resources personnel and search committees.

**Key Terms and Definitions**

Asian women executives (leaders) – Asian Women who are in executive leadership positions in US higher education including President, Chancellor, Provost, Vice President, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Academic Officer, and Chief Financial Officer.

US higher education – Universities and community colleges in the United States which are licensed to provide academic instruction.

Transformational learning – Learning process where people become critically aware of how and why their presuppositions have come to constrain the way they perceive and understand and feel about the world (Mezirow, 1997).

Critical incident – An incident which occurred in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects (Flanagan, 1954)

Critical reflection – Reflection process which is disruptive and uncomfortable as the learner is forced into seeing the world differently than previously accepted (Davis, 2006).

Learning - the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience (Kolb, 1984, p. 41)

Leadership development - a formal and informal process that is intended to maximize institutional and individual effectiveness (Cloud, 2010).
Reflection: The process by which an individual creates and/or validates the meaning of observations and past experience (Mezirow, 1990).

References


Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University: Ed.D Organizational Leadership and Communication
Name of Investigator:
Dr. Margaret Gorman Kirchoff, Principal Investigator
Mamiko Reeves, Student Researcher


Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell me if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are invited to participate in a research study on Leadership journeys of Asian women executives in US higher education. You were selected because you serve as one of the top executives in your academic institution representing a small number of Asian women leaders in US higher education. Your experience and stories will provide insight for aspiring candidates as well as academic institutions who wish to diversify their leadership positions.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this dissertation research is to capture the leadership development journeys of successful Asian women leaders in US higher education. Specifically, a narrative research approach will be used to uncover stories as interviewees reflect on their leadership paths.

What will I be asked to do?
You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview to capture a narrative story of your “leadership journey and critical events.” This interview will be 60-90 minutes in length with the purpose to obtain a sense of any critical events, people, or training experiences that shaped personal leadership development. More in-depth questions will be asked regarding your past paths and turns that may have affected your career. The interview will be scheduled face to face where circumstances allow so that observations may be collected on work environment, leadership style and organization. If a face to face interview is not possible, interviews will be scheduled using a technology such as Skype, Microsoft Live, Lync or Go-to-meetings.

You retain the right to decline answering any questions at any time. In the second phase of interviews, individual profiles will be developed and shared with participants to receive feedback and check the accuracy of transcription and interpretations. Interviewees’ perceptions of
leadership development and leadership styles will be discussed. Interviewees will be asked to make recommendations for aspiring Asian women who would like to advance their careers.

You may be contacted at a later date for follow up questions or for clarification. Prior to the Phase III interview, you will be sent a transcription in order to check for accuracy and/or clarity. You may request a summary or final report on the findings. Interview questions are included here.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
You will be interviewed at a time and place that is convenient for you. There will be two interviews. The main semi-structured interview will take about 60-90 minutes. After the initial analysis, I will mail you a transcription and analysis to check accuracy and schedule a follow up video conference for 20-30 minutes.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There will not likely be any serious risk in participating in the interviews although there may be a discomfort as you reflect on the past to describe any challenges in your life.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may contribute to an increased number of Asian women leaders in US higher education in the future.

Who will see the information about me?
Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being part of this project.

The researcher will take every precaution to keep all information confidential. Research data is used only for reporting of the findings. Pseudonyms will be used for interviewees to protect identity and institution names will not be disclosed. The research will only mention institutional types, such as four year research institution. Audiotapes, transcriptions and other identifying information will be kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to me for up to three years. After three years, all data will be destroyed. Please be aware that direct quotes will be used in the final report.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. I would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?
No special arrangements will be made for compensation solely because of your participation in this research.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. At any point in time, you may withdraw from this study without explanation, penalty or consequences of any kind. Your participation or nonparticipation will not affect your relationship with Northeastern University or any other organization.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Margaret Gorman Kirchoff, Principal Investigator, Northeastern University at mdkirchoff@gmail.com or Mamiko Reeves, student researcher at reeves.m@husky.neu.edu 989-859-5350 (cell).

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?
No remuneration will be offered to the participants.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
There will be no cost to participate in this study.

I agree to take part in this research.

______________________________  _______________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part                    Date

______________________________
Printed name of person above

______________________________  _______________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the Participant above and obtained consent

______________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix C

Interview Questions

Research Question: How do Asian women in US higher education describe their leadership development journey?

Sub Question: What are Asian women leaders’ perceptions of any social, structural, or contextual influences that enhanced or hindered their developmental experience?

Introductory question:

Could you please describe your current position, your role and responsibilities?

a) How do Asian women leaders describe critical incidents that may have disrupted previous beliefs and knowledge?

- What is important to you as a leader of the US academic institution? What is your personal value that you bring to your workplace?
- How do you describe your leadership style?
- Were there any changes in your perspectives on leadership styles based on your experience?
- Were there any memorable moments or critical incidents which affected your leadership development journey?
- How did your thoughts/beliefs change after the critical incidents? Did you make any behavioral changes?
- Was there anyone in particular who affected your decision to move up the career ladder?

b) How do they describe intentional leadership development activity? i.e. mentors, training, etc.

- There are various training tools used for leadership development such as 360 degree feedback, coaching, mentoring, and action learning. Did you have any formal opportunity to go through these intentional leadership development activities? If so, what activities were helpful and why?
- Was your obtaining your current position intentional or was it relatively unplanned?
- What were some of your formal and informal leadership development training that helped you obtain your current position?
- What kind of training experiences prepared you?
- What thoughts or belief encouraged you to apply for your current position?
- What were some of the hard decisions that you had to make in obtaining the position?
c) How do they describe experiences in their career where heritage and/or cultural context may have impacted their belief, behavior and decision making in the context of leadership development?

- What was some of the messages you received from your family growing up? Did it affect you when you were making career choices?
- Model minority is a term used to describe certain ethnic minority group who is perceived to achieve educational and economic success compared with average population. Bamboo Ceiling is the word coined by Jane Hyun as a combination of individual, cultural, and organizational factors that impede Asian Americans’ career progress inside organizations. How relevant were these terms in your career?
- Was there any challenges or opportunities that you experienced because of your ethnic background or gender?
- How would you describe your relationship with your family of origin, spouse or your immediate family?

"Reflections" — Interviewees’ perceptions of leadership development and their leadership styles will be discussed. Advise for aspiring women.

- What do you think is important component of formal or informal leadership development for Asian women candidates?
- What would be your advice on the aspiring women who would like to obtain executive position in US higher education?
- What would you advise for US institution which would like to diversify their leadership make up in their organization?
Appendix D

Key Terms and Definitions

**Asian Women Executive Leaders** – Women leaders who are in executive leadership positions in US higher education including President, Chancellor, Vice President, Provost, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Academic Officer, and Chief Financial Officer.

**US Higher Education** – Universities and community colleges in the United States which are licensed to provide academic instruction.

**Critical Incident** – An incident which occurred in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects (Flanagan, 1954)

**Critical Reflection** – Reflection process which is disruptive and uncomfortable as the learner is forced into seeing the world differently than previously accepted (Davis, 2006).

**Discourse** – A process in which adult learners have an active dialogue with others to better understand the meaning of an experience, weighing evidence and assessing the cogency of supporting arguments (Mezirow, 2000, p. 26).

**Learning** – A process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984)

**Leader Development** - The expansion of a person’s capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes promoting individual development and personal growth. (Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004, p. 2)
**Leadership Development** - The expansion of an organization’s capacity to enact the basic leadership tasks needed for collective work; setting goals, creating alignment, and maintaining commitment” (Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004, p. 18) A formal and informal process that is intended to maximize institutional and individual effectiveness (Cloud, 2010).

**Meaning Perspective** - The structure of cultural and psychological assumptions within our past experience assimilates and transforms new experience (Mezirow, 1985, p. 21)

**Meaning Scheme** - The constellation of concept, belief, judgment, and feeling which shapes a particular interpretation (Mezirow, 1994, p. 223.)
Appendix E

Mind Mapping for Analytical Questions and Interview Questions
Appendix F

Initial Organization of Open Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>short summary of comments</th>
<th>(Manual process) combining into categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strong belief in education</td>
<td>Access to Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going into HE was given</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>want to do something big</td>
<td>Ambition and passion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can do better than others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion for excellence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work with others</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration with others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration = family influence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mentoring was helpful</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>call mentor when needed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>multiple mentors needed (various purpose, both gender)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>case study (crisis management) training</td>
<td>Formal leadership training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>media training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvard University President training (case study)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaborative style</td>
<td>Leadership style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>situational leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>democratic, delegation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empower others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facilitative leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coaching others</td>
<td>Formal leadership training for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regular mentoring sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>continuous improvement</td>
<td>Life long learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>life long learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>try new things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>keep working at it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult faculty - write up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>needed to report up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>could not talk about what was happening</td>
<td>Negative experience/challenges (critical moment???)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family relocation was the hardest decision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried about spouse's job</td>
<td>Personal value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excellence is important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transparency is important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mission of the university is important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work with others is important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - not many woman in the leadership</td>
<td>Asian experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>did not meet typical Asian profile</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>had to do a lot more than men</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looked young and cut hair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wide network of people</td>
<td>External influence. Wide network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>connection is important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>executive search firm called me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My boss noticed me and recommended me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation was serendipitous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn by observing others</td>
<td>Advise for candidates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tried something that I never thought about</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have minimum credential being important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>letting boss know that you are interested</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>look at not direct line, but side line</td>
<td>Advise for institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give opportunity to Asian women (risk taking)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>intentionally think about diversity</td>
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Appendix G

Data Analysis List of Nodes

**Node Structure**

**Asian women interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hierarchical Name</th>
<th>Nickname</th>
<th>Aggregate</th>
<th>User Assigned Color</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>Ambitious, Passion</td>
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<td>Challenges</td>
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<tr>
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<td>None</td>
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<td>Commitment to Excellence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment to the University Mission</td>
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<td>Critical moment</td>
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<td>External influence</td>
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<td>Formal Leadership Training Development</td>
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<td>Formal Leadership Training Development\Mentoring and coaching</td>
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<td>Integrity</td>
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<td>Leadership Style</td>
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<td>Life Long learning</td>
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<td>Negative experience</td>
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<td>Personal Value\Value for Education</td>
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<td>Reflection</td>
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Appendix H

Nvivo Coding Summary by Nodes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aggregate</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
<th>Number Of Coding References</th>
<th>Reference Number</th>
<th>Coded By</th>
<th>Modified On</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Nodes\Commitment to the University Mission

Document

Internals\Interviewee Barbara

No 0.0072 1

1 MR 5/2/2014 10:41 PM

One is a commitment to the mission of community colleges. That’s important for leadership in community colleges. I would say the same if you were at a comprehensive university, a research one. It certainly a strong leader would have a deep commitment and belief in the mission and the values of that institution.

Internals\Interviewee Debbie

No 0.0126 2

1 MR 5/5/2014 12:21 AM

I believe that higher education can be a transformational experience in that it’s the job of colleges and universities to hone on an ongoing basis and develop what it is in the current moment for an institution to create and deliver a transformational experience relationship between a liberal arts college and what is traditionally called the real world or the outside world and to make something we can break down the barriers.

Nodes\Critical moment

Document

Internals\Interviewee Amy

No 0.0090 2

1 MR 5/2/2014 7:56 PM

i learned a lot about myself and I also learned a lot about how to be a better leader. so, I will give one example, I would say this is probably a defining moment for me.

2 MR 5/2/2014 8:02 PM
The higher you go, the harder it is because everything you do has consequences. There is a positive and there is a negative. If you are not getting negative consequences, you are probably not making big decisions. You are really making big decisions, there is always a small proportion of people who do not agree with you.

because I was never struck by lightning of "ah-hah." I think one of the good things ... I was never a good student, because I always was very impatient.

They were removed in saying to me like the students that we were actually serving.

I thought if they could make policy, there are few who are first generation college students who are a lot of diversity around the table. They could sit there and make policy. I certainly should sit there and help them.

I felt like I was closer to the student issues and concern and that’s when I went back to school to get my doctoral degree because I realized that unless I have that, my credibility was always questioned. It was still questioned but it’s less of an issue that sort of get to the table. That’s how I got into administration.
What I bring to the table and what I need others to bring to the table. I don’t know that there’s any particular incident but I came into an environment that was not team-oriented; not entirely. That’s an overstatement. Largely very [inaudible 00:07:18] and ownership-driven and I was interested in building something that was more consensus-driven but not so consensus-driven that it didn’t go anywhere. Something that was consensus-driven but effective.

I would say the most formative test experiences for me were to the leadership style, one was a negative experience so I had a boss with whom I did not get along very well. Figuring out with lots of help from various mentors how to make that a… it’s not a positive experience at the time, something I could look back on and say I learned a lot about both how I want to be and how I do not want to be as a boss, as a leader, and what my values are through that experience.

I moved into a culture that was very much about managing up and really not enough in my view about managing down and out. Being able to see that and then figure out how to work around that was a big project of my time there. It really created more of a culture of managing out and down and spent a lot of time managing up.

Crucial moments that were plunging as well as positive. I’ll give you ones that are challenging experiences, and one that I learned to sometimes make the right decisions, but not everybody knows it’s the right decision.

Personnel issues.

And actually discussing situations, so people don’t always know, or can not always know about the reasons for the decisions you make. And sometimes it takes some time for some people to get to that stage of acknowledging it.