

UNDERSTANDING THE LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS AND BARRIERS TO SUCCESS FOR
ASIAN AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARY LEADERS

BY

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ABSTRACT

As Asian Americans are the fastest-growing U.S. immigrant group and are projected to become the largest immigrant group by 2065, more work will be needed to ensure the library field's demographics reflect the communities we serve (Kim et al., 2021). The lack of representation of Asian Americans in all levels of library work, especially in executive roles, may make it more difficult to create culturally relevant services and programs for these communities (Le, 2021). This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to understand the lived experiences, leadership pathways, and barriers of Asian American public library leaders in California. The target populations of this study were mid- to senior-level East, Southeast, and South Asian American public library leaders who worked in California. The research method was qualitative, the design was phenomenology, and data was collected through individual interviews using purposeful sampling. I examined what these leaders experienced in their leadership pathways in the library field, guided by the following theories: Critical Race Theory, Asian American racial development theory, and the model minority myth. I analyzed and interpreted the data from interview transcripts through coding, a basic qualitative analysis technique, and a detailed explanation of the values of Asian American library leaders, their leadership pathways, and barriers in the library field. The major findings that emerged from the participants' experiences were: (a) navigating racism within the workplace was a part of their professional experiences; (b) intersectionality of identities had an impact on some of their careers; (c) most participants believed that leaders must work hard, develop their voice, and advocate for what is right; and (d) most participants prioritized community interests. This study may benefit communities interested in diversifying their public library staff and leadership (i.e., library leaders and Asian American library staff) as well as library users, who may be looking for

library staff, collections, and programs that represent the diversity of their community. From this study's findings, library leaders and library associations can glean some insight into what kinds of barriers this group faces and identify ways to help encourage more Asian Americans to obtain leadership roles in public libraries.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Despite the profession's core ethics revolving around embracing diversity, American library workers are 88% White, while the White population in the U.S. is 63% (Espinal et al., 2018). In addition to the dearth of diversity in public library staffing, Asian Americans are also the least likely among all race/ethnic groups to become executive leaders (Yu, 2020). According to Yu (2020), the model minority myth, a pervasive stereotype that Asian Americans achieve occupational success and are not disadvantaged minorities, remains a chief impediment for Asian Americans to advance into executive-level positions. Not surprisingly, in the library field, where Asian Americans make up only 3.6% of library staff nationally, there is also a gap in the literature about Asian American leaders in the public library sphere (ALA, 2017). Through my dissertation, I learned about the leadership pathways of Asian American public library leaders. By better understanding the leadership pathways and barriers to success of Asian American public library leaders, current library leaders can examine how they are currently supporting or not supporting leaders in this demographic. My hope is that by increasing one's understanding of this population, we can help remove barriers for future Asian American leaders and other leaders of color in the field.

Study Background/Foundation

Public libraries can play a key role in empowering diverse communities to participate in a democratic society by ensuring that community members have access to a wide variety of information (ALA, 2017a). While public libraries' doors are open to all, people from historically marginalized and excluded groups can encounter significant structural inequities while engaging in these spaces (Cooke, 2017). At the same time, librarians, who are traditionally in charge of developing programs that are available to the public, are significantly less diverse than the public

in general. The library field is overwhelmingly White (88%), female (81%), middle-aged, and middle-class (ALA, 2017; Sonnie, 2018). The homogeneity of the field can also make library workers of color feel isolated, lonely, and contribute to a lack of belonging to the organization (Brown et al., 2018).

Current State of the Field

To remedy the lack of cultural diversity in the library workforce, several measures have been put into place to encourage people from underrepresented backgrounds to get into the field. Since 1997, the American Library Association (ALA), the largest national organization devoted to libraries, has awarded over 1,300 Spectrum Scholarships to Native American, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern and North African, and Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander students in providing financial assistance to help them get a graduate degree and leadership positions within the profession (McClung et al., 2022.) On top of increasing the recruitment and retention rates of librarians of color through financial assistance, the Spectrum Scholarship Program also provides Spectrum Scholars with resources for developing their leadership skills (McClung et al., 2022).

To help recruit and increase support for Asian American library leaders, the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA) and Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA) were created to empower and support library workers in a predominately White field (Gao et al., 2023). According to Gao et al. (2023), CALA partnered with APALA to create a national forum to discuss leadership barriers and opportunities for Asian American and Pacific Islander library workers. Based on their national forum, Gao et al. (2023) created a three-part leadership curriculum to support the leadership development of Asian American and Pacific Islander library workers. This leadership curriculum consisted of (1) identifying and

understanding leadership approaches and how culture can impact one's approach; (2) building community internally and externally; (3) developing self-advocacy and overcoming barriers to leadership (Gao et al., 2023). Inclusive leadership, the practice of leadership that "carefully maximizes the contributions of all stakeholders in the community" by having participants "at the table at multiple levels of the organization and being a valued contributor," is a style that resonated with APIA participants in the forum (Gao et al. 2023, p.15). This outline can create a potential foundation for future CALA and APALA leaders who may be interested in developing a leadership program that focuses on APIA library workers' interest in leadership pathways.

Library workers of color also have access to the Joint Conference of Librarians of Color (JCLC), a professional development event organized by the ethnic affiliate groups and affiliates of the ALA. In a case study about the JCLC, Hines (2020) noted that this conference is considered by participants, organizers, and the ALA to be an influential and supportive professional development environment for library workers of color since its inception in 2006. In 2015, the Joint Council of Librarians of Color, Inc. was formed as a nonprofit organization that advocates for and promotes librarianship within communities of color, collaborates on common issues, and hosts the JCLC every four to five years (Hines, 2020).

Despite the national resources available to support the diversification of the library profession, the profession remains overwhelmingly White and has problems retaining librarians of color (Espinal et al., 2018; Healey-Brooks & Lee, 2022). Librarians of color can sometimes face racial microaggressions or commonplace verbal or behavioral slights, tokenization, and stereotyping that can make their journey in the library field difficult to navigate (Espinal et al., 2018). In a research article about mentorship, Healey-Brooks and Lee (2022) asserted that library workers of color can benefit from having a mentor with a similar background. Still, due to the

lack of diversity in the library field, it can be challenging for new library workers to find a mentor with ample experience. To further support Asian American library leaders, creating spaces to build communities and develop their leadership skills remains important for their growth in the field.

Historical Background

The lack of diversity in the library and information field has been noted since the ALA started hosting ethnic affinity groups in 1970 (Gregory, 2021). These ethnic affinity groups became known as the ethnic caucuses of the ALA. The Black Caucus of the ALA (BCALA), The National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking (REFORMA), the American Indian Library Association (AILA), CALA, and APALA all provide space for library workers of color in a culturally homogeneous field (Gregory, 2021). Over the past 25 years, library workers have had little demographic change despite the good intentions of creating targeted initiatives around diversity, equity, and inclusion, such as conferences, celebratory events, presentations, and scholarly publications (Poole et al., 2021). For Asian American library workers, APALA was created in 1980 specifically to support Asian American and Pacific Islander librarians by serving as a forum for these communities to talk about work-related issues and successes and increasing the visibility of Asian American and Pacific Islander librarians (Yamashita, 2000). APALA's support and advocacy paved the way for Patty Wong, a San Francisco Bay Area-based library director, to be the first Asian American president of the ALA, the nation's oldest organization devoted to libraries, in 2021 (ALA, 2021).

Despite this recent success, Asian American leaders may also still experience unique leadership pathways and barriers due to prevalent stereotypes surrounding communities that may identify as Asian American (Mouton et al., 2020). Asian Americans are also the least likely

among all race/ethnic groups to become leaders (Yu, 2020). Stereotypes can play a powerful role in how groups of people are perceived. For Asian Americans, there are two historical stereotypes of this group of people that have persisted over the years: the model minority myth and the “perpetual foreigner” image (Daley et al., 2022, p. 2). According to an article about anti-bias interventions to promote leadership opportunities for Asian Americans, Mouton et al. (2020) stated that the model minority stereotype is used to describe a group of individuals from a minority group that is perceived to be more hardworking and high achieving than the general population. Unlike many minority groups, the stereotypes of Asian Americans can be complex. On one hand, Asian Americans are seen as fulfilling a model minority stereotype in that they are highly competent, intelligent, and hardworking. On the other hand, Asian Americans can also be seen as unfriendly and poor communicators (Mouton et al., 2020). The positive stereotypes can do harm as a society may feel less compelled to address the racism and discrimination faced by Asian Americans and enact policies that protect them (Mouton et al., 2020). One of the negative stereotypes that Asian Americans face is the “perpetual foreigner” stereotype (Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018, p. 38). In a study that examined the racialized sexism that Asian American women faced in their professional and personal lives, Mukkamala and Suyemoto (2018) stated that participants in their study would often feel like a perpetual foreigner in their environments (p. 38). Participants would indicate that they had felt there was a blanket assumption cast upon them that all Asian Americans were immigrants/foreigners, despite the large diversity of cultures and generational statuses within this group. Both the positive stereotypes and the negative stereotypes over time may contribute to limiting the type of opportunities that can help Asian Americans get into leadership positions in the first place. There are many types of research about librarians of color in general; however, research on Asian American public library leaders

remains limited. The exploration of Asian American library leaders' experiences can inform their leadership pathways, challenges, and barriers in their career trajectories. Chapter 2 includes a detailed discussion and review of the literature on the current issues library leaders face, the racial climate of the library profession, and the racialized climate of Asian American library leaders.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

While the literature provides a solid foundation describing the value of diversity in the library field, Alabi (2018) and Le (2021) stated that there is limited literature on the racial climate of libraries and library leaders of color in general. While some studies on Asian American academic library leaders were found for this study's literature review, no studies focused specifically on the leadership pathways, barriers, and experiences that Asian American public library leaders in general or in California face. Additional information on the experiences of Asian American public library leaders is needed to describe their lived experiences more fully in the United States.

Problem Statement

In the United States, Asian Americans are also the least likely among all race/ethnic groups to become leaders in business, private, or governmental organizations (Yu, 2020). According to Yu (2020), the model minority myth, a pervasive stereotype that Asian Americans achieve occupational success and are not disadvantaged minorities, remains a chief impediment for Asian Americans to advance into leadership positions in organizations in the United States. Not surprisingly, in the library field, where Asian Americans make up only 3.6% of library staff nationally whereas they are 6.4% of the U.S. population, there is also a gap in the literature about Asian American leadership in the public library sphere (ALA, 2017; U.S. Census Bureau,

2024). The underrepresentation of Asian Americans in libraries may impact the field's ability to connect with Asian American communities through culturally and linguistically inclusive programming, collections, and outreach.

More specifically, in California, the demographics paint a similar story. Asian Americans comprise 16.5% of the state population of 39 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). In San Mateo County, where I live, while Asian Americans make up 33.1% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024), anecdotally, no public library directors in the county identify as Asian American. According to Harper (2020), libraries must have diverse individuals working at all organizational levels to encourage diverse and underrepresented patrons to use library services. When there is a lack of cultural diversity in library staffing, it can be more difficult for libraries to create a sense of belonging and cultural recognition for diverse patrons via public library systems' services and programs (Espinal et al., 2018). The sizable Asian American population in California necessitates libraries and their leaders to reflect the populations they serve.

The underrepresentation in both the national landscape and California may also impact the recruitment and retention of Asian American library workers. Harper (2020) shared that Library and Information Science (LIS) students have a stronger preference to approach librarians who most likely resemble them, and this tendency is especially true for those individuals who belong to underrepresented groups. On the retention side, Harper (2020) also shared that creating communal groups of cultural affinity can help librarians of color navigate their profession while still being true to themselves. The underrepresentation of Asian American public library leaders in the field and the gap in the literature on this community create a need for their experiences to be known. These experiences may help the library field better understand what it is like for this

group to navigate predominately White work environments while serving a diverse constituency. Their experiences may also aid our understanding of how this underrepresentation began in the first place. To begin to address the underrepresentation problem, a more nuanced understanding of their experiences and their barriers to success is necessary.

Audience

This study benefits communities interested in diversifying their public library staff and leadership (i.e., library leaders and Asian American library staff). There is limited literature on Asian American public library workers, and this research study will add to this body of knowledge. This study will provide shared experiences and perspectives to Asian American public library workers and leaders. Through this study, individuals interested in diversifying the public library workforce, such as library leaders, can become more aware of the cultural narrative that impacts Asian American library workers. Asian American library workers can learn about the pathways and barriers that may impact their professional journeys. The hope is that this work will ultimately benefit library users, who may be looking for library staff, collections, and programs that represent the diversity of the community.

Specific Leadership Problem

According to the ALA (2024), diversity is one of the profession's core values. For this profession, diversity can be reflected in the "commitment to recruiting people of color and people with disabilities to the profession and the promotion and development of library collections and services for all people" (ALA, 2024, p.1). The modern-day public library strives to be a technology hub, an information center, and a place that hosts a variety of programs that reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. Despite diversity being a core professional value, the demographics of library workers have remained almost virtually unchanged (Brown et

al., 2018). Over the past 20 years, the lack of diversity has pushed the field to examine its involvement with race and racism (Cooke, 2014; Honma, 2005; Riley-Reid, 2017). In the library field, where Asian Americans comprise only 3.6% of library staff nationally, there is also a gap in the literature about Asian American leaders in the public library realm (ALA, 2017). The underrepresentation of library leaders of color in the profession, especially Asian American librarians in leadership roles, is not a new phenomenon and has been addressed in studies since the 1980s (Le, 2021). As Asian Americans are the fastest-growing U.S. immigrant group and are projected to become the largest immigrant group by 2065, more work will be needed to ensure the library field's demographics reflect the communities we serve (Kim et al., 2021). The lack of representation of Asian Americans in all levels of library work, especially in executive roles, may make it more difficult to create culturally relevant services and programs for these communities (Le, 2021). This study contains an examination of what Asian American public library leaders experienced in their leadership pathways in the library field. From this study's findings, library leaders, library associations, and those with hiring authority can glean some insight into what kinds of barriers this group faces and identify ways to help encourage more Asian Americans to obtain leadership roles in public libraries.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the pathways of Asian American leaders in the public library field as they ascend in their career. This study will help reveal common barriers that Asian American leaders experienced in their career trajectory, so that those in positions of authority can reflect upon their hiring, recruitment, and retention practices.

Methodology and Research Design Overview

Qualitative methodology was selected for this study to examine the lived experiences of Asian American public library leaders. Qualitative methodologies are generally used to gain deeper insights into an issue or problem and many qualitative researchers tend to be intrigued by the nuances surrounding daily life and the meanings that participants create from their interactions with each other (Marshall et al., 2021.)

As some qualitative research tends to be focused on the lived experiences of people, exploring the target group is best managed when data are obtained through in-person interactions (Marshall et al., 2021). This methodology is typically used when a better understanding of the richness and complexity of peoples' experiences is necessary (McAleese & Kilty, 2019). Being invested in qualitative methodology may lead to a new discovery, a fresh perspective into the lives of the participants, and the ability to make a difference in the lives of those involved (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).

For this study, I used a phenomenological approach. According to Marshall et al. (2021), phenomenology can be used to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of one's lived experiences through a complex and rich description of phenomena. In an article that discusses phenomenological research, Finlay (2013) shared the following three approaches as best practices for engaging in phenomenological research: (1) the researcher should have a passion, curiosity, and openness to deepening their knowledge about their topic; (2) the researcher should strive to be empathetic listeners for the participant to feel more comfortable in sharing their whole experience; and (3) the research should strive to dwell with the data while examining them to get its whole meaning. In a phenomenological study, the researcher often seeks to answer two questions: "What are the individual's perceptions/experiences of this phenomenon?" and "What

are the settings and conditions in which the experience of this phenomenon occurs?” (Creswell, 2014, p. 1). These questions led to the main question that guided this study: What are the lived experiences of mid-level or senior Asian American library leaders regarding attaining library leadership positions in public libraries?

Population and Sample

The target population of this dissertation study consisted of Asian American public library professionals in California. In terms of my sample, I recruited mid- and senior-level East, Southeast, and South Asian American public library leaders with various generational statuses (e.g., first-generation American and beyond) who worked in California.

Purposeful sampling was used to identify individuals who met the criteria the research required in this study. The main objective of a purposeful sampling is to reproduce a sample that can be assumed to be representative of the target population (Creswell, 2014).

Eleven participants were recruited for this study by emailing the APALA listserv and the We Here social media group, an online community for library workers of color. To determine if participants met the criteria, I sent an email that consisted of an online survey that asked the interested participants for their name, contact information, title, organization, affiliation, location, generational status, and cultural background. Participants who met the criteria were contacted via email to set up a meeting time and sent a copy of the IRB form. I then coordinated a time to speak via Zoom, a video meeting room platform, and spent the first part of the interviews going over the informed consent process and asked if they had any questions. I ensured that the participants' schedules were accommodated due to their professional and personal commitments.

Data Collection and Analysis

Once I identified potential participants, I sent an initial email to each person inviting participation in the study and included Institutional Review Process (IRB) information. Each participant ended up signing a consent form prior to being interviewed as the process seemed straightforward to them. This form included my research statement, the purpose of the study, the study procedures, the risks and benefits of the study, an indication that the interviews would be recorded, and a clause on the confidentiality of personal information. I then conducted 60–90-minute semi-structured interviews through Zoom. Each interview was transcribed using Zoom. All participants received copies of the interview transcripts to review for accuracy. I used qualitative software program Quirkos to code and organize my results.

Once I received a transcription of my interviews, I cross-checked the transcriptions with the audio recordings for accuracy. I then used basic qualitative analysis techniques such as coding the data and looking for concepts and patterns to describe the participants' experiences. I did this right after the interview. I analyzed each transcript by grouping the participants' quotes with similar keywords and patterns in Quirkos. After the transcripts were reviewed a few times, I grouped words that elicited common and unique themes. According to Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019), the coding process is dynamic and can help the researcher understand the participants' views and actions from their perspectives. Confidentiality was maintained by removing any personally identifiable information in the study and using pseudonyms for the participants. The recordings were deleted after the transcriptions were checked and the transcriptions were stored on my password-protected City University OneDrive account. The transcriptions will be destroyed after five years.

Research Questions

The main research question, along with four sub-questions, guided the study: What are the lived experiences of mid-level or senior Asian American library leaders regarding attaining library leadership positions in public libraries?

1. How do they describe their experiences with their career trajectory?
2. What are their experiences with any barriers they may have faced as they ascended in their career?
3. What are their experiences in supporting Asian Americans to pursue library leadership careers?
4. How do they describe their experiences of receiving support from others in their own leadership journey?

Study Limitations and Biases

Limitations were inevitable in the research process. Within the qualitative research process, issues relating to credibility can be beyond our control (Noble et al., 2015). For example, respondents may not have answered the interview questions accurately or without bias. They may also not have felt comfortable answering the questions. As a mid-level Asian American public library leader who met the criteria for participation in this study, I found it challenging to navigate the data neutrally as I brought my own preconceived notions and biases regarding this topic. In a book about phenomenological research and writing, Peoples (2022) suggested using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the process of continually updating our understanding of the phenomenon, which helped navigate my own preconceived notions. By engaging in follow-up interviews with participants when needed, I helped clarify my preconceptions as I analyzed and interpreted the data (Peoples, 2022).

This study also examined the experiences of Asian American mid-level or senior public library leaders who work in California. These experiences likely will differ from the experiences of Asian Americans from other regions due to the location and their respective organization's cultural impact on the individual. The limitation of having a small sample size may impact the transferability of the study.

Statement of Bias

As a mid-level Asian American public library manager in the Bay Area, I may have brought preconceived ideas of the experiences of mid- and senior-level Asian American public library leaders in California. I worked to put distance between what I believed was the experience of other leaders in California and what their experiences had been. By engaging in peer-debriefing over the data and keeping a research journal, these methods acted as a system of checks and balances to ensure that what I analyzed was accurate and was not based on my assumption of the participants' experiences.

Study Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries that the researcher sets to help narrow the scope of the study (Creswell, 2014). Delimitations can include research questions, selection of objectives, and the population. The first delimitation was the choice of the problem of study, as I created the research topic of the study: to learn more about the leadership pathways and barriers of Asian American public library leaders. The second delimitation revolved around the geographic regions. In terms of geographic region, I recruited Asian American public library leaders from the state of California. The third delimitation revolved around criteria for participation, such as the participants' roles in their organization and their generational status, as I recruited mid- to executive-level leaders who represented the diversity of East, Southeast, and South Asian

American communities due to the overlap and geographic connections among these regions and cultures. The findings and results may not necessarily generalize to other subjects, locations, or future time periods.

Definitions of Key Terms

Definitions may have different meanings for readers and participants, so the following definitions are provided for their use in this study:

Asianization refers to the idea that white supremacy regards all Asian Americans as one group and disregards the unique histories of its multitude of ethnic communities (Iftikar & Museus, 2018).

Bamboo ceiling generally refers to the environment where Asian Americans are disproportionately underrepresented in leadership roles despite having a high educational attainment rate in general (Hyun, 2005).

The *model minority myth* is a pervasive stereotype that Asian Americans achieve occupational success and are not disadvantaged minorities (Yu, 2020).

Intersectionality is the idea that one can be oppressed in many ways (e.g., gender, race, age, religion, etc.) based on their identity (Iftikar & Museus, 2018).

Leader refers to those individuals who serve in a mid-level or a senior-level management capacity. Mid-level leaders report to library administration while supervising staff who report to them. Senior-level leaders serve at the highest levels of the organization as a part of the library administration and set the overall direction and vision for the organization.

Summary

The perspectives of Asian American public library leaders can play an important role in learning about leadership pathways and barriers for library workers of color. It is important to

ensure that library leaders, in general, continue to understand the impact of the racialized climate of the library and information science field, as well as the racialized experiences of Asian American library leaders. This study will inform current and future Asian American public library leaders about the importance of sharing their stories and bringing awareness of challenges in pursuing careers in library leadership.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review examines the racial climate, the leadership pathways, and barriers of Asian American leaders and other leaders of color within library settings. The modern-day public library strives to be a technology hub, an information center, and a place that hosts a variety of programs that reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. Despite the profession's core ethics revolving around embracing diversity, librarians who work at American libraries are 88% White, while the White population in the United States is only 63% White (Espinal et al., 2018).

In addition to the lack of cultural diversity in library staffing, Asian Americans are also the least likely among all racial and ethnic groups to become leaders (Yu, 2020). According to Yu (2020), the model minority myth, a pervasive stereotype that Asian Americans achieve occupational success and are not disadvantaged minorities, remains a key barrier for Asian Americans to advance into leadership positions. By better understanding the leadership pathways and barriers to the success of Asian American public library leaders, current library leaders and the library profession as a whole can examine how they are currently supporting or not supporting leaders in this demographic. In this literature review, I provide an overview of the current challenges faced by library leaders, the racial climate for Asian American leaders, the racialized experiences of workers of color in the library profession, the key sources of support, and examined Critical Race Theory (CRT) and AsianCrit theory in relation to the experiences of Asian American public library leaders.

Common Experiences for Library Leaders

Library leaders can often navigate a variety of experiences in the library environment. In a systematic literature review with an analysis on academic library leaders and their challenges,

Ashiq et al. (2021) reviewed relevant studies published in the first two decades of the 21st century and found that the most dominant library leadership experience highlighted by the literature was on change management. Despite there being accelerated ongoing change for libraries due to the rapid development of technology, Ashiq et al. (2021) found there had been much resistance to change among library professionals who were reluctant to adopt and embrace new technological developments. Consequently, libraries can sometimes be ill-equipped to meet the needs and expectations of their patrons (Ashiq et al., 2021).

Studies have also found that library leaders need to continuously reinvent the concept of the library to align the library services, resources, and spaces with the changing needs of their patrons (Ashiq et al., 2021; Harland et al., 2017). Effective library leaders who are visionary, innovative, and risk-takers can strategically address the patrons' needs presented by the 21st century by engaging all library stakeholders and ensuring the development and implementation of user-centered services (Ashiq et al., 2021; Harland et al., 2017). To help library leaders usher in the changes needed to meet their users' needs, they should strive to continually provide access for their staff to engage in professional development programs and library leadership institutes (Ashiq et al., 2020, 2021). Clear, ongoing communication from leaders can be key in developing buy-in for lasting and productive changes in the library (Anexander & Wakimoto, 2020).

As many of today's library leaders are likely to retire in the next decade or two, succession planning, or the development and preparation of staff to become future leaders, remains a core issue that library leaders contend with (Ashiq et al., 2021; Green, 2020; Kumaran, 2015). In a research paper about succession planning in academic libraries, Green (2018) stated that hosting library residencies can help develop new librarians and library workers in short-term learning roles and give early-career staff on-the-job experience needed for their development.

When library leaders have a clear succession plan that involves mentoring and providing growth opportunities, it can be much easier to advance capable and qualified librarians into leadership roles in the future (Ashiq et al., 2021; Green, 2020; Kumaran, 2015).

Change management, consistent advocacy and revisioning of library services, and succession planning can be key themes that library leaders navigate in their own career journeys. At the heart of these themes, being an effective communicator can be helpful in working with stakeholders, developing buy-in for changes at the institutional level, and developing future leaders. On top of these common experiences that library leaders face, Asian American library leaders may experience added complexity in their professional journeys in a racially homogeneous workforce (Le, 2016; Nataraj et al., 2020). In the next section, I will provide an overview of the racialized experiences of Asian American leaders.

Racial Climate for Asian American Leaders

Public libraries serve a critical role in fostering social connections, increasing learning and literacy for their diverse communities. Having a culturally diverse staff can be key to supporting multiracial and multilingual communities. Despite having ongoing conversations about diversity and developing initiatives on recruiting more library workers of color into the profession, the demographics of librarians have not significantly changed over the years, with 87% of the American Library Association membership identifying as White (Busch, 2022). This lack of diversity can be seen as an invitation to investigate the reasons that prevent people of color from entering and staying in the profession long-term. In an article about strategies to improve the racial climate in academic libraries, Alabi (2018) and Le (2021) stated that while there are programs that focus on recruiting underrepresented populations, there is a dearth of literature on the racial climate of libraries and library leaders of color in general. Alabi (2018)

highlighted a discordant view between librarians of color and White librarians on the basic question of to what extent racism and discrimination exist in the field, as one may have librarians of color who can see racism as a major problem while White librarians may be less aware of how racism manifests itself in our profession. This ideological divide can make it harder for a profession to interrogate its issues around race and discrimination when a dominant group may not be fully aware of the issues that exist. This general lack of awareness, coupled with unconscious bias or unintended discrimination against those who are marginalized in society, may make it more difficult to address race-based discrimination (Bellack, 2015). This divide sets the stage for the climate that Asian American leaders navigate in their careers. Due to the lack of literature on stereotypes and Asian American public library leaders, I focused on the literature about the perspectives of Asian American academic library leaders and stereotypes. In this section of the literature review, I touch upon the perception and stereotypes of Asian Americans, common microaggressions, the concept of the bamboo ceiling, whiteness in libraries, and theories on Asian American leadership.

The Perceptions and Stereotypes of Asian Americans

Stereotypes can play a powerful role in how groups of people are perceived. For Asian Americans, there are two historical stereotypes on this group of people that have persisted over the years: the model minority myth and the “perpetual foreigner” image (Daley et al., 2022, p. 2). According to an article about anti-bias interventions to promote leadership opportunities to Asian Americans, Mouton et al. (2020) stated that the model minority stereotype is used to describe a group of individuals from a minority group that are perceived to be more hardworking and high achieving than the general population. Unlike many minority groups, the stereotypes for Asian Americans can be complex. On one hand, Asian Americans are seen as fulfilling a model

minority stereotype in that they are highly competent, intelligent, and hardworking. On the other hand, Asian Americans can be also seen as unfriendly and poor communicators. The positive stereotypes can do harm as society may feel less compelled to address the racism and discrimination faced by Asian Americans and enact policies that protect them (Mouton et al., 2020). The positive stereotypes and the negative stereotypes overtime may contribute to limiting the type of opportunities that can help Asian Americans get into leadership positions in the first place. Xu and Lee (2013) asserted that for median individual income and representation at the managerial level, Asian Americans fare worse than White Americans. They also asserted that the poverty rate among Asian Americans (12.3%) is higher than that of the White population. The success stories from this group are often not a result of individual efforts that come from an equitable and fair system, but from the American immigration policies that have focused on bringing in highly skilled professionals since the 1960s. As the model minority image ultimately lends to obscuring the racial subordination and discrimination of Asian Americans, Asian American leaders may navigate the complexity of stereotypes as they serve their diverse communities (Mouton et al., 2020).

Asian Americans make up one of the fastest-growing groups in the United States and are on track to becoming the largest minority group by 2065 (Kim et al., 2021; Mouton et al., 2020). Given the demographic changes, scholars have started to move beyond the Black-White conversation that is dominant in racial stratification theories. In Kim's (1999) seminal work on racial triangulation theory, she proposed that Asian Americans' race relations are based on their positions relative to Black and White populations. Kim (1999) asserted that the American public has the propensity to praise Asian Americans as the "model minority" while simultaneously marginalizing them as "outsiders" (p. 107). This complex view on Asian Americans can be

attributed mostly to the high socioeconomic status that people perceive them to have and the “perpetual foreigner” image that continues to persist (Daley et al., 2022, p. 2).

In a study that examined the racialized sexism that Asian American women faced in their professional and personal lives, Mukkamala and Suyemoto (2018) stated that participants in their study would often feel like a “perpetual foreigner” in their environments (p. 38). Participants would indicate that they had felt there was a blanket assumption cast upon them that all Asian Americans are immigrants/foreigners, despite the large diversity of cultures and generational statuses within this group. This would include assumptions for others on whether the participants spoke English and assertions that they should *go back to their own country*. In a COVID-19 world, this othering from other groups and the dominant assumption that Asian Americans are often viewed as foreign and not representing cultural Americanness has contributed to their subordination and devaluation (Daley et al., 2022). Daley et al. (2022) also shared that COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced an increased marginalization of Asian Americans in general as the pathogen seemed to emerge in China and to this day, many Americans fail to respect the distinctions among different Asian ethnic groups. According to Daley et al. (2022), pathogen threats have been linked to negative attitudes towards immigrants and people with unfamiliar backgrounds. Daley et al. (2022) asserted that during times of uncertainty, there may be preferences towards the familiar ingroups versus the outgroups. In a pre-pandemic world, Asian Americans feeling marginalized was a common experience. The pandemic helped contribute to the rising anti-Asian sentiment and violence. The feeling of being marginalized can be a common experience for some Asian Americans in the workplace (Daley et al., 2022).

Microaggressions

While the concept of the model minority remains the chief narrative on how Asian Americans are perceived, Asian Americans also experience racial microaggressions in their professional and personal lives. According to an article about Asian Americans and microaggressions, Sue et al. (2009) stated that microaggressions are defined as commonplace verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights or insults that can communicate negative or hostile messages to those who belong to a marginalized community. These slights or snubs can be intentional or unintentional and can have a negative impact on the people of color who are on the receiving end of these messages. Sue et al. (2009) shared that despite the image that Asian Americans are successful in our society, prejudice and discrimination continue to impact this group's self-esteem and psychological well-being. The authors shared that racial microaggressions can be classified under three forms: (1) microassault, (2) microinsult, and (3) microinvalidation. Microassaults are when verbal or nonverbal racially derogatory remarks are made to hurt people of color intentionally. Microassaults can include offensive visual displays on specific racial groups, racial epithets, and behavioral discrimination. Microassaults are the most likely historical expressions of racism as they are pointed acts by an aggressor towards someone from a marginalized group.

Microinsults and microinvalidations, on the other hand, tend to represent slights that are unintentional and operate unconsciously. Microinsults are defined as behavioral actions or remarks that can demean a person's racial identity (Sue et al., 2009). For example, a White American praises an Asian American for speaking "good English" (p. 89). Microinvalidations are actions that can negate or exclude the thoughts, feelings, or realities of people of color. An example of microinvalidation is when a person denies an individual's personal experiences with racism.

Sue et al. (2009) asserted that there were recurring themes of microaggressions targeted at Asian Americans, including the invalidation of ethnic differences, invisibility, second-class citizenship, exoticization of Asian American females, and treating them as if they are “aliens in their own land” (p. 89). These microaggressions can make one experience low self-esteem, distress, sadness, and/or anger. According to Wong-Padoongpatt et al. (2017), given that most White Americans do not commit racial microaggressions with malicious intent, the subtlety of these situations can make it difficult for people of color to broach. For many Asian Americans, racial microaggressions can be ambiguous experiences. The ambiguity of these situations can be stressful in comparison to blatant and clear microassaults as some Asian Americans may be left wondering if they did something wrong to be on the receiving end of microaggressions (Wong-Padoongpatt et al., 2017). When people of color attribute the negative feedback to themselves instead of calling out these situations as discrimination, these individuals may feel more stress. Wong-Padoongpatt et al. (2017) shared that these race-related experiences can have a negative impact on the self-esteem of Asian Americans, and over time, this impact can lead to poorer health outcomes. While it can be conjectured that microassaults, microinvalidations, and microaggressions may also color the pathways of Asian American leaders in general, there is a dearth of literature on the connection between microaggressions and Asian American public library leaders specifically.

Bamboo Ceiling

Stereotypes and microaggressions can lead to what is called the bamboo ceiling, a concept that was coined by a leadership strategist named Jane Hyun, where Asian Americans are disproportionately underrepresented in leadership roles despite having a high educational attainment rate in general (Hyun, 2005). In an article about the bamboo ceiling phenomenon, Yu

(2020) stated that 61% of Asian Americans in the U.S. over the age of 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher in comparison to 40% of White Americans, 30% of African Americans, and 20% of Hispanic/Latino Americans. Despite this number, Asian Americans, especially Asian American women, are the least likely among all racial groups to become senior leaders (Yu, 2020). According to Lu et al. (2020), individuals are less likely to achieve leadership roles when their characteristics do not match the cultural prototype of a leader. In the United States, the cultural prototype of a leader is high in communication assertiveness and can stand out and speak up for their interests. For Asian Americans who were raised in traditional and nonassimilated households, harmony, conformity, deference to elders, humility, and a reluctance to ask questions or complain can be seen as valuable traits (Lu et al., 2022; Yu, 2020). However, to move up into executive leadership roles, social skills such as networking and marketing yourself and your skills are a requirement for entering the leadership pipeline (Chin, 2016; Yu, 2020). In a study about Asian Americans, corporate work, and bamboo ceilings, Chin (2016) interviewed second-generation Asian Americans between the ages of 29 and 57 who felt limited by a "bamboo ceiling" or had moved up the corporate ladder (p. 70). In her study, Chin (2016) expressed that in comparison to their White counterparts, Asian Americans also lacked sufficient mentors and sponsors – individuals who were able to share information about important opportunities, projects, and the hidden rules of the work world. These factors can contribute to the racial landscape that Asian American public library leaders are steeped in as they navigate their careers.

In an article about the bamboo ceiling and the Asian-White gap in managerial attainment for college-educated employees, Shao (2022) analyzed data from the National Science Foundation's National Survey of College Graduates (NSCG) and compared and analyzed the

probability of obtaining a managerial position for graduates who are U.S.-born White people versus Asian Americans of different generations. Through this research, Shao (2022) said that the opportunity of achieving managerial positions varied among those who belong to the various Asian subgroups as defined by their birthplace and educational attainment. Shao (2022) indicated that Asian Americans who were born and raised in a different country and received no American education were at a significant disadvantage in relation to those Asian Americans who were born and raised in the United States. Foreign-born and/or foreign-educated Asian Americans may encounter more obstacles than their American-born and raised peers as they may be less familiar with the cultural nuances of American society and work culture or less proficient in English. As a result, they may be perceived as less suitable to lead and supervise subordinates (Shao, 2022). The author of this study also proposed that previous studies on management tended to categorize Asians as one racial group, even though recent studies have shown that East Asians (e.g., Japanese, Chinese, Korean) seem to encounter more obstacles than South Asians (e.g., Indians) in ascending to leadership positions (Lu et al., 2020; Shao, 2022). While the U.S. Census Bureau defines Asian as a racial category that includes individuals whose origins include East, Southeast, or South Asia, some Americans still only identify East Asians as the only Asians; as such, East Asians are more likely to endure the negative stereotypes associated with Asian Americans in general in comparison to South Asians (Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2020, Lu et al., 2020). In a case study about Chinese and Indian Americans at a high-tech company, Chavez (2021) reported that decision-makers tend to associate foreign-educated Chinese with being socially distant and cold and foreign-educated Indians as warm, expressive, and aggressive. While being aggressive does not always help one with navigating the American workplace, aggressiveness can sometimes be seen as a similar trait to assertiveness. This trait is commonly

believed to align with the Western prototype of leadership (Chavez, 2021). Findings from the case study may suggest that East Asian immigrants may experience the American workplace differently than their South Asian peers (Chavez, 2021). As we develop our understanding of Asian American public library leaders and their pathways, the heterogeneity and diversity of this group and the group's potential connection with the concept of the bamboo ceiling may need to be further investigated.

Whiteness in Libraries

According to Espinal et al. (2018), while libraries can be viewed as egalitarian institutions, providing access to information, public libraries are not immune from racism, white supremacy, and whiteness. Whiteness is defined as a structural advantage in a society steeped in racial dominance (Espinal et al., 2018; Honma, 2005). It is an often-unmarked category created and recreated to maintain an unequal distribution of power, wealth, and opportunity. Honma (2005) explained that the first public library in the United States was impacted by the sociopolitical environment of the time, which included a desire to increase public services to develop a more informed society further and an influx of immigrants, mostly from Eastern and Southern Europe, in the 19th century. The immigration patterns of the 19th century inspired the creation and the original mission of the public library. George Ticknor, the founder of the Boston Public Library, saw that there was a strong need to “assimilate their masses” and to help the citizenry “pull themselves upwards – morally and intellectually – by their bootstraps” (Honma, 2005, p. 5). Honma (2005) asserted that the founding principles of the library align with a common U.S. trope of White ethnic assimilation and meritocracy and this alignment helped to perpetuate and uphold whiteness in library spaces.

Nataraj et al. (2020) shared that the library has long been perceived as a space that is steeped in Western culture and that European exceptionalism can be seen from the building aesthetics to a Eurocentricized library collection to a homogeneous staff. The unspoken Eurocentricity of library spaces, collections, and the lack of diversity in library staff can make it difficult for library workers of color to navigate and critique the library (Nataraj et al., 2020). Nataraj et al. (2020) also asserted that library workers of color take on additional emotional labor of having to navigate how these White hegemonic social norms function and that this labor is increased when they attempt to name these norms and social codes as a part of White supremacist culture. When library workers of color voice their opinion on the oppressive practices created by the dominant culture, they may be perceived as unprofessional and uninformed (Honma, 2005; Nataraj et al., 2020). Asian American public library workers are not immune to the emotional labor involved in navigating whiteness in spaces and practices.

Whiteness can manifest itself in libraries in a variety of ways. In an article about whiteness in academic libraries, Brook et al. (2015) shared that whiteness can show itself in the following four ways:

1. White ascendancy: The system of thinking that arises from White mainstream authority, which has been created by the historical position of whiteness' power and domination. This leads to the notion of White entitlement to maintain control over spaces, conversations, and outcomes.
2. Monoculturalism: The expectation that individuals conform to a singular worldview, which has its roots in the normalcy of White culture.
3. White blindness: The ideology that obscures the idea of White identity and privilege under the guise of colorblindness.

4. White estrangement: The practice that sustains White supremacy by creating physical and social distance between White people and people of color. (p. 251)

White ascendancy, monoculturalism, White blindness, and White estrangement have manifested themselves in a myriad of ways in the library profession. In the last century, the development of libraries in the Southern United States coincided with the practice of segregation, and the quality of libraries among the communities was hardly equal (Jennings & Kinzer, 2022). Jennings and Kinzer (2022) stated that Black libraries tended to be the afterthoughts in the communities and when White library boards advocated for better service in Black libraries, they were inspired by paternalism – the general imposition on other communities as they are motivated by a claim that other people would be better off (Dworkin, 2020; Jennings & Kinzer, 2022). Paternalism and the idea that “the majority race has to define what is good for the minority race” has persisted in America as historically, White Americans have defined the environment in which people of color exist (Jennings & Kinzer, 2022, p. 66). Libraries are not immune to this challenging history.

The culture of whiteness, while unnoticed by many, can be a key piece in creating institutional policies, practices, and cultures that may be able to perpetuate hostile racial climates for library workers (Brook et al., 2015; Espinal et al., 2018). In the library, people of color may have to navigate work environments where the persistent expectations of conformity may create an environment where they experience racial microaggressions, cultural erasure (where cultural practices are forgotten or abandoned in favor of the dominant culture’s practices), or tokenization (the practice of hiring someone from a minority group to create the image that people are being treated fairly because of their ethnic and racial identity) (Espinal et al., 2018). As the demographics and culture of librarianship are slow to diversify, homogeneous environments tend to foster homogeneous attitudes and practices (Espinal et al., 2018; Jennings & Kinzer, 2022).

Library workers of color often must navigate White fragility, the reactions, and discomfort that some White people feel when confronted with issues on race and racism (Schmidt, 2019). White fragility can make it difficult for library workers of color to bring their authentic selves to work as it can create environments where people feel unsafe and uncomfortable in bringing up issues on race (Schmidt, 2019). White fragility, coupled with the library workers' burden of disproportionately being tasked with diversity and inclusion work in libraries, can create unsurmountable hurdles for library workers of color. Despite the library profession claiming diversity to be one of its core values, the lack of cultural diversity in the library staffing indicates that more reflection on whiteness and the racial climate of libraries continues to be needed (Espinal et al., 2018).

Asian American Leadership Theories

Finding cultural leadership frameworks describing Asian American leadership styles in the existing literature was not easy and perhaps this was partly due to the limited leadership pipeline for this community. In the United States, leadership models tend to focus on White Americans and their individual capacity to create effective organizational change. For example, John Kotter created an eight-stage process of creating major change in an organization and Bernard Bass created the transformational leadership model which focuses on the individual's impact on their followers (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Kotter, 2012). While both models have had a significant impact on leadership literature, leadership theories, in general, tend to uphold Western perspectives and whiteness as default categories without acknowledging how leaders of different races may be perceived (Ladkin & Patrick, 2022). While some of these theories may aid our understanding of the leadership characteristics of leaders of color, these theories do not usually include the perspectives of culturally nondominant individuals.

Over the years, there have been attempts to define an Asian American leadership style. For example, Lee et al. (2013) shared that some common leadership characteristics among Asian American leaders may be based on Daoist belief in a cultural leadership model known as the Daoist Big Five: altruism, modesty, adaptability, honesty, and perseverance. According to this model, being humble and maintaining a low profile yet working diligently can be a positive characteristic of Asian American leadership (Lee et al., 2013). Lee et al. (2013) also stated while some Asian American leaders are influenced by the Western culture's traits such as dominance and control, these leaders are also reaffirmed culturally by Daoist leadership values of developing relationships with others, servant leadership and role modeling.

Some researchers have compared Western and Asian cultures to describe Asian American leadership styles. Chin (2013) shared that Asian Americans tend to value collectivism, group harmony, indirectness, and family orientation compared to their White peers. Compared to Western norms, Asian Americans may also place a higher value on communal behaviors because much of this group are foreign born and are more likely to retain the values of their country of origin (Sy et al., 2017). These characterizations can help to further define the leadership qualities of Asian Americans public library leaders.

Racialized Experiences of Library Workers of Color

The library profession has its struggles with homogeneity, and it is no secret that it has a longstanding racial and cultural diversity problem (Cooke, 2014; Riley-Reid, 2017). To remedy the lack of cultural diversity in the library and information science (LIS) workforce, programs such as the American Library Association's (ALA) Spectrum Scholarship Program, the University of Arizona's School of Information and Library Science's Knowledge River Program, and the Association of Research Library's Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce have

dedicated time in recruiting and providing space for those who identify as Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander American, African American, and Hispanic American (Cooke, 2014). Despite these programs' positive work, the field's demographics have hardly changed (Cooke, 2014). Since there was a scarcity of literature specifically devoted to public librarians, I used literature on academic librarians to provide a foundational understanding of what librarians of color experienced. In this part of the literature review, I will provide a brief overview of the barriers that academic librarians of color face in the field, and then I will provide an overview on the barriers that academic Asian American librarians face in the profession. Lastly, I will share some ways these groups have found support.

Academic Librarians of Color and Common Barriers

While there was a dearth of literature that focused on public librarians of color specifically, there were a few studies focused on academic librarians of color and their experiences in a racially homogeneous work environment that can help describe the field in general. In a theoretical research article about academic librarians of color, Riley-Reid (2017) argued that some of the barriers that contribute to job dissatisfaction levels among librarians of color can contribute to them leaving academia. Riley-Reid (2017) proposed that these barriers can include the lack of existing support systems, the high expectations placed by the administration in the workplace environment, and the internal pressure that several people of color place on themselves to be deemed worthy of the position. In the following paragraph, I share an overview of how the work environment and internal pressure can impact a librarian of color's career journey.

Academic Librarians of Color and Workplace Environment

Every organization has its own unique culture one must navigate. According to Riley-Reid (2017), an institution's work environment is a significant predictor of job satisfaction of librarians of all races, but it was a crucial element for librarians of color who may already feel isolated and alone, especially if this librarian was the only person of color in their department or division. Navigating a work environment that can be described as competitive and political can increase these feelings of isolation (Riley-Reid, 2017). Even in work environments that are not competitive and political, librarians of color may often have to deal with microaggressions or feel like they are the only ones representing their identity, which can help them feel as if they do not belong (Riley-Reid, 2017; Swanson et al., 2018). Riley-Reid (2017) also conveyed that this isolation may make librarians of color feel as if they cannot speak out against actions they deem as racist, xenophobic, homophobic, or sexist. Academic librarians of color may also have to navigate high expectations surrounding tenure and promotion guidelines, which can often be unspoken about, confusing, complex, or vague (Riley-Reid, 2017).

Academic Librarians of Color and Internal Pressure

It is a common experience where librarians of color find themselves among the few people of color within their organization (Riley-Reid, 2017). In a phenomenological study about the lived experiences of academic librarians of color, Swanson et al. (2018) interviewed academic librarians of color and found that these individuals regularly questioned their authority and competency. The phenomenon of questioning their authority and competency would manifest itself as librarians of color would have their professional knowledge, skills, and abilities dismissed to the extent that patrons would not believe that they are librarians (Swanson et al., 2018). According to Riley-Reid (2017), librarians of color can often straddle the two vastly different worlds of their institution, and their ethnic background and the desire to be seen as

competent can fuel some librarians of color to do more than their coworkers to prove their capability to do their job. There can also be regular stress on many librarians of color to make themselves visible to their communities as there is a belief that because of their racial and ethnic background and identity, they can contribute in unique ways by being better equipped to serve their diverse communities (Riley-Reid, 2017; Swanson et al., 2018). Without support and the proper tools to succeed, it can become much harder for librarians of color to thrive in their workplace environments (Riley-Reid, 2017; Swanson et al., 2018).

Asian American Academic Librarians and Common Barriers

The underrepresentation of library leaders of color in the profession, especially Asian American librarians in leadership roles, is not a new phenomenon and has been addressed in studies since the 1980s (Le, 2021). In an article about academic library leadership and the intersections of race and gender, Le (2021) collected information about the race and gender of library directors at 33 prestigious university libraries. Through their research, they found that while Asian American librarians tend to be more educated than the general population of credentialed librarians with similar years of experience, their probability of being represented in executive leadership roles in libraries was one-third of White Americans and one-half of African Americans (Le, 2021). Le (2021) mentioned that racial homophily, the preference to hire people more culturally like themselves, served as one of the barriers for Asian Americans in leadership. In an article about Asian Americans in academic library leadership, Le (2016) shared that despite a dramatic increase in the number of Asian American patrons in the educational community, Asian American women, while being visible as women of color in academic institutions, were also cast aside as invisible in these work environments. Stereotypes can also prevent Asian American librarians from moving up the career ladder (Le, 2016; Mouton et al., 2020). The

stereotypes of being seen as not assertive enough and not matching up with the Western prototype of being an assertive, communicative, and confident leader and the professional invisibility that some may face can create barriers to their career advancement. (Le, 2016). In the following section of the literature review, I will provide an overview of how stereotypes and professional invisibility may be able to create roadblocks in an Asian American librarian's journey to leadership.

Asian American Academic Librarians and Stereotypes

Stereotypes can have a marked impact on Asian American librarians' career trajectory. In a chapter about Asian American identity in academic libraries, Lim (2018) shared her reflections on her leadership journey as a manager and leader in academic libraries for over 20 years. Through her research and reflections, she shared that despite a substantial amount of Asian American librarians who aspired to hold leadership positions one day, there were disproportionately low numbers of Asian American librarians in senior-level leadership positions (Le, 2016; Lim, 2018). Lim (2018) suggested that the stereotypes of Asian American librarians as servants, "perpetual foreigners," and "model minorities" might have had a strong impact on the perception of them as leaders (p. 239). In her research on undergraduates' perceptions of leadership capabilities, she found that undergraduates tended to rate White Americans as the prototype of leadership more often than Asian Americans and these perceptions matter because evaluations from students can be a part of the tenure and promotion review process (Lim, 2018). These perceptions may impact leaders of color, who may face subtle or blatant discrimination when dismissed for promotions because they are perceived to lack leadership presence (Lim, 2018). In a systematic review of common findings in research articles about Asian Americans in academic libraries, Hosoi (2022) shared that Asian American librarians can also be stereotyped

as nonassertive and passive, while rigid and strict. These stereotypes can impact the perception of others about Asian Americans, as there can be an expectation for them to be docile and submissive (Hosoi, 2022). If they are not docile and submissive, they can be treated as a threat or a “dragon lady,” a stereotype that describes Asian women as strong-willed, alluring, and deceitful (Hosoi, 2022, p. 17). Hosoi (2022) expressed that these stereotypes can contribute to Asian American librarians’ authority, expertise, and leadership being questioned. In addition, Asian American library employees may be excluded from spaces where vital decision-making happens, are ignored, or are viewed as lacking leadership qualities (Hosoi, 2022). Asian American librarians may have to know how to navigate pervasive stereotypes to persist in the library field.

Asian American Academic Librarians and Professional Invisibility

In the library world, Asian American librarians may have to navigate professional invisibility in their work environments (Le, 2016). Le (2016) expressed that through his research, he found that Asian American women commonly shared that they felt ignored, unwelcomed, and silenced in academic spaces. The author of this study also shared that while there are external factors that cause some of these barriers, like racism and stereotypes, some of the barriers may be self-imposed, as many Asian Americans may shy away from the spotlight and feel uncomfortable standing out (Le, 2016). Le (2016) stated that in the United States, leaders who are perceived as being successful and effective tend to be the ones who seek visibility by being involved in multiple leadership activities, taking on leadership positions, and publicly recognizing their accomplishments. Many Asian American academic library leaders have found ways to raise the level of their visibility through presenting at professional conferences, publishing works in scholarly journals, and being active in professional organizations (Le, 2016;

Yamashita, 2000). In a systematic review about the Asian American experience in academic libraries, Hosoi (2022) investigated the underrepresentation of Asian Americans in executive leadership roles in academic libraries and suggested that these group can push back against invisibility and stereotypes by defending their perspectives, pushing back against colleagues, self-advocating, speaking out, or persisting. Hosoi (2022) also mentioned that Asian Americans can heighten their visibility and be recognized by their contributions by involving themselves in coalitional resistance and finding like-minded community who can help to trumpet their achievements. While Asian American library leaders may have to navigate professional invisibility in their work environments, they can increase their visibility by speaking up, taking up space, and building coalitions (Hosoi, 2022; Le, 2016). It is also important to note that the lack of visibility of this group in leadership roles may have an impact on the literature available, as while there were some resources on Asian American academic library leadership, research on Asian American public library leadership specifically was virtually non-existent.

Sources of Support

Despite the challenges that the racial climate may bring to Asian American public library leaders, Asian Americans have also experienced a long history of activism and support through national ethnic affiliate organizations for library workers. According to Yamashita (2000), Asian American activism hit its stride at the confluence of a growing number of college-aged Asian Americans and the protests surrounding the Vietnam War in the late 1960s. The author shared that the Asian American Librarians Caucus was created by Janet Suzuki, a third-generation Japanese American librarian, who developed the caucus to address issues of Asian American librarians and to improve services to Asian American communities (Yamashita, 2000). At that time, Yamashita (2000) shared that the moving force behind this caucus and general activism

was due in part to the second- and third-generation Japanese and Chinese Americans who were advocating for the improved living conditions of the San Francisco Chinatown, addressing the anti-Asian sentiment that was propagated by the Vietnam War, and fighting for reparations for Japanese Americans who experienced the American concentration camps of World War II.

While there were separate associations for Chinese American librarians in the 1970s, Janet Suzuki yearned to create a pan-Asian organization to represent the community's diversity. To combat potential challenges and to provide an additional layer of support for this group, Suzuki, and other forward-thinking Asian American public library leaders of the 1980s created the Asian Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA) as an ethnic affiliate caucus of the American Library Association (Yamashita, 2000). According to Yamashita (2000), the group aimed to provide a culturally inclusive space for Asian American and Pacific Islander librarians to discuss work-related issues, successes, and problems. Another purpose of this group was to advocate for the visibility of Asian American and Pacific Islander librarians, as well as recognize the contributions of these librarians to their communities. To this day, APALA has created spaces of inclusion for Asian American librarians to develop their leadership skills and to help grow the next generation of librarians by developing networking opportunities, mentorship programs, and scholarship programs to support future and current library and information science professionals in this community (Lee, 2018).

Asian American public library workers may also get support through the national Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA). CALA was established in 1973 and started as the Midwest Chinese American Librarians Association, an organization in Illinois representing the interests of Chinese Americans in the midwestern U.S. (ALA, n.d.; Gao et al., 2021). Within the next few years after, the Chinese Librarians Association was formed in California in 1974 and

the Midwest Chinese American Librarians Association expanded into what is now known as CALA and has nine regional chapters (Greater Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, Northeast, Northern California, Southern California, Southeast, Southwest, Canada, and Asia-Pacific Chapter) (ALA, n.d.; CALA, 2024). In its current iteration, CALA has over five hundred members from the United States, Canada, and Asia who strive to support the professional development and leadership development of Chinese and Chinese American librarians through collaboration, networking, and mentorship (Gao et al., 2021). Gao et al. (2021) also shared that CALA's value is in its commitment to providing a forum of discussion for Chinese American librarians to talk about their professional interests and concerns. While the pathways for Asian American public library leaders may be complex in nature, Asian Americans have access to national support networks through the American Library Association's ethnic caucuses. The lack of literature on the support that Asian American librarians receive indicates a need for further investigation into retention efforts for this population group.

Critical Race Theory

The racial climate for Asian American public library leaders can be a complex one to navigate. Critical Race Theory (CRT) helps to provide a framework in how we understand the racialized environment that Asian American public library leaders navigate. According to foundational scholarship about CRT, CRT's core tenets are two-fold: (1) CRT strives to understand how white supremacy, whiteness, and the subordination of people of color have been developed and maintained in the United States; and (2) CRT scholarship tends to share a moral devotion to social justice and liberation and seeks to change the system so that a more equitable world can exist (Cortés, 2013). Originally rooted in critical legal studies of the 1960s through the 1970s, CRT was officially founded in 1989 by scholars that include Derrick Bell, Kimberlé

Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Patricia Williams, among others (Cortés, 2013). According to Cortés (2013), CRT has become a foundational tool to examine multiculturalism and how law, race, and power impact power structures and minoritize people of color. Through the CRT lens, we acknowledge that (1) racism is ordinary and is a predictable part of the fabric of our society; (2) to eliminate racism, there should be an interest convergence and that the rights of people of color can only advance when they converge with the interests of White people; (3) race is a social construct; (4) there is truth in the narratives of marginalized communities; and (4) White people have also been the recipients of civil rights legislation (Crewe, 2021). At its core, CRT challenges dominant ideologies such as colorblindness, meritocracy, and neutrality, which can represent the interests of those in power and serve to reproduce systems of oppression (Cabrera, 2018). In the following section, I will discuss AsianCrit theory, a subsection of CRT that focuses on the racialized environment of Asian Americans.

AsianCrit Theory

To address the specific needs of Asian Americans in the higher education leadership realm, AsianCrit emerged from the development of CRT. While CRT provides a general framework for us to better understand the racialized experiences of people of color, AsianCrit seeks to draw attention to the experiences encountered by Asian Americans and the challenges they face (Chan et al., 2021). Founding scholars Iftikar and Museus (2018) created seven core tenets of AsianCrit framework to help one better understand the racialized experiences of Asian Americans. Below are descriptions of the seven tenets of AsianCrit theory (Iftikar & Museus, 2018):

1. *Asianization* alludes to the idea that Asian Americans experience racism within American society, as there is a tendency for society to lump all Asian Americans

into a monolithic group and stereotype them as “perpetual foreigners” and overachieving model minorities.

2. Historical, national, and transnational contexts remain key in analyzing the impacts of racism on Asian Americans.
3. *Re(constructive) history* focuses on re-reflecting upon history to expose racism towards Asian Americans.
4. *Strategic (anti)essentialism* draws from the CRT tenet that race is a socially constructed concept that has been shaped by political, social, and economic influences. This tenet acknowledges that Asian Americans are put into a racial category by an oppressor (White Americans) and that a singular Asian American experience does not exist.
5. *Intersectionality* focuses on the notion that racism and other forms of oppression can come together to impact the lives of Asian Americans.
6. *Story, Theory, and Praxis* is the idea that research, counter-storytelling, theoretical frameworks, and practice are interwoven elements when it comes to analyzing the experiences of Asian Americans.
7. *Commitment to Social Justice* alludes to the advocacy for the elimination of racism, heterosexism, capitalism, sexism, and other forms of oppression.

The frameworks of CRT and AsianCrit can help Asian American leaders more closely analyze the experiences of Asian Americans navigating the field of librarianship and their leadership journeys. The Asian American population is a heterogeneous one, where this group is represented by at least 24 national origins from East, Southeast, and South Asia, with their own migration histories, cultures, and languages (Yu, 2020). Through the AsianCrit framework,

Asian Americans can increase their visibility by telling their unique stories that can capture the broad range of ethnicities and experiences of immigration through storytelling and counterstorytelling.

According to Kim and Shang (2022), one of the tenets of AsianCrit revolves around the assumption that Asian Americans have been rendered invisible when it comes to their experiences of racism. Kim and Shang (2022) also shared that Asian Americans tend to be left out of research studies exploring workplace racism and discrimination as the stereotype of being a “model minority” obscures the racism felt by Asian Americans, which can hinder the advancement of Asian Americans and allow their organizations to continue to support dominant systems of oppression (p. 1). The general omission of Asian Americans in research studies exploring workplace racism and discrimination can be seen as detrimental to all communities of color as the lack of information on this community can contribute to the narrative that racism does not exist, which can inhibit the growth of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives geared towards making organizations more equitable (Acholonu & Oyeku, 2020; Kim & Shang, 2022). By centering and elevating the Asian American voice, AsianCrit provides a framework to help counter the marginalization of these populations as well as highlight the unique experiences that Asian American library leaders can face in the workplace. Despite a dearth of literature on Asian American public library leaders, the AsianCrit framework was a helpful tool to better understand and analyze the experiences in my study.

Conclusion

In a field that is as culturally homogeneous as librarianship, the pathways to leadership for Asian Americans can be seen as a complex journey. Despite having ongoing conversations about diversity and developing initiatives on recruiting more library workers of color into the

profession, the demographics of librarians have not significantly changed over the years, with 88% of the American Library Association membership identifying as White (Busch, 2022). The lack of diversity can be seen as an invitation to investigate the reasons that prevent people of color from entering and staying in the profession long-term. In their professional and personal lives, Asian Americans have to navigate a world in which the stereotypes of being a “model minority” or a “perpetual foreigner” are pervasive and othering (Daley et al., 2022, p. 2). Asian Americans may also encounter a “bamboo ceiling” in their career trajectory, especially if they do not match the Western prototype of what an ideal leader should act and look like (Chin, 2016, p. 70). To better understand the nuanced and complex histories of staff from communities of color, storytelling and counterstorytelling, research, and understanding theoretical frameworks will be key. While I was able to find information about the experiences and the frameworks that discuss the experiences of Asian Americans in education, academic libraries, or in their professional lives in general, there was a gap in the literature that specifically addresses the experiences of Asian Americans in public libraries. The gap in the literature may mean that more work will need to be done in analyzing the experiences of Asian Americans in public library leadership.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of Asian American leaders in the public library field as they ascended in their careers. It was expected that this study would help reveal the pathways and common barriers that Asian American leaders experience in their career trajectory, so that those in positions of authority can reflect upon their hiring, recruitment, and retention practices. To better understand Asian American public library leaders' experiences, I engaged in a qualitative phenomenological study. In this study, I answered the following four sub-questions: (1) How do public library leaders describe their experiences with their career trajectory? (2) What are public library leaders' experiences with any barriers they may have faced as they ascended in their career? (3) What are public library leaders' experiences in supporting Asian Americans to pursue library leadership careers? and (4) How do public library leaders describe their experiences receiving support from others in their own leadership journey? Through this section, I will go over the research method, research design, participants, data analysis methods, limitations and biases, and study delimitations.

Research Method

Qualitative methodology was selected for this study to examine the lived experiences of Asian American public library leaders. Qualitative methodologies are generally used to gain deeper insights into an issue or problem and many qualitative researchers tend to be intrigued by the nuances surrounding daily life and the meanings that participants create from their interactions with each other (Marshall et al., 2021). As some qualitative research tends to focus on people's lived experiences, exploring the target group is best managed when data are obtained through in-person interactions (Marshall et al., 2021). This methodology is typically used when a better understanding of the richness and complexity of people's experiences is necessary

(McAleese & Kilty, 2019). In-depth interviews can typically utilize general, open-ended questions which can elicit more holistic descriptions of the participants' experiences (Crosby et al., 2022). Being invested in qualitative methodology may lead to a new discovery, a fresh perspective into the lives of the participants, and the ability to make a difference in the lives of those involved (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).

According to Creswell (2014), quantitative research tells a story with numbers and uses closed-ended questions and responses to examine the relationship among variables or compare groups. Incorporating marginalized communities into research can be a complex task and quantitative methods can make it difficult to more deeply understand the lived experiences of participants (Crosby et al., 2022). While it is important to capture the diversity of these communities' experiences, marginalized group members may find research distressing, especially if they have to retell past traumatic experiences, so it will be key to develop a trauma-informed approach toward research (Crosby et al., 2022). However, it is important to not further disempower members from marginalized communities by excluding them from research, as they are in the most need of understanding (Crosby et al., 2022). Quantitative research tends to focus on answering the questions "what?" and "when?" while qualitative research answers the questions "why?," "how?," and "how come?" (Barroga et al., 2023). Quantitative research also tends to be shorter in written content than qualitative research, which can tend to provide more nuanced descriptions of its participants' experiences (Barroga et al., 2023). The lack of literature on Asian American public library leaders necessitated a need for a more detailed discussion on their lived experiences. Therefore, quantitative and mixed-methods methodologies were not the best fit for this study as there was a need to explore the details surrounding the lived experiences of a specific community group.

Research Design

According to Marshall et al. (2021), phenomenology can be used to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of one's lived experiences through a complex and rich description of phenomena. In an article that discusses phenomenological research, Finlay (2013) shared the following three approaches as best practices for engaging in phenomenological research: (1) the researcher should have a passion, curiosity, and openness to deepening their knowledge about their topic; (2) the researcher should strive to be empathetic listeners for the participant to feel more comfortable in sharing their whole experience; and (3) the research should strive to dwell with the data while examining them to get its whole meaning. In a phenomenological study, the researcher often seeks to answer two questions: "What are the perceptions/experiences of this phenomenon? and What are the setting and conditions in which and under the experience of this phenomenon occurs?" (Creswell, 2014, p. 1). These questions led to the main question that guided this study: What are the lived experiences of mid-level or senior Asian American library leaders regarding attaining library leadership positions in public libraries? In the qualitative research realm, there are five main approaches: narrative research, which explores the life story of an individual; phenomenology, which focuses on understanding the essence of an experience; grounded theory, which focuses on developing a theory based on findings from the field; ethnography, which focuses on describing a group from the same culture; and case studies, which focuses on developing descriptive analyses on a case or multiple cases (Marshall et al., 2017). To better focus my study on understanding the essence of an experience, phenomenology was the approach that best suited the needs of the study. I collected data through phenomenological research by interviewing the participants about their leadership journeys. Identifying individuals who met the qualifications was a key first step in engaging in this study.

Once I identified potential participants for my phenomenological study through the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA) listserv and We Here social media group, I sent an initial email to each person inviting participation in the study and included Institutional Review Board (IRB) information. The email consisted of an online survey that asked them for their name, contact information, title, organization affiliation, location, generational statuses, and cultural background. An example of the email can be found in Appendix B. I reviewed the participant information to ensure that they met the criteria of the study. The identities of the individuals in this study were protected by the City University of Seattle's IRB process.

After the interview date and time were determined with the participants who qualified for the study, I sent an email to the participants that included an interview time confirmation and a copy of the IRB form. The email also included information about how I would review the IRB process and ask for consent at the beginning of the interview session. Each participant signed a consent form via Adobe Acrobat which included my research statement, the purpose of the study, the study procedures, the risks and benefits of the study, and a clause on the confidentiality of personal information. The IRB form and its certificate of approval may be found in Appendices C and D. All participants ended up signing the consent form before meeting, as the process seemed straightforward to them. During the interview, I greeted every participant, went over the Informed Consent process, reiterated that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. I verbally asked the participant if they understood the study's purpose, the potential risks of the study, and what I was asking them to do. I also asked them if they had any questions about the process. All participants received copies of the interview transcripts to review for accuracy.

Data Collection

To ensure the quality of data collected from the phenomenological approach, I adopted the following three-phase process that Castillo-Montoya (2016) suggested for qualitative data collection: (1) ensuring that the interview questions were aligned with the research questions; (2) receiving feedback on interview questions; and (3) piloting the interview questions. Each phase helped the interview align with the goal of the research.

Phase 1: Ensuring Interview Questions Align with Research Questions

As the researcher engages with participants and learns more about their lives' complexity, it remains crucial to carefully construct interview questions to align with the study's purpose (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). According to Roberts (2020), research questions should be able to elicit an in-depth response to the study's topic. Asking interview questions that cannot elicit responses to the research questions could waste time and energy on the participants' and researchers' ends (Roberts, 2020). Interview questions should be broad enough not to limit or bias the participants' responses (Roberts, 2020).

When crafting interview questions, one should strive to garner meaningful answers to help one better understand the interviewee's lived experience (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I created an outline of general topics I would like to address in the interview and modified a list of main interview questions from my guiding dissertation that were directly related to each research question (e.g., "Discuss any barriers or challenges that you have faced in relation to your career trajectory toward library leadership. What barriers or challenges do you face now as a leader? How have these barriers influenced your leadership style?"). As for my interview questions, I used my guiding dissertation, *Asian American Community College Presidents: An AsianCrit Analysis of their Approaches to Leadership*, as inspiration, as this piece covered a similar topic

to my own viewed through an AsianCrit theory lens (Hu, 2019). With permission from the author, the interview questions from this dissertation were modified to eliminate references to academia and to add references to library work to fit my respective field (e.g., “What advice would you offer other Asian American community college professionals who would like to advance in leadership roles?” changed to “What advice would you offer other present and future Asian American library workers who would like to advance in leadership roles?”). Potential follow-up questions (e.g., “Could you please tell me a little more about [topic]?” and “Could you please elaborate on what happened?”) for during and after the interview were created based on my previous experiences as an interviewer in my professional life. The complete lists of interview and follow-up questions are included in Appendix A.

As a core goal of this current study was to illuminate the experiences of Asian American public library leaders, the AsianCrit tenets of Asianization and intersectionality can help counter one-dimensional stereotypes of these leaders by centering their complex narratives (Hu, 2019; Iftikar & Museus, 2018). The Asianization tenet helped me analyze whether the barriers, challenges, and opportunities of Asian American public library leaders reinforced and/or counteracted dominant racialized narratives of Asian Americans. The intersectionality tenet helped me consider how multiple systems of oppression such as sexism, heterosexism, racism, and ableism simultaneously impacted the lived experiences of the participants and their abilities to lead their organizations. Lastly, the current study aligned with the commitment to social justice tenet, with the goal of reducing barriers for future Asian American public library leaders (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Having a solid plan helped me stay focused on my research topic and helped me facilitate deeper responses from participants of this study (Roberts, 2020). During my

interview, I touched upon the following topics, which guided my data collection and analysis: bamboo ceiling, model minority myth, Asianization, and intersectionality.

Phase 2: Receiving Feedback on the Interview Questions

To enhance the study's reliability and trustworthiness, I received feedback on the interview questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). During my dissertation reviews, the interview questions were reviewed for overall organization, structure, writing style, and comprehension (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). During this process, I learned which questions were confusing and needed rewording, which questions would yield data that was not useful, and which questions should be included in the study (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Interview questions should be short, easy to understand, and keep the conversation going (Roberts, 2020; Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Phase 3: Piloting the Interview Questions

According to Castillo-Montoya (2016), once interview questions had been crafted and feedback on the questions had been received, I tested to see if the questions worked by trying them out in a pilot study. I tested the interview questions with a colleague who matched up with the characteristics of the target population of the study through my work. During the pilot study, I took note of the areas of improvement for my interview questions. My colleague suggested that I combine three separate questions on leadership ("Please describe what leadership means to you. What makes a successful leader?", "Describe your leadership style," and "What are your self-perceptions of your abilities of being a leader at your organization?") together as one question to ensure an efficient delivery of queries, as they all touched upon the theme of leadership. Based on the feedback presented, the three interview questions were combined into one (e.g., "Please describe what leadership means to you. What makes a successful leader? Describe your leadership style. What are your self-perceptions of your abilities of being a leader at your

organization?") In the actual interview, before I asked this question, I told the participant this question will be going through the different aspects of leadership. The final version of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Conducting the Interview

I conducted semi-structured interviews through Zoom. Semi-structured interviews provided some structure to the interview process while enabling me to have the space and flexibility to ask follow-up questions if necessary (Marshall et al., 2021). Each interview was 60-90 minutes long and was transcribed using Zoom. During the interviews, I asked follow-up questions to ensure I understood what they were saying and where they were coming from. For example, one of the participants talked about how there was another female leader in a higher position than her who would feel threatened by her ambition. For this participant, I asked her, "Would you say that it is common in your experience for others to be threatened by women with ambition?" to better understand their leadership pathway. These follow-up questions were generated organically to help me deepen my understanding of the participant. All the participants were able to answer my follow-up questions. Fortunately, I was able to gain enough information from a single interview session, so no additional interview sessions were needed. After the interview, I downloaded the Zoom transcriptions and the audio recordings and used the audio recordings to cross check the transcriptions for accuracy. For confidentiality purposes, identifying information was removed from each transcription. Confidentiality was maintained by removing any personally identifiable information in the study. The recordings were deleted after the transcriptions were checked and the transcriptions will be stored on my password-protected City University OneDrive account. The transcriptions will be destroyed after five years.

After reviewing the interview data, I emailed and called a few of the participants with follow-up questions to help clarify my understanding of what was said. For example, one of the participants described one of their predecessors as being perceived as a “dragon lady” in their interview. To ensure that my understanding of their description of their predecessor was accurate, I asked them, “What did you mean when you mentioned that your predecessor was a ‘dragon lady’?” In this instance, the participant expressed that “dragon lady” to them meant that the individual they talked about was seen as “demanding” and “all about respecting their authority.” During the interviews, when participants mentioned something that happened to them that was potentially hurtful without much elaboration, I asked them, “How did that make you feel?” to deepen my understanding of their experience. The participants would then share more details about how they felt about a particular experience.

Participants

The target population of this dissertation study were Asian American public library leaders in California. In terms of my sample, I sought mid- and senior-level Asian American public library leaders who worked in California. To recruit participants, I used a purposeful sampling method, where participants were chosen based on their characteristics (e.g., location, generational status, and cultural background) and their role as an Asian American mid- or senior-level public library leader. As Asian American communities can represent a wide spectrum of cultural backgrounds and generational statuses, I recruited participants who represented East Asian, Southeast Asian, and South Asian cultural backgrounds to ensure that a broad array of perspectives, histories, and contexts would be accounted for. In a research article about the complexities of generational status for Japanese Americans, Saito (2021) mentioned that historical context and societal reception play a role in the development of the

ethnic identity of immigrant groups in the United States and that contextual factors contributing to ethnic identity formation that include home, school, and community can lead to positive adjustment and well-being. Due to the role of generational status' impact on ethnic identity, I recruited participants who had a variety of generational statuses. I also ensured that these participants represented a mix of regions (e.g., Northern California, Central California, and Southern California).

According to Bartholomew et al. (2021), phenomenological research requires data to come from different perspectives while acknowledging there are time limits and constraints to each study. The authors stated that relatively small sample sizes may be sufficient in describing a phenomenon and may help researchers avoid potential redundancy of data that can come from larger sample sizes. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation, the state when there is enough information to replicate the study, can play a role in the quality of research that is conducted and the credibility of the study. Data saturation may also occur when no new data is being obtained through the participants (Peoples, 2022). Qualitative studies can reach data saturation at relatively small sample sizes of nine to seventeen interviews or four to eight focus group discussions (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). I recruited seven participants via email through the Asian Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA) listserv and the We Here social media group. Using the snowball recruitment method, I asked some of these participants to recommend additional mid- and senior-level Asian American public library leaders for this study and was able to recruit four more participants. Five of these participants were my acquaintances in the profession and none of them worked in the same library I did. I had not met the remaining six participants prior to interviewing them. Once I ensured that the participants met the criteria of the study, I

scheduled a 90-minute Zoom interview for each participant based on the availability provided to me. Before the interview, I sent the participants interview questions to enable them to review the content and reflect upon their answers prior to the discussion taking place. Table 3.1 contains descriptive information about the participants.

Table 3.1

Participant Descriptions

Participant	Gender	Identity	Generation	Management Level
Jan	Female	Chinese American	Fourth	Senior
Rebecca	Female	Filipino American	First	Middle
Charlotte	Female	Filipino American	First	Senior
Elizabeth	Female	Indian American	First	Senior
Luna	Female	Filipino American	First	Middle
James	Male	Korean American	First	Senior
Sara	Female	Chinese American	Fourth	Middle
Elijah	Male	Filipino American	First	Senior
Mia	Female	Taiwanese American	First	Middle
Celeste	Female	Filipino American	Second	Middle

Jennifer Female Japanese American Fourth Middle

The participants from this pool represented a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, including two Chinese Americans, five Filipino Americans, an Indian American, a Taiwanese American, a Korean American, and a Japanese American. Six spent most of their careers in Northern California, two spent a prominent part of their career split mostly between Central and Northern California, and three hailed from Southern California. Nine participants identified as female, while two identified as male. Five participants held senior-level positions, and six participants were in middle management roles. Four of the participants self-identified as immigrants, four participants indicated they had immigrant parents, and three participants expressed that they were fourth-generation Americans.

Data Analysis Methods

After reviewing the transcriptions of the interviews, basic qualitative analysis techniques were used, such as coding the data and looking for concepts and patterns to describe the participants' experiences (Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019). According to Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019), the coding process is a dynamic one that can help the researcher understand the participants' views and actions from their own perspectives. Quirkos, a qualitative software program, was used to go through each transcript, manually code and highlight passages. At the time Quirkos was used for my analysis, the program did not have advanced AI features.

After each transcript was coded, Quirkos created a bubble chart that helped me further understand the connections among the codings. Each transcript was analyzed four times by highlighting the participants' quotes that had similar keywords and patterns. After reviewing the

transcripts a few times, the codings that elicited common themes were grouped together. When similarities in some of the ideas presented in the interview transcripts were found, I went through the transcripts again and highlighted the recurring patterns. For example, when some of the transcripts mentioned how important it was for participants to put the needs of the community over the needs of the individual, I went through all the transcripts and highlighted any instances that would mention this pattern. I also took note of when a few of the codings formed a pattern. For instance, several of the interviews noted different types of racial discrimination from explicit race-based attacks to microaggressions. Through these codings, a broader theme of how navigating racism was a part of these participants' leadership journeys was developed.

The findings were discovered through an analysis of the patterns and themes surrounding the participants' experiences and then examining the data for the connections to AsianCrit theory. The connections to the core tenets of AsianCrit, which is an expansion of Critical Race Theory to center the racialized journeys of Asian Americans, was used to analyze the results. For example, as patterns around the interviewees' race and gender arose, connections to the AsianCrit tenet of Intersectionality, the notion that White supremacy and other forms of oppression shaped the conditions in which Asian Americans exist, became more apparent (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). As participants addressed being stereotyped as perpetual foreigners and model minorities, the connections to the AsianCrit tenet of Asianization, the notion of how White supremacy and nativist racism in the U.S. contribute to Asian Americans being racialized and stereotyped, came to the surface (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Common findings and themes from the analysis are presented in Chapter 4. Participants' quotes were shared while findings were reported verbatim from transcribed interviews.

Limitations and Biases

Limitations were inevitable in the research process. Within the qualitative research process, there can be issues relating to credibility that can be beyond our control (Noble et al., 2015). For example, respondents may not answer the questions accurately or without bias. They also may not feel comfortable answering the questions. To reduce the limitations in this study, I tried to earn trust with the participants by outlining the transparency of the research process and sharing the interview questions with them in advance.

As a mid-level Asian American public library leader who met the criteria for participation in this study, I found it challenging to navigate the data neutrally as I brought my own preconceived notions and biases regarding this topic. In a book about phenomenological research and writing, Peoples (2022) suggested using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach which helped me navigate my own preconceived notions. The hermeneutic approach focuses on the process of continually updating our understanding of the phenomenon and being able to replace our current conceptions with more fitting ones through reflection (Peoples, 2022). By engaging in follow-up questions with some of the participants both during and after the interview, I helped clarify my own preconceptions as I analyzed and interpreted the data (Peoples, 2022).

This study examined the experiences of Asian American mid-level or senior public library leaders who work in California. These experiences likely will differ from the experiences of Asian Americans from other regions due to the location and their respective organizations' cultural impact on the individual. The limitation of having a small sample size may impact the transferability of the study.

Statement of Bias

As a mid-level Asian American public library manager in the Bay Area, I may have brought preconceived ideas of the experiences of mid- and senior-level Asian American public library leaders in California. I worked to put distance between what I believed was the experience of other leaders in California and their true experiences. On top of engaging in follow-up questions, engaging in peer-debriefing over the data helped me gain external perspectives on my research process. I was able to debrief over the data with my colleague in the field and they reviewed my preliminary notes and findings. Along with my dissertation chair, my colleague illuminated the patterns they kept on seeing with the participants' intersectional identities. This external perception was helpful as it exposed a gap in my coding. Keeping a research journal helped me keep a personal record of the process, my feelings, and impressions during the interview. Through my journal, I kept a log of my evolving perceptions and personal introspections over what had been said in the interviews. Both techniques served as helpful tools that aided my understanding of this research process.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries that the researcher sets to help narrow the scope of the study (Creswell, 2014). Delimitations can include research questions, the selection of objectives, and population selection. The first delimitation is the choice of the problem of study, as I created the research topic of the study: to learn more about the leadership pathways and barriers of Asian American public library leaders. The second delimitation revolved around their geographic regions. In terms of geographic region, I recruited Asian American public library leaders from California. The third delimitation revolved around criteria for participation, such as the participants' roles in their organization and their cultural background, as I sought to find mid- to executive-level leaders who represented the diversity of East, Southeast, and South Asian

American communities due to the overlap and geographic connections among these regions and cultures. The findings and results may not necessarily generalize to other subjects, locations, or future time periods.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the leadership pathways of Asian American library leaders by examining the lived experience of Asian American public library leaders in California. The delimitations of the study revolved around the (1) topic of the study (leadership pathways and barriers of Asian American public library leaders); (2) the geographic region in which I recruited participants (California); and (3) the criteria for participation, such as the participants' roles in their organization and generational status. I recruited participants via email through the Asian Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA) listserv and the We Here social media group and interviewed eleven mid- and senior-level Asian American public library leaders through Zoom. When analyzing zoom transcriptions and audio-recordings of my interviews, basic qualitative analysis techniques, such as coding the data and looking for themes, concepts, and patterns to describe the participants' experiences, were used. The participants' experiences in this study may differ from other Asian American public library leaders from other regions, so having a smaller sample size may impact the transferability of the study. This study sought to inform the experiences of Asian American public library leaders on the importance of sharing their stories and an awareness of challenges in moving up in their careers.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to provide the research findings. I used a phenomenological approach and looked for patterns and categorized themes through a Critical Race Theory and AsianCrit lens. In this chapter, the research questions that guided this study are reshared and themes and findings are presented.

The findings are organized based on the research sub-questions. The major themes that emerged from the participants' experiences were: (a) navigating racism within the workplace was a part of their professional experiences; (b) intersectionality of identities had an impact on some of their careers; (c) most participants believed that leaders must work hard, develop their voice, and advocate for what is right; and (d) most participants prioritized community interests.

Research Questions

The overarching question that guided this study was: "What are the lived experiences of mid-level or senior Asian American library leaders regarding attaining library leadership positions in public libraries?" The study was guided by the following sub-questions:

1. How do they describe their experiences with their career trajectory?
2. What are their experiences with any barriers they may have faced as they ascended in their career?
3. What are their experiences in supporting Asian Americans to pursue library leadership careers?
4. How do they describe their experiences of receiving support from others in their own leadership journey?

Presentation of Findings

Through my analysis, the following four themes surfaced: (a) navigating racism in the workplace was a part of these participants' experiences (Navigating Racism); (b) some participants mentioned how intersectionality had an impact on their careers (Intersectionality); (c) most participants reported that leaders must work hard, develop their voice, and advocate for what is right (Persistence); and (d) all participants prioritized community interests (Community). Within three of the themes, a few subthemes emerged. The second theme of Intersectionality did not have any subthemes. Under the Navigating Racism theme, participants shared that they contended with stereotyping, White-dominant spaces, the bamboo ceiling, as well as explicit race-based attacks. Under the same theme, some participants noted how they were able to break ceilings and be the first Asian American to be in a leadership role. Under the theme of Persistence, participants highlighted the value of hard work, developing one's voice, and advocating for what is right. Lastly, under the Community theme, participants expressed great pride in their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts, their value of mentorship, and their work in diversifying staff through networking and intentional actions.

Table 4.2

Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes	Quotations
1. Navigating racism is a part of the experience.	Stereotypes	<p><i>“The whole model minority thing is really a shadow over us.” Elijah</i></p> <p><i>“As an Asian American, you get stereotyped as submissive.” Charlotte</i></p>

White-dominant spaces	<p><i>“It’s still a very White, predominately female profession.” Jan</i></p> <p><i>“This profession is very White, and when you don’t get job offers you question yourself.” Sara</i></p>
Bamboo ceiling	<p><i>“Moving further beyond my current position has been a little bit of a challenge.” Jennifer</i></p> <p><i>“I’ve never played the game or codeswitched, so that is why I will never be a library director.” Sara</i></p>
Explicit racism	<p><i>“A White man in a suit told me to go back to [expletive] China.” Mia</i></p>
Breaking ceilings	<p><i>“I am the first director of color at my library.” Charlotte</i></p> <p><i>“I was the first Asian American to be appointed as a library director in the city.” James</i></p>

2. Participants expressed how intersectionality had an impact on their careers.

“In Asia, people are still not taking women too seriously.” Mia

“As an Asian American female, there can be a preconceived notion that I was going to be more quiet and more reserved.” Jan

“As a female of color, I try to bring others to the table.” Charlotte

		<i>"I wanted to break that stereotype of being a quiet Asian woman." Celeste</i>
3. Participants reported that persistence was a part of their leadership journey.	Working hard	<i>"Working hard was instilled in me from a young age." Jennifer</i> <i>"I overworked and that got the attention of managers and admin. That's how I ended up standing out among my colleagues." Luna</i>
	Developing one's voice	<i>"It's really being comfortable in your own skin as much as possible, and being mentally and emotionally ready to lead other people." James</i> <i>"It's really important to be your authentic self and just keep pushing forward, even though it can be hard sometimes." Rebecca</i>
	Advocating for what is right	<i>"I'm super proud of our drag queen storytime. It was such a controversial time. We were getting phone calls from across the country." Charlotte</i> <i>"We are very humble. It is hard for us to tell the story... But when we advocate for our own organization, we do it well." Jan</i>
4. Participants valued the community's interests.	Diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts	<i>"I actually started a Filipino affinity group with Filipino-identifying staff." Rebecca</i> <i>"Being inclusive means being unapologetically</i>

inclusive.” Elizabeth

Value of
mentorship

“I’m really more of a mentor. I grow staff and then they get promoted.” Sara

“My mentors helped me out with school and navigating management.” Rebecca

“My mentor saw so much potential in me. He was always so supportive.” Celeste

Diversifying
staff with
intention

“We track what the demographics are of our workforce.” James

“I had to stand up for myself a lot and say, ‘I need someone who is reflecting of this community.’”

Charlotte

Theme 1: Navigating Racism was a Part of These Participants’ Experiences

Navigating racism was a common theme throughout most interviews and participants shared about the barriers in navigating their careers. Participants were open and shared their stories as Asian Americans who pursued leadership roles in public libraries in California. The AsianCrit tenet of Asianization and transnational contexts aligned with the results of this section, as their perceived foreignness gave the impression to other racial groups that they were less capable leaders because they did not look or sound like White American leaders. Their stories shared their leadership pathways and how they often had to work harder than their White peers in a public library work environment. Most participants revealed that they experienced varying

levels of racism and microaggressions from colleagues at their organizations. These participants were aware of how they were racialized in predominately White work environments as less competent or less capable leaders due to their racial identities.

Charlotte was one of the participants who recognized their leadership pathway looked different from her White peers. Charlotte was a city librarian in Southern California. She was a first-generation Filipino American who spoke both English and Tagalog. Charlotte had worked in public libraries for 29 years and worked in a variety of roles from circulation assistant to librarian at the same institution. As the first person of color in her current senior-level position, Charlotte realized early on how different her career pathway was from her White peers. Charlotte said:

When I look at the greater executive table, there's very few people of color there. Coming into my current director position, it was hard. The previous directors were White, and I think there's a level of entitlement with them, where you don't feel like you have to earn the position, or you don't feel like you must show that you've earned it.

Charlotte went on to express how difficult it was to be the first of her culture because she felt the need to prove herself worthy of the position. She had mentioned how the previous White directors maintained the status quo and did not have to excel in their roles to be accepted for who they were. Charlotte mentioned that “being Filipino or Asian American, you often get stereotyped as submissive, and that stereotype impedes us.” Under the umbrella of racism, many other participants in the study expressed that it was common for them to experience being perceived in a certain way based on their race in the workplace, as well as having to navigate culturally homogeneous spaces, navigating and sometimes breaking the bamboo ceiling, and experiencing explicit racism. These four findings will be presented as sub-themes below.

Navigating Stereotypes

One subtheme under the theme of Navigating Racism was the challenges in being stereotyped by colleagues. Several participants stated how the model minority stereotype, the stereotype that depicted individuals as competent but quiet and submissive, colored their leadership experiences as they would receive pushback when their behavior did not align with what was expected out of them (Daley et al., 2022). In addition to having experienced being stereotyped as a model minority, some participants mentioned how the stereotype of being a “perpetual foreigner,” the stereotype where ethnic minority populations are seen as not being from America, impacted how they were perceived in the workplace.

Elizabeth’s story was an example of a participant who endured barriers that stemmed from the model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes. Elizabeth was the director of a city library in Northern California. She had 40 years of experience working in public and community college libraries in Central and Northern California. Elizabeth grew up in a middle-class family in India and immigrated to California to attend library school. As a first-generation immigrant from India, Elizabeth endured barriers surrounding her Asian immigrant identity and the model minority stereotype, who shared that:

It is true, for a lot of Asians, that we tend to be very deferential. In a way, we really bow to authority very easily. We don’t question authority and we’re raised to respect it. We’re very careful, so when we question things, people raise their eyebrows and ask, ‘How dare you?’ I’ve had to figure out how to stand your ground and push forward. I think that is one of my biggest barriers. If you are a minority woman who’s strong, you get looked at as, “You can’t do that.”

When she reflected about her Indian roots, Elizabeth expressed that Asian Americans tended to have a deferential and submissive image and it was common for Asian Americans like herself to respect authority and not to question it. Elizabeth indicated that the submissive, deferential

model minority stereotype was difficult to break through as a strong woman of color. Whenever she questioned authority, she was met with strong resistance. Elizabeth said it took her some time before she felt comfortable in standing up for herself and pushing forward as an immigrant and a woman of color in a field where she did not see herself represented in staffing or library programs or services in general.

On top of navigating the model minority stereotype, Elizabeth also navigated outside perceptions of her English language abilities. Despite English being her first language, Elizabeth also shared how the perpetual foreigner stereotype, her immigrant identity, and the assumption that she did not speak English impacted her when she was starting library school in America:

I think one of the barriers is that you're always trying to explain yourself. People constantly ask me, "Oh, how do you speak English so well?" My mother tongue is English and I have a Master's degree in English Literature, so I think we can communicate. When I was going to library school, they were really pushing me to take the TOEFL because I came from a university out of the country, and I told them, "I'm not going to take it." I actually called the department head on the phone and said, "You're talking to me on the phone. Can you understand me?" and he said, "Yes." "Then why am I being required to take the TOEFL?"

Being asked to take the TOEFL test, a test that measures the English language ability of non-native speakers of English to enroll in an English-speaking university, was maddening to Elizabeth, whose first language was English. She mentioned how much courage it took for her to call the department head of her library school to tell them she was not going to take the test. Elizabeth cited that one of the barriers to her leadership pathway was that she had to regularly explain herself and justify her existence in professional spaces. As with Elizabeth's experience, the perpetual foreigner stereotype and the assumption that one did not speak English was a common occurrence in some of the other participants' leadership pathways. They mentioned how their appearance, race, and accent contributed to other's questioning of their communication

skills in English, even if they were fluent in English. For example, Sara noted that one of the stereotypes for Asian Americans are “if we can speak English correctly.” For most participants, the assumptions and stereotypes created a shadow over who they were and impacted how they were seen in professional spaces.

Other participants alluded to the idea that stereotypes around their identity would have a negative impact on their leadership experiences. Elijah served as the assistant director at a city library in Southern California. Elijah identified as a first-generation Filipino American immigrant and had worked in public libraries in a variety of roles, from library assistant to librarian in Southern California for 17 years. Elijah echoed the sentiment of how stereotypes can create barriers for Asian American library workers and expressed:

I think the more dangerous assumption is that I am going to be nice, a “yes” person, and a pushover. I sometimes feel that I can’t be aggressive or upset about something. In the past, I have been called “arrogant.” I wonder if I was White, would you ever say that to me? I have been called “confident” as well, but I feel that some people get upset when I project like, “I want to do this and I am willing to do it now.” If I challenge something and tell people that “No, I don’t like that” or “We’re not doing that,” I feel there’s a little bit like a “I thought Filipinos were nice” kind of thing.

Elijah noted that the model minority myth and the expectation of Filipinos “being nice and submissive” can be challenging to navigate, especially in a leadership role, where you may have to be more assertive and provide direction. Even though both Elizabeth and Elijah are in senior-level positions at their respective public libraries with decades of experience, the stereotypes of Asian Americans like the model minority myth and the perpetual foreigner stereotype continues to be one of their barriers in navigating the world of public librarianship.

Navigating White-Dominant Spaces

All participants mentioned how navigating White-dominant spaces was a component of their leadership pathways. In a predominantly White field, most participants made note of how

White-dominant spaces sometimes made them feel lonely, tokenized or unwelcomed as public library staff. Participants provided rich descriptions of how being in a majority-White profession has impacted them from going to library school to the interview process. Some participants said the lack of cultural representation in public libraries also made it difficult for them to see themselves in library staff roles to begin with. For example, Rebecca indicated that the lack of cultural representation in library staff colored the beginning part of her career. Rebecca served as a program manager at a city library in Northern California. Rebecca identified as a first-generation Filipina American and started off as a journalist before getting a librarian role at her current institution. Even though Rebecca had fond memories of her hometown library growing up, library work never seemed like a possibility for her before getting into libraries because of the lack of representation:

I don't know why it took me that long to realize that librarianship could be a career for me. I always loved the library. Librarians were a big part of my life growing up in my hometown. For me, I just didn't think it was a possibility. The numbers look pretty bad, the profession is 86% White people?

While Rebecca noted that the librarians in her hometown were a prominent part of her childhood, librarianship seemed like a distant possibility before working in libraries. The lack of representation in the librarian space made the field seem like it was not the most welcoming in Rebecca's eyes. When she eventually joined the library field, there were very few Filipino librarians and library programs that reflected her Filipino culture. Other participants also shared that they were often one of the few Asian Americans represented in their work environments. The lack of representation and cultural mentorship created a barrier for some participants as it impacted their belief in themselves.

Sara was one of the participants whose experiences with a lack of diverse staff and cultural mentorship impacted her professional growth. Sara, a technical services manager in a county library system in Northern California, was one of the participants impacted by the culture of whiteness in the field. Sara identified as fourth-generation California Chinese American, had worked in public libraries in Northern California for over 35 years, and was bilingual in Cantonese and English. Sara also noted how the demographic makeup of the field had impacted her career trajectory:

One of the barriers I have faced in my career stems from it being a White world. It's very White and then when you don't get job offers, you question yourself. Is it because of you as an individual, or you because of your color? Oftentimes, I did question why I wasn't promoted and then I think about how people from different cultural backgrounds interview differently. For example, eye contact is a part of it. To this day, I am not good with eye contact and some people tend to talk very fast or use hand gestures. There may be a perception of who the interviewer wants, and you might not match up with that.

Sara's perception of how pervasive the culture of whiteness was in hiring practices was not an uncommon one. The homogeneous climate of the public library profession made her question why she did not get job offers. Sara indicated that because she did not fit the western norms of librarianship, it was sometimes difficult for her to move up in her career. Some participants echoed how the lack of cultural diversity in the field put pressure on them to feel like they had to fit into a mold and codeswitch to be accepted or even get into the field to begin with. Another participant, Luna, echoed this sentiment. Luna was a senior librarian in a city library in Northern California. Luna immigrated to the United States from the Philippines when she was eight and had worked in library paraprofessional, librarian, and assistant branch manager roles in the public library field over the past 16 years. Luna's experiences with a predominately White field made her feel like an outsider to the profession:

I look young for my age, so I feel my physical description affects how people see how serious I could be. Because I didn't see a lot of Filipinos in the field, it made me feel like an outsider or a visitor to the field in addition to being a visitor in America. And then when I was in school, I saw a lot of my White colleagues being promoted ahead of me and having an easier time finding jobs and careers, whereas I would still be stuck and scrambling to put multiple part-time jobs together to make a living.

Throughout her early days in her career, because Luna appeared younger and was a part of an underrepresented group, she felt that she was perceived as less capable. While she worked multiple part-time jobs, she witnessed her White colleagues having an easier time getting promoted and moving up in their careers. The lack of diversity in the field made her feel like an outsider to the profession.

On top of the lack of diversity in library staff, some participants noted the lack of cultural representation in leadership roles and how that inspired them to strive to have a seat at the table in terms of decision-making. Elijah noted that the lack of representation in library leadership inspired him to apply for management roles:

I became a professional librarian for a few years, but the one thing that made me decide that I want to become a decision maker was a story that was told by my branch manager. At that time, one of the new city leaders was an African American man. During this time, there were not a lot of people of color anywhere, but it was a big thing when he became one of our new city leaders. At one of the branch manager meetings, there was a lot of talk like, "Oh, yeah, he's so great" and "He's so articulate" again and again. The handful of people of color among the branch managers got really offended at this meeting and were like, "Why do you keep on saying that?" The White people in the room were like, "What are you talking about?" "You keep saying he's articulate. Is that an automatic assumption that he's not articulate? And so, you're marveling at the fact that he can speak? I got offended at what they were saying at the meeting. At that moment, I was like I couldn't let this happen. I need to throw my name in the leadership pool. I want to be with the people of color who are protesting this.

Elijah spent several years as a professional librarian before he became interested in a leadership role. He shared that he became interested in applying for a management position when his branch manager told him a story about a discussion about the new African American city manager at

their branch manager meeting. At that time, there were few leaders of color at the city government level, so the city manager's appointment was deemed significant within the context of the city's history. In the branch manager meeting, the White branch managers repeatedly expressed how the new city manager was "articulate." These microaggressions, or intentional or unintentional slights that can communicate negative messages to underrepresented community members (Sue, 2009), were upsetting to the few branch managers of color in the room as it felt demeaning to be surprised by the new African American city manager's eloquence. While personally maddening to Elijah, Elijah's example of microaggressions in the branch manager's meeting was a part of the reason why he decided to strive for a leadership position at his library. Upon hearing his branch manager's story, he wanted to have authority to make space for underrepresented voices and stand up against microaggressions and other injustices. For Elijah, navigating predominantly White spaces inspired him to develop his leadership skills to make a difference at his organization. Elijah's, Rebecca's, and Sara's stories are some of the perspectives that help describe the challenges in navigating a culturally homogeneous field and work environment. On top of navigating whiteness in the workplace, participants shared how the lack of diversity in the field also made it difficult for them to ascend in their career journeys.

Navigating the Bamboo Ceiling

Navigating the bamboo ceiling, a work environment where Asian Americans are disproportionately underrepresented in leadership roles, was one of the barriers that some of the participants contended with (Hyun, 2005). In addition to being underrepresented in leadership roles, participants also shared stories of struggle in being able to ascend in their careers in a predominantly White work environment. For example, despite being a qualified professional and a national leader, Rebecca indicated that throughout her career there were individuals who never

believed in her and actively prevented her from moving up. At her organization, Rebecca served as a librarian and a branch manager in addition to being active in national library organizations.

On this note, Rebecca said:

There are a lot of strong Filipino women, but at the same time, we're not in leadership yet. It's like there's some sort of barrier that's preventing us from achieving those levels. In my career, every step of the way, I feel that I've had somebody in library leadership who just never believed in me. For example, every time I have gone up for a promotion, she would say that I am not ready for this role.

Even though Rebecca perceived that strong Filipino women have a significant presence in her community, she wondered why there were not more Filipino women in leadership roles in libraries. Rebecca mentioned that she felt that there was a ceiling or a barrier preventing them from moving up in their careers. In Rebecca's case, she felt that there were usually colleagues who doubted her abilities and did not believe in her leadership potential. Rebecca's experience was a common story with some of the other participants who had a more difficult time moving up their own career ladders due to being culturally different in predominantly White work environments.

Similarly, Sara also wondered if there was a ceiling or barrier that prevented them from advancing in their careers. Sara mentioned how their authenticity made it harder for them to break the ceiling and rise to a senior-level leadership position. For example, Sara noted how her unwillingness to waver from being her authentic self meant that it would be difficult for her to move up in her career:

One of my barriers is that I don't play the game. I've never played the game and codeswitched, which is probably why I will never be a library director. I know there are some Asian Americans who have moved up the ladder because they know how to play the game. If you are not an extrovert, you're not even considered for high-level roles. I'm just not that individual.

Sara acknowledged that moving up in her library system meant that one would have to embody the Western ideal of an extroverted leader. Sara noted that to be a library director, one would have to “play the game” and be a politician to be able to perform adequately in the position. Sara also touched upon the idea of how codeswitching, or adjusting one’s style of appearance, expression, and behavior in ways that will create a comfortable environment of others (Blanchard, 2021), was a skill that was needed to move up in a work environment that was not always welcoming to people of color. Sara believed that one of the reasons why some of her peers of color were able to move up was because they were able to successfully codeswitch and adopt the Western ideal of being an extroverted leader in predominantly White library spaces. The Western ideal of an extroverted leader was touched upon directly and indirectly through several other interviews. Several participants expressed that they were raised to be quiet and humble and how their humility sometimes made it harder to get noticed in a culture they perceived as valuing extroversion. While some participants said that their quiet nature was a superpower as it helped them focus on listening to their staff and constituents, these cultural differences also created a barrier in them moving up their respective career ladders, as well as facing explicit racism along the way.

Navigating Explicit Racism

Some participants shared that navigating explicit racism was a part of their library career trajectory. These participants expressed the pain they felt in navigating racism in the field. For example, Jan shared her experiences navigating explicit racial remarks in her library career. Jan served as a city librarian in Northern California. Jan identified as a fourth-generation Chinese Californian and had worked in libraries across Northern, Central, and Southern California for over 40 years. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian American faced increased

marginalization as the pathogen emerged from China and many Americans are unaware of the distinctions among the different Asian ethnic groups (Daley et al., 2022). Despite having been a senior-level leader who was nationally recognized for their leadership skills, Jan indicated that she still experienced explicit racism in her role, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Jan said:

When I was at my previous institution during COVID, I would get spat on a lot and would get pushed around, even as a director of a large institution. It was always about “go back to where you came from” and “you brought this disease.” It was all this racism and misguided thinking that they kept deep down that was only now coming to the surface.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Jan would face the vitriol of the public who believed that her community caused the pandemic. The explicit racism Jan faced made her reflect upon the importance of supporting library workers of color in a public library setting. Even though she was a director of a large, respected organization, community members would still try to disrespect her through racist language. Experiences like these influenced Jan to work harder to support library workers of color who did not have the same level of opportunities as their White colleagues. Jan shared that, “I want to support people who have been disenfranchised because they had a challenge, or a barrier based on their perception of who they were” and supporting library workers of color helped her persist during trying times such as these. Even though Jan was a fourth-generation Chinese American, the community still viewed her as a perpetual foreigner.

Participants who identified as immigrants with non-Western accents would also face explicit racism from their communities. As an immigrant from India, Elizabeth said that their accent would sometimes be a point of contention for some individuals:

I remember there was once when I was talking to a customer on the phone at work, and he got very angry with me. He told me that he wanted to speak to a native English speaker. That really devastated me, because my accent was different, but English was literally my first language. In India, that's how we grow up. My family was middle class, and we moved around a lot. My father was in the military and English was a common language for all of us. Things like that really hurt you and make you hold back a lot more.

The pain that Elizabeth felt while being on the receiving end of this call from a customer had a negative impact on her personal growth and developing her self-confidence. This experience frightened her to the point where it took her awhile to get comfortable with being her authentic self. As an immigrant and a person of color, she felt like she was an outsider in her career and was afraid to negotiate for herself in terms of salary and career. It was not until her mentor, also a person of color, helped her negotiate for her salary for her current role many years later. Similar to some of the other participants who identified as immigrants, being viewed as “foreign” and “not representing cultural Americanness” further contributed to their devaluation (Daley et al., 2022). Explicit racism remained a part of some of these participants’ experiences in the public library field.

Breaking Ceilings

Despite the challenges in the participants’ career trajectories, the following senior-level leaders ended up doing extraordinary work and breaking ceilings. These participants were the first from their cultural background to assume their roles, and they shared that they used their positionality to pay it forward to other library workers of color. For example, Charlotte shared the following:

When I first joined library administration, it was all White. I’ve completely flipped the table and now our entire executive team is made of all people of color. I am the first director of color in a predominately Hispanic community.

Charlotte's example exemplified breaking ceilings on a local level, whereas Jan noted how she broke barriers nationally when she became the president and an executive board member for a national library organization:

I was the first Asian American president of [a national library organization,] and another person of color came in right after me. The barrier was broken right away, so it was great. This organization has a long history and has been in existence for 150 years. I broke another barrier by serving as an executive board member for this organization.

Jan noted that through her various leadership roles she had been able to push for equity in significant ways and created spaces for other underrepresented library workers. Like many other senior-level library leaders, Jan expressed that being the first of her cultural background to be in these leadership roles was meaningful to the underrepresented communities she served because it was a unique experience for these communities to see themselves reflected in library leadership. When she was hired to be a library director of her predominately Asian American city, Jan shared "I was greeted with so many open arms... The fact that it was somebody who looked like them, who cared about who was there, made me more approachable to them." Jan described the love and appreciation she received from her predominantly Asian American city and how she made the community feel comfortable in reaching out to her to share feedback on library services. Building upon the feedback she received from her community, Jan used her authority to increase her world language collections and cultural programming at her library to further support underrepresented populations in her community.

James also shared how he broke barriers by becoming the first public library executive who identified as being Asian American in his city. James served as a city librarian of an urban library system in Northern California. He had worked in public libraries for over 32 years in a variety of roles from librarian to branch manager to city librarian. James identified as a Korean

American, who was born to a Korean mother and a White American military father and was raised by his White American grandparents. Since his mother was not a part of his childhood, James indicated that he never had an opportunity to connect with his Korean heritage growing up. It was not until he was appointed into a city librarian role that he recognized the magnitude of his appointment of being the first Asian American to be the library director in his city. This realization enabled him to embrace his Korean heritage and use his role to make space for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders.

When James was appointed as the first Asian American city librarian, he quickly learned what his appointment meant for his community. Throughout his tenure as a city librarian, he was able to leverage his authority to empower his community and staff. For example, James used his authority to reduce the barrier of entry to libraries for staff through informal mentorship. He shared that his approach was to be accessible to staff by supporting them and sharing his wisdom. During the pandemic, he met up with paraprofessional staff to develop and foster a supportive community for them. To further support his community and staff, when he first started at his institution, he was able to galvanize efforts to eliminate overdue fines and helped to create a racial equity plan for his library system. James, along with Charlotte and Jan, were the first Asian Americans to break ceilings in their library leadership roles, but all expressed that they did not want to be the last. All three participants stated that they took immense pride in supporting and growing underrepresented library leaders.

Theme 2: Navigating Intersectional Identities was a Part of The Participants' Experiences.

The theme of navigating intersectional identities was a common theme throughout the interviews, as participants shared how their experiences as both a woman and a person of color

impacted their leadership pathways. The AsianCrit tenet of intersectionality aligned with the results of this section. Intersectionality is when multiple systems of oppression such as sexism, heterosexism, racism, and ableism, simultaneously impact the lived experiences of the participants and their abilities to lead their organizations (Ifikar & Museus, 2018). Participants noted how being an Asian American woman meant that they had to negotiate stereotypes, racism, and sexism in their professional and personal lives, and many of these participants did not initially view themselves as natural-born leaders early on in their careers. Nine out of the 11 participants talked about how it felt like there was a preconceived notion of who they would be based on their identity of being Asian American and female. For example, Jan said, “As an Asian American female, I think others had this notion that I would be more quiet and more reserved.” Being perceived as quiet, reserved, and possibly even submissive was a common pattern with the Asian American female participants. Participants expressed that when they did not match up with the stereotypes of being quiet and submissive, they sometimes experienced more resistance and criticism. As an example, Elizabeth was someone who had to navigate pressure related to her identity. Elizabeth mentioned “if you are a minority woman who is strong, you can be looked at a certain way, so being ready to deal with the consequences of that is important.” As in Elizabeth’s case, the combination of identifying as a strong Asian American woman in an environment, where Asian American women were often labeled as submissive and quiet, invited disapproval.

On top of the potential of facing pushback for breaking stereotypes, some participants mentioned how preconceived notions around their intersectional identity also made them feel underestimated. For example, as a branch manager, Rebecca was often mistaken for the student intern even though she was the leader of the branch she worked at. In comparison to Rebecca’s

feelings towards her patrons' perceptions of her, Mia noted that her leadership pathway was shaped by her family's perceptions of her abilities. Mia worked as a senior librarian at a county library system in Northern California. Mia identified as a first-generation Taiwanese American immigrant and had a Master of Library and Information Science from a Taiwanese university as well as an American university. Mia worked for several years at a university library and archives in Taiwan before working in the special collection and public libraries in the East Coast and California. As an immigrant from Taiwan, Mia expressed how her identity and traditional gender roles impacted how she was treated in her personal life by her family:

When I didn't have a job, my husband believed that I didn't have the ability to do anything. I don't know what made him feel that way because I did a great job in my academic career and got my two MLIS degrees. I moved to a different country and found a job by myself. I think he learned this from his own childhood. His mother was a housewife, and he thought that mothers from that generation are the ones who go out to spend money and they don't do things. The day after I got into a management role, I think he saw me differently. I feel like this is the very sad part about being an Asian woman. In this part of the world, people are still not taking women seriously. I think I have been underestimated for a long time, and I want to prove that I can do better in my career. Not just to my husband, but to everyone else.

Even though Mia had two graduate degrees and a robust career in libraries, her family still underestimated her abilities and did not always treat her seriously. Mia took a risk, moved to the United States from Taiwan, and was able to find a job at a prestigious library. Despite her accomplishments, it took her husband a long time to recognize her academic and professional abilities. Some other participants echoed the sentiment that because they were women of color, they felt the need to work twice as hard to gain visibility and respect. The combination of the pervasive stereotypes of Asian American women as quiet and submissive with the professional invisibility they sometimes faced was a part of the Asian American public library leaders' experience in California.

Theme 3: Persistence is a Part of The Participants' Experiences.

Despite participants' leadership pathways containing their own unique challenges, most participants cited that a part of their journey revolved around persistence in working hard, developing their voice, and advocating for what is right. The AsianCrit tenet of commitment to social justice aligned with this theme. All participants experienced working in environments where they were the only ones of their cultural background at some point in time in their careers. Some participants talked about how they were the first Asian American in their roles and how they persisted by working hard, developing an authentic voice in an environment that was not always welcoming of underrepresented voices, and using their authority to push for what they felt was right for their communities. For example, as the first Asian American senior leader at his urban library system, James recognized the magnitude of appointment and mentioned how important it was to be present and work hard to support the community. James stated:

If you want to be a leader, you really have to be the first one to show up and the last one to leave. You have to be willing to put in the work. In my role, I have worked 60+ hour work weeks. I've done whatever it took to get the job done. I don't think there are any shortcuts. It really does take a lot of hard work to lead a successful organization, to have the impact that we need to have and to justify the resources that were being entrusted with us.

Like James, other participants overwhelmingly agreed that hard work was necessary to support a diverse patronage with a robust set of needs. As public libraries are funded through taxpayers, there can be a heightened obligation to work hard to justify the library's expenditures. It was a common refrain among participants who noted that they had to work twice as hard to get noticed and to move up in their respective career ladders. Participants expressed that being the first of their race in a particular role added to the pressure these participants felt to make space for themselves and others. In this section, working hard, developing an authentic voice, and

advocating for what is right will be covered as ways in which participants persisted in a culturally homogeneous environment.

Working Hard

The participants reported that working hard was a central part of their journey. Some acknowledged that because of their identity, they felt that they needed to prove themselves in the library field. Other participants shared that working hard was instilled in them at an early age. As a fourth-generation Japanese American, Jennifer shared how working hard, and overachieving was a value that was taught to her growing up. Jennifer stated that:

I don't want to say I'm a workaholic. Maybe just a little bit. But there's this inner persona of always trying to please and overachieve that was instilled in me from a younger age. I'm wondering how much of that impacted where I'm at today.

Jennifer noted that when she was young, she was culturally raised to work hard and to work in harmony with others. Despite being the only Asian American public services leader at her conservative Central California library system, Jennifer's work ethic helped her move up the ladder in her library career and get recognized nationally as an emerging leader by a national library organization. Her work ethic had enabled her to engage with a variety of professional development opportunities and she served as one of the lone voices for diversity, equity, and inclusion at her library system and for her community.

While Jennifer's leadership pathway was colored by her strong work ethic and her tendency to be in harmony with others, Luna cited that she felt compelled to stand out in her work to overcome the difficulties she faced navigating a predominantly White field. Luna, a senior librarian, also talked about how working hard and proving herself was a part of her pathway:

I've been in the library field since 2009. I got my degree in 2014, but I didn't get my first official librarian position until 2018. During that time, I felt like I must prove to myself that I can overcome the whiteness of the profession. It took me so long to get to where I

am, whereas I see other people didn't have as much trouble. So that's what propelled me into an accidental leadership role: the need to prove myself. I ended up standing out amongst my colleagues.

It took Luna many years to navigate the library field before she got her first full-time librarian job. For several years, as Luna worked multiple part-time jobs to make ends meet, she wondered how her White colleagues were able to move up quickly on their career ladders while she was in entry-level roles for a long time. Luna indicated how the whiteness of the profession made her take longer to ascend in her career and wished that she had mentors who told her what she needed to know to interview well and move up the ranks. Once she got into a librarian role, Luna noted that she felt that it was important for her to work hard to prove herself in a field where she did not see herself represented. As she progressed in her career, she learned that it was the combination of working hard and having a strong voice for equity that enabled her to stand out among her colleagues and persist in an environment that was not always welcoming. The sub-theme of working hard also extended itself to the hard work and efforts in developing a strong and authentic voice as shown in the following section.

Developing One's Voice

Developing a strong and authentic voice was a part of the participants' leadership pathways. The participants overwhelmingly valued being their authentic self in the public library profession, but several admitted that it was difficult to do in a culturally homogeneous field. As a senior leader at a city library, Charlotte talked about her experiences being the first director of color to take the helm at her library system and how important it was for her to be her authentic self in her new role. Charlotte said:

I feel like I can be my authentic self at work, but that's also a promise I made to myself when I became a director. The director before me was very quiet and she hired an image consultant and an executive coach. When I took the director role, I'm just going to be me. I don't want staff to be like, "Who is the director?" Staff don't have to change everything in the library just because I walked into the room. I want them to feel safe with me, regardless of what my position is.

When Charlotte was hired as a senior-level leader, she made a promise to herself to be authentic and true as a leader. She recalled how her previous director was shy and reticent, and hired an image consultant and an executive coach to help mold her in the image of an "ideal leader." Charlotte knew from when she took her director role that she was already an anomaly based on her cultural identity and did not want to be anything but herself. Being authentic helped Charlotte become more approachable to her staff and encouraged her staff feel like they can be authentic with her in turn. Charlotte also expressed how her authenticity made the library a warmer and more inviting place for staff. For example, she mentioned how feeding others is a big part of her Filipino culture, so she enjoyed showing love towards staff by feeding them as well. Her authenticity and welcoming nature enabled her to change the culture of her leadership team and recruit and retain other leaders of color in her executive team.

On the other hand, Sara, a technical services manager at a county library, had a different perspective on developing an authentic voice. Sara had experience working in urban libraries and suburban library systems. She noted how it took her a long time to feel comfortable in being her authentic self at her libraries:

It took a long time for me to be my authentic self in libraries. I think it also depends on the environment. When I work with folks who look like me, it's really easy to be authentic, right? It is also easy to be authentic when you're working with folks who are serving the underserved like in Chinatown or work for urban libraries. It's there where you can be your authentic self.

As Sara spent most of her career in urban library settings serving a diverse patronage, she was able to use her language skills in Cantonese to support a diverse community. Through these urban library settings and working with people who looked like her, even though it took her a long time to be her authentic self in libraries, she felt like she could be herself in ways that were more difficult to do in more privileged, less culturally diverse environments. Sara mentioned that although codeswitching can be sometimes a part of the job, especially having worked in more privileged and affluent environments where you may not see many Asian Americans represented, codeswitching was not something she was interested in that point of her career. Sara spoke fondly of the times when using her authentic voice and vision helped her create inclusive spaces for others. For example, she used her authentic voice, her authority, and vision to expand her library's world language collection significantly and advocate for more Asian American representation in the library profession.

Like Sara, James noted that it took many years to develop an authentic voice and feel truly confident in his own "skin." James' predecessor was a well-respected leader in the profession, so when his predecessor retired and he was appointed to replace him, he expressed how there was a significant amount of pressure to follow such an iconic leader. In addition to having felt the strong pressure and weight of being the first Asian American leader of his library system, he also navigated his own feelings of imposter syndrome, or the feelings where some may doubt their abilities or have a persistent fear of being exposed as a "fraud" (Lacey, 2022). On top of navigating a culturally homogeneous field, James' executive leadership experience was colored by the stressors that came with the COVID-19 pandemic. His experience of being able to lead a large organization during library closures helped him build up his confidence. The experiences of James, Sara, and Charlotte in developing their authentic voices and remaining

true to themselves reflected their persistence in a field where their perspectives were distinct and uncommon.

Advocating for What is Right

The participants had a strong social justice ethos and valued equity and equality for all. Participants expressed how they occasionally would have to stand up for what they believed in and have the courage to be steadfast in their beliefs. They cited how their cultural identity inspired them to advocate for communities around them. For example, Jan noted that when she was an early-career library assistant in an urban public library, she used her cultural perspective to advocate for Chinese American children to have accurate depictions of themselves. Jan shared:

When I brought the books to her, I said “there’s a couple that you might have expected me to include that I’m not including.” And she said, “Why? It depicts Chinese people.” And I said, “But do you think all Chinese people look like this?” And she said, “well, no, it’s kind of bothered me a little bit, but I wanted the Chinese American theme or the Chinese theme for my books.” I then asked, “Wouldn’t you rather that you tell the story? Maybe in your own words, rather than have the images from these books? I know that I am taking a risk by sharing that with you in this way, but as someone who strongly believes in providing images where the children feel that they are seen and heard as they should be as opposed to the depiction by someone else.”

Early in Jan’s career, she worked in an urban public library setting and served a culturally diverse population in Northern California. One of her tasks was to find books for a second-grade teacher’s class. As Jan went through the book list that the teacher gave her, she noticed that *The Five Chinese Brothers* by Claire Huchet Bishop and *The Story of Ping* by Marjorie Flack, both books by White authors, that contained stereotypical illustrations of Chinese people with yellow skin and squinted eyes. When she brought the books to the teacher, she purposely left off these two titles and explained that the reason why she left them off was because she believed strongly in giving children access to accurate depictions of people of color. Jan’s courage in standing up

for accurate representation of Chinese people in literature was one of several examples of participants standing up for themselves and their library communities. Even though Jan could have potentially risked her job by standing up for what she believed in, she persisted in being a strong advocate for the Chinese community.

Jan also mentioned how she used her position and her role as the first Asian American to be the president of a prominent national library organization to stand up for the community years later:

There were several times on council when a very prominent librarian called one of the long meetings we were in “Chinese water torture.” I will say that I was the only one that got up and said, “Can we correct what you just said and talk about it? I’m not public shaming you, but what you said was hurtful and you said it out of mind. And so, but because it’s on the record and because everyone in the room heard it, I need you to think about the impact of the words that we say.”

During her time in national library organization leadership roles, Jan noted that there were times when she had to stand up and make space for others. During a longer meeting with other national library leaders, a prominent White librarian called one of the meetings “Chinese water torture” several times. Upon hearing these remarks, Jan stood up and confronted the librarian directly in the meeting and asked to correct what she had said as it was hurtful. Eventually, her colleagues, many of whom were not Asian American, supported Jan in stopping the meeting until the librarian apologized for her statement. Jan recognized that it was not easy to stand up for your community but mentioned that as one of the only Asian Americans in these national leadership spaces, it was personally important for her to persist in standing up for her community. Despite some of the barriers they have encountered, the participants were able to persist in their work environments by demonstrating the ability to work hard for their communities, developing an authentic voice and standing up for their communities.

Theme 4: Participants Valued the Community's Interests.

One of the prominent throughlines among all the participants was the strong emphasis on prioritizing the needs and well-being of the community over one's own interests and desires. The AsianCrit tenet of committing to social justice aligned with this section. Participants expressed how important it was for them to give back and make space for others, as well as nurturing the next generation of leaders of color. For instance, as a long-time senior-level leader, Jan talked about how taking care of one's community was a main driver to her persisting in the library field. She expressed a sense of pride in giving back to the Asian American library community through mentoring and coaching others by sharing:

I go out of my way to meet other Asian American library leaders and offer that support for them, not from the perspective of I know everything, but more from a "If you need anyone to talk to, I've been there." It's important to do this because we are also navigating together in a world that doesn't always recognize the value of our cultural norms or the positive influence and impact they may have on our leadership roles.

Jan acknowledged that in a culturally homogeneous field, the communal norms of Asian Americans and their positive influence they may bring to communities may not always be recognized, so she noted that part of what gave her professional joy was the ability to mentor and support other Asian American library leaders. Participants cited that their love for the community was a main driver in their persistence in this field. Within this theme, participants showed their passion for community through their diversity, equity, and inclusion accomplishments; their appreciation for mentorship and mentorship programs; and their intentional actions towards developing a more diverse workforce.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Accomplishments

Many participants expressed a sense of pride in creating spaces and breaking down barriers for other underrepresented community members through the diversity, equity, and

inclusion-focused projects they led. Participants also said that their experiences being one of the few people of color in their organization heightened their desire to make space for others by developing racial equity plans and creating affinity groups. As a senior-level leader, James was one of the individuals who used his authority to push for others via developing a racial equity plan for his urban library system:

I've developed a racial equity plan that really pushes for greater diversity and equity in my organization. We pay close attention to how we recruit, who gets hired, who's getting disciplined, who's getting fired, and who's getting promoted. We are data-driven, and we track the demographics of our workforce for everyone's classification. We ask ourselves, "Is our workforce representative of the community that we're serving? Is our leadership team diverse?"

Through his library system, James helped to create a racial equity plan that pushed for greater equity in recruiting, hiring, firing, and promoting. This plan enabled his team to track and measure their efforts in ensuring that their workforce represented the communities they served. James relayed that creating a racial equity plan was a labor of love and noted that it was important for his organization to ask hard questions and reflect about cultural representation at the staff level.

Another participant by the name of Celeste was also proud of her accomplishments in developing spaces for others. Celeste was a branch manager at a city library in Southern California and identified as second-generation Filipino American. She had over 25 years of experience in the public library world and worked her way up from being a library assistant to a librarian to a branch manager role. Celeste stated that one of the equity-related projects that was most memorable to her was the citywide book club she supported:

We participate in a One Book program, which is like a citywide book club...The winner one year was a book by a [Filipino short story writer], so a lot of the programs and events we created were on Filipino culture...

Celeste ended up supporting a city-wide book club that honored a Filipino author. She noted how meaningful it was to support this city-wide book club and its cultural programming. This project enabled her to create programs embracing her culture for community members across her city to enjoy and feel represented in library spaces. This project also became the impetus in propelling her into library school as she was able to get a full-ride library school scholarship based on her essay about how personally and culturally meaningful it was to create such programming around a Filipino American author. In summary, Celeste and James created uplifting spaces for their communities through their diversity, equity, and inclusion work for both library staff and patrons. In the next section, participants shared their perspectives on creating spaces of empowerment with the specific focus on library staff through mentorship.

The Value of Mentorship and Creating Spaces for Others

Most participants indicated how important mentorship was to their careers and how essential it is for others' careers. For example, eight of the 11 participants mentioned that they did not have mentors of color and some of the older participants expressed themselves having navigated this profession without a mentor. Three other participants mentioned they were fortunate to have mentors of color in their lives and these mentors were able to encourage them in every step of their career. This experience of having limited mentorship or having a mentor of color inspired participants to take pride in mentoring others or creating affinity groups. For example, Rebecca was proud of the informal mentorship and affinity group she created for Filipino-identifying staff in her system. Rebecca cited the importance of being in community with other librarians of color to create a sense of belonging through social events. Through these activities, the staff would develop relationships and support each other through library school

projects, job interviews, and resume review. On top of having developed a Filipino librarian community, Rebecca shared another benefit that came from the creation of her affinity group:

When I first started [in my library system], I could count all the Filipino librarians on one hand. We've almost doubled since I started. I've helped them with some of their assignments in library school, the interview process, and all of that. It's nice to see the growth there.

When Rebecca started working at her current organization, she found that there were not many Filipino library staff. Rebecca expressed that it was a meaningful experience to be able to grow the number of Filipino librarians in her library system. Having grown her own community of Filipino librarians in her library system enabled her to also expand Filipino cultural programming options in her management role as there were more staff members who had more in-depth knowledge of Filipino American culture and history. The combination of heightened Filipino American librarian visibility and more Filipino cultural programming created a welcoming space for Filipino library workers in her library system. By creating spaces for others in her work environment, Rebecca was able to fully realize the value and importance of mentorship in the library profession as a whole.

Like Rebecca, Luna similarly reflected on how proud she was in developing spaces for library workers of color. Luna's experiences in navigating a predominantly White profession were a contributing factor in her developing a mentorship program for others. Luna expressed that it was difficult not to see herself reflected in the leaders and staff at her organization. She also shared that her work environment felt isolating because she was one of the few people of color at her institution. As one of the few librarians of color in her library system, Luna felt the need to develop spaces for people of color like herself:

I did not have any Asian American mentors, so I ended up founding a BIPOC mentorship program because none of the people of color I worked with had the same mentorship

opportunities that seemed so commonplace in White spaces... Being in a leadership role, it gave me an understanding on how White people were able to get where they were. I did not have the skillsets or the tools to help me fit into that world until I saw some important things were missing. I did not have Filipino Americans or other Asian Americans to go on to explain it to me.

At her library system, Luna observed that her colleagues of color did not have the same mentorship and sponsorship opportunities as her White colleagues. Once she was hired into a leadership role, her mentors helped her gain a more nuanced understanding of how her White colleagues were able to get ahead in their careers. She observed that her White colleagues' skills and cultural fit in their respective work environments made it easier for them to move up the career ladder. This experience inspired her to develop a mentorship program for her colleagues of color at work to provide scaffolding and support for underrepresented communities within her workplace. In summary, Luna's and Rebecca's passion for mentorship and supporting others was emblematic of many of the participants' drive to develop a culture of mentorship for other library workers of color.

Diversifying Staff with Intentional Action

In this study, participants reflected on the value of diverse cultural representation in library staffing to meet the needs of a diverse constituency. Some participants said that diversifying staff in a predominantly White field would not happen without intentional action, and it took work to find and encourage individuals who represented the diversity of the community to apply. Depending on where one lives in California, there may be varying levels of credentialed librarians available to work. For example, when Jan worked as a senior-level leader in rural Central California, she noted that there were a limited number of librarians in her area compared to cities and towns closer to library schools, so she had to create her own training

program to help develop her talent pool and develop a more diverse librarian staff for her communities:

In this program, if you were pursuing your MLIS, we gave you librarian-type activities that correlated with your curriculum development, and we paid you as a librarian for those. When you graduated in a year or two, we put you in a Librarian I role, as long as you were successful in your performance appraisals. And that was growing our own. That program created a much more diverse workforce for us.

Having witnessed the lack of credentialed librarians in her more rural area, Jan was inspired to create her own librarian trainee program to help develop a diverse pool of candidates. Library staff who were pursuing their master's degree in Library and Information Science also received certain professional development activities that related to the curriculum they were engaging with in their graduate program. For example, library staff would work on the library's collection while learning about collection development in school. When they graduated, they were placed automatically into an entry-level Librarian I role. By pairing their professional work with the curriculum to help them develop their skillsets in the field, she was able to grow her staff and develop a more culturally diverse workforce.

Like Jan, James indicated that diversifying the workforce takes time and effort. James expressed how important it was to be intentional in recruiting a diverse workforce:

As far as what advice I would offer to current library leaders who want to diversify their workforce, you have to be intentional. It doesn't happen magically. You have to actually measure and track your progress over time and take a data driven approach. For example, I was recruiting for a new chief deputy to oversee public services a couple of years ago, so I essentially did the work of a headhunter. I looked at the urban library landscape, looked at different organizations, websites, and their leadership teams. I focused on people of color, and I made sure they got the brochure that announced the recruitment. I reached out to several people on LinkedIn and made some phone calls with another half-dozen people.

James noted how important it was to be able to track and measure data on recruiting and hiring to diversify your workforce. When he was recruiting for a new assistant director to

oversee public services, he went to great lengths in recruiting a diverse pool for this position. He researched the different libraries and their leadership teams and would make sure that leaders of color got the recruitment notice. James also reached out to this network and talked to several individuals about the position via phone. In the end of James' recruitment process, he was able to hire an assistant director who both represented the diversity of his community and had the breadth and depth of knowledge he was looking for. James was intentional about advertising the position to people of color in the field and took the time to reach out to connections and talk to individuals about the position. He noted that his assistant director admitted that they would not have thought to apply for the position if he had not put in the effort in recruiting them. In the end, Jan and James, along with other participants, echoed the sentiments of how it took hard work to develop a diverse workforce that is reflective of one's community.

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study was an exploration of the lived experiences of mid- and senior-level Asian American public library leaders in California. Through the analysis of these transcripts, I was able to identify the following themes: (1) navigating racism within the workplace was a part of their professional experiences; (2) intersectionality of identities had an impact on some of their careers; (3) most participants reported that leaders must work hard, develop their voice, and advocate for what is right; and (4) participants prioritized community interests. In Chapter 5, I will focus on the discussion of findings and conclusions, including applications to leadership, recommendations for action, and further research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to explore the leadership pathways and barriers of mid-level and senior-level Asian American public library leaders in California to answer the main research question: “What are the lived experiences of mid-level or senior Asian American library leaders regarding attaining library leadership positions in public libraries in California?” The problem examined in this study revolved around the underrepresentation of Asian Americans in public library leadership roles and how this underrepresentation may impact the recruitment and retention efforts of Asian American public library leaders, as well as the field’s ability to connect with Asian American communities through culturally and linguistically inclusive programming and outreach. Through this study, four themes emerged as participants shared their successes and challenges they encountered as they ascended in their careers. In this chapter, I will discuss how the findings connect to the research question and the problem statement. I will also provide recommendations about the applicability of this research to the general realm of leadership, as well as suggest other potential research pathways.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusions

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the leadership pathways and barriers of mid-level and senior-level Asian American public library leaders in California. Asian Americans are the least likely among all race and ethnic groups to become leaders in business or governmental organizations (Yu, 2020). Additionally, in the library field, Asian Americans are underrepresented in library staffing at the national level. While in the profession, Asian American public library leaders experience racism, navigate a culture of whiteness, and often endure initial professional isolation. I analyzed both the leadership

pathways and barriers for Asian American public library leaders in California. I interviewed 11 mid-level and senior-level Asian American public library leaders who worked in California.

Through a semi-structured interview, each participant was asked 19 questions. These questions were aligned with the main tenets of AsianCrit theory and were selected to help answer the research questions. Further, follow-up questions were designed to help elicit further conversation in the interviews to help deepen my understanding. The full list of questions was included in Appendix A for reference.

Four themes surfaced during data analysis. Theme 1 showed that navigating racism in the workplace was a part of these participants' leadership pathways. Participants noted that the lack of diversity in the profession created an environment where they had to navigate subtle and explicit forms of racism, model minority or perpetual foreigner stereotypes, and the occasional professional alienation as they were often one of the few from their cultural background in their workspaces. While unpleasant, these experiences helped the leaders become strong advocates for underrepresented populations, and some participants were able to achieve remarkable feats through their diversity, equity, and inclusion work. For example, the senior-level leaders were able to break ceilings by being appointed and elected to influential national and local leadership roles, where they were unapologetic in questioning the status quo and developing meaningful, inclusive spaces for underrepresented public library workers. Despite the challenges they faced in the work environment, the participants expressed the joy they felt when they were able to support and uplift other underrepresented library workers in their communities.

While race played a prominent role in the participants' experiences in the public library field, Theme 2 showed the impact that gender and intersectionality had on the leadership experiences of those participants who identified as both female and persons of color. The female

participants described how the submissive and quiet stereotype of Asian females impacted how they were perceived as leaders. For example, some participants mentioned that when they did not match up with the stereotype, they were met with resistance from their colleagues. Other participants noted that this stereotype made people underestimate them and their abilities, despite being qualified individuals in their respective leadership roles. The oppression based on race as well as gender was a key part of the participants' experiences in the public library field.

The participants' experiences with racial and/or gender-based injustice influenced them to develop a strong sense of resilience, persistence, and advocacy. Theme 3 focused on the role of professional persistence by working hard, developing their authentic voice, and advocating for what is right. Participants noted that because they were often the first ones from their cultural background to assume their roles, some participants felt the pressure to prove themselves in their organizations through tireless work devoted to their communities. Furthermore, these leaders also noted the importance of developing one's authentic voice while being a part of an underrepresented community, but some admitted that being authentic was not an easy feat, especially in predominantly White spaces. Lastly, leaders channeled their experiences with oppression into boldly advocating for communities of color. For example, Jan used her leadership authority and positionality to call out oppressive language in meeting spaces and challenge culturally insensitive depictions of Asian Americans in schools. The participants' persistence in working hard, developing their voice, and advocating for their communities was an integral part of their leadership experience.

Building upon the theme of advocating for others, Theme 4 showed that the participants valued and prioritized community interests by making inclusive spaces for coworkers and patrons. The participants demonstrated persistence and resilience to develop meaningful

programs and support groups for fellow staff, symbolizing a dedication to rise above their professional challenges to care for other library workers of color. From implementing a racial equity plan systemwide to developing a mentorship program geared towards library staff of color, the participants expressed a strong commitment to social justice and prioritizing their community's needs. Despite enduring professional obstacles, a steadfast commitment to creating inclusive spaces for community, diversifying the profession, and communities emerged as a central theme.

Some participants shared how by creating their own informal supportive networks, they could grow their staff's cultural diversity. Other participants, like Jan and James, were also able to work towards diversifying their staff through intentional actions. When Jan worked in Central California, she developed a librarian training program to help support the professional development of underrepresented staff who wanted to become librarians one day. While Jan looked inwards to increase the diversity of her staff, James looked outwards and connected to many potential candidates in his network when he had a senior-level position opening at his organization. Through creating and engaging with informal and formal networks, the leaders in this study were able to become strong advocates for their communities. In the next section, I will be reviewing the connections between the study's themes and the problem statement.

Application of Themes to the Problem Statement

In this study, I interviewed mid-level and senior-level Asian American public library leaders in California to attempt to answer my main research question. Through their stories, I was able to examine the problem of the underrepresentation of Asian Americans in the public library environment and how this underrepresentation may impact the recruitment and retention of Asian Americans in public libraries as well as the field's ability to connect with linguistically

and culturally diverse communities. In the following section, I discussed how the research supported answering this question.

Main Research Question

I reflected upon the main research question (i.e., what are the leadership pathways and barriers regarding mid-level or senior Asian American library leaders attaining library leadership positions in public libraries in California?) and the problem (i.e., the underrepresentation of Asian Americans in the library field), and found codes and themes that helped answer the question. While the leaders encountered a variety of pathways and barriers as they ascended in their careers, I found that having to navigate subtle or explicit racism or gender-based oppression, coupled with the general lack of mentorship early on in most participants' careers, presented some challenges in terms of helping the participants feel welcomed within the work environment. In this section, based on the qualitative analysis, the following four main findings emerged: (1) navigating racism and intersectional identities were a part of the journey that Asian American leaders faced as an underrepresented population; (2) how persistence was a reaction to the inequities in the field revolving around the lack of cultural representation in library staffing; (3) how valuing community was a way for participants to nurture other underrepresented staff and patrons in their communities; and (4) how some participants were able to break barriers by ascending to prominent senior-level positions in their work environments.

Navigating Racism and Intersectional Oppression

Through counterstorytelling, the participants countered the dominant narratives of being submissive model minorities incapable of serving in leadership roles (Kim et al., 2021). For example, Elizabeth and Mia experienced explicit racism in the workplace, mainly because they speak English with perceived foreign accents and their status as immigrants. Their experiences

connect with the AsianCrit tenets of Asianization and transnational contexts (Iftikar & Museus, 2018), as their perceived foreignness made others, particularly White Americans, question their credibility. Despite these tensions, both Elizabeth and Mia have found leadership roles and successfully lead their teams because of their abilities to navigate racism within their work environments.

In addition to navigating their Asian American and racialized identities, gender seemed to be a part of the barriers experienced by the female participants in this study. Building upon the AsianCrit tenet of intersectionality, participants shared the roles that gender played in terms of their leadership styles. For example, in addition to her racial identity, Rebecca expressed that being an ambitious woman of color made others in her organization feel threatened and competitive towards her. Furthermore, another observation from the interviews was the fact that many of the female participants did not initially view themselves as natural-born leaders early on in their careers. However, the female participants mentioned that they either paved a path by themselves to apply for leadership roles or were encouraged by others to pursue a pathway in leadership, which led them to the positions they inhabited at the time of writing. Lastly, despite the field being female-dominated (ALA, 2017), the female participants spent several years trying to establish themselves as leaders, in particular, around White women who, as some of the participants reported, had a difficult time accepting that qualified Asian American women could inhabit a leadership role. These experiences revolving around intersectional identity, as well as the subtle or explicit racism participants faced, indicate the field may have issues around creating inclusive environments for underrepresented library staff members.

Persistence as a Reaction to Underrepresentation

One of the primary findings focused on the role of professional persistence by working hard, developing their authentic voice, and advocating for what is right. The data revealed that despite the challenges that participants faced being a part of an underrepresented community, they were able to use these experiences to tirelessly work to make their communities a better place. Some participants noted that working hard was a response to being underrepresented in the field. For example, James noted that he recognized the magnitude of his appointment as the first Asian American library director in his city and worked long hours to ensure he was supporting his community to the best of his ability. While James' focus was external, Luna persisted in working hard to prove to herself that she could overcome white supremacy in the field. In addition to valuing a strong work ethic, participants expressed the role of authenticity as leaders from underrepresented backgrounds. For instance, Charlotte expressed that as the first senior leader of color at her organization, it was important for her to be unapologetically herself to help her diverse staff feel at ease with her. Lastly, some participants recognized the responsibility they had as one of the few people of color in the field to stand up against injustice and advocate for communities of color. Jan was a prime example of an individual who recognized their authority, unique cultural vantage point, and leadership position to stand up against a racially insensitive remark in a national leadership forum. The leaders were able to harness their experiences coming from marginalized communities to persist in developing their own unique voices and standing up for others.

Nurturing Underrepresented Communities

The participants' experiences with navigating the public library environment as members of the Asian American community indicate the significant role being in the community played in

their professional growth and satisfaction. Compared to Western norms, Asian Americans may also place a higher value on communal behaviors and actions such as creating affinity groups and mentorship programs because much of this group are foreign born and are more likely to retain the values of their country of origin (Sy et al., 2017). To combat inequities and professional loneliness in the field, participants used their personal experiences as persons of color in a predominantly White field and channeled their energy to create affinity groups and mentorship programs to uplift and empower underrepresented library workers in the field. All participants demonstrated a strong alignment with the AsianCrit tenet of committing to social justice in their work by mentoring underrepresented library workers and advocating for communities of color by embedding the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion at their institutions. Despite the challenges that existed for these Asian American public library leaders, the participants' commitment to social justice enabled them to develop robust networks and affinity groups to reduce their feelings of professional isolation and uplift other underrepresented library staff.

Breaking Barriers

One of my main interests in pursuing this study was to investigate how Asian American public library leaders experience barriers as they ascend in their career journeys within a predominantly White profession. Despite encountering challenges and pressures from their respective jobs, some participants were able to achieve remarkable heights in their careers and were able to be appointed to national and local senior-level leadership positions. Over time, Jan, James, and Charlotte were able to develop a strong sense of professional confidence and were able to use their perspectives as some of the few library leaders of color to ascend to the top ranks of their organizations. All three senior leaders noted the pride they felt in being Asian

American and the meaning they derived from advocating for and making space for communities of color in their organization through developing formal and/or informal mentorship opportunities. These leaders also prided themselves on culturally specific values such as relationship building. They all were able to model valuable leadership skills that can transform an organization by courageously challenging institutional inequity because of their strong commitment to paving the way for future leaders of color. Being in a highly visible and public role can serve to inspire future leaders of color and to advance the mission of the library to serve our diverse communities.

Application to Leadership

Critical race theory (CRT) and AsianCrit theory provide insight into providing support for future and present Asian American public library leaders in California. Chapter 2 includes descriptions of CRT and AsianCrit theory, which are theories to help recognize the contributions and participation of marginalized people in political and social environments. One of the study's core findings revolved around the idea that Asian American public library leaders face challenges stemming from dominant social norms as they advocate for themselves and other underrepresented library workers. Organizational leaders should strive to apply leadership that fully recognizes the experiences and identities of Asian American public library leaders to create libraries that support the cultural diversity of the communities we serve.

Furthermore, the study's findings bring validation that people of color continue to navigate microaggressions, xenophobia, and other behaviors that impact their confidence, behavior, and morale at work. The participants' experiences with microaggressions, discrimination, and lack of diversity in the workplace and leadership spaces indicate the perpetuation of systemic racism within the field of librarianship. At the same time, these

experiences have inspired these leaders to advocate for social justice through their staff- or patron-facing programs and developing spaces of affinity. Organizational leaders should consider how race, gender, stereotypes, and discrimination impact library workers' perception of competence, hiring, and retention.

Lastly, library administration and other organizational leaders should consider reflecting on whether they are bringing barriers to success for Asian American public library leaders and other library workers of color in terms of their access to professional development and support and advocacy for the diverse communities they serve. It remains crucial for leaders to continually reflect on how their actions and behavior impact their staff and communities. As leaders develop their teams, a high level of understanding of the nuanced racialized experiences of library workers of color will be vital in retaining Asian American public library workers.

Recommendations for Action

The participants articulated and advocated for systemic change in the way organizations support Asian American library workers and other library workers of color. Participants noted that their colleagues in the field were not always able to understand and validate the perspectives and experiences of Asian American public library workers. Therefore, I provided the following three recommendations for library leadership to consider:

- Recommendation 1: Provide equity-focused learning opportunities for non-Asian American staff and library administration to learn more about Asian American perspectives to increase cultural competencies for all who interact and work with Asian American library staff and communities.
- Recommendation 2: Develop a culturally relevant and formal leadership program that acknowledges the lived experiences of Asian American public library workers and fosters

belonging and inclusion through cohort-based professional learning for Asian American-identifying staff.

- Recommendation 3: Develop affinity groups geared towards supporting and growing Asian American public library workers through a mix of informal learning opportunities.

To increase cultural understanding of Asian American public library staff and patrons, one recommendation is to develop equity-focused training and resources geared towards non-Asian American library staff members that begin to talk about the shared history and differences with Asian American communities. By being information professionals, library workers often share information via local training sessions or conference presentations and create resource guides and lists on various topics. Formalized professional development activities and learning about other cultural groups can take place in a variety of ways. For example, a book club or a film club that focuses on Asian American perspectives and is geared towards staff could be a way to develop cultural competence and learn about new perspectives. A panel presentation that features Asian American library workers of different backgrounds who share information about their lived experiences can be one way for other communities to deepen their knowledge on this population. These formal learning opportunities would enhance the library profession's understanding of Asian Americans and give both Asian American and non-Asian American colleagues the ability to more deeply understand and compassionately care for their Asian American library staff and communities.

While the first recommendation is geared towards the collective learning of both Asian American and non-Asian American library staff, the second recommendation focuses on the professional development of Asian American library staff specifically. In my study, participants often cited feeling isolated initially in the library field because they did not see themselves

represented in library staffing or programming. Some participants mentioned how they lacked mentorship and had to figure out their career trajectory themselves, which added to the difficulties they faced in the profession. To counter the professional isolation that Asian American public library workers often feel being numerical minorities in the profession, developing a culturally relevant leadership program for Asian American public library workers will be vital. This program could consist of basic public library leadership principles (e.g., how to work with your city and county government and how to develop your change management skills) while covering how one's cultural identity can be a strength in the workplace. Another crucial element to this leadership program would be helping Asian American library workers understand their own complex history, culture, and politics, and how this influences their perspectives on library services. In addition to learning about leadership principles and one's cultural and historical context, participants in this program could move in a small cohort to be able to develop their relationships and network with each other to help reduce the social and cultural isolation they may feel in the profession.

In addition to creating formalized leadership opportunities for Asian American public library staff, developing informal professional development activities to grow and connect will also be vital for Asian American public library workers. Participants noted that some of their most profound learning experiences stemmed from being in community with other underrepresented library workers. Developing cultural affinity groups for underrepresented library staff where library staff can gather on work time to share a meal, discuss issues in the field, and to help each other develop the skills necessary to ascend in their career could help Asian American public library workers deepen their sense of belonging at their organization.

Affinity groups are key for ensuring that Asian American public library workers feel seen and heard throughout their careers.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study could be replicated with public library leaders outside of California using interview data to examine the leadership pathways and barriers of Asian American public library leaders. Exploring the leadership pathways and barriers on Asian American public library leaders from other regions in the United States which may have less Asian American public library leaders and less cultural diversity within the community, may bring different perspectives to the themes found in studies. Further research regarding developing and examining the impacts of a culturally relevant mentorship and leadership program geared towards those who identify as Asian American public library workers could be beneficial for public library leaders to deepen their understanding of how to create inclusive spaces for library workers of color. Another suggestion for further research could include inviting non-managerial Asian American public library staff to provide a more comprehensive view on Asian American public library leadership pathways and barriers. Conducting a study with non-managerial staff could help provide more comprehensive insight into the impact of racialized experiences on Asian American public library workers in general. While I was able to recruit a diverse pool with my study, including non-managerial staff, could potentially invite a broader mix of Asian American cultural backgrounds to be represented in a future study. Such studies could help provide a holistic and comprehensive description of the experiences of Asian American leaders in the public library field.

Concluding Statement

As the country continues to diversify, Asian American public library leaders will continue to be needed for staff and patrons alike. Through this qualitative phenomenological study, I provided a detailed analysis of the leadership pathways and barriers of mid-level and senior-level Asian American public library leaders in California. The themes that surfaced from the interviews included navigating racism, whiteness, and intersectionality; being persistent in developing an authentic voice and advocating for underrepresented communities through diversity, equity, and inclusion work; as well as valuing the power of community. I analyzed their leadership pathways, their successes, and barriers, and revealed that Asian American public library leaders need more support to help them navigate racism in professional workspaces.

The findings of this study are vital as Asian American public library workers continue to face microaggressions, discrimination, and racism. This should help library administrators, colleagues, and other stakeholders consider the challenges and barriers that Asian American library workers face in the profession. As an Asian American public library leader, I related personally to some of the challenges the participants faced and learned about ways in which I can navigate my career pathway and how to support other library workers to the best of my ability. Additionally, I learned that Asian Americans can be inspirational leaders, and their courage, tenacity, and commitment to social justice have uplifted their communities. The Asian American leaders I interviewed prided themselves on modeling cultural values such as relationship building, listening, and valuing group cohesion. Several participants noted the value of developing a strong sense of self and standing up for diverse communities, even when they may have been the only ones to do so. The participants in this study also noted the importance of

paying it forward and nurturing and mentoring the next generation of Asian American leaders and other leaders of color.

By developing informal and formal professional learning experiences for Asian American and non-Asian American library workers alike to learn more about Asian American communities, library leaders and stakeholders can build a culturally compassionate work environment for their Asian American colleagues. Further reflection from public library administrators on how they may or may not create barriers for Asian American library workers will be needed to help improve the work environment for underrepresented library workers at large. The development of best practices on supporting Asian American public library leaders will be key in eliminating barriers in their leadership pathways as they navigate their career journeys.

AI Statement

In this dissertation, I used Grammarly's AI grammar checker throughout all chapters. When I was unsure about the formality of some of the language used in chapter 5, I used Grammarly's style checker to give me ideas on how to reword the occasional phrase in academic language. In addition to Grammarly, I used Zoom's basic AI features to provide a transcription of the recorded interviews. Lastly, I also used Quirkos, a qualitative data analysis tool, to help me manually code interview transcripts. At the time of writing, Quirkos did not have advanced AI features. All AI use was checked and verified for accuracy.

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APPENDIX A

Guiding Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your background and identity? For example: disability, ethnicity, gender, language, race, sexual orientation, nationality, etc. Please share your age and how long you have been in your librarian and leadership roles.
2. How has your background and identity impacted your career? (*Asianization*)
3. Please share your background and work history. Why and how did you decide to become a leader? (*Asianization, (Re)constructive history*)
4. What were your long-term career goals when you first entered the library profession? Generally, when and how did you make the decision to pursue a leadership career in public libraries?
5. Discuss any barriers or challenges that you have faced in relation to your career trajectory toward library leadership. What barriers or challenges have you encountered in your career journey? What barriers or challenges do you face now as a leader? How have these barriers influenced your leadership style? (*Asianization, Intersectionality*)
6. Have Asian American cultural values enhanced or impeded your leadership progression? (*Asianization*) If so, how?
7. Describe your experiences as a leader at your past and current organizations. (*Asianization*)
8. Were you able to feel like your authentic self at this institution(s)?
9. Have you been able to push forth the initiatives that matter to you?
10. Have diversity and equity initiatives been a key priority for your institution(s)? If so, please provide examples.
11. How have role models influenced you in your library career? (*Asianization*)

12. How have you supported other Asian Americans in their pursuit of a library leadership career? (*Commitment to Social Justice*) If so, how?
13. What advice would you offer other present and future Asian American library workers who would like to advance in leadership roles? (*Commitment to Social Justice*)
14. Please describe what leadership means to you. What makes a successful leader?
(*Asianization*)
15. Describe your leadership style. (*Asianization*)
16. What are your self-perceptions of your abilities of being a leader at your organization?
(*Asianization*)
17. Provide 1-2 examples of initiatives or accomplishments that you are most proud of during your time in your career. Explain why. (*Asianization*)
18. What kind of important or necessary skills must Asian Americans possess or develop in order to attain high-level public library administration/leadership positions? (*Asianization*)
19. What kind of library leadership development programs should be developed and by whom for Asian Americans who aspire to pursue a career in library administration? (*Commitment to Social Justice*)

Example Follow-Up Questions

1. You mentioned something about [enter topic here]. Could you please elaborate on what happened? How did it make you feel?
2. What did you mean by [enter topic here]?
3. Can you give me an example of [enter topic here]?
4. Can you give me another example of [enter topic here]?
5. Could you please repeat your response?

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Email

Email Subject: Invitation to Participate in Dissertation Study on Asian American Public Library

Leaders in California:

Hello,

My name is Jess Koshi-Lum, and I am an Ed.D. candidate in Leadership at the City University of Seattle. I am seeking participants for my dissertation study regarding the leadership pathways and barriers for Asian American public library leaders in California.

The purpose of this study is to understand the pathways of Asian American leaders in the public library field in California as they ascend in their career and common barriers that Asian American leaders experience in their career trajectory. My hope is that my study findings can provide valuable insights to those in positions of authority who can reflect upon their hiring, recruitment, and retention practices.

I am looking for mid-level (e.g., Branch Manager, Supervisor, Division Manager) and senior (e.g., Director, Assistant Director) Asian American public library leaders in California who are willing to participate in this study about leadership pathways and barriers for Asian American library leaders. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview about your experiences as a mid-level or senior leader in a public library via Zoom. The interview should take no longer than 90 minutes to complete.

This study has been approved by the City University of Seattle's Institutional Review Board. Your participation is voluntary, and you can decide not to participate or withdraw your participation at any time without penalty or negative consequences. Your participation is confidential.

It is your choice whether or not you want to participate in this research. The purpose of the research is to learn about the lived experiences of Asian American public library leaders in California. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to answer interview questions about your professional pathways as an Asian American public library leader in California. The risks or discomforts from this research may include stress or retraumatization from sharing their stories as persons of color in a homogeneous field or social or economic risks (e.g., effect on financial standing or loss of confidentiality) in the potential of being identified while retelling negative professional experiences. This study will benefit communities interested in diversifying their public library staff and leadership (i.e., library leaders and Asian American library staff) as well as library users, who may be looking for library staff, collections, and programs that represent the diversity of their communities.

If you choose to participate, please send an email to koshilumjessica@cityuniversity.edu to indicate your interest and the best way to contact you. Your participation will be anonymous. If you have any further questions, please contact me at koshilumjessica@cityuniversity.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jess Koshi-Lum

Ed.D. Candidate

City University of Seattle

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

**CITYU RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT****Title of Study:**

Understanding the Leadership Pathways and Barriers to Success for Asian American Public Library Leaders

Name and Title of Researcher(s):

Jess Koshi-Lum, Ed.D. Candidate in Leadership, City University of Seattle

For Faculty Researcher(s):

Department: _____

Telephone: _____

City U Email: _____

Immediate Supervisor: _____

For Student Researcher(s):

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Eunjeong Choi

Department: School of Education and Leadership

Telephone: XXX-XXX-XXXX

City U E-mail: koshilumjessica@cityuniversity.edu

Program Coordinator (or Program Director):

Dr. Abigail Nubla-Kung

Sponsor, if any:

N/A

You are being invited to participate in a research study.

Key Information about this Research Study

The researcher will explain this research study to you before you will be asked to participate in the study and before you sign this consent form.

- Your participation is voluntary and you can decide not to participate or withdraw your participation at any time without penalty or negative consequences.
- It is your choice whether or not you want to participate in this research.

- The purpose of the research is to understand the pathways of Asian American leaders in the public library field as they ascend in their career. My hope is that this study will help reveal common barriers that Asian American leaders experience in their career trajectory, so that those in positions of authority can reflect upon their hiring, recruitment, and retention practices.
- If you choose to participate you will be asked to respond to interview questions via Zoom; Approximate time: 60-90 minutes.
- The risks or discomforts from this research include minimal risks, similar to the risks in everyday life. This may include emotional risks such as feelings of sadness or anxiety in the retelling of one's stories or social or economic risks (e.g., effect on financial standing or loss of confidentiality) in the potential of being identified while retelling negative professional experiences
- The direct benefits of your participation are the possibility of being able to provide information to library leaders interested in developing a diverse workforce. Asian American library workers may also learn the challenges and barriers to their success in the library field.

You should talk to the researcher(s) about the study and ask them as many questions you need to help you make your decision.

What should I know about being a participant in this research study?

This form contains important information that will help you decide whether to join the study. Take the time to carefully review this information.

- You are eligible to participate in this study because you are:
 - East, South, or Southeast Asian American
 - Current mid-level (e.g., Branch Manager, Supervisor, Division Manager) or senior (e.g., Director, Assistant Director) public library leader in California
- You will be in this research study for approximately 3 months.
- About 10-15 individuals will participate in this study.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this research study is to understand the pathways of Asian American public library leaders in a predominantly White field as they ascend in their careers. It is anticipated that this study will help reveal common pathways and barriers that Asian American leaders experience in their career trajectory so that those in positions of authority can reflect upon their hiring, recruitment, and retention practices.

Research Participation.

You will be asked to participate in the following procedures:

I understand I am being asked to participate in this study in one or more of the following ways (initial options below that apply):

- Respond to in-person; and/or, telephone questions; Approximate time _____
- Answer written questionnaire(s); Approximate time _____
- Participate in a virtual video interview using Zoom _____; Approximate time 60-90 minutes.

During a Zoom meeting, the researcher will first discuss the informed Consent process and form with participants. If participants decide to join the study by signing this form, they will then participate in an individual interview with the researcher. The researcher will use Zoom to generate a transcription of the interview, and the recordings will be viewed to cross-check the transcription for accuracy. The recordings will be deleted immediately after transcriptions have been checked. Personal identifying information will be removed from the transcription, which will be password protected and stored on my City University OneDrive account. The transcriptions will be destroyed after five years.

Interview question themes include: Ethnic background/identity, leadership journeys, leadership challenges.

- Other, specifically, follow-up questions. Approximate time 15-30 minutes

You may refuse to answer any question or any item in verbal interviews, written questionnaires or surveys, and, you can stop or withdraw from any audio or visual recording at any time without any penalty or negative consequences.

Are there any risks, stress or discomforts that I will experience as a result of being a participant in this study?

Participants have the right to be fully informed of any risks that may be associated with their involvement in the study. Taking part in this research involves certain risks: This could include: emotional risks (e.g., feelings of sadness or stress) in retelling one's stories or social or economic risks (e.g., effect on financial standing or loss of confidentiality) in the potential of being identified while retelling negative professional experiences. Participants can refuse to answer any question or any item when engaging in verbal interviews or stop or withdraw from any audiovisual recording without penalty or negative consequences.

Will being a participant in this study benefit me in any way?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your participation in this research. However, possible benefits may include the possibility of being able to provide insight to those library leaders who are interested in developing a more diverse workforce. For Asian American public library leaders, an indirect benefit may include a better understanding of oneself due to being able to reflect on an experience. _____

You will receive _____ for your participation in this research.

You will not receive any payment for participation in this study.

Confidentiality

I understand that participation is confidential to the limits of applicable privacy laws. No one except the faculty researcher or student researcher, his/her supervisor and Program Coordinator (or Program Director) will be allowed to view any information or data collected whether by questionnaire, interview and/or other means.

If the student researcher's cooperating classroom teacher will also have access to raw data, the following box will be initialed by the researcher.

Steps will be taken to protect your identity, however, information collected about you can never be 100% secure. Your name and any other identifying information that can directly identify you will be stored separately from data collected as part of the research study. The results of this study will be published as a thesis and potentially published in an academic book or journal, or presented at an academic conference. To protect your privacy no information that could directly identify you will be included.

All data (the questionnaires, audio/video tapes, typed records of the interview, interview notes, informed consent forms, computer discs, any backup of computer discs and any other storage devices) are kept locked and computer files will be encrypted and password protected by the researcher. The research data will be stored for 5 years (5 years). At the end of that time all data of whatever nature will be permanently destroyed. The published results of the study will contain data from which no individual participant can be identified.

Signatures

I have carefully reviewed and understand this consent form. I understand the description of the research protocol and consent process provided to me by the researcher. My signature on this form indicates that I understand to my satisfaction the information provided to me about my participation in this research project. My signature also indicates that I have been apprised of the potential risks involved in my participation. Lastly, my signature indicates that I agree to participate as a research subject.

My consent to participate does not waive my legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, and/or City University of Seattle from their legal and professional responsibilities with respect to this research. I understand I am free to withdraw from this research study at any time. I further

understand that I may ask for clarification or new information throughout my participation at any time during this research.

I have been advised that I may request a copy of the final research study report. Should I request a copy, I understand that I will be asked to pay the costs of photocopy and mailing.

Participant's Name: _____
Please Print

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: Jess Koshi-Lum
Please Print

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

If I have any questions about this research, I have been advised to contact the researcher and/or his/her supervisor, as listed on page one of this consent form.

Should I have any concerns about the way I have been treated or think that I have been harmed as a research participant, I may contact the following individual(s):

Dr. Abigail Nubla-Kung, Dissertation Director, City University of Seattle, at City University of Seattle, at 521 Wall St., #100, Seattle, WA 98121; 206-239-4531; anublakung@cityu.edu

This study has been reviewed and has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of City University of Seattle. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the IRB at IRB@Cityu.edu.

APPENDIX D

IRB Approval

**Institutional Review Board
Certificate of Approval****IRB ID# Koshi-Lum_Choi_SEL**

Principal Investigator (if faculty research):

Student Researcher: Jess Koshi-Lum

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Eunjeong Choi

Department: SEL

Title: Understanding the Leadership Pathways and Barriers to Success for Asian American Public Library Leaders

Approved on: 10/9/2024

- Full Board Review
- Expedited Review (US)
- Delegated Review (Can)
- Exempt (US)

CERTIFICATION

City University of Seattle has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The Faculty Advisor and the student researcher have the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original Ethical Review Protocol submitted for ethics review. This **Certificate of Approval** is valid provided there is no change in experimental protocol, consent process, or documents. Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures are required to be reported to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board in advance of its implementation.



Bryan Carter, Ph.D.
IRB Chair, City University of Seattle