Asian American Female School Administrators' Self-Concept and Expectations for Students' Educational Success

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Abstract

Historically, Asian American school administrators' experiences leading the K-12 educational system have been under-researched and under-theorized. Today, as the fastest growing population in the United States, Asian American educators' experiences and contributions can no longer be ignored in educational policy and research. Drawing on the traditions of critical race theory in education, this qualitative study underscores the leadership experiences of four Asian American women school administrators in one Southern U.S. state and seeks to identify their self-concept and expectations as school administrators. This vantage point provides the basis for investigation into their sense of responsibility for equity and leadership practices in diverse educational settings.

Keywords: critical race theory in education, intersectionality, race-gender epistemology, school leadership, principal expectation

INTRODUCTION

Asian Americans are now the fastest growing population in the United States (Covarrubias & Liou, 2014; United State Census Bureau [USCB], 2011). Despite the call to diversify the teaching profession (Howard, 2007), Asian American educators continue to represent a small segment of the teaching force, unable to keep pace with the growing rates of Asian American students in the K-12 educational pipeline (Chong, 2002). Historically, Asian Americans have not been central to policy discussions to diversify the teaching force. Additionally, Rong and Preissle (1997) discovered that the declining number of Asian American teachers was largely due to a variety of historical, political, and economic factors that excluded them from the teaching pipeline and from the necessary recruitment, preparation, and retention efforts that could contribute to addressing the overall shortage of teachers of color (Goodwin, Genishi, Asher, & Woo, 2006). In 2012, Asian Americans accounted for 2% of all K-12 public school teachers, comparing to their African American colleagues at 6%, Latina/os at 8%, Native Americans at less than 1%, and Whites at 83% (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2012). In contrast, Asian American students accounted for 5% of all K-12 public school students (NCES, 2013). This percentage will increase as the general Asian American population is expected to grow by over 200% by the year 2050 (USCB, 2011).

The racial disparities between the teaching force and the Asian American student population creates a new set of concerns for the school principalship pipeline. The first concern is the fact that the academic achievement of Asian Americans is still much debated and misunderstood in the field of education (Covarrubias & Liou, 2014). The image of Asian American students is often depicted as the model minority, a racial group that is immune to racism in the educational system (Lee, 2015; Tuan, 2001). Such a stereotype minimizes their history with racism and conflates the experiences of Asian American students with those of Whites, where they are often positioned by the dominant discourse as a threat to white entitlement and an alienated group in the civil rights struggle for race and economic justice in schools and communities (Chou & Feagin, 2015). Goodwin, Genishi, Asher, and Woo (2006) illuminate that school reform efforts and classroom curriculum are often irrelevant and disconnected from the life experiences of Asian American students. Part of this concern is school principals' inability to engage in curricular reform and instructional expertise that are inclusive of Asian Americans and to create conditions to support Asian American teachers in their instructional effectiveness, career advancement, and promotion to principalship (Goodwin et al., 2006).

These school-level conditions lead to the second concern, which is the role of Asian American educators in leading for social justice, given their perceived ambiguous political position in the U.S. civil rights discourse and the continual pressure for them to prove and disprove their minoritized status. The pressure of proving and disproving their experiences living with racism often implicate their ability to build coalitions with other communities of color to address educational justice (Liou, 2016). Together, the educational system needs to recognize the extent to which the absence of Asian American educators further reinforces the model minority thesis in K-12 classrooms. The perspectives of Asian Americans are especially important, given their unique position in race relations and experiences in the school system. Potentially, Asian American educators' life experiences can help to complicate and surface the diverse learning needs and aspirations of Asian American students, particularly those of low-income, immigrant, undocumented, or refugee backgrounds (Liou, 2016; Chu, 2016; Lee, 2015).

Our final concern is the fact that women are severely underrepresented in school administration[1] (Shakeshaft, 1986; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008), which further necessitates an intersectional analysis of female Asian American school administrators' current realities of leading schools. These historical and contextual factors have led us to examine how female Asian American school administrators view themselves in relation to their social justice work in the school and how their self-concepts mediate their expectations and practices in a system that has largely minimized their existence and contributions to the educational achievement of the students they serve.

To bring these concerns to the forefront, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Asian American women school administrators define their expectations for school leadership?
2. How do Asian American women school administrators act upon their expectations of themselves as a method to foster conditions of high expectations for their students?

[1] *For the purpose of this article, educational administration and educational leadership are interchangeable.*

ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

There have been no Asian American female educators admitted into the cohort-based leadership preparation programs at the universities where we have served as faculty in the last four years. The expectations of Asian American women school administrators have not previously been documented. With the exception of a few dissertations (Fong, 1984; Lee, 1998; Pacis, 2005), the experiences of female Asian American school administrators have been under-researched and under-theorized. The few studies available indicate that female Asian American school administrators encounter institutional racism, sexism, tokenism, a lack of role models, and limited, if not absent, access to mentorship and professional networks (Chu, 1980; Fong, 1984; Pacis, 2005). These findings are consistent with the experiences of other female school administrators of color, as Asian American women operate in the context of patriarchy and white supremacy that shapes their underrepresentation, limited career mobility, and double glass ceiling at the intersection of race and gender status (Andrews, 1993; Fitzgerald, 2003). Female Asian American leaders' professional context is marked by a racial and gendered climate that has led them to feel isolated, invisible, and unsure about their leadership competence (Hune, 1998; Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017; Turner, 2002). These conditions have rendered the intersections of race and gender central to their realities. Furthermore, these realities are accompanied by historical stereotypes of Asian American women as obedient and submissive (Rosette, Koval, Ma, & Livingston, 2016), two characteristics that often work against them in white-male-dominated leadership settings (Blackmore, 2005; Lee, 1998; Youngberg, Miyasoto, & Nakanishi, 2001). In addition to raced and gendered marginalization, female Asian American school administrators are often geographically isolated, as they disproportionately work in schools and districts with predominantly Asian American populations (Lee, 1998).

The limited literature reveals that Asian American women tend to share characteristics and leadership styles with other female leaders in the forms of collaboration, empowerment, and community (Kawahara, Esnil, & Hsu, 2007; Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017; Pacis, 2005). As an aggregated group, Asian American women tend to be bilingual, highly educated, and older than their counterparts who share similar leadership positions. They are also capable of being reflective and decisive and assuming assertive leadership styles verbally and non-verbally (Yamauchi, 1981). As a form of identity, members of this community's bilingual and bicultural dispositions are perceived as an asset to their leadership as they actively reject the stereotypes attributed to them (Yamauchi, 1981). Many have self-

imposed high expectations for excellence and determination in pursuing career goals (Lee, 1998; Pacis, 2005). Thus far, this limited literature has disputed stereotypical notions of Asian American women school administrators as submissive and passive organizational leaders.

This body of research is consistent with many aspects of the literature that show female school administrators encounter systemic challenges based upon raced and gendered stereotypes (e.g., Adkison, 1981, Biklen, 1980; Blackmore, 2002; Noel-Batiste, 2009; Shakeshaft, 1986). Research has shown that negative stereotypes influence an individual's self-awareness and the person's subsequent interactions with others in such environments and contexts (Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999; Steele, 2010). This phenomenon, known as stereotype threat, has been understudied in the leadership literature, but it has been shown to be a significant obstacle when one is made aware of the possibility that their perceived race and gender identities are going to be used to discount them and their organizational legitimacy (Steele, 2011).

Instead of consenting themselves to racist and patriarchal conditionings, female leaders across racial backgrounds have shown the ability to debunk the ongoing stereotypes and systemic oppression working against them, and they are committed to making a difference in the world (Helgesen, 1990). As leaders, many value the dignity and worth of each individual – a principle that has become the driving force for their advocacy of children by going above and beyond the daily bureaucracy and transactional leadership (Regan & Brooks, 1995). This principle also drives their moral commitments to be responsive and caring in leadership practices (Shakeshaft, 1986; Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007). In particular, female school leaders of color have been reported to demonstrate strong commitment to high academic expectations for the wellbeing of communities and children of color (Reed, 2012; Venegas-Garcia, 2013). At the school level, the overall expectation of educators is considered a significant correlate of effective schools (Edmonds, 1979; Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). These school level expectations are operative in structuring students' opportunities to learn, as students are often grouped in classrooms by race and abilities to reflect the extent that they are valued and cared for (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Noguera, 2003).

Conditions of high expectations for learning and teaching can have emancipatory effects in the classroom as they promote practices that are closely associated with students' access to a rigorous and empowering curriculum, caring and demanding teachers, and a school culture that treats students' prior knowledge and social capitals from perspectives of asset, not deficit (Liou & Rojas, 2016). From this asset point of view, ethics of caring have

been found to be central to high expectation practices in the school (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006), such that female leaders of color often display a genuine care in their students' wellbeing and opportunities to learn (e.g., Dillard, 1995; Venegas-Garcia, 2013). Similarly, high expectation practices often include the expressions of empathy and sympathy toward staff and students as a method of fostering relationships based on equity, racial understanding, and empowerment (Du Bois, 1935; Rojas & Liou, 2017). Unlike standardized testing, which imposes expectations externally, these expectancy practices stem from a deep interest to nurture and support underserved children to meet higher levels of academic achievement with an uncompromising belief in their intellectual promise. For many female leaders of color, caring and high expectations for children is not a choice, but a lifelong responsibility (e.g., Dillard, 1995; Mertz & McNeely, 1998). Together, school-level caring and high expectations have shown to foster academic resiliency among students (Benard, 2004).

RACE-GENDER CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP

School leadership is often perceived as taking on the tasks to convene stakeholders to work toward a set of organizational goals (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2003). It is in this context that leadership is often conceived to be an observable, linear, and individualistic endeavor and accomplishment (one person leads and everyone else follows). To achieve organizational objectives, the underlying policies, procedures, and practices to guide individual actions are often perceived to be objective, neutral, and fair. This results-oriented approach often discounts history, context, and the current centrality of racism and patriarchy in shaping and differentiating individuals' organizational experiences and outcomes.

Increasingly, leadership has been perceived as having emancipatory potential when the intent is to intervene for educational injustices with the moral use of power (Bogotch, 2000). However, the dominant perception on school improvement has also been a linear perspective without accounting for stereotype threat and political relationships that often require school administrators to enact multiple types of leadership to accomplish their daily objectives. To expand upon this goal and people of color's abilities to speak truth to power, critical race theory in education is one analytical lens that challenges these color- and gender-blind assumptions and organizational norms that 1) often overemphasize school outcomes without critically examining the deeply entrenched belief systems and procedures that differentiate people of color's organizational experiences at the intersection of race and

gender and 2) devalue the race-gender epistemologies and leadership legitimacy of people of color – specifically, female Asian American school leaders (Bernal, 2002).

Scholarship associated with critical race theory has historically centered on the experiences of people of color as a legitimate form of knowledge and as a method to identify, resist, and transform oppressive conditions and practices that perpetuate a system of racial hierarchy through law, social policies, and societal attitudes. Serving both as a framework and a body of research, this theory was initially born out of ethnic studies, legal studies, women's studies, sociology, and other fields where critical scholars were dissatisfied and frustrated with research that often casts communities of color in a negative light and minimizes the role of racism and other intersectional experiences in social institutions like schools (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The literature seeks to provide counter-narratives to traditional civil-rights discourses that fail to challenge the systems of white supremacy, as the basis of emancipation (Lynn & Dixson, 2013).

Further, critical race theory in education posits that the historic and contemporary constructions and manifestations of race are operative in the school system (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). It draws on an interdisciplinary approach to formulate an intersectional analysis of racism, capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and other forms of oppression (Lynn & Parker, 2006). This intersectional analysis provides an appropriate vantage point to understand the race-gender epistemologies of Asian American women in educational leadership (Bernal, 2002; Parker & Lynn, 2002), and how these systems of knowing are historically situated to contribute to each person's self-concept and expectations of leadership and the students they serve. The race-gender epistemologies and pedagogy of Asian American women as administrators position them as holders and creators of knowledge, as their leadership experiences often come from a dialogic, relational, and community-driven orientation to challenge a field that has historically been and continues to be decontextualized and grounded in the notion of individualistic achievements, meritocracy, and masculinity. The inclusion of the voices of female Asian American administrators can begin to account for the role of race and gender in their immediate leadership context and in their efforts to dismantle multiple forms of subordination and pursue educational equity through the manifestations of their expectations for themselves and their students (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

According to Shields (2010), transformative leadership problematizes static or transactional notions of leadership, for it calls for a fluid and dynamic understanding of leadership beyond institutional and organizational arrangements. It also distinguishes the functions of school leadership in a spectrum of practices associated with transactional,

transformational, and transformative leadership as a method to illuminate its emancipatory potentials. Applying this notion of leadership, we posit the ways in which school administrators' life experiences with systemic oppression can mediate their identity development as leaders and influence their ability to build school communities in which educators are intentional in advancing equity, social justice, and quality of life for all. Therefore, the goal of transformative leadership is much more than to ensure the achievement of organizational goals; it attends keenly to how the process of meeting these goals will revolutionize society toward justice (Shields, 2010).

Through confronting systemic oppression, transformative leaders must be dialogic by foregrounding the strengths, aspirations, and needs of the people as a key source of motivation for leadership (Freire, 2000; Liou, 2016; Shields, 2010). The idea that leadership is relational is consistent with the concepts of dialogic leadership (Shields, 2010) and servant leadership (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002), as people are the center of organizational objectives, not test scores (Dennis, Kinzler-Norheim, & Bocarnea, 2010). The literature has made it clear that race and gender affect women of color's perceptions and expectations of their leadership roles in the school system (Reed & Evans, 2008). Therefore, transformative leadership must also be conscious of the race-gender inequities and their intersections with other forms of oppression.

The race-gender conscious leadership provides an analytic framework that is consistent with the literature, where the race-gender epistemologies and pedagogy of women of color educational leaders are closely associated with justice-oriented dispositions to challenge dominant ideologies of leadership and schooling and to create schools as counter-spaces of radical possibilities for the future in working with and for others. Given the ways in which race and gender mediate one's organizational experiences, the dialogic nature of school leadership must also require individuals to be conscious, responsive, and adaptive to problematize organizational norms. Therefore, the pedagogy of Asian American women as school administrators must not be overly essentialized as a fixed, biological trait of leadership. Rather, each person's individual positionality and situated context matter in how they resist and defy social categories and stereotypes in their identification and affiliation with their social justice work (Artiles, 2015). School administrators' inter-subjectivities within and across particular communities are fluid in shaping their perceptions and relationships with the tasks of school leadership. Their experiences with race and gender give them the abilities to enact leadership in ways that are much more nuanced and iterative than what has been reported in the literature so far. Hence, school administrators' consciousness about the social justice challenges in their school, the shifting terrains of their

local context, and ability to harness the appropriate expectations of themselves and those around them is significant in how they chart their course toward revolutionary leadership (Marshall & Oliva, 2006).

CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

This study took place in a Southern U.S. state, where there are only a handful of female Asian American building-level administrators working in the K-12 school system. We used pseudonyms to protect the identities of our participants and the communities they served. As a general snapshot, there are 2,246 public schools located in the state, serving approximately 1.6 million students. Asian American students account for 3% of the total public school enrollment. Asian American teachers and school principals combined make up less than 1 percent of the educators working in public schools. A purposeful sampling procedure was used to recruit participants (Merriam, 1988). The public contact inventory of Asian American administrators was requested from the State Department of Education; an invitation-to-participate email was sent to all the female administrators on the list. In the end, four Asian American women school administrators participated in the study. All participants were first-generation Asian Americans. Our participants' professional experience in education ranged from 15 to 30 years, of which between 5 to 11 years were in administration. Three of the participants were middle school administrators and one was an elementary school administrator. These participants were either in their late 40s or late 50s, which is slightly higher than the national average of 48 years of age (NCES, 2016). Two of the women were Thai American, one Filipina American, and one of Vietnamese descent. The participants' schools varied in location and student demographics. All the schools but one were classified as Title I schools.

Employing a critical race counter-storytelling approach (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), data collection primarily relied on semi-structured in-depth interviews (Johnson, 2002) and field observations. According to Solorzano and Yosso (2001), counter-storytelling is a process in which those who are dehumanized by dominant epistemologies and discourses identify and articulate the sources of dominance and subjugation that seek to de-legitimatize their existence. In this study, we elicited the stories of Asian American women school administrators for the purpose of making meaning of their leadership experiences outside of the traditional white male-centric models of leadership that often assume themselves as normal and universal. We sought approaches to contribute to new ways of understanding the complex nuances of school leadership, and the salience of race and gender in the lives

of school administrators. In addition to our research participants' counter-narratives, we also collected archival data to strengthen our understanding of the school context and to further substantiate our interpretation and analysis of our participants' leadership practices. Lastly, we also developed reflective memos throughout the fieldwork and analysis process to identify emerging themes over time, and to also provide another source of evidence for triangulation.

Data analysis was ongoing from the start of the project. A constant comparative method was adapted from Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory to allow for themes within and across each counter-story to emerge and to compare data with the literature to look for consistencies and discrepancies. For member checking (Merriam, 2002), the participants were given opportunity to review their interview transcripts and initial thematic findings to name and theorize their experiences, to further clarify and substantiate their stories, and to make meanings of events and experiences attributable to their perceptions and expectations of themselves and of others around them (Merriam, 2002). Triangulation between multiple forms of data, member checking, and participant debriefing was instrumental for establishing the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Together, these methodological and analytical approaches allowed us to explore the complexity in our participants' experiences and to put their stories into context (Maxwell, 2004).

Defining Expectations for School Leadership at the Intersection of Race and Gender

Our findings show that the female Asian American school administrators in the study conceive of leadership with a great deal of purpose and with the expectation that practices that are closely associated with multiple forms of leadership through their race-gender epistemology. These leadership practices are mediated by their race-gender consciousness, as we found their self-concept as Asian American women informs their expectation practices as leaders in their school.

Double glass ceiling and intersected discriminations

These administrators' experiences with racism and patriarchy played a major role in shaping their self-concept as school leaders. One of the major challenges to their ability to function was the stereotype threat that cast a perception of doubt about their leadership credentials. For example, Anna described the feeling of having to prove and disprove herself due to her identity as a female Asian American administrator. She explained,

> *I have to prove again and again and again, that I am an administrator; I deserve this.... Because I am an Asian and I am a woman, I have to work harder than a*

native, because this is my adopted country. If I don't do well, then they will think, 'She got the job because she knows someone.' I don't want to be that person. This thought is always there... it is very hard.

To Anna, race and gender are salient threats to how she experiences the unspoken pressure of constantly having to prove her self-worth. Despite the societal stereotype of Asian Americans as hard working and industrious, these external perceptions do not alleviate the stereotype that somehow she was unqualified, foreign, and lacking the skills to be an administrator.

Additionally, our research participants felt societal expectations of Asian Americans as non-English-speaking immigrants play a role in how they experienced stereotype threat. When asked about her self-perceptions as a school administrator, Mary explained the impact of stereotypes on her self-concept and day-to-day realities. She explained,

You have to work three times as hard.... People underestimate us because we, Asians, tend to be quiet.... Do people ever yell at you? People would be like, 'Do you understand English?' 'Just keep yelling,' I said, 'I speak with an accent but I am not deaf.' They think less of you because of your accent and because of the way you look.

Mary's experiences with stereotype threats show that even those in the position to lead an organization are not immune to systemic racism. Consistent with the literature on female Asian school administrators (Hune, 1998; Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017; Pacis, 2005), our research participants had to endure stereotype threats regarding their English-speaking capabilities, and by extension their credibility, to provide school leadership in male-centric English monolingual settings. We found that these administrators perceive that stereotypes negatively sensitize their race and gender identities and impact their expectations for school leadership. In turn, they use "working hard" as a strategy to counteract these stereotypes and to resist the constant feeling of being minimized due to negative perceptions of their physical appearance at the intersections of race, gender, and immigration.

Resistance and self-defining

Despite navigating negative stereotypes and presumed deficits, our participants also resist these perceptions by defining leadership by who they are, instead of aspiring to the dominant images of white male leadership. Their abilities to resist these stereotypes contribute to their consciousness about themselves, and they are able to turn these negative

images into positives and affirm their beliefs and responsibilities as leaders. When asked about the pressure to prove and disprove herself as a school administrator, Hope described,

> *I have to take the courage to be me, the blue-collar, warm, and receptive me.... I can't be someone else, putting up this tough façade, because I am wearing a different hat. Yes, I'm a leader, but I'm not really a different person. I'm who I am.... That respect for a human is the basis of my faith; it plays out in my interactions with teachers, parents, other community members, and it plays out in my decisions.... It never gets easy, but you have to stand up for your beliefs.*

Instead of conforming to the white male images of school leadership, Hope insisted that she was not going to become a different person simply because of her responsibilities in school. She was inspired to authentically develop relationships with her school community as a method to reject the historical and ideological representation of female Asian American administrators. By not conforming to the white male images of leadership, Hope asserts her human agency to define her role and expectations for leadership, not waiting for others to legitimize her through racist, patriarchal frameworks. Through her authenticity and respect for her own humanity, the dehumanization associated with these stereotype threats has led her to put *people* at the center of her leadership approach. Her experiences with racial and gender marginalization have only encouraged her to stand up for her beliefs and to seek practices that affirm the humanity of her teachers and students.

Similarly, other administrators also discussed the role of race and gender in shaping their consciousness in school leadership. Our research participants use their knowledge of racism and patriarchy to help them gain political clarity about who they are and their positionality in life, and to cultivate leadership arsenals to sustain them while they work toward justice. Such perspective was exemplified by Mary's description of her expectations for social justice leadership,

> *The good thing about knowing where you are is that you are always conscious of who you are.... If you ask me what is it I hold dearest to my heart, it is justice. When people question you, challenge you, and even threaten you with your life, ... that kind of politics.... Even now people told me to shut up. My mom always lives in fear that I will say something not quite right and then.... Imagine that sometimes you do something and you just don't know whether you will get it or not.... I keep going... that's my way of thinking and my way of paying back to the society.*

Through these administrators' race-gender epistemology, the idea of paying back to society provides the impetus for administrators like Mary to conceive of leadership as public service. This concept of leadership for the public good has led them to associate their

leadership with practices that focus on collaboration, building bridges between stakeholders, and serving others by creating a just-oriented school culture. While these administrators may be threatened by overt and subtle racial and gender hostilities, they are using these experiences to inform their leadership to create inclusive communities where everyone is valued and cared for.

Redefining high expectations through caregiving leadership

In our study, the idea that school-level caring and high expectations help to increase student resiliency also translated into how these administrators use their race-gender epistemologies to persist in their leadership roles. The administrators in our study often described themselves as "the caregiver," which includes caring and nurturing their teachers and school staff. Even in difficult situations with challenging teachers or parents, the administrators want to remain attentive to personal needs, diverse perspectives, and contexts within and beyond the immediate issue. The administrators consider themselves servants to the school community, and the administrative position they hold is a means to that end. Their commitment to people and sensitivity to individual differences are reflective of caregiving leadership, under which human actualization is both an organizational asset and an organizational goal (Dennis et al., 2010).

When asked about this people-driven model of leadership, Hope talked about her ability to sympathize and empathize with her teachers and staff. From this collectivist vantage point, Hope was able to define her leadership based on equity and solidarity. Hope illuminated:

> *I was a teacher myself, so I know how challenging it is to be a teacher and more so, how dedicated one needs to be as a teacher.... As an administrator, you will have those difficult moments or conversations, ... it was not and will never be easy, but I think I have been able to do it with empathy and respect. Teachers are very self-critical already; it is hard to take feedback that is harsh and doesn't come with lots of empathy. By empathy I mean, ... maybe there was a reason. Instead of saying, 'This is what I see and this is what you must do,' I take my time to listen and to understand their perspectives. If the rationale doesn't make sense, then of course, I will give them the feedback that I know. I say, 'This is not the best way but this is how I know. What do you think?' So, it's more collaborative.*

Our participants' expectations for school leadership are not necessarily to lead as a front person, but to work in solidarity side-by-side with the entire community through race and gender unity. When asked about how she viewed and expected of herself as a school leader, Mary explained,

I am not what you see as typical, the lead-in-the-front type; I am a servant leader, if I have to name it. I am a people person. And we are in a human endeavor of serving humans.... I am here to work with them [teachers, students, and parents], support them, and do everything I can to help them.

By placing people, not products such as test scores, as the center of her leadership objectives, Mary was able to focus on building relationships with those she is serving. Our field observation also confirmed her assertions; Mary's teachers, staff, and students know her at a deep, interpersonal level, and in turn, she expects them to treat her and each other with respect, equity, and care. This finding is consistent with the literature, where female administrators are often found to value the dignity and worth of each individual, for the purpose of building an inclusive and empowering community for learning and teaching (e.g., Fennell, 1999; Lindsay, 1997; Regan & Brooks, 1995). It is this public servant leadership framework that provides Hope, Mary, and our other research participants a purpose to persist as administrators.

Fostering Conditions of High Expectations for Educational Equity

The second major theme that emerged in our findings spoke to the mechanisms through which these female Asian American administrators cultivated the conditions for others to harness similar high expectations for themselves and with each other to work toward educational equity. By placing people at the center of their leadership focus, our research participants use their interpersonal relationships as the basis to role model and communicate their expectations for teaching and learning.

High self-expectations

Earlier, we discussed that these administrators worked long hours as a strategy to counteract the doubts of incompetence that had been cast upon them. A part of this commitment is also due to their high expectations of themselves to ensure that their school was free from the injustices they had to encounter as Asian American women. When asked about how she demonstrated her expectations for herself as a school leader, Mary said,

People say that I aged a lot over the years since I started here. That probably is an understatement. The first five or six years, I barely had five hours of sleep every day. I did not get to see my families much at all because I was here all the time. I still work long hours but I think I am better at juggling between [family and work] now.

Even though these administrators were able to persist in their leadership roles, they worked tirelessly, sacrificed family time, and some even paid the price of their own personal health. When asked about the amount of time they spent on their jobs, Shine described

such practice as a form of role modeling for her students. She was motivated to instill the consciousness and work ethic that would help her students access the education opportunities they need to take on the fight against systemic inequities as future leaders. Shine elaborated:

> *I would like my students to be able to look up at [me], an Asian woman, and say, 'You know, she didn't just learn English, become a teacher, and stop there.' I want them to see that I had the obstacle of learning English and here I am.... They can go to college, they can become a teacher if they want to, and they can become an administrator, and more, that they can become a leader in any areas.*

For Shine, this outlook is a way to pay back to society. It started with having the self-expectations to improve the learning conditions of her students. Then, it was about using a method of role modeling and interpersonal relationships to instill confidence and belief that her students could also become leaders of their future profession.

High expectations as equity and ethics of care

It is by engaging teachers and students based on where they are that allows our research participants to act upon their expectations with and for their school community. For instance, Mary said:

> *All my students were not born and raised here, like myself. I came here on a student visa; I almost had nothing, but you know, my students have even less. That's why I keep doing what I am doing [working for equity and social justice]. I am a role model for my students. They need to see, to know that they can too [be a leader of their profession] and even more.*

The deep interpersonal relationships and high expectations are not limited to the confines of the classroom or the principal's office. Our field observations in these schools were marked by repeated patterns of positive interactions between the school administrator, teachers, and parents. When asked about the importance of developing positive relationships with the school community, Shine shared: "The only way you can have a relationship is to get to know them [teachers, students, and parents].... Relationships help you to understand each other better, like what angle the reaction is coming from."

Through the process of building relationships of caring and high expectations, our research participants also see the importance of these deep interpersonal relationships reflected in the ways students are characterized and treated in the classroom. For instance, when Hope was asked about her school-level expectations for her teachers and students, she responded, "You can tell my blood is boiling when I see there is no teaching and learning

in the classroom; you just can tell. My face, my body, my throat... all just tensed up." For our participants, high expectations in the classroom are quintessential to the success of all students. The literature shows that caring and high expectations go hand-in-hand, and without one, a school cannot have the other (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006). As a case in point, Hope was equally demanding of herself and the entire school community to stay committed to the intellectual promise of all students.

As the participants described the importance of creating caring and high expectation cultures in their school, we asked how they went about supporting all populations to meet their expectations to foster equity. Mary illuminated:

> *I choose to work for the neediest people [refugee and/or immigrant students and parents], for those whom nobody wants [to work with]. It has been my mission in life. After all these years, I am still doing the same thing... trying to level the playing field. Life is precious and yet fragile.... I think education is one of the most important professions; it actually saves lives, creates lives, [and] gives hope. I want the school to be a sanctuary, a small piece of heaven on earth... my kids [students] know the school is a safe place, we love them, and we expect highly of them.*

Our finding was consistent with the literature on sanctuary schools, where educational institutions work to eliminate stereotype threat and low expectations by deeply caring for all students' intellectual promise as a strategy to harness school-wide equity (Antrop-González, 2011; Muñoz, Espino, & Antrop-González, 2014). For Mary, her educational expectations also starts with idea that her school must be a safe place to learn for all students, regardless of background. She insists that schools must play a role in leveling the playing field through higher expectations, both for the profession and for the students. Furthermore, it is important for Mary to not limit her expectations to school success such as test scores or graduation rates, but to expand these visions to see how education can be a tool for the most marginalized students to work toward a more justice-oriented future.

To these administrators, they expect their students to go beyond meeting educational standards, because that may not always be good enough in life. Therefore, they strive to exceed their own expectations for themselves to be the best and more, so that their intentions can set a higher level of standards for everyone. Anna discussed how caring and high expectations must be conveyed in ways that treat students like their own. She said.

> *I live by my father's teaching. Since I was young, he always said, 'Whatever you do, do your best and more.' He said that best was not enough; it had to be best and more.... I struggled when I first came [to this country]. I was here all by myself and poor. I have worked very, very hard to get here.... I tell my students, 'You put your*

mind to it, you will get what you want. You may not get it today, you may not get it tomorrow, just don't give it up.' I never raise my voice to my students, but they know I am very strict. They know, and my teachers know, too, that they can't and will not get away with being slacking .... My students and their families have been through a lot... it's a tough love... they know where my heart is.

Similarly, Shine's expectations for her school community also prioritizes students' socialization and safety as the basis to promote equity. For Shine, equity means more than equal access to educational opportunities or test scores. Rather, it is about having high expectations to educate and nurture the whole child. She defines success in the following way,

How you define success.... what we do is a day-to-day thing; I suppose you can measure that in terms of children feel safe, they are happy to be in school, they do well... not just do well measured by a score or a test but measured in terms of socialization, learning to become a good person... I mean you see improvement in their whole being; it shows in their attitudes, ... they feel good, they are more respectful, they smile more, they look happier... It's not one thing; it's about the whole child.

Likewise, Anna also believes in the whole-child approach to promote school-wide success. Her response to the question regarding her expectations of students was unequivocal,

I am very protective and motherly to my students. And they know. They know I will fight every obstacle for them.... They make you feel like you are doing something all the time, they keep you awake worried about them, and they make you happy when they succeed.... You have to take away all the grief and all that low-esteem before you can make a whole child. The whole idea of you need to feel loved, someone loves you enough to do something for you. .... I want that one day they will still remember, 'Someone actually thinks well of me.'

Instead of defining their expectations merely on test scores, our participants care for the whole child and strive to provide the leadership necessary to remove obstacles so that the students are nurtured from the perspectives of love and mindfulness. One of the obstacles that Anna pointed to was the self-fulfilling prophecy of low teacher expectations that often lead students to develop negative self-perceptions for academic achievement (Liou, Marsh, & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2017). By prioritizing interpersonal relationships, Anna's leadership not only tackles systemic inequities, but also ensures that students are loved equitably, so they too could embrace and care for who they are and who they wanted to become.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our study discovered that these administrators' experiences with race, gender, and immigration status had shaped their attitudes, beliefs, and expectations as school leaders. For our participants, their high expectations for learning and teaching were considered as "the glue," as Mary noted, for building a school culture where social relations and classroom learning were not conceived hierarchically, but with an authentic form of equity in all aspects of schooling. Our participants' race-gender epistemologies provided them the ability to critique the racist and patriarchal norms of school leadership and to harness expectations of themselves and for others by creating conditions that reject the white, patriarchal norms that have come to define race, gender, and leadership. By taking on a grounded approach to elicit these administrators' counter-stories, we learned that their leadership framework and commitments were not a result of being model minorities. Rather, their abilities to resist racism and patriarchy are a result of their strong sense of purpose for social justice leadership. By dialogically placing people at the center of their leadership framework, these administrators are conscious about the ways in which their school operates in these racist patriarchal contexts and utilize their knowledge to define leadership for themselves and the school community. We found these administrators' efforts to create conditions of caring, sympathy, and solidarity with and for their school community to be manifestations of their race-gender epistemologies as school leaders.

The findings of our study suggest potential areas for future research. We found that race and gender played an important role in shaping Asian American women's minoritized status in the field of educational leadership. Because the current study was based on a relatively small sample size in one state in the US, replicative studies on a large scale or using an expanded pool of Asian American female administrators inclusive of district-level administrators would help test the pervasiveness of these findings.

Further, our findings call for additional research to be conducted on how school principals operate from their race-gender insider knowledge to promote equity and social justice (hooks, 1984). The race-gender epistemologies of these administrators were developed through their experiences with systemic oppression, which allow them to be highly responsive to the needs of their students, parents, and communities that might be systemically marginalized in similar or different ways. We need to continue to use research as a tool to create platforms and spaces for these counter-stories and leadership lessons to emerge. We also need to further examine the effects of school leaders' expectations of

students as a method to broaden the body of research that has historically focused on teachers in the classroom. Creating a new pathway to investigate the relationships between educational expectations and school-wide equity can help to shift our understanding of such dynamics from pedagogical to ecological and systemic (Liou & Rotheram-Fuller, 2016a; Weinstein, 2002). This expanded look of educational equity can contribute to school administrators' understanding of how to create conditions to foster school effectiveness in authentic ways. Additionally, the field of educational leadership must develop an extensive body of knowledge on ways to reshape the traditional images and ideologies of school leadership and to critically develop aspiring school administrators' consciousness to work for and with those around them from the perspectives of equity and solidarity.

As these female administrator participants positioned themselves as the creators of knowledge, their insights have important implications for the educational leadership pipeline. Given that students of color are already the majority population in the K-12 system, there is a pressing need to address systemic inequities through conscious leadership to interrogate and transform structures, procedures, curriculum, and practices that are rooted in the dominant ideology (Bernal, 2002). Conversely, students of color also need to have access to conscious administrators of similar backgrounds so they can be prepared for social justice leadership in their future professions. As such, implications for practice also point to the pressing need in principal preparation programs to strengthen aspiring school leaders' ability to receive systems of continuous mentoring at the intersections of race, gender, and other important identity markers. This strengthening could reduce the instances of school administrators constantly feeling and resisting the pressure to respond to stereotype threat in isolation. Finally, our study also underscores the importance of defining leadership as an adaptive, fluid, and highly situated set of behaviors mediated by one's positionality, consciousness, and social relationships with those around them. This said, we are reluctant to classify our participants' self-reported practices as a fixed notion of leadership that can be easily explained through a single, one-dimensional, and linear framework of leadership. The field has an obligation to raise consciousness beyond transactional and transformational leadership, to recruit and develop leaders who will exercise the political will to take on fundamental issues regarding race and gender, while creating belief systems and cultures that will result in equity and justice for all.

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