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ON THE EDGE OF LEADERSHIP: NARRATIVES OF ASIAN INDIAN AMERICAN  
WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The School of Leadership and Professional Studies  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

By  
Denozy Sharma

May 2022

ON THE EDGE OF LEADERSHIP: NARRATIVES OF ASIAN INDIAN AMERICAN  
WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing family: my beautiful Son, Aadvan, whose smiles made my doctorate journey more precious than ever, my parents who provided spiritual support from across the ocean, Dr. Baker, Dr. Capps, Dr. Burch, and Dr. Brake for their guidance and feedback, and Dr. Lester Archer for his support, wisdom, and challenging inquiries.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My journey through this dissertation process would not have been possible without the love and support of my family. They believed in me and supported me in every way possible. I would also like to dedicate this accomplishment to my paternal grandfather who dreamed of having a doctor in the family but did not live long enough to see his dream come true.

My heartfelt thanks to my chair, Dr. Brake, and committee members, Dr. Baker and Dr. Archer. Special thanks to Dr. Baker, Dr. Capps, and Dr. Archer, as they supported me thoroughly throughout this process. I thank Dr. Burch for her initial guidance in this program; I miss her. I express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Lester Archer for his invaluable guidance and continuous encouragement and support, in the unconditional help he provided in revising my dissertation.

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ON THE EDGE OF LEADERSHIP: NARRATIVES OF ASIAN INDIAN AMERICAN  
WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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This study was an investigation of the experiences of Asian Indian American Women (AIAW) in higher education in the United States. The motivation of this study was to gain a better understanding of Asian Indian American Women who, in spite of their rising presence in academia and educational attainment, are noticeably underrepresented in academic leadership roles. Asian Indian American women fall far behind White females in leadership positions in higher education.

A qualitative research methodology has been conducted. The investigation involved the narratives of the five female participants (faculty members and/or administrators in U.S. higher education) who identified themselves as Asian Indian Americans. Interview data were coded and analyzed based on the interview transcripts. Coded categories lead to the finding of common themes. Based on each research question, categories and themes have been described based on patterns.

This study highlighted primary areas, which include the experiences of the participants, their way of combatting challenges, and the role of a support system and mentors in their journeys. Findings suggest that almost all of these participants experienced gender and racial discrimination. Sometimes it was easy for them to decipher whether the discrimination was based on race or gender; sometimes it was difficult. They felt that as women of color, they lived

in the intersection of multiple jeopardy. Along with racial and gender discrimination, these women discussed about discriminations based on their appearance such as their short height and how they dressed. As a result, most became less interested in pursuing leadership roles in higher education. All participants expressed the importance of mentoring in shaping their careers.

The implications emerging from this study include, research is still limited on Asian Indian American women (AIAW). Future studies on this topic, especially in the area of leadership, will add new dimensions to the body of existing work on minorities and women leadership in higher education.

Recommendations for future researchers are to explore more about Asian Indian Women in higher education in the United States. They may expand upon this study by exploring the experiences of those AIAW who wish to achieve the top leadership positions but have not yet done so. This subgroup of aspirant women may provide valuable data related to the barriers faced by AIAW in higher education institutions.

Future researchers can also explore the experiences of Asian Indian American Men in higher education in the United States. They can also consider comparing White women and Asian Indian women in higher education in the U.S. There are few AIAW at the leadership positions in higher education in the U.S.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Women of color constitute the most underrepresented in the presidency positions in institutions of Higher Education (American Council on Education, 2017). In fact, only 5% of college presidents in the United States are women of color and 2% are Asian or Asian American women (American Council on Education, 2016). However, among all Asians, Indian immigrants have much higher educational achievements compared to any other race and ethnicity in the United States (Zong & Batalova, 2016). According to the American Council on Education (2017), educational attainment of adults 25-years and older across all ethnic groups for doctoral degrees is approximately 1.9% of the total population. Asians have the highest percentage of achieving doctoral degrees (4.7%); whereas doctoral degrees achieved by Whites are (2.0%), Black (1.1%), Hispanic (0.7%), and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (0.6%). Johnson (2016) found that despite the rising numbers of Asian Indian women in higher education; a disproportionately small number of these women have achieved leadership roles in higher education.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2015-2016) reported that female students earned the majority of university degrees, which translates to female students earning 56% of all associate, master's, and doctoral degrees, respectively, and 54% of all bachelor's degrees. Research suggests there is underrepresentation of and bias toward women in leadership roles in higher education (Bain & Cummings, 2000; Johnson, 2016; Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers, 2017; *The White House Project: Benchmarking Women's Leadership, 2009*). Nationally, 27% of colleges have women serve as college presidents and only 31% are full professors (Warner & Corley, 2017).

Although there is an increase in the number of women graduating with higher education degrees, there are fewer women in senior leadership positions at institutions of higher education. According to the American Council on Education, women in the United States continue to earn more bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees, but they are still underrepresented in leadership roles in educational institutions (President's Report, American Council on Education, 2017).

Particularly for Asian American women, they are evaluated as least suitable for leadership roles when compared to White women and Asian men (Tinkler et al., 2019). Despite the larger portion of higher education degrees achieved by women, fewer Asian Indian American Women (AIAW) serve as presidents or vice-presidents and as faculty members. Prinster (2016) noted the difficulty to get the actual number of Asian presidents in institutions because there is a very small number and cannot be tracked. Hune noted that Asian American women faculty are "differently raced, gendered, and deemed foreign" (Hune, 2011, p. 309). Women are consistently overlooked as leaders, face challenges and barriers, including pay inequality and other bias in leadership roles (American Council on Education, 2016). Previous research asserts that women are evaluated on their leadership skills differently than men (Ritter & Yoder, 2004). For example, managers may not promote women into upper-level positions because they do not possess male-like traits (Buckalew et al., 2012).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Asian women have often been omitted when discussing women of color (Bornstein, 2008; Jackson & Harris, 2005; Mena & Vaccaro, 2017), and many institutions exclude Asians in their definition of ethnic minorities or underrepresented populations (Lee, 2006; Museus & Kiang, 2009). Little to no research exists in the literature that specifically focusses on Asian Indian Women in Higher Education in the United States. In fact, searches did not reveal any

empirical studies relating to Asian Indian American Women (AIAW) in leadership roles in Higher Education in the United States. This study attempts to add to the literature a scholarly discussion about AIAW in their quest to hold leadership positions in academia.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to get a better understanding of factors relating to career advancement in higher education in the U.S. to an administrative role (e.g., Dean, Provost, Vice-President, and President) among AIAW who aspire to senior leadership roles in American higher education. The limited research regarding the lack of AIAW leaders in academia provides an opportunity to explore the challenges AIAW face as well as the lessons learned from those who have succeeded in obtaining leadership roles in higher education in United States. This study will examine those challenges faced by and lessons learned from AIAW who have pursued leadership roles in higher education in the U.S. The focus of the present study will be on getting a better understanding of the representation of AIAW in administrative roles and faculty positions. Experiences from women and their experiences in gaining senior leadership roles should provide important insights particularly for AIAW who aspire to reach top leadership positions in higher education in the United States. Although the educational and socioeconomic successes of Asian Americans have been widely discussed (Nguyen, 2016; Prinster, 2016), information is still lacking relating to major barriers and challenges faced by AIAW while pursuing senior leadership roles in academia.

### **Research Questions**

1. What challenges do AIAW encounter when pursuing senior leadership roles (dean and above) in higher education in the United States?
2. What factors influenced AIAW to pursue a career in higher education in the United States?

3. What support have AIAW received from their institutions to help develop them as leaders?
4. What resources do AIAW need most to obtain senior leadership roles in U.S. higher education?

### **Methodology**

The study used a qualitative methodological approach to examine challenges and experiences of Asian Indian American Women during their career trajectory in academia. The qualitative methodology was narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry involves both the personal and the social aspects of the experience. Narrative inquiry was first used by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) as a methodology to describe the personal stories of teachers. Wang and Geale (2015) asserted, “Narrative researchers look for ways to understand and present real-life experiences through the stories of the selected participants. The narrative approach allows for a rich description of the experiences of participants and conclusions derive from their experiences” (p. 196).

Narrative inquiry is a methodology in which a researcher attempts to illuminate the meaning of personal stories and events. Wang and Geale (2015) noted that first-hand experience provides extra insight and that narrative inquiry has an underlying philosophy that enables the illumination of real people in real settings through personal stories. Berry (2016) extended the understanding of narrative inquiry as providing powerful data that adds meaning to answer important research questions. According to Wang and Geale (2015), narrative inquiry amplifies voices that may have otherwise remained silent. It utilizes storytelling as a way of communicating the real-life experiences of participants to a larger audience. Researchers can access unique information that provides in-depth understanding of a participant’s point of view (p. 195).

For data collection, interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of AIAW in higher education. Participants completed an informed consent form before starting the interview process. The data from semi-structured interviews were documented using a recorder with the permission of the participant. The recordings were used for research purposes only, and personal information was and continues to be protected. Pseudonyms were selected for the participants. Interviews were transcribed and coded for themes.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is to contribute to the literature on women in leadership and to use the lessons learned from the narratives of AIAW. Their stories provide important information and a better understanding of the issues related to AIAW leadership in higher education. This study is relevant and important for multiple reasons. As AIAW are achieving higher education degrees, their presence at top level positions is alarmingly low. This study highlights the challenges faced by AIAW in obtaining senior leadership roles in higher education with the United States. Institutions are lagging in the strategies to implement the development of women's leadership. Many institutions are working on enhancing leadership skills for their female faculty, staff, and administrators (Madsen et al., 2012).

Two creative and innovative programs were introduced at Princeton University after the publication of a report on women mentoring women. One program was initiated by the staff and the other was launched by student leaders with the support from Princeton's Women's Center (Keohane & Madsen, 2012). Women have modified the perception of leadership and have practiced collaboration, inclusiveness, and integrity; this change is truly revolutionary, and more alterations are likely to happen as we move forward (Madsen, 2012).



The present study focuses on AIAW in higher education and provides valuable insights for aspiring Asian Indian American Women in academia. This study cultivates the existing literature about women's leadership, explores the challenges and roadblocks for Asian Indian American Women in higher education, and contributes toward providing strategies and solutions for advancing AIAW aspiring to leadership positions in academia.

### **Limitations**

The scope of this investigation was based on the responses of the participants and their interest in answering the questions. In addition, personal narratives may introduce bias to the study. Participants may be biased toward answering the interview questions, and this can negatively impact the study. Each woman's response depends on the degree of self-awareness and willingness to disclose personal information. Findings can be influenced by such unforeseen circumstances. The sample size of this study is also a limitation; a small sample size might not provide enough data to draw conclusions. The smaller sample size raises the issue of generalizability to the whole population of the research (Harry & Lipsky, 2014; Thomson, 2011). Due to small sample size, data interpretation and analysis may be more difficult or complex (Richards & Richards, 1994). According to Silverman (2010), qualitative research approaches sometimes leave out contextual sensitivities and focus more on meanings and experiences. A phenomenological approach of qualitative methodology, for instance, attempts to uncover, interpret, and understand the participants' overall experience (Tuohy et al., 2013; Wilson, 2014). So, the overall experience can be similar, but circumstances of each participant of this study has the potential to be different.

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations are the boundaries made by the researcher to target the right population chosen for research design (Dimitrios & Antigoni, 2019). For example, choosing to pursue Asian Indian American Women at an administration level and faculty will exclude the research to make broad generalizations regarding women at the level of dean or higher positions. These conscious decisions were made with keeping the purpose of the study in mind. Boundaries of this study were drawn around Asian Indian American Women in higher education. This study is based on a qualitative approach, and there are some benefits of using qualitative research approaches. Qualitative research methods produce detailed descriptions of participants' feelings, opinions, and experiences, and the researcher interprets the meanings of their actions using frameworks associated with these methods (Denzin, 2000). Qualitative research design (interactive approach) has a flexible structure, as the design can be constructed and reconstructed to a greater extent (Maxwell, 2012).

## **Definitions**

### **Asian American Women**

Asian American Women is the population with ancestry from China, India, the Philippines, Thailand, Japan, and other Asian countries, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

### **Asian Indian American Women (AIAW)**

Asian Indian American Women are American women with ancestry from India. The United States Census Bureau uses the term "Asian Indian" to avoid confusion with Native Americans, also known as American Indians. The U.S. Census Bureau (2020) defines Asian as, "A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia,

Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.”

### **Model Minority Stereotype**

Model minority stereotype is a cultural expectation of Asian Americans as a group that everyone will be naturally smart, good at math, science, and technology. It is also assumed that they must be hard-working, wealthy, uncomplaining, and obedient (Chou & Feagin, 2017).

### **Summary**

Chapter 1 contains the problem statement, purpose of the study followed by the research questions, a brief introduction to the methodology, the significance of the study, then the limitations and delimitations. Definitions are provided for the clarity of the terms used in the study. The statement of the problem has been identified as the lack of Asian Indian American Women in leadership positions in higher education. The purpose of this study is to get a better understanding of the factors relating to barriers that may get in the way of AIAW attaining leadership positions. The methodology is narrative inquiry. Following chapter 1 is the review of the literature.

Chapter 2 discusses and reviews the literature related to the study and research questions. The literature review will define the stated problem and examine the previous studies related to Asian Indian American Women in higher education in the United States. Chapter 3 explains the research methodology used in this research. Chapter 4 will discuss the analysis of the data that was collected through interviews. Lastly, Chapter 5 will draw conclusions and offer recommendations from the narratives by using the methodology and data analysis in Chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

A search of the literature reveals that most of the research on AIAW in academia is relatively narrow. Further examination of the literature also reveals the gaps in scholarly work focusing on AIAW in higher education in United States. Although there is research and literature on Asian Pacific American women in higher education, Asian Indian women in higher education and their roles as faculty or as administrator are overlooked.

This Chapter provides a discussion on the literature review in three broad areas:

- 1) Women in higher education in the United States
- 2) Asian women in higher education in United States, and
- 3) Asian Indian American women in higher education in United States.

This chapter will provide an in-depth exploratory review of stereotypes that affect Asian Indian American women in academia and how these stereotypes keep them from accomplishing top leadership positions in higher education in America.

### **Women Faculty and Administrators in Higher Education in the United States**

Women are accelerating in attaining higher education and are now receiving more degrees than men (Alcalde & Subramaniam, 2020). Despite the increased number of women obtaining degrees, women hold the least senior administrative positions and are the lowest paid among higher education administrators (Alcalde & Subramaniam, 2020). According to Gangone and Lennon (2014) women are the majority in the leadership pipeline, yet they are vastly underrepresented in leadership positions in educational institutions in the United States. Also, women may be outperforming men but are earning lower salaries, particularly in academia. The inequity of women in leadership roles in academia is widespread globally

(Northhouse, 2013; Sohail, 2014). Women remain underrepresented in higher education on all leadership positions such as provosts, deans, and presidents (Gallant, 2014). Women mentioned gender disparity, lack of support, childcare, or domestic duties as obstacles they faced when seeking top roles as leaders (Cook & Glass, 2014; Ely et al., 2011; Gallant, 2014). DeFrank-Cole et al. (2014) reported that women hit the invisible glass ceiling of inequality while pursuing leadership positions even though they have succeeded in their careers. There is a gender gap in leadership roles in institutions of higher education (Cook, 2012; DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014). Even though women have earned more bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees than men, they are consistently underrepresented in leadership roles in academia (DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014; Diehl, 2014; Gallant, 2014; Lennon et al., 2013).

Female leaders can bring transformational change with their unique experiences and progressive skills that may enrich institutional performance (Diehl, 2014; Madsen, 2012a, Madsen 2012b). In addition, more women in leadership roles will not only bring a diverse and perspective, but they will be even more germane to stimulate and improve gender equilibrium for females in academic institutions (Co'rdova, 2011; White, 2012). Most importantly, the development of additional research on Asian Indian American women in higher education in United States might inspire a more diverse population of women in academia. Researchers tend to focus on external barriers faced by women on top positions (Metcalf & Gonzalez, 2013). Literature on women leaders in higher education incline more toward the challenges and barriers encountered by female leaders and not as much of leadership development (Madsen 2012). Distinct studies examine various reasons for gender inequality of women in leadership roles, including glass ceilings (Johns, 2013; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010), mentoring and work relationships (Wallace, 2014), sexual harassment (Madden, 2011; McLaughlin et al.,

2012), and managing work and family (Cha, 2013). Women faced and reported discrimination and harassment more than their male counterparts (Jimenez, 2012). Barriers faced by women leaders include not having the same opportunity typically accessible to men at the workplace (World Atlas, 2012, p. 84). Women are less likely to obtain leadership positions, are rarely given any promotions for top positions, and quite often receive less pay (Savigny, 2014). According to Powell (2012), women remain at the entry level positions and are overlooked for top leadership positions despite the efforts and qualification. A detailed study and better understanding are required to find the underlying reasons why women are less likely to be considered for leadership roles and encourage solutions to recruit prospective women (Dobele, 2014; Fotaki, 2013).

Furthermore, as women face the glass ceiling phenomenon in their carrier frequently, it is important to understand that the “glass ceiling” is an invisible barrier that exists in a workplace to keep people from growing in their jobs and lesser qualified people keep passing them by getting promotions (Piertrangelo, 2020). Madsen et al., (2012) described the shortage of women in leadership positions in academia because women experience challenges in terms of biases against women as leaders and internal biases. Therefore, this study explored experiences of AIAW and factors that hindered their growth and ability to access leadership positions in higher education.

Factors such as discriminatory hiring practices, sexual harassment, and hostile workplace environments are the contributors to glass ceiling.

The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission was created by President George H. Bush in conjunction with the Civil Rights Act of 1991 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). The commission was created to identify the barriers that prevented women and minorities from

advancement in the workforce. This commission revealed that the glass ceiling is valid, and the concept of an invisible barrier obstructing women and minorities from proceeding up the corporate ladder to management and executive level positions truly transpired (U.S. Department of Labor, 1995).

The evolution of women leaders excelling in their higher education career remains slow as compared to men (Lapovsky, 2014; White, 2013). Age, gender, family/marital status, and individual stress are some variables identified as relating to women trying to break the glass ceiling and hindering women from growing in their leadership roles in academia (Metcalf & Gonzalez, 2013). Additionally, women hold lower academic status than men in academia (Schneider et al., 2011). The inequity of women as leaders in academia is widespread globally (Sohail, 2014). Even though women continue to enter the labor force in greater numbers, they still are greatly underrepresented in higher education leadership positions and women of color are especially underrepresented in academia (Catalyst, 2020). Stereotypes regarding gender and leadership continue to persist (Hernandez Bark, Escartin, Schuh & Dick, 2016).

The report *Benchmarking Women's Leadership in the United States 2013* examined the higher education sector, Colorado Women's College (Lennon, 2013). All facets of higher education were examined, such as students, faculty, administration, and board of trustees, under the term "Academia". Researchers found that although the ascending number of women attending colleges and attaining degrees continued to increase, their numbers did not lead to a significant improvement in overall presence of female leaders in top leadership roles or any improvement in their compensation (Gangone & Lennon, 2014). The 2013 report stated that women represented 57% of all college students, women were only 10% of full professors and 26% of university presidents (Gangone & Lennon 2014). Gangone and Lennon suggested a

need for mentorship and sponsorship for women to excel in careers in academia (2014). According to (Flaherty 2021), only 24% of women are the top earners among 130 research universities, and women of color are just 2% of top earners (American Association of Universities).

To conclude and to summarize this section, the literature suggests that there is a constant change in academia, but the stubborn and complex environment of institutions equality issues are the barriers women face in their career progression in higher education (Barrett & Barrett, 2011). Women as leaders in higher education are underrepresented and hit invisible glass-ceiling. Despite of all the challenges, women can excel in their career with the help of mentorship and sponsorship.

### **Asian Women in Higher Education in the United States**

Asian women and their existence in leadership roles in higher education are overlooked. The contents of this study draw from literature that examines the challenges Asian American women experience in higher education in United States. Asian American women are a small but growing population of higher education faculty in the United States (Nguyen, 2016). Asian Americans are seen as being Asians and not as Americans (Mella, 2012). The misconception and dilemma of being considered foreigners while learning and working within institutions of higher education hinder their growth (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Hune, 1998; Lee, 2006; Wong et al, 1998). An examination of history shows, there were 252 female Asian full-time professors in 1980-81 in the United States, which increased to 1,267 in 1999 (Hune, 2006, p. 28). According to National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), by 2018 this number has increased to 5,258; whereas the total number of full professors in 2018 was 185,758 including males and females. Asian American women faculty are less likely to hold tenure position as



compared to Asian American men (Hune, 2006, p. 28). According to NCES (2020), Asian/Pacific Islander Male faculty percentage is 7% total, whereas, Asian/Pacific Islander Female comprise 5% of the total faculty in academic institutions in The United States. The percentage of Asian Women in leadership roles as college presidents in higher education in United States is only 2% (American Council on Education, 2016). The statistics provide a review of historic data, but the individual experiences of these women reveal the distinct challenges, strategies, and triumphs of working in the traditionally White male academy (Nguyen, 2016). According to a new study from Eos Foundation's Women's Power Gap Initiative, the American Association of University Women, and the WAGE project, women of color are even more grossly underrepresented, at just two percent of top core academic wage earners among 130 research universities (Flaherty, 2021).

When an average American considers the term *Asian or Asian American*, a particular race or ethnicity might come to their mind. According to (Lopez et al., 2017), Asian refers to people whose ancestors originated from the regions of the Far East, Southeast Asian, or Indian subcontinent. Asian countries, among others, include China, India, Japan, Vietnam, Pakistan, South Korea, Indonesia, and Malaysia. In the U.S., 59% of U.S. Asians were foreign born. Their reasons for immigration varying among different origin groups (Lopez et al., 2017).

Hune (2006) problematizes the particular intersection in which Asian females find themselves: While a white woman in the academy has to deal with being a woman in a man's world, and an African American male with being black in a white world, Asian females must deal with being a female, being of a particular race, culture and ethnicity.

Nguyen (2016) explains how different backgrounds, culture, family histories, immigration stories, and professional paths lead to unique personal experiences in academia.

Asian American includes a wide variety of ethnicities, culture, language, and history. In the study, Nguyen (2016) explains how Asian American includes people from China, India, Japan, and Vietnam are defined suddenly by their ethnicity. A common challenge Asian women faculty face is a struggle with the issue of identity (Nguyen, 2016). Stereotypes are another challenge, including “model minority” or the “lotus flower” image Asian women face (Shrake, 2006, p. 183). The term *model minority* stereotypes Asians as hard workers who quietly achieve high results, and *lotus flower* defines Asian women as feminine and passive (Nguyen, 2016). In social science research, many refer to Asian American women as an invisible minority (Hune & Nomura, 2003; Wagner, 2016; Wu, 2015; Wu & Jing, 2011). An extensive body of literature describes Asian Americans as quiet, hardworking, determined, and socially passive (Pak et al., 2014; Vega, 2015; Zhang, 2010).

In summary, Asian American Women remain underrepresented in academia despite of their increasing numbers in education statistics and consistent efforts to achieve success in American institutions. Asian women, even if they are American, are recognized as foreigners and struggle with their identity issues. The mischaracterization of Asian women as foreigners makes it much more problematic for Asian Indian American women. These women need to be teased apart since they have distinct cultural roots, experiences, and historical immigration patterns in the context of the United States.

### **Asian Indian American Women (AIAW) in Higher Education in the United States**

The term Asian Indian Women refers to women who come from India or their ancestors immigrated from India to America. The Asian Indian population is the second largest Asian group and one of the rapidly growing populations in the United States (Mukherjea et al., 2013). According to The United States Census Bureau (2016), Asian Indian Women comprise 47.9%

of the total Asian Indian population in the United States. Despite these numbers, little to no statistics exist on Asian Indian American Women (AIAW) as leaders in academia in the United States. According to the American Council on Education (2016), women of color are the most underrepresented in the leadership positions in institutions, but these statistics do not identify AIAWs. Prinster (2016) cited Yamagata-Noji (2005) who found that it is difficult to measure the actual number of Asian women leaders in higher education, as the number is very small and cannot be tracked. It was even more challenging to find Asian Indian women in leadership roles in higher education.

To better understand possible factors that contribute to the limited number of AIAW in American academia, the next sections of the literature review about Asian Indian American Women is divided in three segments: Racial Discrimination, The Myth of Model Minority, and Mentoring and Support for Asian Indian American Women.

### **Racial Discrimination against AIAW**

Asian Indian Women living in the U.S. identified discrimination and racism as sources of stress. Research has shown that across communities of color, experiences with discrimination and racism can cause significant psychological distress, putting these individuals at increased risk of developing mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress (Carter, 2007; Helms et al., 2012). Can there be factor that may be contributing to the limited number of AIAW in American academia?

Asian American Women are underrepresented in many fields, including educational leadership. They struggle with gender, racial-ethnic, and cultural discrimination (Liang, Peters, 2016). Hune (2011) examined the “gains” and “leaks” of Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) women’s trajectories from Ph.D. to campus president. She mentioned an increasing

trend of AAPI female students enrolling in higher education but an underrepresented number of AAPI women faculty, particularly in the top leadership roles (Nguyen, 2020). Many studies before and after Hune's (2011) study have indicated invisible barriers AAW face in leadership. The barriers include prejudice and stereotype related to gender, race, and culture; unjust treatment of their institutions in hiring, evaluating, and promoting; and personal difficulties, such as disadvantaged socio-economic status, language barriers, and heavy home-work responsibilities (Asher, 2010; Chin, 2012, 2020; Hune, 2020a, 2020b; Kawahara, 2007; Liang & Peters, 2017; Loo & Ho, 2006). All the previous studies are about Asian American Women which includes Asian Indian Women as well. These may be reasons why there are few AIAW in higher education.

However, Asian Indian American Women are not explored, and it is even more difficult to find Asian Indian women in top level and faculty positions in academic institutions. Immigrant Asian faculty face many challenges, including their language, accented speech, and culture. In a study by Nguyen (2016), Thomas-George, a South Asian professor in Illinois shared her experience about wrongly pronouncing the word "pseudo" for three years and discussed her mispronunciations impacted the environment of her classroom. Jean-Marie and Lloyd-Jones (2011, p. 57) held the view that women of color encounter five challenges: 1) an unwelcoming institutional climate; 2) institutional and individual discrimination and prejudice; 3) difficult establishing their legitimacy; 4) tokenism and its concomitants; and 5) overload. With reference to Turner (2002), women faculty of color face these obstacles more acutely because of their multiple marginalities. Discrimination can be a contributing factor in limiting Asian Indian American Women in leadership roles in higher education. According to Wong and

Halgin (2006), discrimination affect the self-esteem and psychological well-being of Asian American.

### **Myth of Model Minority Relating to Asian American Women**

Myth of model minority, as used by Chou and Feagin (2016) in their study related to discrimination against Asian people. Stereotypes related to Asian people's way of English speaking and accent still predominates in many areas of U.S. (Chou & Feagin 2010, p.9). Asian Americans are successful not only in education but also in their jobs and career, such stereotypes mask the unemployment and challenges they face in their daily lives (Chou & Feagin 2010). Chou & Feagin (2010) argue that the positions available to Asian Americans often are not as good as what their educational and experience records should secure. Asian American Faculty face discrimination and stereotyping in their academic career (Ng et al., 2007). Several studies show the fact that Asian women face additional marginalization due to gender stereotyping (Hune & Chan 1997; Reddy et al., 2002).

### **Mentoring and AIAW**

The literature on Asian Indian American women's mentoring is exiguous and lacks several viewpoints. Peer mentoring has not been studied in detail, yet it is an important factor in a protégé's life in academia (Chandler, 1996). Kram (1985) identified the importance of mentoring as a support and feedback from an experienced, senior individual to a less experienced, junior member of an organization. The traditional view of mentoring included pairing older males with junior males in institutions and was not reflective of the needs of women in the organization. A mentor was perceived as a powerful and experienced member of an organization who encouraged career mobility (Darwin, 2000). Women have experienced mentoring relations with men due to the dearth of women being on higher positions (Thomas &

Higgins, 1995). Mentoring can be helpful in protégé's career, decision-making, visibility in the organization, and exposure to opportunities (Blackwood & Brown-Welty, 2011). Effective mentoring relationships could be valuable to overcome underrepresentation by gender (Yong, 2006). According to Blackwood & Brown-Welty (2011), mentoring can be a tool in the career advancement of underrepresented women to improve their access to higher-level administrative positions. Kawahara et al. (2020) insisted that mentorship is one of the most important factors and practices that is needed for Asian American Women in all crucial aspects of their leadership lives, from professionalism to leading styles and behaviors. Thus, individuals increasingly may need to look beyond the organization to multiple relationships that can provide valuable developmental assistance (Thomas & Higgins, 1996).

Mentoring may contribute to a limited number of AIAW in higher education leadership roles in the U.S. Unfortunately, when aspiring academicians cannot find a mentor, it can lead to an unsuccessful career in the academy. Effective mentorship can make a difference between success and failure in the life of an aspiring academician. Mentoring and coaching can provide psychological assistance in the uncertain environment and can provide the confidence to handle the challenging situation.

### **Racial Discrimination against Women of Color**

Being a woman and of a particular race and ethnicity adds complexity to entering the world of academy. While white women are struggling to carve a niche in a white male dominant academy, it is even harder for women of color to go through the process of recruitment, hiring, and retention as faculty. Mertz (2011) noted, "A growing body of literature documents the experiences of female faculty of color, reasons for their underrepresentation in the academy, and obstacles to their success in the position" (p. 42). Issues related to the

discrimination and bias in higher education toward females of color has not captured the attention of researchers and practitioners (Mertz, 2011). Bronstein (1993) suggested white males predominate in the faculty and are considered a “mainstream model.”

Faculty candidates of color go through a biased evaluation and may hinder their viability for the position since they “must prove themselves in ways not expected of their white male peers” (Johnsrud & Sadao, 1998, p. 335). According to Gonzalez (2020), a woman of color in academia is presumed incompetent. Female faculty of color feeling isolation and marginalization are left alone to find out things on their own, as they might be perceived incompetent or dependent. They try to make social and professional networks outside their department or university for support. Faculty of color often forget the coldness, isolation, and obstacles they face are because of their ethnicity, gender, and race (Mertz, 2011).

Reports of discrimination and bias experienced by faculty of color related to institutional climate and low job satisfaction are widely reported in the literature (e.g., Aguirre, 2000; Aleman & Renn, 2002; Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Frierson, 1990; Garcia & Thompson, 1999; Gregory, 2001; Hurtado, et al., 1998; Turner & Myers, 2000). Female faculty of color report being “treated as second class citizens...devalued in everyday interactions” (Johnsrud & Des Jarlais, 1994, p. 335). Female faculty also reported of receiving biased treatment in day-to-day experiences, and their behavior and adherence to rules and procedures are subjected to greater scrutiny that can only be attributed to their “difference” in terms of race, gender, and ethnicity (Mertz, 2011, p. 58). Mertz suggested:

The burden that falls so heavily on female faculty of color may only be obviated when there are more faculty of color, from ethnic and cultural groups, in numbers large enough so that faculty of color become part of the mosaic of the University. (p. 62)

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework brings together psychological capital regarding four dimensions and how it can be helpful to AIAW. The framework helps to steer the discussion of the role of mentoring and its importance for AIAW in academia. The framework is conceptualized to help in the understanding of women in higher education. Within the context of the present study, the framework helps to situate psychological capital, mentoring, assimilation, and acculturation as it relates to women. In this study, assimilation and acculturation focusses on their impact on immigrant women. Lastly, the framework includes stereotypes explained in regard to AIAW.

### **Psychological Capital and Women**

This research also focuses on how AIAW can overcome the barriers related to their academic carrier by believing in themselves. Positive mindset can help achieve the desired goals, and Psychological Capital (PsyCap) is a model that can be useful for AIAW in achieving success in academia. Youssef-Morgan et., al (2015) identified PsyCap as a personal development phenomenon which is related to the state of mind and positive attitude of a person. The phenomenon has four dimensions: 1) being confident to take on and put in effort to take challenging tasks and be successful; 2) staying optimistic constantly; 3) not giving up hope; and 4) being resilient. It is “a core construct that consists of hope, efficacy, optimism, and resiliency’ (Luthans, et., al, 2008. p. 820). Motivated persons will put their heart and soul into be successful, and this determination can be a powerful factor to achieving anything they set their mind to. Confident persons will be adept to resiliently handle any task and will be hopeful and optimistic about their success.



PsyCap includes self-efficacy, hope, and resiliency, which can, in turn, transform into optimism and fill an individual confidence through internalized perceptions of being in control. These are few of the many outcomes that may result from practicing the PsyCap factors (p. 19). The idea of PsyCap describes the application of positive psychology of an individual. Youssef and Luthans (2010) examined personal psychological strength in relation to how women persevere. People who set challenging goals, take chances, are motivated, have a positive outlook despite obstacles and setbacks, and continue with perseverance become successful in achieving their goals (Luthans, et., al. 2007). PsyCap has four characteristics: self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resiliency.

***Self-Efficacy.*** Luthans (2002) defined self-efficacy as the psychological capacity of a person for their own development and effective performance. All a person needs is the psychological inner strength and belief in themselves. Luthans et al. (2007) explained self-efficacy as a factor that motivates a person to use their strength and skills to take challenges. It helps to have faith and confidence in oneself when obstacles and difficulties arise. It is a self-awareness about one's strength and capabilities and to recognize positive change and personal development to achieve a goal (p. 34).

***Hope.*** The second characteristic of psychological capital is hope. Hope is a mental state in which a person sets goals to achieve the desired aims through self-determination, energy, and self-motivation (Cavus & Gokcen 2015). Staying positive and optimistic about a situation is a hope. Cavus and Gokcen (2015) maintained, "Optimistic people expect that positive situations will happen while pessimists are expecting that negative things will take place (p. 246).

***Optimism.*** This is the third characteristic of PsyCap. Optimism is defined as being positive about future events and expecting positive results in the future; whereas, pessimism is

constantly thinking about negative outcome of events in the future (Luthans et al., 2007).

Positive people look at the positive aspects of a situation and work accordingly. They have the power to foresee things in a positive manner and internalize useful aspects of their life.

**Resiliency.** The fourth characteristic of PsyCap is resiliency, which means the ability to recover from adversity while staying positive. Resiliency is not only the capacity to quickly recover from the difficulties, but it is an ability to be very positive in challenging events. (Luthans et al., 2007). AIAW may face adversity during their career; how they react in the situation determines how resilient they are.

All four characteristics of PsyCap play a critical role in a variety of organizations (Luthans, 2002a). Although there is no direct relation between the AIAW in higher education and PsyCap, a study by Youssef and Luthans (2007) supported a significant relationship among hope, optimism, resiliency, and job satisfaction. Their findings revealed that psychological capacities, optimism, hope, and resiliency may have a positive impact on the employees and on work-related outcomes (Youssef & Luthans 2007). All four characters are somewhat related to personal development and can impact the success of a person in their endeavors. PsyCap may be a model to achieve success and help deconstruct the barriers for advancement in the academy.

## **Mentoring**

Mentoring can be helpful for women faculty in many ways; it can increase the sense of empowerment and prevent them from resigning from their career due to limited institutional support, discrimination, and lack of respect (Wimmer, 2019). Mentoring can play an important role for aspiring educators to advance in academia, and it may also enhance career satisfaction. The most common benefits of mentoring are problem-solving or providing advice; it can lead to institutional change but is crucial in early years in a tenure track position (Yen, et al., 2019). The

scenario of success would be different for AIAW in academia if they could find a mentor in their respective fields. The foreseen benefits of mentoring are assumed to create productive relationships required for a successful academic career and life (Buzzanell et al., 2015). Mentoring can be a survival strategy for women of color in academia. Stanley and Lincoln (2005) discovered that many women faculty of color regret that they hardly experienced any mentoring, especially during their journey toward tenure, and those who benefitted from mentoring no doubt it has enabled their success.

### **Assimilation and Immigrant Women**

According to statistics on U.S. Immigration (1996), assimilation is observed as continuous process of change and progressive refinement and adaptation to American society. AIAW try to acquire new skills of working positively and effectively in their academic careers. Edmonston (1996) argued, “Assimilation is a segmented process, depending on the subculture of American society in which different immigrant groups reside” (p. 37). Acculturation research generally concentrates on people who are assumed to be immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and sojourners (e.g., international students, seasonal farm workers; Berry, 2006b). Acculturation and assimilation are processes where immigrants and collectively these group population are assumed to be permanently settled in their new homeland and are attempting to adjust to a new culture. According to Berry (1980), assimilation categories consist of adopting new culture, receiving new practices, values, and identifications, and discarding those from the culture of origin. In conclusion, assimilation is abandoning one’s own cultural habits and values to totally accept the culture of new country. According to Berry (1997), the integration strategy is considered the most effective acculturation strategy in terms of the long-term health and wellbeing of the individual.

## **Acculturation and Immigrant Women**

Acculturation is defined as an adaptive process of adjustment by cultural groups and direct interaction between distinct cultural groups (Berry, 1987; Mena et al., 1987). Asian Indian women are a richly diverse population group. Asian Indian women come from a patriarchal, collectivistic society and bear the responsibility of holding, teaching, and transmitting cultural traditions, values, and beliefs to their families (Bhattacharya, 2002). Acculturation is a dynamic process, and numerous studies have been conducted on this subject. John W. Berry (1991), one of the leading scholars in acculturation studies, developed a framework of acculturation strategies for understanding the “psychology of immigration” of immigrants. According to Berry (1991), cultural knowledge, socialization with American society, socio-cultural adaptation, and English language proficiency are the integral parts of the adaptation process. Adaptation into the new culture can depend on the personality of an individual, their attitude, social support, and circumstances. Key factors that potentially influence acculturation among Asian Indian Women are socioeconomic and demographic history, education level, self-efficacy, and English proficiency.

## **Stereotypes**

Hune (2011) states in an article that Asian Americans are an understudied and misunderstood racial/ethnic group in the United States who are beset by stereotypes of being a “model minority” and “perpetual foreigner” despite their birthright, citizenship, and established commitment to American society (Chou & Feagin, 2008, Hune 2011). Asian Americans are stereotyped as being especially accomplished in science, engineering, and mathematics. Moreover, many believe Asian Americans should be grateful for overcoming the racism and are model minorities. In context to academia, Asian American women are expected to not speak up

about the issues related to race and rights for Asian Americans and other minority groups (Chandra, 2002). Hune (2011) observed, “Asian American women faculty have identified racial sexual harassment from male faculty, and some male students as one of their challenges in academe.”

Such incidents not only demoralize Asian American women faculty but also encourage the resignation from their faculty positions. Women faculty of color have found ways to combat inequality and marginalization in the academy (Masta, 2018). It is challenging for female faculty of color to excel in their career when their colleagues continue to see them as females and a minority group (Faircloth, 2011, p. 221).

The question arises: How can AAIW arise above all the challenges they face in academia and be successful in their career? There are a few strategies that can help AAIW to excel in higher education in United States. Self-efficacy, self-mentorship and resiliency are some of the characteristics that can help them overcome the difficult situations. Bandura connects resiliency to self-efficacy, the potential to bounce back from a difficult condition or circumstances along with self-motivation (Faircloth, 2011). Bandura (1982) found “Individuals who have strong self-efficacy are tend to be high performers.” Self-efficacy plays an important role to inspire people when external stress leaves them feeling isolated, unappreciated, and disrespected (Bass & Faircloth, 2011).

Individuals who are determined and self-motivated have the ability to overcome tremendous obstacles. Self-mentorship is a way of having self-efficacy, resilience, and self-agency. As described by Butner et al. (2000) self-mentorship is a purposeful process of mentoring both oneself and others through academy in the absence of mentorship by more senior level colleagues.

## Summary

This literature review provided insights about AIAW in academia in United States. A brief discussion of women in higher education in the United States, Asian women in higher education in United States, and Asian Indian American women in higher education in United States provides a better understanding of challenges women face in the higher education institutions. The discussion included racial discrimination, the myth of model minority, mentoring and support for Asian Indian Women, and other obstacles still impacting women's success in leadership roles. How women are perceived in leadership roles and leadership effectiveness was also examined. Additionally, specific differences related to acculturation and assimilation were discussed. For the purposes of this study, the literature review focused on women in higher education and Asian women in higher education. From the previous studies, it is apparent there are challenges and obstacles for all women in leadership, but women of color seem to experience both racial and gender barriers. The conceptual framework was presented. For the conceptual framework, it was built on several constructs. These constructs included psychological capital, mentoring, and assimilation. Also included were acculturation and stereotypes.

In the next chapter, the methodology will be discussed. The present study utilizes qualitative methodology. Specifically, narrative inquiry is the specific methodological approach. Included in the chapter will be a discussion of narrative inquiry. The design will be described. Data collection and data analysis will be discussed. Of note is a discussion of the three-dimensional narrative space. This space helps with the data analysis in narrative inquiry. Finally, some discussion relating to trustworthiness will be discussed.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the overall methodology of the study. The purpose of this study was to get a better understanding and to explore the experiences of Asian Indian American Women (AIAW) faculty and administrators in higher education in United States. Higher education institutes and universities are facing increasingly complex challenges in attracting and retaining women (Uche et al., 2014). There is an underrepresentation of and bias toward women in leadership roles in higher education (Johnson, 2016; Pasquerella et al., 2017). Asian American women are evaluated as least suitable for leadership roles compared with white and Asian men, as well as with white women (Tinkler & Ridgeway, 2019). Chou and Feagin (2017) stated that racism is deeply rooted, and discrimination persists in many areas that are institutional and integral in the life among Asian Americans. Nguyen (2020) also explored in her study the lived experiences and perspectives of Asian American women in academic and non-academic leadership. The preliminary model she used demonstrated gender still matters and is centered in higher education, and support is still required for AIAW and women of color to overcome invisible barriers related to gender and culture.

This chapter contains a brief review of the research problem, a robust discussion about the research design, selection of participants, interview protocol, and data collection along with analytical procedures. Trustworthiness is also discussed.

### **Overview of Research Problem**

The fundamental reason for this research project was to better understand the challenges and barriers AIAW faculty and administrators encounter in higher education in United States. Scholars observed indicators of discrimination and bias has changed from definite to indirect

practice over time (Sue, 2010). Nevertheless, there remains a shortage of women in leadership positions in academia because women experience challenges in terms of biases against women as leaders and other internal biases (Madsen et al., 2012).

### **Research Questions**

1. What challenges do AIAW encounter when pursuing senior leadership roles (dean and above) in higher education in the United States?
2. What factors influenced AIAW to pursue a career in higher education in the United States?
3. What support have AIAW received from their institutions to help develop them as leaders?
4. What resources do AIAW need most to obtain senior leadership roles in U.S. higher education?

### **Research Design**

A qualitative research design was applied in this study. The researcher is considered both the data collector and data analyst in qualitative research, which provides a possibility for research bias (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A qualitative study provides the opportunity to delve deep into interviewees' realities and allow access to their counter-narratives as a different model from the "model minority paradigm" (Buena Vista et al., 2009, p. 79). Pure qualitative methodology was selected because these types of studies afford participants the opportunity to express their points of view and to share their experience through communication. A qualitative approach is ideal to garner a greater insight of the lived experiences of the participant and the impact of the phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012).



For methods, to study the behaviors, strategies, and personal experiences of AIAW, interviews were best suited. More specifically, the researcher used semi-structured interviews. Creswell (2013) stated that the intricacies and depths of a journey can be perceived through a person's viewpoint, and qualitative research is the best way to extract these. According to Sutrisna and Barrett (2007) qualitative methods have been considered appropriate for studying complex situations and yielding rich findings whilst acknowledging the researchers' influence in "shaping" the research findings. According to Williams (2001), to overcome glass ceiling effects in academia, there must be a clear understanding of the challenges that prohibit progress and cultivate strategies that were expressed through the lived experiences. Participants in this study also shared their lived experiences and provided input on handling their challenges.

The specific methodological approach was narrative inquiry. Stories themselves are considered raw data in narrative inquiry (Butina, 2015). Narrative inquiry is one of the five traditional approaches of qualitative research. A narrative approach was selected for this study to gain insight about the experiences and first-person stories of AIAW in academia.

### **Setting and Context**

This qualitative study focused on Asian American Indian Women. Selected participants for the interview represented the Asian American Indian Women. In sampling, individuals are selected in such a way that they represent the larger population for the desired study (Gay & Airasian, 1996). The researcher considered individuals who had leadership and mentoring experience in academia and who had the opportunity to work in top-level positions in academic institutions. However, considering the targeted population being very small, faculty members and administrators who might not have leadership experience were chosen. This study will

contribute to the diversity of the sample and provide a reasonable study structure for future researchers.

## **Participants**

The final, purposive sample of participants ( $N = 5$ ) comprised of Asian Indian American females (immigrant and nonimmigrant). All held faculty positions in institutions within the United States. One was a retiree. Inclusion criteria were female, Asian American Indian, and working as faculty or administrators in an institution of higher education in the United States. In academic year 2016-17, there were 4,360 degree-granting higher education institutions, of which 1,528 were two-year colleges and 2,832 were four-year colleges (NCES).

The purposive sample came from the target population for this study. The target population was Asian Indian American women who filled roles as faculty or as administrators. Twelve Asian American Indian women faculty and administrators from educational institutions across America were chosen, but only five participants responded with the consent to participate in this research.

To gain a larger sample, the method of snowball sampling was employed. Snowball sampling is when research participants recruit or suggest other participants for the study (Glen, 2014). Patton (2002) concurred, citing snowball sampling as a common technique when recruiting participants for a qualitative study. Two prospective participants were identified, and during the course of the interview they were asked to volunteer prospective participants, which is a common practice in snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted online as face-to-face interviews were not possible considering COVID 19 pandemic. Therefore, interviews were conducted online via Skype, Zoom and telephone.

## **Procedures**

The data collection procedure started after submitting the application to IRB for approval. The application included a summary of this research, purpose of the study, literature review, interview questions, and informed consent form for obtaining the permission from the participants to allow me to interview them for the study (see Table 1).

Data collection started after the IRB approval (see Appendix A). The participants who were both interested in participating in the study and met the criteria of the study were emailed. Identities and personal information of the participants remained confidential. Their identities and information about their institution was not released to anyone or anywhere in the dissertation. Confidentiality was ensured, pseudonyms were used, and anonymity has been maintained.

The selected participants received an email including the details of the study purpose, participant's rights, expectations, and ethical assurances. The conversations were recorded after seeking the permission of the participant. The interview questions assessed whether female leaders in higher education had received any support from their institutions and if they had or have mentors to support them in order to acquire the leadership role. The second area of interest explored through the interview was the leadership characteristics the participant thought was essential in their advancement. The third and last area of interest was to examine the challenges or roadblocks women leaders faced and what they did to address the challenges. The interview invitation was sent to twelve faculty and administrators in United States via email. Interviews were recorded using Zoom. Transcripts were used for initial coding and axial coding for common themes.

## Data Analysis

This study relied on narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is used as a methodology to study the experiences of a person has in the past, how they felt about their experiences, and a way of thinking about experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The data analysis was conducted using the three-dimensional narrative space.

The three- dimensional space narrative structure in this study is adapted from Connelly and Clandinin, (2006). The dimensions are *Interaction*, *Continuity*, and *Situational*.

*Interaction* is about looking inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. The second dimension is *Continuity*, which consists of past and present experiences, stories from earlier times, and also includes the future in order to imply past experience to plot lines in the future. The third dimension is *Situational*, which is looking at the context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape or setting.

Included in data analysis was the use of data gathered using an interview protocol (see Table 1). The main element of qualitative interviewing is to provide a structure to the respondent within which they can explain their own understandings in their own terms (Patton, 2002). The main purpose of this narrative inquiry was to depict the lived experiences of the participants, vital and rich incidents related to the research happened in the past. Narrative inquiry also ensures to provide the voices to the stories of participants through research (Bell, 2013). Data reduction is also an important factor in analyzing the data. Data reduction is the process of the selection, simplification, and transformation of data in transcriptions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data were collected focusing on perspective women's experiences in higher education. During the interviews, data were documented in written notes and audio recordings. The research data were stored on a password protected USB drive. Privacy and security are the utmost

## Interview Protocol

**Table 1** *Interview Guide*

Interview Questions	Research Question
Tell me about yourself?	
Tell me about your early career and experience working in academia?	
What motivated you to pursue your career in academia?	2. What factors influenced AIAW to pursue a career in higher education in the United States?
What leadership characteristics do you believe you possess?	1. What challenges do Asian Indian American Women encounter when pursuing leadership roles in higher education in the United States?
What challenges did you face as an Asian Indian women in higher education?	
If you have ever thought about moving into a greater leadership role in what ways have you prepared yourself?	
What intentional changes have you made in order to reach at the top position in higher education?	4. What resources AIAW need most to obtain senior leadership roles in U.S. higher education?
What resources you used or was required to reach at the top level?	
What leadership traits do you expect from other Asian Indian women?	
In what ways would you say that you acquired the knowledge and skills from your institution as a student to become a leader?	3. What support have Asian Indian women received from their institutions to help develop them as leaders?
What changes would you like to see in a university in order to deliver efficient women leaders?	
To what extent do you believe the kind of institution you work for impacts, positively or negatively your success as a female leader?	3. What support have Asian Indian women received from their institutions to help develop them as leaders?
What are possible obstacles you believe that Asian Indian women encounter in higher education as they move into leadership positions?	1. What challenges do Asian Indian American Women encounter when pursuing leadership roles in higher education in the United States?
How would you describe the support you receive from family in your career trajectory?	
How would you describe the support you receive from friends in your career trajectory?	
Before we conclude this interview, is there additional information you would like to share?	

utmost consideration while dealing with the confidential information. After collection, the data were analyzed, followed by the analysis process of coding and theme identification. This research followed the three stages of qualitative data analysis as recommended by Maxwell (2012), which includes categorizing and coding the data; connecting strategies and creating categories, themes, and patterns; and analyzing and writing the final discussion of the study.

According to Maxwell (2012), data analysis for qualitative research can be sorted into three main groups: 1) categorizing and coding the data; 2) connecting strategies and creating categories, themes and patterns; and 3) analyzing and writing the final discussion of the study.

The narrative thematic analysis approach used in this study consisted of five stages: 1) organizing and preparation of the data, 2) obtaining a general sense of the information, 3) coding the data, 4) categorizing or themes, 5) interpretation of the data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Regarding ethical considerations, a pilot study of the research design was conducted. A pilot survey is the imitation and trial of the main survey, and the purpose of doing pilot study is to find any existing flaws in the data collection. Qualified participants were identified after they met the criteria of this study (Asian Indian American Women, faculty/administrator). Two participants took part in pilot study and provided their feedback. Interview questions mentioned in Table 1 were asked with their consent. The results were used to guide the methodology of the full-scale investigation. This saved time and resources and provided input as to whether data collection was feasible. It also helped determine the approach and necessary techniques required for the project. Pilot testing helped as a validation technique as well.

## **Trustworthiness**

Creswell (2013) defined qualitative validity and reliability as the steps a researcher takes in order to check “for accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures” (p. 163). In qualitative studies, validity is well-known as trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Connelly, 2016). Trustworthiness provides confidence to both the researcher and the participant, increasing the degree of faith in each other. Researchers should establish the protocols and procedures required for the research to be considered worthy of consideration by readers (Amankwaa, 2016). Trustworthiness of results of qualitative research provides foundation to the quality of the study. For instance, a researcher may use member checking as a validation technique (Campbell et. al., 2016). In this study, member checking and the research subjectivity statement were used to add trustworthiness.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking is often mentioned as a validation technique. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend member checking as a “means of enhancing rigor in qualitative research, proposing that credibility is inherent in the accurate descriptions or interpretations of phenomena.” Ethical aspects of member checking also includes the protection of the identity of the participants and interpretation of data.

The method of returning an interview or analyzed data to a participant is known as member checking. Member checking is used to validate, verify, and assess the trustworthiness of qualitative results (Doyle, 2007). Member checking covers a range of activities including returning the interview transcript to participants to member check the interview using the interview transcript data. Member checking is a process to ensure the participants are not

influenced by the researcher's own agenda and are providing the true information for the research (Tong et al., 2007). Transparency is the most important aspect of the study, expected from the researcher about the interview process, and the methods of implementation and validation (Birt et al., 2016). This study has used the member checking methodology by confirming all the answers participants provided in the interview. The researcher interpreted the data to the participants for more clarification and to avoid any influence.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

I was born and brought up in the Indian social and cultural milieu. Stories of Indian women leaders and women leaders from different parts of the world have always inspired me to explore the idea of women's leadership. I aspire to study about Asian Indian American women in higher education in United States. As a leader, the most important thing to me is to grow as a leader and to help other women to grow across the world. I hope to make significant contributions to AIAW research areas using acumen in the sphere of Educational Leadership.

The significance of this study is based on the narratives of the Asian Indian American women. Their stories may reveal some important information and understanding of the issues related to the women in leadership in higher education and academia. This study is relevant and important for multiple reasons. As AIAW are achieving higher education degrees, their presence at top level positions is alarmingly low. Most importantly, Asian Indian women are under-represented as leaders and administrators. Many institutions are working on enhancing leadership skills for their female faculty, staff, and administrators (Longman et. al., 2012). There remains a gap between the top leadership positions and skilled women leaders to fulfill those positions. I strive to contribute towards the role of AIAW in academia.



## **Limitations**

The nature of this study required a particular group of a population to participate, and the sample size was limited. First, the initial preferred population of interest for this research is AIAW leaders (e.g., Deans and above) in academia, but there were not adequate AIAW leaders. Among the AIAW in academia, only one was identified. Unfortunately, she was not accessible to be included. The identification of AIAW leaders was limited in scope. As a result, the inclusion criteria were widened to include faculty that may emerge as leaders. These participants were in the population of AIAW faculty and administrators that filled the gap. Secondly, face to face interviews were not possible due to the circumstances related to the pandemic. The scope of this study is based on the responses of the participants and their interest in answering the questions. In addition, personal narratives may bring a biased view on the study. Each woman's response is dependent on the degree of self-awareness and willingness to disclose personal information. Sometimes people are not comfortable to share any personal information, or they may hide a particular instance. Findings can be influenced by such unforeseen circumstances. Unforeseen circumstances may include participant's role and position at their institution, and their ability to disclose any information. These constraints made it challenging to draw accurate conclusions and acquire the facts.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how AIAW explain and describe their personal experiences in working in higher education institutions. A qualitative narrative inquiry research design with semi-structured interviews was used to garner data. The participants were purposefully selected based upon established criteria: women representative of Asian Indian American community who were in faculty and administrative positions from 4-year,

nonprofit higher education institutions within the United States. Trustworthiness and validity were established. Relevant themes were identified by using a qualitative approach.

In the next chapter, the results are presented. The three-dimensional narrative space is used as a model to organize the emerging themes.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, the results of the interviews are presented. First, the purpose of the study is stated followed by the research questions. Next, the participants are introduced. Demographic data is used to assist in the introduction. After, the emerging themes from the qualitative data are presented.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify possible barriers and explore how Asian Indian American Women (AIAW) administrators and faculty members describe their experience in higher education in the U.S. This research consists of AIAW administrators and faculty members. After the commencement of this project, the researcher tried to find AIAW in leadership in higher education but could find only one. This person is the first foreign-born president of a renowned university also the first Indian American to lead a major research university in the United States. Unfortunately, this person was not available for the interview. In the literature review, several studies that document the underrepresentation of women of color, especially AIAW, in U.S. academia were referenced.

This qualitative research is focused on four research questions: 1) What challenges do AIAW encounter when pursuing senior leadership roles or as faculty in higher education in the United States? 2) What factors influenced them to pursue a career in higher education in the U.S.? 3) What support have they received from their institutions to help develop them as leaders? 4) What resources do AIAW need most to obtain senior leadership roles in U.S. higher education?

The common approach to qualitative studies is to present the results as themes. The narrative thematic analysis approach used in this study consisted of five stages: 1) organizing and

preparation of the data, 2) obtaining a general sense of the information, 3) coding the data, 4) categorizing or themes, 5) interpretation of the data. Using this approach, the emerging themes are organized, then the discussion in chapter 5 addresses the research questions.

**The Research Participants**

Five participants volunteered to take part in this study. Each participant met the inclusion criteria of being an Asian Indian American Women in academia as a faculty member or administrator in higher education in the U.S. Due to an underrepresentation of AIAW in academia, the participation sample includes both faculty and administrators. The age of the participants ranges from early 40s to early 70s. All had doctoral degrees and had been part of higher education in various institutions. One common demographic characteristic the group had was speaking one or more languages in addition to English. Pseudonyms for the participants are selected. To protect their identity and privacy, the most popular baby names used in America were chosen. Table 2 provides a description of the participants.

**Table 2**

**Description of Participants**

Name	Age Range	Immigration Status	Position	University Campus 4Year Institution
Amy	60-65	Immigrant Indian	Research instructor	4Year Institution
Mary	45-50	Immigrant Indian	Associate Professor	4Year Institution
Lia	40-45	Immigrant Indian	Adjunct faculty	4Year Institution
Nora	70-75	Immigrant Indian	Retired Professor	4Year Institution
Olivia	45-50	Immigrant Indian	Academic Advisor	4Year Institution

Amy, an immigrant Asian Indian, now a citizen, is a research instructor in a research university. She expressed the absence of Asian Indian Women in science and the medical field. Amy came to the U.S. to accompany her husband and aspired to acquire a higher education. She completed her Ph.D. degree from a U.S. institution while taking care of her two children. She is in her 60s.

Mary is an immigrant Asian Indian, now a citizen is an Associate Professor in a University. She completed her Ph.D. degree in the U.S. The struggle to get a tenure track position was real, as Mary had two young children who needed a lot of attention and time. Because she did not want to change her path from academia to research, she worked some part-time faculty jobs. Her race and ethnicity became the most prominent challenge later in her career in academia. She is in her early 50s.

Lia is in her 40s and has worked as a research associate and as a part-time adjunct faculty in a university. She came to the United States to pursue her Ph.D. in education. Though she did not face any challenges due to her ethnicity, she did feel left out sometimes.

Nora is a retired professor from a university with 30 years of extensive experience in teaching. As a woman in a STEM field, she was a minority and felt a chilly work environment in the institution. Her journey as a professor has not been a smooth one due to her gender and identity. She is in her early 70s.

Olivia came to the U.S. as a student and completed her doctoral program in education. She is an academic advisor in a university. She initially faced some challenges due to her accent and expressed that her classmates were not interested in knowing more about her culture during her education.

## The Emerging Themes

Table 3 portrays the emerging themes and how they fit into the three-dimensional narrative structure. The Three-dimensional space narrative structure was used to organize the emerging themes. Three-dimensional narrative inquiry creates metaphorical conclusions, where the first dimension indicates the personal, the second dimension is related to the social, and third is about place and sequences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50).

**Table 3**

### Three-Dimensional Narrative Space

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Family support</li><li>• Accent and Language</li></ul>
Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Need for Educational degree</li><li>• Transformative Learning</li></ul>
Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mentorship</li><li>• Childcare</li></ul>
	<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Place of work/ institution's location</li></ul>
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Family background and experience</li></ul>
Continuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support from institution</li><li>• Factors influencing career pursuits</li></ul>
Situational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unsupportive work climate</li><li>• Gender based discrimination</li></ul>

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In the first dimension, *Interaction*, includes the self and others. Here, the emerging themes are identified as family support, accent and language, need for educational degree, transformational difference, mentorship, childcare. The following is a discussion on each of the dimension and the effect of the themes on the life of participants of this study.

In the second dimension, *Continuity*, the themes identified were place of work, and family background.

In the third dimension, *Situational*, the themes that fit were unsupportive work climate and gender-based discrimination.

### **Family Support (Interaction)**

Asian Indian culture is a collectivist culture where much attention is paid to family values and is family-oriented; most of the familial responsibilities are on women. In contrast, U.S. culture is individualistic and individual-oriented, where individual values are prominent. However Asian Indian Women expressed their concern about not having individualistic mindset. AIAW feel that they pay more attention to the family and make decisions based on their role within the family. Cultural differences can impact the decision-making of AIAW towards their career and can be a factor relating to the research questions in this study. Such as challenges AIAW face in academia, all the factors that have influenced AIAW to pursue their career in higher education, and support they received from their family and institution. Culture plays a vital role in the decision-making process and can impact a career based on a person's decisions.

Mary shared her experience. She said, “The day I finished writing my dissertation the following night, I went into labor and had my first baby girl. I was glad that I finished writing my dissertation.” As she was looking for a tenure track position and working as a part-time faculty member, her husband received an offer in a different state also to work in academia. This

meant that she had to put her career on pause. She continued, however, expanding her knowledge:

I was learning new things and was doing my research when my first daughter was old enough, and I had my second daughter. I kept applying for the tenure track positions and finally got an offer letter from a university. I had to take the offer as it offered me the opportunity to do research and teach a graduate-level program.

Accepting this offer meant Mary had to move with her young children without her husband. She remembers it as a difficult time:

It was pretty hard for me, and I had no idea what I was going to face in the department I was joining. I joined as tenure track faculty, where I had to meet some professional obligations. I was putting extra effort to excel in the career I always wanted, and family responsibilities were also there. There was a lack of support from my department, and some of my co-workers created all kinds of problems.

Mary continued to face obstacles, including a submitting a review packet, interacting with unwelcoming colleagues, and feeling the need to work harder than others just to keep up. She faced these challenges with resiliency. She recalled,

I took it as a challenge and did not leave my job. It's been almost ten years now. I have done five times more work in my department than any other faculty in my department, but no one is impressed or recognizes my hard work...I have external grants, lots of publications, and even which is not required by a tenure track faculty...after all these years chilly climate is still there in my department, but I am thankful that my kids are grown up now.



Mary's experiences over the course of her career are indicative of the struggles AIAW face in academia.

Amy also supported the fact that she had to sacrifice many things in her career because she had two small kids. She said, "We Indian ladies are family-oriented; if some of the jobs require traveling or leaving our kids or family behind, we choose to leave the job."

Amy said:

During my research days, I was responsible to pick up my daughters from school and my lab meetings were scheduled for the same time. So, I missed most of the lab meetings as it clashed with the timings for picking up my kids from school. These kind of family obligations are something we need to take care of and make arrangements accordingly, and it is sometimes an obstacle in moving forward in your career. Even though my parents and family did help me with the kids but managing the time and career during my Ph.D. was very difficult.

Olivia remembered:

I did most of my doctorate, including my comprehensive exam, after my daughter was born. I wrote my final paper for one of the classes on the day I gave birth to my daughter. It was tough for me because the deadline for submission was near, and my daughter was born 17 days earlier than the due date, so I had to finish my paper in the hospital.

Asian women have cultural expectations of playing the role of primary caregiver for the family as wife and mother at home and their academic duties (Yook, 2013).

### **Accent and Language (Interaction)**

Most of the participants shared how having an accent hindered their growth in their early career, and they had to exert extra effort. Amy had similar experiences to described in this study.

Amy said:

The main thing was when I taught in the lab as an assistant, and the biggest challenge was my Indian accent. It was difficult for me to interact with the students. It took some time for me to get adjusted to the environment in my initial career. When I started working as a Teaching Assistant, the biggest challenge for me was communication with the students because of the Indian accent.

Olivia also shared her experience of having a difficult time because of her accent. She is a student advisor, and her accent was a big challenge during the initial months of her career. She said, “There are many hurdles, especially for Asian Indian Women who are immigrants and things are much more difficult for them.”

### **Education (Interaction)**

Education helps a person to learn skills and help an individual meet basic job qualifications and make them more intellectual and learned.

Olivia said, “I would like to study further or do some certification in order to enhance my skills. I would like to focus on research and planning to do another degree that will help me in my future endeavors.”

Amy said:

There is a need of AIAW to take part in STEM courses, as I do not see much AIAW in leadership positions in academia. Women need to step forward and apply for advanced courses to be successful in academic institutions.

Mary said:

Education is an important part of showing your worth. You should have enough intellectual ability to prove your worth so that people cannot ignore you or underestimate you. You need intellectual materials on your plate when you are pursuing upper administrative position. If you do not have qualification and your CV show less educational accomplishments, you are not even eligible for the position you are applying for.

Lia said:

I would do all the certifications that are needed for the leadership position. I have learned and had acquired knowledge by interacting with people asking about different resources. I took online courses, learned from YouTube videos, and reading books; they all have served as excellent resources in terms of education.

### **Transformative Learning (Interaction)**

According to Jack Mezirow, Transformative learning is a “process of effective change in a frame of reference” (p. 5). Previous learning experiences and cultural norms affect the habits of mind, while the points of view are student’s personal beliefs and attitudes (Mezirow, 1997).

There are cultural, social, educational, political or psychological codes that influence habits of mind to think, feel and act in a particular way.

All the participants of this study showcased transformative learning with their culture and previous learning experiences influenced their learning new skills. Some of them had to unlearn their previous knowledge to learn new skills. But previous learning experience and cultural norms influenced their attitude towards new learning.

Amy said:

During my early career when I was doing my PhD, I started working as a TC assistant in the lab. The biggest challenge for me was to communicate with the students. Sometimes they did not understand what I said, and sometimes I had difficulty understanding them. I worked hard on my accent in order to be an efficient teacher. Also, I was not very good at asking for [an] example. If I am working on a data and whoever is working to release some data and deadline is approaching, I could not ask for it. But my mentor taught me to develop the skills to ask for the things that is required. It's science if you want to finish some analysis based on data, then just ask and tell the designated person to give you the data by specific date because you don't want to miss the deadline. Culture and my prior experience of working influenced my attitude towards learning new skills.

Olivia said:

I had to work on my writing style during my doctoral studies. I had to unlearn the British style of writing and learn the academic style of writing. The challenge was I had limited time to complete my degree and I had to develop many skills. After completing my degree and few years later I took a position as academic advisor, accent was a challenge. I worked on all the areas of my improvement and things are much better now. I work with lot of students, provide them guidance based on their needs.

## **Mentorship (Interaction)**

Mentorship played a significant role in all the participants' lives to reach the level they are at now. It helped them to face the challenges and provided strength to move forward. According to Tillman (2001), mentoring facilitates the emotional, cultural, and social adjustment to institutions where women faculty of color often face alienation and isolation. All five participants talked about how their mentors guided them through their early careers, and they still follow their mentors' footsteps. These women had mentors with whom they could share their experiences and ask for advice. Mentoring plays an essential role in the academic development of newly minted faculty and their career trajectories, particularly for women and faculty of color (Dixon-Reeves, 2003; Tillman, 2001). Previous studies indicate that women who have mentors are much more successful than those without (Tolar, 2012).

Olivia shared her concern: "It is tough to find a mentor easily. We need more role models, and the underrepresentation of AIAW is the biggest challenge. As an AIAW, I would encourage women to mentor other aspiring women."

All the participants of this study had mentors who guided them during their journey. The underlying values of the mentoring relationship were named as trust, dignity, and selfless guidance to get through a difficult situation.

Amy said:

I wouldn't be where I am if I had no mentor. I feel very fortunate to find my mentor during my research, who guided me through every step of my career. My mentor taught me the U.S. style of working because things are different in my home country. We talked about my goals for each week and how I would achieve them. My mentor taught me to be disciplined, systematic, and very organized

about my goal setting and achievement. I still follow those rules after all these years.

Olivia had a similar experience and felt lucky to have a mentor during her journey. She had many people who played the mentor role, but her professor taught the APA style writing and helped her improve her writing. In addition, her mother constantly motivated her to publish papers and always asked about her progress. Finally, she gave all the credit to her husband who cared for their daughter while finishing her doctoral degree.

Mary related:

I had multiple mentors during my career; I was fortunate to have my husband as one of them. He guided me on every step in academia because he himself was working as a professor. I understand the importance of a mentor in order to make a difference in academia; I have mentored hundreds of students, and most of them have been women and minorities. To be able to help someone makes me feel happy and satisfied.

Amy said:

I am very fortunate to have a great mentor during my research. She guided me in my research and made me a better human being altogether. I always followed her advice and worked according to what she suggested. I don't want to disclose her name, but she is someone I look up to and ask for guidance every day. Now after all these years I myself try to provide all the guidance and assistance to my students because that is what I have learned from my mentor.

Lia said:

I made three intentional efforts first is to become a social person. I used to be very shy person; I forced myself to mingle with people. So, it led me to be comfortable to collaborate with diverse people. I forced myself to step out of my comfort zone and just go and meet with other students and talk to faculty. Second intentional effort I made was, I pushed myself to take leadership roles. As a student, I got the opportunity and learned a lot from that. Third intentional effort was searching [for] a mentor, their guidance, their experience. Support from a mentor can work like a pillar, who supports you, believe in you and guide you in challenging situation.

Mary had a different experience; she had no mentors, unfortunately. She took advice from some professors during her early career but could not find a mentor. However, she feels the importance of having a mentor and is always happy to guide her students who ask for advice. She has mentored many students during her career and continues to do that.

### **Childcare (Interaction)**

Childcare can provide help to working parents, single mothers and aspiring women leaders. Childcare is the most important part of the participants of this study.

Olivia said:

Childcare in an institution can be beneficial for aspiring leaders, as it will provide the freedom to work without having to worry about their children. My husband took care of our infant daughter when I was working on my dissertation during my doctoral program. I remember going to the library at six in the morning and coming back at eight in the night. My parents and in-laws supported me morally, but my husband took care of everything and supported me.

Amy said:

Childcare is an important part of any woman for pursuing their desired career. I missed important lab meetings and information only because I had to pick up my two daughters from the school at same time every day and timings always clashed with my lab meetings. I love my children very much. I am not complaining, but there are some responsibilities you cannot ignore or avoid.

### **Support from Institutions (Continuity)**

Support from the institutions in terms of infrastructure and facilities is prodigious. Amy said that as a STEM professional, she had enough resources for her chemistry and physics experiments. The institute had fully equipped labs to conduct all the research work. All other participants of this study also added that their institutions provided them with the best resources and properly equipped classrooms.

Amy said:

I come from a rural urban area and did not have enough facilities and resources to pursue my further education, and, being a science major student, I did not have fully equipped labs. The problem I faced was lack of infrastructure and could not conduct experiments related to physics and chemistry subjects. But when I came to United States for higher studies, I had no issues related to the labs. Labs were fully equipped, infrastructure was marvelous, and laboratories provided all the resources to conduct advanced research in my area of study.

Lia said, “My university and the professors have huge impact on me. My department had all the resources a student needs and provided me the opportunity to learn new skills.”



Olivia said:

My institute had so many resources, and all of those resources helped me acquire new skills. For example, writing center in my institute helped me improve my writing skills. Library had all the books that were needed for my area of study.

Mary said: “I have no issues related to the resources and infrastructure. Labs are fully equipped, and infrastructure is tremendous. I have all the advanced technology to perform my lab work.”

Nora shared similar experiences related to the infrastructure of her institution that her department had all the facilities and latest technology for the students and faculty.

Amy said:

My institute have all the modern equipment and technology to perform lab work. Most of the experiments we have to do are very expensive and require high-end machines. Luckily, I got the best infrastructure to enhance my studies and defense for my research.

Institutions provided all the facilities to their students and faculty. Mary cited some tough challenges she had with her department. She said:

I am a tenure track faculty, and I aspire to move up the ladder, but our department is not diverse, so it is hard for me. All the major decisions in our department are by voting system among the faculty, which turns out super biased because of no diversity. If there are women in the top positions (such as dean, president), the situation will be different.

Amy further added the need for more women in leadership roles. She said, “There are not many AIAW in my department or STEM, and I don't know if they are not applying for the higher positions or are unwilling to take the leadership roles.”

Nora echoed for the presence of AIAW in academia, as there was no diversity in her department as well. She also added that her department is conducting meetings focusing on women in STEM, and many events are happening in their department related to women, but she was not sure about AIAW specifically.

Institutions have the infrastructure and resources, but due to lack of diversity in the academic organizations, it is difficult for AIAW to advance in their career.

Lia considers herself very fortunate, as she received much support from her institution during her doctoral program. She said, “My university-sponsored my doctoral program, so it was a huge reward for me.”

### **Factors influencing career pursuits (Continuity)**

There are many factors that influence a person to join a certain career. Background of a person, their family and culture have a big impact.

Mary said:

My father was in academia in my home country, which motivated me to pursue my career in academia. Teaching is my passion, and I devoted myself to teaching and research. I received many offers from the corporate industry, and the salary offered is comparatively high in those jobs, but I chose academia because I love teaching.

Amy also said that becoming a faculty member was her childhood dream:

As a small child, when I saw all the teachers coming into the classroom and giving lectures, it all was fascinating to me, and at that time, I decided that I wanted to be a faculty and teach in a college.

Olivia shared her experience of being a high school teacher in her home country.

I have always believed that two things can make a difference in society; one is leadership, and the other is education. That is why I pursued my doctorate in Educational Leadership and want to make a difference in the world of academia.

Lia said:

I had excellent professors and mentors throughout my academic career, and I respect them immensely. So, if I do my best in academia, it would be a way for me to show my gratitude to them and keep me motivated to be successful in academia.

### **Unsupportive Work Climate (Situational)**

Asian women in academia suffer from the "Double-bind Syndrome," which describes the dual disadvantages of being a woman and being a woman of color (Diggs et al., 2009).

According to Piercy et al., (2005), diverse faculty members and women are more likely to see academia as "chilly" and have less job satisfaction, which leads to retention problems

(Buenavista et al., 2009).

Mary had similar experiences, and she said, "I feel that I am the double minority. I am female, plus I am Asian, and despite being Asian American, I get treated as a foreigner." She provides care for two children, and she has done more work professionally than any other co-worker, but her hard work is never recognized.

Mary further stated:

I felt drained out during my initial five years because of the chilly climate of my department. My colleagues were almost males: whatever extra work I did, it was never enough, no matter the extra hours in the lab or teaching.

Mary said:

I thought academia would be more friendly and social, but I sometimes feels it's a corporate industry. I requested a class capacity reduction during COVID, but my request was denied.

Compared with men, women faculty are less likely to feel a sense of belonging in their departments, have satisfactory social networks, or are privy to departmental discussions about research, teaching, and promotion (Blakemore et al., 1997). She added:

the way I felt, or the way people behaved in my department and talked, was very disappointing and made me think I was a minority. I am Asian and had to do five times more work than my colleagues to exceed research expectations, and they will say the core expectation is met and not exceeded. So, I put in five times more work than any other colleagues to achieve what they will get with less work or less effort.

Nora echoed Mary's experiences that even though she was Asian American and had worked in academia for more than 30 years, she always felt excluded. People treated her as if she didn't exist, and she had to make efforts to get heard. As a result, she faced discriminatory treatment and felt isolated.

Lia said she felt left out initially when she came to the U.S., but she made friends from diverse countries to combat her situation. She got involved in several associations to keep herself

busy and make more friends. It helped to overcome my challenges, she said. According to Lin et al., (2006), Asian women are still an “invisible group” who remain in the margins of U.S. academia and are often ignored or silenced.

### **Gender-Based Discrimination (Situational)**

Maranto and Griffin (2010) propound academia as highly male-dominated and gender-segregated in their study. Asian women struggle with gender, racial, ethnic, and cultural discrimination (Liang et al., 2017); they also suffer from “Double-bind Syndrome” of being a woman and being a woman of color (Diggs et al., 2009). Previous studies also indicated the frequent job change in female faculty due to the job stress in academia (Sullivan, 2012).

Mary had a similar experience to what Li (2006) described in his study. According to Li et al. (2006), Asian faculty face enormous hurdles due to multiple contrasting roles and cultural expectations. Mary said that she struggled to hold the tenure track position because she had two children to care for, and she faced a chilly environment in her department. She further explained her experiences with having difficulty in managing time between household responsibilities and career. Her department expected her to work as if she had no family. Mary said that she felt intimidated because she was a single mother and wanted to grow in her career. She said: “I constantly feel that I am a double minority, I am a female, plus I am an Asian and always get treated like a foreigner even I am an American.”

Nora echoed Mary. She said that she faced gender-based discrimination during her career. She received discriminatory treatment because she was Asian, and she was the only female faculty in her department. Nora said:

I am an extrovert and liked to socialize with my colleagues, but they did not invite me for the group lunch get-together or any outings. As a result, I felt left out and

had to make much effort to get heard. Sometimes it is challenging to communicate in such an environment where you get treatment as an outsider.

Amy said that there are few females in her department, and she encourage other AIAW to study and apply more in STEM positions. Olivia and Lia did not talk much about gender discrimination. However, according to Diggs et al. (2009), Asian women face external factors of being seen as exotic and different. Asian female faculty may also be hired as a token of cultural diversity, which leads to being invisible and isolated (Hune et al., 2006).

### **Summary**

This chapter revealed the results of this qualitative narrative inquiry of AIAW, and their lived experiences described their ability to access their current job roles and aspirations for leadership positions in higher education. Berry (2016) explained, “Narrative enquiry provides powerful data to answer important research questions meaningfully” (p. 14). The results came from semi-structured interviews from AIAW in academic institutions conducted with five participants who comprised a purposive sample. The analysis was established, and the results from each of the research questions are presented in Chapter Five. Multiple themes were identified after the analysis included: Unsupportive Work Climate, Accent, Gender-based Discrimination, Family and Culture, Mentorship, and Support from Institutions.

Some of the responses identified more with these themes than others. Unsupportive work climate was experienced by most of the participants. Asian women in academia suffer from the "Double-bind Syndrome," which describes the dual disadvantages of being a woman and being a woman of color (Diggs et al., 2009). Accent was a challenge for three participants; the other two participants did not face accent related challenges. Amy, Nora, and Olivia shared their experience related to their accent. Nora and Mary faced gender-based discrimination. They

recalled having difficulty to adjust to the work environment. Family and culture related barriers were shared by all the participants from different points of view. Some participants had family support but no childcare, and some had childcare support, but different family obligations kept them from participating in career related activities. Regarding mentorship, all AIAW expressed different influencers that positively impacted their lives and the importance of mentorship in their career. Tillman (2001) suggested the effectiveness of mentor-protégé relationships that lead to high productivity both in research and teaching for females. Support from the institutions regarding the infrastructure is tremendous. All participants admitted the high-end infrastructure and technology their institutions offer is unmatched, but there are some challenges in their departments they face that are of significant concern. To conclude, all participants spoke of their lived experiences and shared what impacted their lives.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings. The research questions are treated. Implications and recommendations for future research closes the chapter. The References list and Appendix A follows.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### Introduction

This chapter provides the interpretation and discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 4. This chapter is divided into four major sections: Discussion of Findings, Limitations, Recommendations, and Implications for Further Study.

According to American Council on Education (2016), only 5% of college presidents in the United States are women of color, and 2% are Asian or Asian American women. The extant literature indicated that there exists underrepresentation of AIAW in academia despite the high number of doctoral degrees achieved by Asian women. Even though women and women of color hold many positions in academia, little is known why few AIAW hold president and chancellors' positions in educational institutions in the United States.

In this study, I set out to get a better understanding of AIAW in leadership roles in higher education. Narratives provided the individual stories, and the three-dimensional narrative space models was used to help with analysis. The resulting data evaluated using qualitative research with a narrative inquiry approach. Narrative inquiry provides powerful data that adds meaning to answer important research questions (Berry, 2016).

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What challenges do AIAW encounter when pursuing senior leadership roles (dean and above) in higher education in the United States?
2. What factors influenced AIAW to pursue a career in higher education in the United States?
3. What support have AIAW received from their institutions to help develop them as leaders?
4. What resources does AIAW need most to obtain senior leadership roles in U.S. higher education?



All the participants share some similarities across backgrounds. However, their experiences varied based on factors such as immigration status, their upbringing, and family background. This section is presented in two parts. First the discussion will be a generalized explanation of the findings. This is then followed by a second section that provides a more specific treatment of each research question.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Together, the AIAW's narrative led to findings that contribute to our understanding and to the literature. Findings related to pursuing leadership roles, related to factors influencing career pursuits, related to support received from institutions, mentors, and family, and related to needed resources will be discussed in answering the research questions.

Data from this study provided the opportunity to explore the voices of five AIAW holding faculty and administrator positions in higher education institutions in the United States. The narratives of these AIAW contribute to the literature and fill the gaps by offering new perspectives of aspiring AIAW who are trying to make their careers in academia. In addition, evidence identifying the barriers to senior leadership roles in higher education for AIAW was found.

From the extant literature, several studies highlighted the challenges women face in academia. Teasing apart these findings provide insight which explains experiences of AIAW in academia and barriers they face in their career. However, the feedback of the participants in the present study indicated some had fewer challenging situations because of mentors and family, but none of these females said their journey had no obstacles. Mentoring can be helpful for women faculty in many ways, it can increase the sense of empowerment, can prevent them from resigning from their career due to limited institutional support, discrimination, and lack of

respect (Wimmer, 2019). As discussed in the literature, mentoring empowered most of the women who participated in this study. Kram (1985) stated that mentoring works for as support and feedback from an experienced senior individual to a less experienced junior member of an organization. Mentoring helped them advance in their career. Mentoring pertains to the research question where participants were asked to share their experience about what support they received and who supported them.

Discussed in the literature are assimilation and acculturation, as well as adaptation into the new culture which depends on the individual person and their background. Adaptive process of adjustment by cultural groups and direct interaction between distinct cultural groups is defined as acculturation (Berry, 1987; Mena et al; 1987). Participants expressed steps of their assimilation in various situations that each has tried. They also indicated attempting to improve continuously and trying to adjust to American society by acquiring new skills and certifications related to their jobs. As Olivia mentioned that she completed her doctoral degree in education and planning to do a certification to upgrade her skills for a particular role, and she is also planning to acquire another degree to qualify for a new position in which she is interested. Mary did a certification and attended conferences to upgrade her skills.

As it relates to the challenges faced by AIAW in their pursuit of leadership in higher education, the findings suggest many similarities in the literature. For instance, the participants mentioned gender disparity, lack of support, childcare, and domestic duties as obstacles they face when seeking top roles as leaders. With reference to Gallant (2014) and McPherson (2001), most of the participants mentioned similar challenges they faced not only moving to leadership positions but also retaining their present jobs in academia. Mary shared her struggling experience for not having childcare and a lack of support from her department. She talked about spending

long hours in the lab to prove her worth to her department, meanwhile her children suffered for not having their mother with them. Further, she explained how she managed her time for writing papers because she could not work on her research once her children came back home from school. Amy and Nora echoed what Mary said, Amy recalled missing her lab meetings, and other professional engagements because of family obligations. Nora shared her experience for devoting less time to the family because she was busy with her job. Distinct studies examined various reasons for gender inequality of women in leadership roles, including glass ceilings (Johns, 2013), mentoring and work relationships (Wallace, 2014), sexual harassment, (McLaughlin et al., 2012), and managing work and family (Cha, 2013).

Participants of this study experienced most challenges explained in past studies. Nora indicated the biased treatment and managing work and family were her biggest challenges. Whereas Mary faced gender inequality, including glass ceilings, a lack of mentoring, and discrimination along with managing work and family. She did not have any support from her department or any help with two young children. Amy also expressed her struggle between work and family, but she got lucky with the mentoring, as her mentor guided her throughout her career.

Further Metcalf and Gonzalez (2013) stated that age, gender, family/marital status, and individual stress are some of the variables that hinder women from growing in their leadership roles in academia. According to the findings of this study, all the participants experienced these factors in their career. In regard to individual stress, Olivia expressed her concern for Asian American Indian Women. She said, “Things are much more difficult for them, and perseverance is much needed in this case.” Her individual stress was exemplified when she recalled times when she had to stay long hours in the library and her husband had to take care of their newborn

baby. She added that acquiring a job after the doctoral degree was a struggle. This all added up to individual stress. Mary also added an example that added to her individual stress. She indicated that she did not get a tenured position easily. She waited for a while to hold the tenure position in a university. Even after she accepted the offer, she had to go through a lot of difficulties in her department. She also expressed her concern for the diversity in the institution, as she was the only AIAW in her department. She said situation would have been different if there were more women in her department and especially women of color. Connecting to the literature, Hune (2006) stated that Asian American women faculty are less likely to hold a tenured position as compared to Asian American men.

According to Nguyen (2016), one of the common challenges of Asian women faculty is issue identity. Issue Identity is related to the identity of Asian women faculty and stereotypes associated with their identity. Nora described a similar situation, where she struggled with the identity issues during her career and had difficulty being heard in her department because people treated her as if she never existed. Another body of literature describes Asian Americans as quiet, hardworking, determined, and socially passive (Pak et al., 2014; Vega 2015; Zhang, 2010). Leadership positions demand communication and socialization with other colleagues, achieving leadership role can be difficult if a person is quiet and socially passive.

The barriers AIAW face in obtaining leadership positions in academia include prejudice and stereotypes related to gender, race, and culture; unjust treatment of their institutions in hiring, evaluating, and promoting; and personal difficulties, such as disadvantaged socio-economic status, language barriers, and heavy home-work responsibilities. Findings of this study also uncovered similar experiences of participants. Mary said she was the only one in her department who was Asian Indian and a woman. She faced difficulties related to work

promotion, and evaluation Mary described working twice as hard compared to other employees in her department just because she was an Asian Indian and a woman. Being an Asian Indian and a woman demonstrate a cultural and racial discrimination. Olivia explained her accent was a challenge in her early career as an advisor when explaining things to students. Amy also expressed a similar kind of situation where she had to work on her accent. Nora talked about how she was ignored, and her colleagues discriminated her on the bases of gender and race. All the participants in this study faced barriers related to gender, race, culture, language, and some experienced heavy home-work responsibilities.

Yamagata-Noji (2005) found it difficult to get the actual number of Asian women leaders in higher education, as the number is very small and cannot be tracked. From the analyses of the data, it is even harder to find AIAW leaders in higher education. I could find only two AIAW in leadership positions: One AIAW is a President of a renowned university, and second one is a dean of a renowned university. I did not get the opportunity to interview them because of their busy schedules. All the participants expressed the need of diversity in their institutions, especially AIAW. The findings of this study provide the experiences of AIAW and how they managed to combat the difficulties they faced.

The themes this study produced are unsupportive work climate, accent, gender-based discrimination, family and culture, mentorship, and support from institutions. All themes have been defined after interviewing the participants of this research study. All the participants demonstrated self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resiliency. The literature suggests PsyCap is important in building internal strength (Luthans et al., 2013); This research also suggests these findings. Some of the AIAW demonstrated examples of resiliency, optimism, self-efficacy, and hope. Resiliency appeared more than the other factors in the findings.

These qualities provided them the strength to survive in challenging working situations, and these attributes represent the dimensions of psychological capital. Using a PsyCap lens, I examined the perseverance of women on faculty/administrative positions in higher education. As described above, PsyCap has four main characteristics: self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resiliency (Avolio et al., 2007; Luthans et al., 2002). The four characteristics of PsyCap play a critical role in a variety of organizations (Luthans, 2002). Although efficacy, hope, optimism, or resiliency individually of each of the participants were not measured the study, these themes are integral to research because the literature on PsyCap helped to explain how some people engage in life.

Using the data from my interviews, it was determined all the women had some type of psychological capital. Amy worked on her accent and improved her social skills, which shows self-efficacy, and hope for a better career. Mary represented optimism and resiliency by her hard work and ability to face challenges. She did not quit her job because of the adverse circumstances at her department. Olivia and Lia also demonstrated PsyCap, as both of them worked on their writing and speaking skills, examples of self-efficacy and hope. Although there is no research specifically linking women in leadership in higher education and PsyCap, much related research is transferable.

A study by Youssef and Luthans (2007) supported a significant positive relationship among hope, optimism, and resiliency and work happiness and job satisfaction. Their findings have highlighted “the potential positive impact that employees’ psychological resource capacities in general, and, specifically, their hope and, to a lesser extent, optimism and resilience, may have on work-related outcomes” (p. 792). This is also supported by the data from my interviews; although there may be some challenges, overall, all the women appeared to be happy with their

jobs. All participants were resilient even when facing challenges, and they continued in their positions. Many of the participants appeared to have a positive-growth mindset.

Participants of this study provided a positive mindset had helped them in their career. For example, Mary was very optimistic about her position as a tenure track faculty even though she faced tremendous challenges at work and home, but she did not lose hope, and being resilient is what has helped her overcome all the challenges. Similarly, Nora faced discrimination in her department, but she also did not lose hope and kept working toward her goal. Olivia and Amy had accent related barriers, which they overcame by working hard on themselves. Within my own life experience, I also had some accent related difficulties. I also worked on my accent and written English.

In these narratives, difficulties the participants faced were related to pursuing leadership roles, factors that influenced career pursuits, and factors relating to support they received in their campus spaces. This research illustrates the importance of support from family, mentors, and institutions. To receive support, a supportive network is required, and this network works like a web where one string is attached to another and support each other collectively. All the participants in my study mentioned supportive mentors and family.

### **Findings Related to Pursuing Senior Leadership Roles**

The first research question asked: "What challenges do AIAW encounter when pursuing senior leadership roles (e.g., dean and above) in higher education in the United States?" Analysis of the data disclosed the themes related to family support, accent, education, mentorship, childcare and transformative learning. Although not all candidates aspired to reach the dean level or senior positions at institutions. Mary said she doesn't even want to apply for a leadership position at her current institution because of the challenges she faces in her present role. Amy

expressed the similar concerns and did not apply for a leadership role. Analysis of the data suggests that AIAW may experience more than one of the challenges discussed in themes. Some of the participants do not even aspire to reach senior positions because of the challenges they currently face in their existing positions. Olivia mentioned accent being one of her challenges, and she had to work a lot on it. She had to learn so many things about how the whole system works and how graduate programs work. She did not do her undergraduate work in the United States, so she had a hard time adjusting to the new study system during her doctoral program. Gender in her current role is a concern, as she is an advisor in a STEM setting and does not see many female students, especially AIAW.

Olivia expressed the need for more women leaders in academia, so that other AIAW can look up to them. She added that the young women can relate to other women through affinity. She explained that if a woman leader is an Asian, it serves as an example: ‘if she can do it, I can do it too. If she could overcome all the problems and hurdles, I can also do the same.’

Amy also talked about the low female representation in her STEM program. She said there is a need more AIAW taking STEM courses and pursuing their career in STEM programs as leaders, but she did not see many women in leadership roles. She thought that maybe it's because of family obligations.

Mary expressed concerns about the challenges she faces at her current position in day-to-day life, and it is tough to think about a leadership role when one is struggling for their current position. For here, it may be a case where a person would apply for such a role in a different institution and hope for a better, more diverse environment.



Nora is retired and never wanted a leadership role, as she faced disrespect and discriminatory treatment. She said, “I did not get enough respect from my colleagues for being a woman and an Asian.”

The survival strategy of these participants expressed their concerns about their day-to-day struggle and their positive attitude toward the challenges they faced and aspired to be successful in their respective careers. Findings related to the first question indicated the challenges related to accent, new environment, less support from the institution, and family obligations. Most of the participants struggled to reach at their current positions. Mary expressed fewer AIAW in academia is one factor, and another is overall low women representation in leadership roles. If there are more women at the top, the situation would be different. As Mary explained the selection process for leadership roles in her department was based on the voting system. If there would be more diversity and women, the selected candidate would have been different.

The answer to the first research question touched all the dimensions of Psycap model. Participants explained how resiliency and optimism was helpful, and they worked on themselves. Self-efficacy is a psychological capacity of development of new skills and being more effective in performance (Luthans, 2002). Even though, Mary and Amy expressed their concern about the challenges to reach at leadership positions. They will apply in the future if their current situation changes. Amy and Olivia said there is a need for AIAW in STEM courses. If AIAW have self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resiliency, they can overcome challenges.

### **Findings Relating to Factors Influencing Career Pursuits**

The second research question asked: What factors influenced AIAW to pursue a career in higher education in the United States? Again, analysis of the data discovered the strong will of the participants to pursue their careers in higher education. In addition, all the participants in this

study unequivocally admitted the motivation and role of their families in pursuing their careers in higher education. According to Kulkarni (2013), work life balance consists of an individual's specific prioritization of "work" (career and ambition) and "life" (health, leisure, family, pleasure, etc.), along with the decisions that accompany this prioritization. Collective culture is a culture that emphasizes the needs of the group over those of the individual (Gunsoy et al., 2015). Asian culture is a collectivist culture, and family plays an important role in the life of Asian women.

Mary's father was in academia in her home country, which motivated her to pursue career in academia. She said teaching has always been her passion, and she devoted herself to teaching and research. She received many offers from the corporate industry, and the salary offered was comparatively high in those jobs, but she chose academia because she loved teaching. Amy also said that becoming a faculty member was her childhood dream. When she saw as a small child that all the teachers come to the classroom and gave lectures, it all fascinated her, and she decided to become faculty and teach in a college. Olivia shared her experience of being a high school teacher in her home country. She said that she always believed in two things that can make a difference in society; one is leadership, and the other is education. That is why she pursued her doctorate in Educational Leadership and wanted to make a difference in the world of academia. Lia wanted to pay tribute to her mentors. Joining academy and being successful was her way of showing respect to her mentors and that was the main reason for her to join academy and take it as a career.

Most of the participants said that it was their dream to join the academy and make a difference. All the participants were self-motivated to join the higher educational institutes, but they were not aware of the challenges they would face because of their gender and race.

Leaders who can adapt to the existing environment have a greater chance to succeed in their chosen career. They can change their own management style when faced with challenges. For example, Mary faced many obstacles during her career especially when she took the position as tenure track faculty. She had her husband as a mentor, but when she moved to a different state without him, she lost his help and support in the household also and had to take care of the household and career by herself. She did not quit her job because of the challenges at work and family obligations. She took care of her two daughters and at the same time she worked overtime on her work projects to prove her worth in the department. She said she spent extra hours in the lab and put twice the work and time in comparison to anyone in her department. Olivia also shared a similar kind of experience: she got support from her mentor related to improving her writing skills only. Her personal circumstances made it difficult to complete her degree. she gave birth to her daughter and completed her final thesis on the same day because the deadline of submission was approaching, and her daughter born seventeen days early than her due date. Amy expressed how her mentor supported her in teaching new skills. But her personal obligations kept her to meet the career goals. She struggled between picking up her kids from school and her lab meetings. But she managed everything because she was motivated and passionate about what she was doing.

All the participants of this study expressed challenging contexts, but they did not quit and developed new skills and certifications to succeed in their contexts. Northouse (2013) described how the context impacts a leader's approach and how leaders may have to adapt their approach to the context. This paper found that AIAW had to adapt their leadership approach to a given context. If AIAW are to achieve leadership roles, they may have to adapt their leadership approach for the new context. According to Northouse, 2019; Rodriguez, 2017, successful

leaders may have to shift one's values, beliefs, or assumptions from espoused values and behavior to deal with new and complex contexts.

The leader who is flexible and adapts their approach in accordance with the given context or situation has a greater chance of succeeding. Most of the participants used this approach toward their job roles. Nora expressed how she ignored the biased treatment she received in her department to be successful. She concentrated on her work and made extra efforts to improve her teaching skills that was valued in her context. Mary also had a similar experience; she had a complex situation in her department environment and was not welcomed while her new role was very demanding. Mary increased her effort to prove her worth, concentrated on her research paper, and attended conferences to excel in her career, all actions valued by her department. Olivia expressed her interest in achieving a second doctorate degree to prove her research abilities while learning new skills, increasing respect from her colleagues. All the participants of this study adapted their leadership approach at different times according to their context.

In conclusion, all of the participants adapted their leadership approach to succeed in new and complex situations. They changed their approach to handle challenging situations, where they ignored the adverse professional circumstances and concentrated on learning new skills to be successful in their career. They worked on accomplishing their job and faced the challenging situations with resiliency. No matter how hard the situation was, all of the participants showed their positive approach toward the situation and had faith in themselves.

### **Findings Relating to Support Received**

The third research question was: What support have AIAW received from their institutions to help develop them as leaders?

Motivation and institutional support for the participants in attaining their current positions included support from their mentors or professors and transformational differences. All participants mentioned they received tremendous support from their mentors and their institutions had enough institutional resources.

### *Support from Mentors*

Mentorship is a professional relationship where an experienced person (the mentor) provides guidance and support to another person (the mentee) in their career advancement by helping them develop distinct skills and knowledge for their personal and professional growth (Kram, 1985). The findings of this study show the importance of mentors and their influence on the participants is tremendous, regardless of their race, ethnicity, and gender. The collaborative partnership between the mentor and mentee provided these AIAW women confidence and motivation to face challenges and overcome barriers. In addition, their successful partnership motivated them to mentor other women and become mentors themselves. This provided them the sense of satisfaction, knowing they could help someone with the same situation once they were in. Hune (1997) promoted the establishment of a structural “pipeline” and “mentorship” for Asian women to minimize the disparity in educational leadership positions and increase diversity.

Mary shared that she had multiple mentors during her career; she was fortunate to have her husband as one of them. He guided her in academia because he himself was working as a professor. She understands the importance of a mentor to make a difference in academia; she mentored hundreds of students, and most of them have been women and minorities. To be able to help someone makes her feel happy and satisfied.

Amy echoed Mary. She said that she was very fortunate to have a great mentor during her research. Her mentor guided her in the research and made her a better human being altogether. She always followed her mentor's advice and worked according to it. She did not want to disclose the name, but her mentor is someone she looks up to and asks for guidance every day. Now after all these years Amy try to provide all the guidance and assistance to her students because that is what she learned from her mentor.

Lia shared that she made three intentional efforts towards the success in the academy, first was to become a social person. She used to be very shy person, she forced herself to mingle with people. So, it led her to be comfortable to collaborate with diverse people. She forced herself to step out of her comfort zone and meet with other students and talk to faculty. Second intentional effort she made, she pushed herself to take leadership roles. As a student, she got the opportunity to work in a university setting and she learned a lot from that. Third intentional effort was searching [for] a mentor, their guidance, their experience. Support from a mentor worked like a pillar for her, who supported her, guided her in challenging situation.

Olivia also had a mentor who guided her during her doctoral program and research, which has helped improve her writing style.

In terms of support received from mentors, all the participants received support from their mentors and all of them had mentors to guide them. Mentors are an important part of these women's lives, and, without them, they might not have achieved what they have in their career. Amy is at senior level now, but she still needs guidance and suggestions from her mentor. While some participants commented on role models and mentors they admired from afar, all the participants noted the importance for having one in their life. Olivia said that her mother always asked and motivated her to do the publications. Every time she called, her mother asked how

many publications Olivia had done and what paper she was working on. All of this motivated Olivia to do more in her career.

According to Kram (1983), “The mentor relationship has great potential to facilitate career advancement and psychosocial development in both early and middle adulthood by providing a vehicle for accomplishing these primary developmental tasks” (p. 608).

This study suggests having a mentor can positively impact women’s careers, and it thus supports these findings. This study supports the findings of Luna and Cullen (1993) who found, “Mentoring should be viewed as important to the institution, and mentors should be regarded as valuable talent scouts and trainers” (p. 35).

The findings provide evidence that AIAW may be motivated to work harder to pay tribute to their mentors. Hard work is one way of showing gratitude and respect to their mentors. Hard work, in turn, leads to more opportunities and success in a career. According to Colin Powell (2003), “There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure.”

### ***Making a Transformational Difference***

Transformative learning involves gaining information that disrupts prior learning and knowledge and facilitates adult learners to reshape one’s ideas and perceptions (Davis, 2006). Mezirow (1998) indicates that critical self-reflection “involves critique of a premise upon which the learner has defined a problem” (p. 186) and explores alternative perspectives to make sense of the phenomenon or experience. Once the participants of this study recognized a problem in their career, they discovered the way to overcome barriers, and became confident and motivated internally. Mary shared one of her experiences where she spent hours and hours in the lab and worked extensively on her research project. She attended conferences to learn new skills. The

process of transformation can be difficult and uncomfortable for the individual as they struggle to explore alternative interpretations within them and see the world differently from before (Davis, 2006).

Lia said that she has always worked on herself and if she wants to be a leader. She would approach diverse leaders and request them for appointments. For her, finding out about dos and don'ts of leadership, getting some tips about how to be an efficient leader helped her discover what kind of leadership style is essential and how an institution progresses. She noted that if there is "any training or certification is required, I would do them too. I would try to make sure to collect as many skills and knowledge as possible, so that I am able to work efficiently as a leader."

Amy shared experience of her early career when she started working as a TC assistant in the lab. The biggest challenge she shared was to communicate with the students. Sometimes they did not understand what she said, and sometimes she had difficulty understanding them. She said she had to work hard on her accent to be an efficient teacher. Also, she was not very good at asking for help. She shared an example that she was working on a data and deadline was approaching, she could not ask for the raw data from other employees so that she could work on it. But her mentor taught her to develop the skills to be more vocal and extrovert and ask for what she needed. She said in science, analysis is based on data, and she learned to be more interactive and started to ask for required information from designated person.

Olivia had to develop new skills as well as she had to work on her writing style during her doctoral studies. She had to unlearn the British style of writing and learn the academic style of writing. The challenge was she did not know how online software worked to track all the classes and assignments and had no idea about the educational system of United States. Her other cohort



members being schoolteachers were familiar with the U.S. educational system. After completing her degree, she took a position as academic advisor, her accent was a challenge and she worked to improve this area.

This study revealed that all the participants had worked on themselves to improve their skills. All the participants of this study were inspired to motivate other individuals in the same situation. The excitement in the voices of these women describes how they were able to improve the lives of many minority women. Lia expressed that being an effective leader is all about being an efficient leader, and certain traits contribute towards the growth of people and the institute.

### **Findings Relating to Support Received from Institutions**

All participants indicated that their institutes provided them with the good, quality infrastructure, and professors in their area of study were helpful.

Amy said she come from a rural urban area and did not have enough facilities and resources to pursue further education, and, being a science major student, she did not have fully equipped labs. The problem she faced was lack of infrastructure and could not conduct experiments related to physics and chemistry subjects. But when she came to United States for higher studies, she had no issues related to the labs. Labs were fully equipped, infrastructure was marvelous, and laboratories provided all the resources to conduct advanced research in my area of study. Lia also shared the similar experience she said her university and the professors were very helpful. Her department had all the resources a student required and provided her the opportunity to learn new skills. Olivia echoed Amy and Lia, she said her institute had so many resources, and those resources helped her acquire new skills. The writing center in her institute helped her improve her writing skills. The library had all the books that were needed for her area of study.

Mary also said that she had no issues related to the resources and infrastructure. Labs are fully equipped, and infrastructure is tremendous. She had all the advanced technology to perform lab work. Nora shared similar experiences related to the infrastructure of her institution that her department had all the facilities and latest technology for students and faculty.

On the contrary, when it comes to pursue their career in academia, the situation is different. In this study, education and educational experiences filled the participants with hope and confidence needed to be successful in their future career. There are other factors that also influence the overall success of AIAW in academia. Only the infrastructure is not enough; they need the support from their institutions to grow in their career, like more opportunities and less discrimination. Williams (1995) pointed out many higher educational institutions' practices include culturally embedded beliefs and assumptions based on gender.

### **Factors Relating to Needed Resources**

The fourth research question was, "What resources do AIAW need most to obtain senior leadership roles in U.S. higher education?" This explored different suggestions for the aspiring women leaders in academia and how they can prepare themselves for the more significant roles in the institutions. The findings include the importance of childcare, education, support from family, and diversity in the institution. Asian culture is considered a collectivist culture; family and childcare are some important factors that affect the career of AIAW. Tummala-Nara, (2009) and Singh Chen (2012) found in their studies that acculturative stress varied in degree among Asians. Family support plays an important role to combat negative effects of perceived discrimination on depression. Most of the participants talked strongly about supportive family and encouraging mentors.

### *Importance of Childcare*

Analysis of the results in the finding revealed that most participants had family obligations such as childcare. Olivia expressed that childcare in an institution can be beneficial for aspiring leaders, as it will provide the freedom to work without having to worry about their children. Her husband took care of their infant daughter when she was working on her dissertation during her doctoral program. Amy also said that childcare is an important part of any woman for pursuing their desired career. She missed important lab meetings and information only because she had to pick up her two daughters from the school at same time every day and timings always clashed with her lab meetings. She said she love her children very much and she is not complaining, but there are some responsibilities cannot be ignored or avoided.

Mary also had a similar experience where she had to take care of her two young children all by herself. She took the position as a tenure track faculty, and she had waited long time for this opportunity. She moved with her two daughters to a different state to obtain a faculty position, but her husband could not join them because he had a job in different state. Managing a new position and two young girls all by herself was overwhelming.

Lia expressed her gratitude that she was fortunate that her parents lived with her to care for her children, or the situation might have been very different for her.

There was a probing question in this present study as to whether these women wanted to take a leadership role in the future. If yes, childcare is one factor of their career where they needed help because they could not ignore family responsibilities. All the participants expressed the importance of childcare. In terms of working women and childcare, affordable childcare is the need of their daily life, so that they can concentrate on their career. In the present scenario, there are additional limitations due to the pandemic. With the closure of schools and pre-schools,

women with children faced a sudden increase in childcare responsibilities and household labor. These responsibilities can lead to a decrease in psychological wellbeing and health difficulties, as well as limited career development and progression (Yildirim & Eslen Ziya, 2020). Women already faced the burden of educating children and managed their own employment, a forced lockdown led to a sudden increase of childcare responsibilities and household labor. This created work/family conflict and was more apparent to women (Alon et al., 2020).

Mary, Olivia, Lia, Nora, and Amy all faced challenges related to childcare. Amy missed her lab meetings just because she had to pick up her daughters from school. Mary struggled with two young children during her early career as a tenure track faculty and got frustrated sometimes. Olivia expressed her struggle writing the dissertation at the same time her child was born.

Through these narratives and personal experiences, childcare is very important. When my child was born, I had to take break from my research and study. As a mother, you have the responsibility to take care of the baby. It was very difficult for me to manage household, [a] baby, and studies at the same time. Now my child is 4 years old, I send him to childcare so that I can concentrate on my dissertation. Childcare is not cheap and not everyone can afford it. In my opinion universities should provide free childcare for their students and faculty.

### ***Need for Education***

It is essential to have a formal education to apply for and obtain a leadership position in higher education. In addition, leaders should also have hands-on experience.

Olivia expressed her interest to study further or do some certification to enhance her skills. She said she would like to focus on research and planning to do another degree that will help her in future endeavors.

Amy said, women need to step forward and apply for advanced courses to be successful in academic institutions. There is a need of AIAW to take part in STEM courses, as she does not see much AIAW in leadership positions in academia. Mary also stated that education is an important part of showing your worth. If a person should have enough intellectual ability to prove their worth people cannot ignore or underestimate. She said you need intellectual materials on your plate when you are pursuing upper administrative position. If you do not have qualification and your CV indicates less educational accomplishments, you are not even eligible for the position you are applying for. Lia expressed her interest in doing all the certifications that are needed for the leadership position. She said she have learned and had acquired knowledge by interacting with people asking about different resources. She took online courses, learned from YouTube videos, and reading books; they all have served as excellent resources in terms of education.

In terms of education, it is the foundation for every career, and one definitely needs a qualifying degree in order to apply for the desired role in higher education. All the participants acquired certifications and degrees required for their position. Olivia completed her doctoral program and then she applied for the position she is working on currently. Mary wanted to join academia, so she did her doctoral program in related field. Amy acquired her doctoral degree in her respective field and did some additional certification in order to qualify for the position of her interest. Similarly, other participants acquired the qualifying education related to their area of work because it was the first requirement for the job position. Based on number of studies there is an inter-relationship between the academic levels acquired and objective career success (Dierendonck & Gaast, 2013). Academic qualification also ensures success in life by getting a good job and getting paid well.

### *Support from Family*

Findings of this research question also indicated the need of support from the family so that there are fewer family obligations. Senior level positions require lot of hard work and undivided attention.

Olivia said that she had received support from her husband since her parents and in-laws did not live in the States. Her husband took care of their infant daughter and that's why she had the time to study, most importantly writing thesis for her doctoral program. She spent hours in the library and the whole time her husband took care of the household and their daughter. Olivia's mother supported her morally; she always showed interest and motivated Olivia to do the publications. As with Lia, she received support from her parents throughout her career. Their support and motivation [have] helped her overcome all the obstacles in her career.

Amy echoed Olivia and Lia, she said her family and husband have always been supportive, but family obligation kept her from participating in some of the career related engagements. She had to sacrifice lot of things.

While most participants expressed support from their families and supportive background, Mary had a different story. She had to struggle alone between her dream job and the family. She had the responsibility of taking care of two young children along with the job. She always struggled between work and family. She did not have her parents in the States to help her with her children, and her husband was stuck in different state because of his job. Her new job of tenure track faculty was very demanding. She faced tremendous challenges at work. She decided to concentrate on research along with faculty position. She intentionally made this decision that she will keep continuing publishing papers and writing grants for external organizations. She also expressed her struggle of writing paper. She said it is a time taking process to write a paper,

especially when you submit paper for peer review and it gets rejected, you must work on it. If you get a major revision, it is a time taking process to make the edits and submit again. You must sit there with clear brain and work for long time without any disturbance. But it's not the case when kids are back from school. You must spend time with them, and you cannot ignore your family responsibilities.

Nora said her family was very supportive. They supported her in every way to achieve whatever she wanted in her career, but she faced lot of issues in her department due to other factors. Other factors indicated by the participants was support from the department, diversity, more women at the top position, and educational qualification for the leadership position.

In terms of support from family, all participants expressed the importance of family. Their families have supported them in the best way they could support. Some participants felt their family taught them to listen, learn, be authentic, be independent, and persevere.

After all the findings and discussions in Chapters 4 and 5, it has been found that the experiences of these five women provide data about the challenges AIAW face in academia. Their status and position in the U.S. are different from each other in regard to their family background, upbringing, and their experience as a woman, but one similarity is being an AIAW, which provides them a united voice.

As the process of examining the stories of these women proceeded, it became clear there are many factors and complexities that influence AIAW's lives throughout their career. The findings also provide evidence that the model minority stereotype may play an influential role in the form of their lack of self-promotion. The participants showed evidence of devaluing their own abilities of not applying for the leadership positions. Instead of promoting themselves as having excellent leadership abilities, Asian women may choose to devalue themselves in light of

more traditional Western values (Chou Feagin, 2008). AIAW are worthy of the top leadership positions in the institutions of higher education and should take the responsibility to identify the skills they have and abilities they bring to any institution.

### **Limitations**

A limitation of this study was that none of the participants were leaders in academia (e.g., Dean and above). This fact limited the ability to analyze research questions of this study from the perspective of AIAW currently acting as leaders in academia. The study was informed by the experiences of AIAW who are on the verge of obtaining leadership roles in higher education.

The researcher made a conscious attempt to present participants' narratives without any other influence from the researcher's perspective. However, still, a slight likelihood of bias cannot be ignored. The sample size is relatively small. The experiences of participants overlapped in many instances with each other. However, generalization is crucial with such a small sample size, but analytical generalization has been achieved with the help of literature. Based on the participants' race, different lived experiences were identified, and the concerns they shared had some similarities. Uniformity could have been attained if all the participants were permanent citizens or immigrants and if they were at the same level in their career. Institutions of the participants were also diverse. Some of them were research institutes; some are four-year universities. Therefore, varied responses and experiences were expected to happen. To obtain more identical and uniform responses, participants' backgrounds and current positions should have been similar.

Nonetheless, this variety in participants' area of study and career provide us with more insight about the scenario of AIAW in higher education in the United States. The number of participants was small. Therefore, participants' sample consists of both faculty and



administrators. It would have been more insightful if all the participants were either faculty or administrators altogether. Conducting a qualitative study focusing on a large sample population would be helpful to support, and generalizations could be made regarding barriers AIAW face on their journey toward their ascension to leadership roles. Three dimensions of race (e.g., being Asian Indian), gender (e.g., being a woman), and relationships (e.g., relationships with mentors) have been examined. Indeed, there are many more dimensions that influence AIAW and their leadership style.

### **Recommendations**

This study appears to be the first to concentrate specifically on Asian Indian American Women and the barriers to obtaining the top position in higher education in institutions. A low number of available participants meeting the criteria, themes, and findings lead to an imperfect study but contributes to the literature for future researchers interested in studying AIAW and the pathway to top leadership positions in higher education. The findings of this study suggested further research on AIAW in academic leadership, as this topic is understudied. Few Asian Indian American women participated in the study, and there are fewer AIAW in leadership roles in academia in the U.S. Therefore, there is a scope of exploring the different aspects related to the study. Even Asian men are understudied in the sector of academia in higher education in the U.S. A comparative study between Asian Indian American Women versus Asian Indian American Men can also be a consideration for the future research.

American men can provide much insight as well. Most of the existing studies focus on a collaborative study about Asian women. However, there are no such studies specifically about Asian Indian American (Immigrant/Non-immigrant) Women in academia in the United States. All Asians such as Chinese, Japanese, Indians, Saudi Arabians, and Philippine people are

considered as one group and have been studied without noting their diversity. AIAW have their challenges in the academy and should be studied separately.

The results of this study were limited by the challenges, including the low sample size that met the research criteria. In addition, the apparent lack of the previous study on the related topic creates an inability for validation at the current time, so future researchers may wish to re-explore this same topic utilizing different methods.

### **Implications for Further Study**

Research on Asian Indian American Women (AIAW) in higher education is still limited. Future studies on this topic, especially in leadership, will add new dimensions to the body of existing work on minorities and women's leadership in higher education.

Considering academic leadership as the main area of this study, future researchers may wish to expand upon this study by exploring the experiences of those AIAW who wish to achieve the top leadership positions but have not yet done so. This subgroup of aspirant women may provide valuable data related to the barriers faced by AIAW in higher education institutions. Additionally, since this study focused solely on AIAW, future researchers may also wish to explore the experiences of Asian Indian American Men in higher education in the United States. Future researchers can also consider comparing White women and Asian Indian women in higher education in the U.S. There are few AIAW in leadership positions in higher education in the U.S. To attract AIAW to the leadership pipeline, institutions will need more collaborative efforts to help mentor and guide aspiring AIAW to enhance their leadership skills.

### **Conclusions**

Mentors and personal networks are important informal leadership development for Asian Indian American women to achieve faculty/leadership positions. Formal leadership development

is also very important, and it includes certifications, qualifying degree for a particular position, relevant prior job experience. Leadership development emerges through a willingness to take career risks and is dependent on other circumstances as well. Challenges in the life of participants of this study provided opportunities to reflect and develop strong personal values.

Despite all the limitations, this qualitative study provides insight into the challenges AIAW face and describes the experiences of the five women in this study. This framework provides a voice that otherwise may go unnoticed in academia in the U.S. These women spoke boldly about their experiences of isolation, discriminatory treatment, gender segregation, and shared examples of discrimination. They expressed that their hard work would impact other aspiring women leaders and encourage them to believe in themselves. They are passionate about their career and have been capable of improving their lives and those around them.

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## APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL



*INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY*

DATE: July 21, 2021  
TO: Denozy Sharma  
FROM: Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB  
PROJECT TITLE: [1757680-1] Asian Indian American Women in Academia in United States  
REFERENCE #: IRB# 22-015  
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project  
ACTION: APPROVED  
APPROVAL DATE: July 21, 2021  
EXPIRATION DATE: July 21, 2022  
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a *signed* consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a MINIMAL RISK project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of July 21, 2022.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Robin Pyles at (270) 745-3360 or [irb@wku.edu](mailto:irb@wku.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

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