Southeast Asian Women in K-12 Educational Leadership Positions
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Abstract

The number of Southeast Asian women in the field of K-12 educational leadership positions in California's Central Valley is a current topic that deserves academic attention. Data documenting the success of Southeast Asian female K-12 school administrators is difficult to find because Southeast Asian women working in K-12 school administration is a recent demographic and no such study currently exists. This study focuses on the challenges of gender, ethnicity, and the leadership styles of Southeast Asian women in K-12 administration and teacher-leader positions. The role of a school leader is challenging, overwhelming, and stressful. Despite the perceived undesirable responsibilities of the job, some Southeast Asian women are motivated to pursue positions of K-12 educational leadership. Present trends of hiring and recruiting diversity in education have widened the pool of potential school leaders. The purpose of this project is to explore the challenges and discover the ways that Southeast Asian women have been able to overcome obstacles in K-12 school administration.

Females have higher aspirations than males while in high school, they are more likely to enroll in college immediately after graduating from high school, and they persist and complete degrees at higher rates than males.

             -National Center for Education Statistics, 2004

Introduction

  Southeast Asian women in California's Central Valley are making great strides in the field of education. They are hired in K-12 administrative positions and fulfilling teacher-leader roles more than Southeast Asian males. Although men are out-earning women in most fields, women are slowly closing the gender gap. The Equal Opportunity Act of 1995, along with current trends in education have allowed for more diversity in educational leadership positions. This trend has opened the way for more Southeast Asian women to enter into K-12 educational leadership positions. Despite historical and cultural mores, Southeast Asian women in California's Central Valley are expanding their identities by pursuing higher education and following their ambition to further their careers.

Review of the Literature

The inquiry for this research is fixed within three bodies of literature; (a) Southeast Asian women overcoming the gender and ethnic challenges in leadership positions; (b) Southeast Asian women and the balance between personal and professional lives; and (c) Southeast Asian women in leadership positions. To understand the struggles of Southeast Asian women, it is first necessary to examine the educational career obstacles and trends of women and other ethnic minorities in similar areas. These comparable topics are: (a) the obstacles of women in educational leadership positions; (b) how women are overcoming the challenges of educational leadership roles; and (c) how women balance their personal and professional lives in educational leadership.

The Balance of Personal and Professional Lives of Women in Educational Leadership

  The job responsibilities of an administrator do not seem to be decreasing. For example, the tasks of school planning, organizing, and providing professional development for teachers are identified as undermining personal time, wellbeing, and taking up a significant amount of work time (Byington, 2010). These conflicting needs create problems with prioritizing (Byington, 2010). Burnett and Gatrell found in 2010, that women who are employed outside of the home also have more domestic responsibilities than men who work outside of the home. The study found that, in today's world, it is far more likely that mothers will continue to work after having children (Burnett & Gatrell, 2010). Women, who had children will either cut back on their work commitment or stop working--period (Burnett & Gatrell, 2010). In the United Kingdom and the United States, Burnett and Gatrell (2010) found that while some fathers do participate more with direct childcare and household chores, they still perform on average significantly less indirect housework (laundry, cooking, cleaning, and early infant care) than mothers.

  In the study conducted by Byington (2010), there are still social expectations for women to put the family first. The study also found that the extra time women spend at work does directly impact the time spent with the family (Byington, 2010). As women in school

leaderships manage to break the glass ceiling, the balance of family and career is still a struggle. When children are factored into the lives of women, the juggling act of professional and personal lives is more precarious.

Women in Educational Leadership

Women are underrepresented in educational leadership. Although women are in classrooms and visible in teaching, there are not as many women in school administration positions. Research of women in educational leadership revealed that minority women teachers are the least represented in educational leadership positions (Byington, 2010). Yet, women teachers are the most represented in the classrooms in public education (Burney, 2007). The ability of a minority woman and an ethnic minority candidate to ascend to administration is fraught with adversity.

The limitations of women in leadership can range from a lack of financial incentives, the amount of time required to dedicate to leadership positions, to the lack of support. More research is needed to explore the topic about encouraging more minority women to pursue their career goals and aspirations. The topic of encouragement of minority women into educational leadership positions can lead to a better understanding of the barriers that are preventing minority women from breaking the glass ceiling in educational leadership (Burney, 2007).

Women and Minority Leadership Styles

Men as a gender appear to be more preferable to employers because they are viewed as more career focused (Byington, 2010). Without the chance to explore leadership and construct a personal style, some women do not develop the confidence in their ability to lead others (Jennings, 2009). Increasing the self-confidence and encouraging the belief in one's ability, developing a can-do attitude and renewing aspiration for success, are some of the positive impacts perceived by the participants in educational leadership programs (Jennings, 2009 & Ogunbawo, 2012). Programs to build confidence, mentoring, and exploring alternate definition of principalships are worthy venues of further study. But women themselves, once in a leadership position, must be able to not only stand and speak on reform, but also deliver.

Leadership styles of women emphasize collaboration and empowerment of their subordinates. Most women leadership styles seem to stray from the traditional ideas of leadership that are typically attributed to men (Jennings, 2009). The majority of principals are predominately white and male, when they were new principals, these white men had a large amount of literature to support their struggles, anecdotes to emulate, and footsteps to follow.

The issue of isolation as an ethnic minority in educational leadership.

In Ogunbawo's (2012) study of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) educational leaders, isolation was found to be a major issue. Predominately white schools and communities offer little diversity. The isolation of black and ethnic minority leaders could take the form of social exclusion from a lack of suitable and socioeconomic cultural knowledge (Ogunbawo, 2012). The problem of isolation for women leaders is a two-fold dilemma. The problem is that once a woman is in a leadership role, the inability to share ideas and receive support can lead to a lack of confidence (Jennings, 2009). Once in the field, women are often professionally isolated and

this isolation has a falling domino effect on diminishing confidence from other educators, which leads to flagging self-confidence (Jennings, 2009).

The cycle of isolation to defeat is ironic because women need more support to enter and stay in administration (Byington, 2010). The challenges and responsibilities can be overwhelming, but they often receive less support from within the family and even less support in school and social settings (Byington, 2010). Women and ethnic minorities need to make social connections, and need mentoring and support from within the organization. The shortage of women in administration has little to do with the availability, training, and preparation (Jennings, 2009). The number of women in administration is not reflective of the amount of women in teaching. School leadership is still a male shaped, dominated, and maintained field (Byington, 2010).

The lack of ethnic minority role models and the need for educational ethnic minority mentors.

In California, student teachers are assigned to a master teacher during the last year of the credentialing program. This apprentice-like system is set norm, a true rite of passage for aspiring teachers. However, in the first year as principals, some leaders are left to their own devices and are entrusted to successfully command an entire school. This rite of passage does not exist for principals. Therefore, some principals will flourish, however, most will flounder and leave the profession (Whitacker, 2002). How a principal mentoring relationship should be is yet to be thoroughly examined, but formal or informal mentoring programs and networking are essential, especially for new principals or head teachers (Whitacker, 2002). The point is that some form of support system for school leaders is crucial for the school to be successful.

Petzko (2008) found that school leaders require programs that are rigorous and standards based. Educational leadership programs need to focus on improving student achievement. Principals, themselves are calling more for field experiences that are well planned and calling for highly qualified mentors to guide new principals (Petzko, 2008). Burney (2007) found that the minority women in the study believed that mentoring could be effective if the mentors would provide guidance and help to place them on the path for advancement. The purpose and the function of a principal mentor are multi-faceted, but much needed for the retention of new principals (Burney, 2007).

Networking within the educational profession for ethnic minority women.

Burney (2007) found that 32% of the participants advised that networking was an essential success factor for minority women to advance in education leadership roles. The participants in Burney's study also felt that networking would give minority teachers the access to people that they need to advance in their careers. Ogunbawo (2012) found that the lack of ethnic minority leaders in networking was a disabler. A key component of career mobility is the availability and value of exceptional Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) educators as role models. Visible role models allow participants to identify leadership qualities within themselves and this could inspire them for leadership positions (Ogunbawo, 2012). Participants in the study found it empowering to see other leaders in education who looked like them, who shared in similar struggles, and who could help them as a mentor (Ogunbawo, 2012).

The early stages of the new leader and mentor relationships are crucial at the time because new leaders feel the most vulnerable (Mansfield, Welton, Lee, & Young, 2010). The research revealed that it is reassuring that other minorities have overcome the odds and made it to leadership positions, it gave new educational leaders hope that it would not be an impossible feat (Ogunbawo, 2012). Networking is a career starter for ethnic minorities. As new school leaders successfully gain entrance into educational leadership positions, retaining the ethnic minority women in the positions is the next challenge (Ogunbawo, 2012). Ethnic minority women need support from within the organization.

Support for ethnic minority women within educational leadership organizations.

Networking would allow ethnic minority women to make advantageous career connections. Mansfield, Welton, Lee, & Young, in 2010, identified that there were two obstacles within the organization; the first involved developing professional networks and job opportunities, and the second was the lack of funding to support women and the lack of clear direction in the graduate leadership program (Mansfield et al, 2010). Female educational leaders need support during their careers, because it can be lonely at the top.

The challenges of school leaders have increased, and new principals feel overwhelmed by outside demands. The American school system is in jeopardy of losing its brightest school leaders if changes to the profession are not made soon (Friedman, 2002). New principals have identified four stressors. These include parents, weak teacher performance, work overload, and inadequate staffing. These four stressors lead to principal burnout, and the number one culprit of principal burnout are the teachers (Friedman, 2002). Educators are underpaid (Whitacker, 2002). This is painfully true for school leaders, whose insufficient salaries do not match the amount of responsibilities districts, states, and regions heap upon them. Policy makers need to ensure that principals and teachers are offered the appropriate salary to compensate for increased responsibilities, longer contracts, and longer working hours (Whitacker, 2002). One important way a school system can support new principals is to provide qualified mentors. Mentorship of new principals is the newest trend in education (Ogunbawo, 2012). A high quality, mentoring program can ensure a smoother transition of a principal's career (Ogunbawo, 2012).

Southeast Asian Women Altering Traditional Gender Roles

The ingrained beliefs of how Asian women are supposed to behave are rooted in Confucian and Buddhist traditions (Fuji, 2012). These views are in sharp contrast to the dominant Western views on independence, and being an individual (Fuji, 2012). For example, in some Laotian communities, the fear that Laotian women are abandoning their traditional roles is a topic of concern (Gordon, 2009). Laotian men and women do recognize that their gender roles are changing since they have been in America (Gordon, 2009). Laotian women see their changing gender roles as an improvement and are enjoying their newfound freedom (Gordon, 2009). Laotian men, however, see their once valued role as the breadwinner as diminishing (Gordon, 2009).

The acclimation process of being American (Gordon, 2009) and the acquisition of education have clearly shaped the gender roles of Southeast Asian women. California's Central Valley is home to approximately 47,000 Hmong people (United States Department of

Commerce, United States Census Bureau, 2012). Southeast Asian women are motivated to mold a new identity for themselves because there is an economic need and because there are more opportunities for identity growth (Gordon, 2009 & Pho & Muvley, 2003).

In the Hmong community there are stories of strict gender mores (Wozniacka, 2012). In the United States, Hmong daughters are expected to marry in their early teens (Wozniacka, 2012). They are expected to have up to 8 or 9 children and serve their husband's families (Wozniacka, 2012). These Hmong girls are not allowed to even eat at the same table as men (Wozniacka, 2012). However, certain traditional practices are slowly disappearing from the mainstream practices. In contrast to Wozniacka's report, Moua (2011) found that the tradition of waiting for the men to eat before women and children is disappearing in some Hmong households. Men, women and children are more likely to eat at the same time in (Moua, 2011).

Growing up in America some Southeast Asian girls have experienced shame, isolation, and embarrassment because of their ethnic difference (Almandrez, 2012). It is a two-fold dilemma. The term *ethgender* (Chung, 2008) is not a simple conjugation of ethnicity to gender. Southeast Asian women have the challenge of gender and ethnicity. Ethnicity is not constructed separately from gender, rather ethgender is constructed all of a single piece, at the same time (Chung, 2008). Southeast Asian women must overcome both obstacles in America at the same.

The motivation of Southeast Asian women to succeed in America.

Moua (2011) found that most of the Hmong women in the study were products of welfare, and in a few cases public housing projects. Although immigrants are grateful for public assistance, most were eager to financially provide for themselves. Poverty is one of many reasons for Southeast Asian women are motivated to succeed in America (Moua, 2011). Opportunity is another reason why Southeast Asian women were driven to overcome the odds.

In America, Southeast Asian women are discovering that equal opportunity in public education and in employment empower them and provide them access to more success than back in Laos (Pho & Mulvey, 2003). Education and employment is the leverage that allowed them to be more assertive in family matters (Pho & Mulvey, 2003). Southeast Asian women were voicing their opinions on how to raise their children to assessing the financial needs of the family (Pho & Mulvey, 2003). School and working outside the home gave access to various role models and different lifestyles that had been previously inaccessible to Southeast Asian women (Pho & Mulvey, 2003). The opportunity to attend school and to work outside of the home has literally allowed women to get out of the house.

Coming to America allowed many refugees an opportunity to a better life and many refugees felt a great sense of gratitude (Almandrez, 2010). However, like most new groups in America, it was not long before injustices were perceived and grateful refugees exercised their American right to critique (Almandrez, 2010). For example, one participant in Almandrez' study had a strong loyalty to the United States (2010). The participant in the study saw injustices in educational and income levels among Southeast Asians led her to doubt equity and equality in the United States (Almandrez, 2010). Asian Americans need to avoid the traps laid out by cultural differences and prejudice (Chung, 2008).

The conflicting view of Southeast Asian femininity in America.

Interest in the gender roles of Southeast Asian women has only recently attracted the interest of researchers in the past 30 years (Andaya, 2007). Andaya found that the study of women in history and gender is a new emerging area. The topic of Southeast view of femininity is an evolving one. In 2003, Pho & Mulvey covered a variety of topics that ranged from the female role in the family, to domestic violence. Pho & Mulvey (2003) found that the preferential treatment of sons over daughters is engrained with every succeeding generation. Sons are revered; a family will sacrifice their income to send a son to further his education (Pho & Mulvey, 2003). Daughters are raised to be good wives and good daughters-in-law (Pho & Mulvey, 2003). The daughter is trained at an early age to be self-sufficient, to help others, and to be worthy of her husband and his family (Pho & Mulvey, 2003).

It is natural and easier to fall back on habits when confronted with a new situation (Chung, 2008). Asian women want to be positively judged and therefore may feel the need to express appropriate feminine modesty (Chung, 2008). The reasons why Asian American women continue to display this behavior are rooted in traditional gender-role expectations (Chung, 2008). Asian American women have had a long battle with those in positions of power and attaining that same position themselves (Chung, 2008). The paradox is that up-and-coming Asian American female leaders tend to accommodate and reinforce traditional roles rather than resist them (Chung, 2008). As Asian American women learn to navigate gender egalitarian views, they may feel the need to retreat from interactions in power settings (Chung, 2008). This resistance to actively participate in power plays reinforces the patriarchic hierarchy that they are trying to break away from (Chung, 2008).

The cycle of submissiveness and reluctance to be engaged in confrontational situations are negative traits and are often considered to be signs of incompetence (Chung, 2008). This cycle also reinforces the stereotype of the meek and mild Asian woman (Chung, 2008). Exhibitions of these age-old traits can deny Asian American women professional opportunities and success (Chung, 2008). The gender and cultural beliefs that permeate some Asian countries, those that discourage assertiveness and competitiveness, work against Asian Americans (Chung, 2008). Negative gender and cultural influences are more harmful for Asian American women who are in administrative or leadership positions (Chung, 2008). For example, Hmong women attested to some type of gender inequities in the Hmong culture (Moua, 2011). Interestingly, none of the Hmong women in Moua's (2011) study noted sexism or gender disparity in the workplace. However, they recognized that when they are in the Hmong community, their leadership position and authority are generally ignored (Moua, 2011). This cultural reaction to their newly defined gender role had left a profound impression on their decisions and ambitions to seek leadership opportunities outside of their ethnic community (Moua, 2011).

The art of compromise, being a Southeast Asian American woman.

The term Asian American is an umbrella term that covers several distinct cultures, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, Indian, and Laotian (Chung, 2008). Southeast Asian women have the task of raising their children and completing all of the household chores. The husbands, in Pho & Mulvey's (2003) study, were asked if they would contribute to doing some of the housework, if their wives were too busy. The majority of the men stated *no*. One Vietnamese woman also reported that she felt that her husband should not do the dishes, and she felt concern for him and feared that he would be a target for community criticism. The study revealed that other Southeast Asian

women were willing to take a secondary role in the family in order to maintain the harmony (Pho & Mulvey, 2003).

A successful compromise for one family may not be as well received for another. The case studies of Pho & Mulvey (2003) revealed that each family had developed their own way of coping with the tensions, with emerging conflicts as each one reconcile with their new life in America. As Southeast Asian women create new roles for themselves in their family, they also are creating a new place for themselves in society and a byproduct of this movement is the reassignment of some traditionally defined male roles (Pho & Mulvey, 2003). Southeast Asian women are analytical about which cultural practices are acceptable, which ones to tolerate, and which ones to leave out (Moua, 2011). For example, Hmong women leaders have wordlessly observed, become skilled in actively listening, passively learning, and being expert persuaders and agents of cultural (i.e. gender role) change (Moua, 2011).

The shame culture of Southeast Asians.

The fluidity to cross borders in their ethnic and gender identities demonstrate that leadership ideas and practices of Asian Pacific American women today are deeply rooted in their history (Almandrez, 2010). Most Asian countries also share the philosophy of shame. *Saving face* is a phrase used to describe the efforts to maintain a positive public image (Almandrez, 2010). This is a common mantra among different Asian cultures. Some Asian Pacific American women must deal with the contentious issues related to the ideas of gender to avoid feelings of shame (Almandrez, 2010). Bringing shame or embarrassing one's self is seen as failure and a poor reflection of one's family. The culture of shame is a powerful motivator for Southeast Asian women to excel in public even if they are met with criticism in private (Almandrez, 2010). Correcting behavior or criticizing is a privilege allowed only to the older members of the Asian community (Moua, 2011). It is strictly a one-way street of cultural correction (Moua, 2011). Never, ever, should a younger person correct, or amend, the behavior of someone older, that is an unspeakable cultural insult (Moua, 2011).

Many Southeast Asian women have discovered that being bicultural is not a weakness (Moua, 2011). Instead, being bicultural has enhanced and refined leadership skills and broadened the perspectives of diversity in the community (Moua, 2011).

Some of the eccentric cultural practices of the Hmong people have impacted some of the women leaders professionally (Moua, 2011). In Moua's study (2011), young Hmong girls were criticized by Hmong community members who doubted women's academic abilities and effectiveness as leaders. Although racism cannot be a justification in the Hmong community because the participants came from the same ethnic background, it can be said that all of the participants experienced some form of criticism from their own Hmong community. This occurred on a more regular basis than from the macrocommunity (Moua, 2011). Despite these obstacles, Hmong women surpassed them and succeeded (Moua, 2011).

Leadership styles of Southeast Asian women in K-12 educational leadership

The leadership styles of a Southeast Asian woman differ from the traditional American school leader (Rapaido, 2011). For example the Filipino culture values the collective and collaborative leadership style (Rapaido, 2011). This way of leading is contrary to the Western value of individualism and competitiveness (Rapaido, 2011). Southeast Asian women have a

more collaborative and collective leadership style, and if they are successful, their success is a reflection of the whole community (Rapaido, 2011). Therefore, women do not see the perception of success as an individual achievement. Public accomplishments are equated with whole community achievement (Almandrez, 2010).

This type of communal style is a direct product of the Asian culture (Fuji, 2012). Important decisions are discussed, shared, and options to solutions are weighed against each other; the final choice is a collective experience (Fuji, 2012). Acculturation to the mainstream American culture is a key factor in the career process (Fuji, 2012). Asian American students and leaders who identify strongly with Asian culture are likely to employ a collectivist approach to decision-making; they need to find a way to incorporate both approaches (Fuji, 2012).

Rapaido (2011) found that American schools expect Filipino American students and educational leaders to be autonomous. Skills such as articulation, independence and being driven can be developed through practice, support, and encouragement (Rapaido, 2011). An example of individual assertiveness from Rapaido's study includes an instance when one Filipino educational leader was not afraid to talk to her superiors, or anyone who could help her, when there was a safety concern at her school (Rapaido, 2011). The proactive style she chose in resolving a school issue was the motivation to strengthen her conviction (Rapaido, 2011). She believed she was hired to be responsible for her school, which included protecting it and she did (Rapaido, 2011).

It may be difficult for Asian American women to see themselves as leaders when the dominant qualities of leadership place a higher emphasis on gender, hierarchy, and position (Almandrez, 2010). Asian American female school leaders do not seek public praise because the collective and collaborative leadership style places the emphasis on communal achievements, not an individual one (Almandrez, 2010). For example, Hmong women recognize that inner strength, networking and transparency abilities, and having supportive and accessible role models are important factors that helped them in their career advancement (Moua, 2011). As Asian American women are taking on various leadership roles, they are recognizing the need for more political advocacy and activism in their respective communities (Almandrez, 2010).

Role models, networking and support within the profession of Southeast Asian women in k-12 educational leadership.

The 2010 United States Census Bureau report states that Asian Americans are the fastest growing minority group. The increasing numbers of Asian American students who are enrolled in schools need to have Asian representation in the administrative level. Filipino American teachers who have been educators in the Philippines have observed the lack of educational role models in school administration (Rapaido, 2011). The lack of Filipino American educational leaders as role models is a problem for those teachers who need guidance for upward mobility (Rapaido, 2011). Students, teachers and other administrators of Filipino heritage would consider being a role model in California K-12 public schools if given the opportunity (Rapaido, 2011). The fact that there is a lack of Filipino American educational-leader role models in K-12 public schools in California is seen as directly related to the fact that Filipino American students struggle academically and culturally (Rapaido, 2011). Asian Americans are invisible because they lack role models and mentors and because they are not perceived as leadership material (Chung, 2008).

There are numerous benefits to having a role model who is easily relatable (Almandrez, 2010). The significance of seeing women who resemble each other and a shared cultural identity is a motivator to hope, dream, and imagine futures in ways that have not been thought of before (Almandrez, 2010). Role models and mentors are safe support sources and are invaluable in helping educational leaders who are unsure. In addition, mentors provide Asian American women with the knowledge, resources, and tools to develop leadership, understand organizational structures, and cultivate partnerships to serve the needs of their communities (Almandrez, 2010). Mentors and role models are helpful for women going up the professional ladder. Because Southeast Asian educational leaders have just entered the profession, there is a lack of other women who have forged the way. Instead, Southeast East Asian women have turned to other colleagues and peers as career confidantes.

Some Southeast Asian women have identified their contemporaries as inspirational leaders (Almandrez, 2010). When contemporary leaders make connections and network amongst each other, the mutual respect that is generated propels each one onward to greater achievements (Almandrez, 2010). This is particularly important for first-generation students who lack role career role models. Peers are valuable for providing instrumental support, they can empathize with one another's struggles, validate each other's cultural heritage, and help one another feel more integrated (Fuji, 2012). Asian American educators have had to improvise when seeking professional paths to follow (Almandrez, 2010). Instead of forsaking a desired position, Asian Americans have received support and guidance from colleagues and friends (Almandrez, 2010).

Mentoring future generations is as important to the development of a leader as nurturing and seeking out new educational leaders (Almandrez, 2010). There is a need to create an atmosphere that would provide brighter futures for generations to come (Almandrez, 2010). For example, one Filipino school leader is active at seeking out other Filipino teachers to be role models for students because there were so few Filipino teacher role models at her school site (Rapaido, 2011). Isolation and loneliness has been identified as debilitating state of mind for new ethnic minority leaders (Rapaido, 2011). First generation Southeast Asian educational leaders can succumb to this phenomenon as there is not a support source. This is the problem of being the only one (Rapaido, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

There is one conceptual theoretical framework related to the inquiry of this study: qualitative study. This was a qualitative research study on the challenges and leadership styles of California's Central Valley Southeast Asian women in K-12 educational leadership roles. The personal interviews were set up and conducted at school sites and agreed meeting places over four weeks from September 14, 2012 to October 02, 2012.

Participants and Instrumentation

The school leaders were from one urban school district and two suburban school districts in the Central Valley of California. Other Southeast Asian women were interviewed, one was from a northern California School District, and one Southeast Asian woman from the junior college system. The interviewees' positions ranged from counseling positions to district office positions Specifically, the positions were counselors, vice-principals, principals, and an assistant

superintendent. In a field that had been predominately male, Southeast Asian women are redefining the nature of administration in schools. Female leaders in educational administration face a multitude of roadblocks and obstacles, which were traditionally constructed, shaped, led, and dominated by males. The identity of each participant is confidential and each participant is designated in a code. The code is listed as *Educator # __,* (i.e. "Educator #1") in the order of sequence of each interview.

Each educational leader was given a survey with nine Likert scale items. A total of 15 surveys were given out and nine of the 15 surveys were completed. The Likert scale was on a five-point continuum from 1 being *strongly disagree* to 5 representing *strongly agree*.

Survey and Results

Each educational leader was given a survey designed with nine Likert scale items. Nine of the 15 surveys were completed. Each of the nine completed surveys were filled out by the Southeast Asian educational leader who fulfilled the research requirements of an educational leader in K-12 school administration in California's Central Valley. Not all of the questions on the survey were answered. Many of the questions were left blank or marked as *undecided*. Figure 1 shows the summarized responses for each item for the nine completed surveys.

Themes

There were 10 main reoccurring themes from these 15 interviews. The 10 themes are: (1) the motivation to become an educator; (2) the motivation to leave the classroom for administration; (3) the educational leadership programs or preparation for their positions and planning for the school year; (4) the overwhelming or challenging professional moments; (5) the personal leadership styles; (6) the balance of professional and personal lives; (7) the family history and their influence on participants; (8) the gender and/ or ethnicity as an advantage to their educational leadership position; (9) their personal perception of themselves in their ethnic community; and 10) advice for future Southeast Asian women educational leaders.

Limitations

There are five limitations to this study. The first limitation included time, this project had to be completed in one semester. The second limitation is the distance of potential interview participants. The focus of the study was limited to the cities of California's Central Valley. The third limitation was properly identifying the gender of K-12 Southeast Asian female school leaders. There is difficulty in determining the gender of the Southeast Asian administrators because names do not necessarily denote the gender of the person. Surnames or other names change due to inter-racial marriages. Additionally, if a candidate had a non-Asian surname, the task of identifying other possible K-12 Southeast Asian female educational leaders was difficult. These two identified limitations made determining the gender and identity of Southeast Asian K-12 educational leaders difficult.

The fourth limitation was survey completion. Only nine of the 13 participants who were employed in the Central Valley and were school leaders completed the survey. Additionally, not all of the questions on the survey were answered. Many of the questions were left blank or were

Figure 1: SE Asian Women K-12 Educational Leaders Survey Responses

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Scale	strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
More Effective As An Admin.				5	2
More Challenged As An Admin.				1	6
Adequately Trained For Leadership Role		1	1	4	2
Adequately Trained For School Planning	3	3	1	1	
Professional Goals Well-Received By School			1	5	3
Well-Informed Of Community/ Clientele			3	2	3
Balanced Professional And Personal Life			2	6	1
Ethnicity And Gender As A Career Advantage	1	1	5	1	1

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	strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
Total	4	5	13	25	18

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marked *undecided*. The responses were not included in the data. Therefore, the information from the survey represents only part of the participant responses. One of the surveys was completed and collected from a supplemental educational leader. The fifth limitation was the response of the participants. Some potential K-12 Southeast Asian female educational leaders did not return emails, or phone inquiries by the researcher.

Conclusion

Asian American women are regularly challenged to the stereotypes that are ingrained in the minds of white male counterparts at work (Chung, 2008). The younger generation of Asian

American college students are adapting quicker at challenging the stereotypes (Fuji, 2012). Asian American students took pride in their bicultural competence (Fuji, 2012). The culmination of a blended experience has empowered first-generation students to go to college and succeed (Fuji, 2012).

Conversations about Southeast Asian females in leadership positions are the beginning of empowerment for women in both the ethnic and mainstream communities (Pho & Mulvey, 2003). Open dialogue encourages Southeast Asian women to explore the numerous topics that involve education: opportunities, communication and asserting individual authority (Pho & Mulvey, 2003). Dialogues, protests, and policy work are a forum to express not only the concerns of community, but also current issues (Almandrez, 2010). Personal testimonies of trials and tribulations are a critical component of leadership (Almandrez, 2010). Female leadership positions can alter the misguided public perception of certain ethnic cultural practices (Moua, 2011).

For many Asian American women, the dilemmas between individual freedom and family obligations, and new opportunities and the maintenance of traditional customs, are a part of their new life (Moua, 2011). Some women have successfully taken advantage of the educational opportunities and the socioeconomic advancements; others have experienced major setbacks (Pho & Mulvey, 2003). In the process of becoming leaders, Southeast Asian women became change agents for both the ethnic and mainstream communities (Moua, 2011).

The leadership style of Southeast Asian women in California's Central Valley K-12 educational leadership positions is a variety of collaboration and collective. The 15 Southeast Asian women educational leaders who were interviewed were extraordinary for their accomplishments in America. It cannot be understated that what they have been able to do in such a relatively short time, with a lack of precedence for their careers, is remarkable and literally rare.

Each participant was relentless in her passion for education, and her philanthropic view on her respective communities. In this study, each woman interviewed was so busy in her work and in her dedication to her family that the idea of seeing themselves as heroes to other Southeast Asian women was downplayed. They were quick to give credit to so many others that had helped them. In the time that these interviews were conducted, each Southeast Asian educational leader was the epitome of a determined, intelligent, passionate, courageous woman whose influence is literally unparalleled.

Recommendations

There are three recommendations that are the most important for the future Southeast Asian women California's Central Valley K-12 educational leadership. The three recommendations are; (1) to encourage more Southeast Asian women of K-12 educational leadership positions to network in California's Central Valley; (2) for more visibility of Southeast Asian women mentors in K-12 educational leadership field in California's Central Valley; and (3) for the continuation of support and recognition of Southeast Asian women in K-12 educational leadership in California's Central Valley. There are many more strides to make for Southeast Asian women in K-12 educational leadership positions.

There is a need for more opportunities created for Southeast Asian women in K-12 educational leadership positions to network in California's Central Valley. Current trends have indicated that more Asian students are pursuing a career in education; it is time for educational

leaders already in positions of power to have the opportunity to meet and support each other. Southeast Asian women in K-12 educational leadership roles have many demands on their time, but the value of meeting as a professional group, exchanging ideas, or lending support is priceless.

Southeast Asian women mentors in K-12 educational leadership field need to be more visible in California's Central Valley. Southeast Asian women educators of various leadership positions are numerically represented in California's Central Valley, but for various reasons, they are simply not visible. Whether it is an ethnically difficult surname to identify or a non-gender specific name, it is difficult for current Southeast Asian women educators to be recognized by future minority candidates. These potential Southeast Asian teachers are in need of administrative mentors. Mentors are needed to guide, support, and most importantly advise their mentees. The mentoring system is the start of building a long-lasting network of Southeast Asian K-12 educators. This group of previously non-existent contingent would be a continual support and place of much needed recognition for all of their accomplishments.

The support for more publications, research, and academic contributions of Southeast Asian K-12 educators needs to be more aggressive. Southeast Asian women in K-12 educational leadership positions are a mostly untapped and talented resource. The voice, opinion, and leadership style of Southeast Asian women educational leaders could enhance current school administrations. The continuation of support and recognition of Southeast Asian women in K-12 educational leadership in California's Central Valley is necessary for the current California's Central Valley student and community population.

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