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# History in the making : narratives of selected Asian Pacific American women in leadership

Mary Almandrez

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The University of San Francisco

HISTORY IN THE MAKING:  
NARRATIVES OF SELECTED ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN WOMEN IN  
LEADERSHIP

A Dissertation Presented  
to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
Department of Leadership Studies  
Organization and Leadership Program

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

By  
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San Francisco, CA  
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THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

History in the Making:

Narratives of Selected Asian Pacific American Women in Leadership

The commitment of Asian Pacific American (APA) women to communities of color is not unique. However, their passions, experiences, and narratives have not been widely shared and are rarely considered in the study of leadership. Conventional notions of leadership as gendered, racialized, hierarchical, and individual-focused experiences do not necessarily reflect Asian Pacific American women's leadership. This research inquiry calls for a paradigm shift where leadership is grounded in identity and being.

This study employed a participatory inquiry protocol with an orientation in critical hermeneutics (Herda 1999) to account for the sociocultural complexity involved with Asian Pacific American women's experiences. The data was created in a collaborative partnership between the participants and researcher. Data analysis drew upon the works of Ricoeur (1984, 1992), Kearney (1998, 2002), and Herda (1999) with specific focus on narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination. Through the exchange of stories and ideas, self-reflection, and continuous re-interpretation, both the participants and the researcher reached new understandings.

The narratives of select Asian Pacific American women revealed four key findings. First, identity and being cannot be separated from leadership. Research participants revealed that founding events, cultural traditions, and relationships with

others influenced the ways they led and served their communities. Second, Asian Pacific American women feel an ethical responsibility to carry on their legacies of leadership. They expressed a sense of responsibility to both honor the past and develop future leaders. Third, images of leadership can and do change over time. As Asian Pacific American women continue to share their stories, they provide educators, scholars, and communities with diverse images of leadership. Fourth, Asian Pacific American women place solicitude at the heart of ethical action. Participants considered recognition, reciprocity, and solicitude in their leadership.

The appropriation of identity through the medium of leadership is rarely, if ever, considered by scholars. Understanding how identity informs leadership and leadership influences identity may provide insight on the varied ways that Asian Pacific American women lead and inspire their communities.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH**

#### **Introduction**

Japanese American activist, Yuri Kochiyama (born Mary Nakahara), has been described as “the activists' activist...the Asian American North Star...our godmother, our justification, our revered elder and sacred crone” (Hyphen Magazine 2009). Although she is recognized primarily for her friendship with Malcolm X (she held his head after he was assassinated), Kochiyama has been involved in numerous liberation movements. She was at the forefront of the reparations demands for Japanese Americans (she was a detainee), Puerto Rican Independence, and Black Power Movement. She also served as an early supporter and respected mentor to grassroots leaders who started the Asian American Movement (Fujino 2005:xxiv). Even in her eighties, she continues to be an activist, protesting wars and human rights violations (Talk Story with Yuri Kochiyama 2008). Despite her vocal and visible leadership, very few people outside of the Asian American and African American communities know her story.

This research explores the ways selected Asian Pacific American (APA) women emerge and develop as leaders in their respective communities. Asian Pacific Americans refer to individuals of Asian or Pacific Islander descent, including: Asian Indian, Bangladeshi, Cambodian, Chamorro, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Malaysian, Native Hawaiian, Pakistani, Samoan, Thai, Tongan, and Vietnamese. It is important to note that within the Asian Pacific American community there is a diversity of perspectives, experiences, and histories. The aim of this study is to propose different ways of understanding and appropriating leadership that is more

inclusive and incorporates considerations of narrative, identity, being, and community.

### **Statement of Research Topic**

*Kasaysayan at ngayon* is a Tagalog phrase that means “history in the making.” Yuri Kochiyama, like many unknown Asian Pacific American women, epitomizes this idea. Asian Pacific American women serve as leaders in their families, universities, and community organizations. They are scholars, elected officials, and grassroots organizers. In their activism and their achievements, they break barriers and create avenues for more women of color to lead, influence, and support others (Turner 2007). They also help reconstruct the image of traditional leaders from White men managing people and production to women, and for the purpose of this inquiry, women of color, transforming ethnic communities.

Social justice educator, Lee Anne Bell (1997), categorizes four types of stories that focus on the experiences of marginalized groups: stock, concealed, resistance, and counter (Clover 2005:12). Stock stories are those that are passed down from generation to generation and are considered to be the common understanding of an event (e.g., the great leaders of all time have been men). Concealed stories are those that refute stock stories but remain hidden or suppressed (e.g., women have served in important leadership roles). Resistance stories are those of individuals who have challenged and stood up against oppression (e.g., Yuri Kochiyama protested the Vietnam War). Finally, counter stories are newly constructed stories that utilize the voice and perspective of the marginalized group (e.g., Asian Pacific American women practice ethical leadership in communities of color). From a critical hermeneutic perspective, Ricoeur (1999:10-11) argues for a parallel history “which would counter the history of success and victory. To

memorise the victims of history – the sufferers, the humiliated, the forgotten – should be a task for all of us at the end of this century.” Through the sharing of their narratives, Asian Pacific American women in leadership reveal concealed, resistance, and counter stories. Understanding who these women are may glean insight on the various ways Asian Pacific American women lead within ethnically diverse communities.

Without the considerations of narrative, being, and identity, leadership cannot be fully discussed or understood. For instance, visionary leaders cannot realize their goals if they are not grounded in their history, values, or customs. Ricoeur (1984:69) writes, “The labor of imagination is not born from nothing. It is bound in one way or another to the tradition’s paradigms.” Leaders reflect their social, cultural, and political contexts. Their identity is also bound up with the narratives they tell about themselves and their communities. This research inquiry calls for a paradigm shift where leadership is grounded in narrative and identity.

Through conversations with selected Asian Pacific American women, I seek to understand how narrative identity, mimesis<sup>1</sup>, and imagination inform their leadership ideas and practices. More specifically, I explore how they influence identity and being in their lives through a leadership medium (explained in more detail below in Chapter Three). My primary research directives that serve as a focus for this inquiry include:

- How do Asian Pacific American women see themselves as leaders?
- What is the meaning of leadership in their lives?
- Who and what influenced them to serve their communities and enact change?
- What significance does identity have on their leadership?

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<sup>1</sup> Ricoeur (1984:53) integrates time with narrative through three periods of mimesis, as marked by the subscripts of mimesis<sub>1</sub>, mimesis<sub>2</sub>, and mimesis<sub>3</sub>. This is further discussed in Chapter 3.

- How is leadership emplotted in the appropriation of identity?

Because of this sociocultural complexity, this interpretive participatory inquiry is carried out using a culturally and politically-oriented framework, specifically critical hermeneutics. This framework allows for interpretation and understanding as essential elements of research.

### **Background of Research Topic**

#### **Asian Pacific American Activism**

Racial tension during the Civil Rights era forced campuses around the country to address racial inequities. Asian American college students in California began to look to the radical ideology and militant strategies of the Black Power and Chicano movements as sources of inspiration to start mobilizing their own community (Espiritu 2008). Wars and Third World movements abroad also opened Asian American students' eyes to the other ways of envisioning independence and "self-determination" (Umemoto 2007:30-31).

Through deliberate organizing and coalition-building, Asian American students began to develop their collective voice and spoke out against the racism they faced both individually and institutionally. It was during this time that notions of racism shifted from merely individual bias and prejudice to institutional cycles of oppression (Umemoto 2007:39). Students wanted the systems and structures to change so that people of color could thrive and achieve, as well.

#### **San Francisco State Strike**

The most widely-recognized defining moment of the Asian American movement was the student-led Third World strike at San Francisco State University (then, San

Francisco State College) in 1968 (Asian American Movement EZine 2000, Omatsu 2007:59, Umemoto 2007:25, Wei 1993). The Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) was a coalition of student organizations and individuals (many of whom were Asian American) who pushed for a “New World Consciousness.” TWLF had three primary demands (Umemoto 2007:39-40). First, TWLF called for students’ rights to education. They proposed targeted recruitment strategies for Third World students (i.e., students of color), including access and preparation programs, that would increase their likelihood of acceptance into college. Second, TWLF insisted on the formation of a School of Ethnic Area Studies. They wanted to “retrieve their historical legacy as well as contribute to social change in their communities” (Umemoto 2007:40). In other words, students were hungry for courses that placed their experiences as people of color at the center, in positions of agency – rather than the margin, as victims. Third, TWLF wanted Ethnic Studies courses to be taught by professors of color. They believed people of color were the most qualified to teach these courses and empathize with their experiences.

This strike was not only the longest student-led strike in American history (Omatsu 2007:60, Umemoto 2007: 25), but it also resulted in the formation of the first-ever Ethnic Studies program in the United States. The incredible outcry from Asian American students forced university administrators and faculty to develop curricula that reflected the ethnically diverse populations they educated. The program was designed to raise the consciousness of students of color regarding social issues pertaining to their respective communities while helping them develop culturally appropriate ways of being.

Glenn Omatsu (2007:60) notes five themes that emerged from the strike and influenced Asian American activism in later years. The strike involved students from

working-class backgrounds and students of color connected to their ethnic communities. The strike was also philosophically grounded in the historical resistance efforts of other communities of color (e.g., Black Power Movement). Next, strikers turned to the teachings of global leaders in Asia, Latin America, and Africa to inform their activism. In addition, students' demands reflected their consciousness of and challenge to institutional power and oppression. Lastly, the strikers organized in mass, using direct confrontation. The student strikers served as catalysts of the modern Asian American movement and changed the landscape of Asian American identity and activism.

### **Other Early Asian American Mobilization Efforts**

During the same period as the San Francisco State strike, other local and regional activists began to mobilize (Asian American Movement EZine 2000). San Franciscans insisted that city officials address the poor conditions of Chinatown. Their concerns included inadequate housing, rising unemployment, insufficient access to health care, and an increase in gang activity. Two *nisei*, or second-generation Japanese American, women in New York established Asian Americans for Action in 1969 in an effort to participate in the political arena. College students in the Midwest focused on the exploration and expression of cultural identity. Asian American consciousness, activism, and community mobilizing were found all over the United States (Wei 1993).

One overarching concern that transcended ethnic identity politics and spanned across the country was opposing the Vietnam War (Asian American Movement EZine 2000, Wei 1993). Asian American activists, along with other communities of color, recognized that the war was not only unjust; it was also racist. The antiwar protest, in many ways, helped Asian Americans align with other ethnic groups, create a sense of a

pan-Asian American community, and develop a unified voice against the war and other issues. This served as a springboard for future actions that bound the various ethnic groups together.

Asian American identity and consciousness have transformed since the Civil Rights Movement. Specifically, APA activism evolved from grassroots mobilizing for and with underserved and underrepresented communities in the 1960s to neo-conservatism among young, educated professionals in the 1980s to community-based organizing among Asian Pacific American groups in the 1990s (Omatsu 2007). One overarching omission in many of these evolutions, however, is the narrative of Asian Pacific American women.

### **Asian Pacific American Women's Movement**

The 1970s was a critical time for Asian American women. Middle class and college educated women, in particular, helped spur the Asian American women's movement (Chow 1987). They realized that Asian American women's concerns were largely ignored by the Asian American movement and their issues did not quite fit in with the feminist politics of the women's liberation movement (Hune 2003:4). In other words, they faced oppression and exclusion both intra-ethnically (i.e., sexism within the Asian American community) and inter-ethnically (i.e., racism within a predominantly White paradigm of feminism). They responded by gathering on their own terms.

The origins of the Asian American women's movement can be traced to three modes of assembly: rap sessions, study groups, and women's projects (Chow 1987, Wei 1993). Rap sessions were informal meetings that were organized and attended primarily by college-educated Chinese American and Japanese American women. These were



spaces for women to come together for emotional, moral, and psychological support. Women in study groups developed their own curricula and discourse community. These gatherings provided a place for women to explore issues of privilege, power, and oppression through emotionally-charged and intellectually-grounded discussions. Women's projects were focused on meeting the needs of Asian American women through educational initiatives (e.g., Asian American Women's Studies) and outreach programs (e.g., Los Angeles Asian Women's Center). These were also spaces for academic advancement and social services.

Another important gathering occurred at the Houston Conference of 1977 (Wei 1993). The conference was the result of a successful proposal co-authored by Congresswomen Mink of Hawai'i and Abzug of New York. They passed a bill that called for a United States national women's conference that paralleled the International Women's Year conference. The Houston Conference was significant in that it provided Asian American women with a national forum to raise awareness of political and social issues and it promoted the development of new Asian American women's organizations. Additionally, the presence of Pacific Islanders made the women realize the need to expand the Asian American women's movement to include the Pacific Islander experience, which was and continues to be an often unheard and unseen reality. In some ways, the Houston Conference was the beginning of the collective Asian Pacific American women's consciousness and movement.

### **Significance of the Research**

The commitment of Asian Pacific American women to communities of color is not unique. However, their passions, experiences, and narratives have not been widely

shared and are rarely considered in the study of leadership. Despite the growing numbers of Asian Pacific Americans in the United States, there are still few female APA leaders who are visible and widely-recognized (Kawahara, Esnil, & Hsu 2007; Youngberg, Miyasato, & Nakanishi 2001). Conventional notions of leadership as gendered, racialized, hierarchical, and individual-focused experiences do not necessarily account for APA women's leadership (further documented and discussed in the Review of Literature). On the contrary, their leadership may be more collaborative and may have emerged through their work in culturally-specific communities (Kawahara et al. 2007).

In previous studies, researchers (Buenaventura 1997, Turner 2007) discovered that women of color did not initially see themselves as leaders nor did they have early ambitions to serve in high-ranking positions. Perhaps these women did not see themselves as leaders because traditional forms of leadership did not reflect their experiences. In addition, leadership among some women of color appeared in different environments in distinct ways. Leadership surfaced in their ordinary lives as parents, educators, writers, and artists (Buenaventura 1997). The lone soldiers or rebellious mavericks often portrayed in modern-day films and reality television shows were not necessarily the ways in which women of color expressed and demonstrated their leadership. Asian Pacific American women revealed leadership that was more collaborative and participatory than traditional approaches that were more positional and hierarchical. Some of these women did not seek out leadership. Leadership came to them.

If Asian Pacific American women can imagine themselves as leaders, they are likely to take advantage of opportunities that allow them to identify, cultivate, and practice their leadership. In addition, when women of color achieve high positions in

their organization or community, they also tend to open doors for other women to follow them or create their own paths (Turner 2007). Asian Pacific American women in leadership, then, may inspire young people to envision new futures and imagine different possibilities.

It is equally important for others to see Asian Pacific American women as leaders. Considering their narratives may provide a better understanding of how APA women, as complex and multifaceted individuals, lead and serve in diverse contexts. This, in turn, may help others reconsider how they lead and serve. Therefore, seeing a diversity of leaders benefits all – not just Asian Pacific American women.

### **Summary**

This research explores the influence of narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination on the leadership ideas and practices of Asian Pacific American women. Their narratives may reveal different ways to view, understand, and interpret leadership. Moreover, they may uncover new perspectives on the roles of identity and imagination in leadership.

Chapter One begins with an introduction to the research project and the guiding research directives. Next is a brief overview of the background of the topic. This includes information concerning Asian Pacific American activism, the San Francisco State Strike, other early Asian American mobilization efforts, and the Asian Pacific American Women's Movement. The Chapter concludes with a discussion of the significance of the topic.

Chapter Two includes the review of literature. Five key concepts are highlighted: historical and contemporary leadership theory, community-based leadership, women in

leadership, intersectionality theory, and critical hermeneutics.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2007:41) define leadership as “a relational process of people together attempting to accomplish change or make a difference to benefit the common good.” Implied in this definition are four components. The first is the importance of relationships. Leadership is not accomplished in isolation. The second is collaboration. Partnerships and cooperation are integral to leadership. The third is social change. The “common good” involves a higher purpose than individual gain. The fourth is ethics. Leadership requires an understanding of the community’s needs.

If educators valued leadership development among Asian Pacific American women, then perhaps business, education, science, and public administration curricula would expand to include their diverse perspectives. This review of literature consists of five parts: a synopsis of classical and modern leadership theories, a summary of community-based leadership, an overview of literature regarding women in leadership, a description of intersectionality theory, and an introduction to critical hermeneutic orientation in participatory research inquiry.

#### Historical and Contemporary Leadership Theory

Historical and contemporary leadership theories do not include the role of identity in shaping one’s leadership ideas or practices. Leadership theories have evolved from the Great Man approach, where certain men are born with innate leadership traits, to reciprocal models, where the relationship between leader and follower is central to the leadership style (Komives et al. 2007). A select number of current models (e.g.,

leadership identity model, social change model) do include some language about individual characteristics, but they are intended to underscore the image of leadership as a relational process. These models do not, however, offer insight on the influence of identity, culture, or social group membership on the leaders themselves.

For example, the relational model emphasizes inclusiveness, empowerment, purposeful activity, ethical practice, and process-orientation (Komives et al. 2007). Inclusion in this model refers to leaders recognizing and honoring the different perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds of followers. It does not necessarily focus on the leader placing importance on her identity. Another model that highlights identity is the social change model (Higher Education Research Institute 1996). With social change as the goal of leadership, there are seven components of the model: consciousness of self, congruence, common purpose, collaboration, commitment, controversy with civility, and citizenship. Consciousness of self refers to the leader reflecting on her identity in order to increase her awareness and consciousness about her various social group memberships. However, this value is centered on self-reflection and self-knowledge rather than engagement of identity in the leader and her followers.

Moreover, today's leadership models are largely Eurocentric and focused primarily on the White male experience (Buenaventura 1997, Chin 2007, Murtadha & Larson 2004). Several attempts have been made to expand leadership models to incorporate the perspectives of women, such as feminist and womanist critiques, but they are generally not included as part of the canon of leadership research and scholarship (Buenaventura 1997, Chin 2007, Murtadha & Larson 2004). There is even less information regarding the leadership ideas and practices of Asian Pacific American

women. Therefore little is known about whether ethnicity and gender together influence leadership (Eagly & Carli 2007:131).

In a landmark study conducted by the Asian Pacific American Women's Leadership Institute (APAWLI), researchers (Youngberg et al. 2001:4) discovered that APA women valued "an inclusive, collaborative, consensus-building leadership style rooted in principles, relationships and an ethic of service." Findings revealed four leadership approaches that were grounded in cultural values, namely: the principled leader who is guided by values and morals, the relationship builder who serves as a bridge to bring people together, the woman who "steps up to the plate" and takes on leadership roles to address pressing issues, and the quiet leader who works hard but avoids the spotlight (Youngberg et al. 2001:17). Additionally, participants noted that stereotypes of Asian women (e.g., exotic, quiet, obedient) and immigrant status were potential barriers to leadership opportunities in mainstream organizations (Youngberg et al. 2001:4). In another study of Asian Pacific American women, Kawahara (2007:24) found, "Unlike a more masculine approach of strategically planning one's career, the women found a more emergent, evolving process that weaved together their self-knowledge, growth, interests, and experiences." These approaches were different from those that are discussed in most leadership texts. When theories do not address diverse forms, contexts, and faces of leadership, it may be difficult for Asian Pacific American women to envision themselves and others like them as leaders (Kilian, Hukai & McCarty 2005; Turner 2007).

### **Community-Based Leadership**

Community-based leadership is a recently-developed paradigm that places

emphasis on community needs, resources, and leadership. Maser (1999:29-39) argues that community is founded on place, history, and trust. When an individual has a strong sense of belonging and place within a community, she may be motivated to bring about positive and valuable change to that community. Therefore, a sense of reciprocity and interdependence are important values. History also shapes how communities see their past, interpret their present, and envision their future. Maser (1999:30) writes, "History is a reflection of how we see ourselves and thus goes to the very root of how we give value to things." For instance, if the preservation of language is critical to a community's history, then members are likely to participate in programs and projects that continue this tradition. Trust involves truth and integrity. Maser (1999:39) states, "Hope, as the virtue of trust, is the enduring belief that one can achieve one's necessities and wants. Trust in human relationships is thus the bedrock of community and its sustainable development." Faith in leaders and community members alike help keep the community bond strong.

Understanding community as place, history, and trust requires a different approach to leadership. Authentic and other-centered leadership (Maser 1999:146) that draws from the community's traditions, belief systems, and gifts may bring about change in a more significant way than leadership that imposes prescribed strategies in culturally inappropriate ways. When voices from the community are considered in decision-making and implementation processes, members may feel a deeper connection to the cause and one another.

Community-based leadership has been studied by several researchers in diverse environments. Philip and Shutte (2004) discuss a community leadership development model that was implemented in South Africa. They support approaches that frame



leadership as a sociocultural phenomenon, understand leadership as a process, and connect leadership with capacity-building. Their model includes three components: leading change through dialogue, connective leadership, and collective empowerment. Dialogue promotes inclusion, collaboration, and organizational development. It can lead to new understandings and highlight significant issues and concerns. Connective leadership is focused on individuals feeling a connection to the cause, members working together as a cohesive team, and participants promoting an environment for collective leadership to emerge. It focuses on enabling. Collective empowerment calls for individuals to come together to “find their place, their role, their identity and their voice in the system” (Philip & Shutte 2004:242). Through interdependence and role clarification, individuals partner with one another to promote change within the community.

Stephenson (2005) discusses a community leadership model in Southside Virginia which also promotes dialogue, civic engagement, and problem-solving. Community leadership programs (CLP) were implemented among historically marginalized communities through the medium of art. The goal of the Southside Virginia CLP was “to create conditions in which the citizenry has multiple opportunities to ponder socioeconomic visions of what has been, what is, and what might be in their communities” (Stephenson 2005:85).

The model was guided by several assumptions. First, the arts community may have creative and successful strategies to spark dialogue between and among individuals and groups within the region. Second, through arts-based projects and dialogues, both artists and participants will develop their individual leadership capacities. Third, the CLP

facilitates personal reflection as well as social learning. Fourth, computer-mediated arts projects will help the community envision and tap into the potential for socioeconomic progress. The Virginian artists who initiated the CLP projects and the community members who participated in them exercised their agency and leadership through arts-based grassroots efforts.

Wituk, Ealey, Clark, Heiny and Meissen (2005) report on a study of the Kansas Community Leadership Initiative (KCLI). KCLI was structured as a train-the-trainers program and was intended to serve as a “leadership ripple” (Wituk et. al 2005:89). In other words, after identified community leaders graduated from KCLI, they applied the program’s ideas, practices, and concepts to their respective communities, and in turn helped others to develop their leadership knowledge, skills, and abilities. The researchers explain that community leadership increases social capital, cultivates leadership capacity, and ultimately leads to community development. They further elaborate that community leadership is inclusive, continuous, and highly relational. It also provides opportunities for learning.

In contrast to traditional community leadership programs that focused on networking and community history, KCLI centered on building leadership capacity and practical skill development. Another difference is KCLI’s broad reach. While traditional leadership programs aimed at training civic officials, KCLI participants included leaders in non-profit, educational, and community-based organizations. The researchers conclude that KCLI is a helpful and positive program for community-based leadership development.

Other researchers (Bond, Holmes, Byrne, Babchuch & Kirton-Robbins 2008)

argue that an “ethos of care,” intentional opportunities, and relationships influence women, specifically, to take on leadership roles in their community groups and associations. Findings from their study reveal five ways and reasons why women accept leadership posts in their neighborhoods and communities. First, there does not appear to be one clear path to leadership. Second, both formal and informal opportunities to engage in community leadership influence women’s decisions to seek out leadership roles. Third, women rise as leaders when they respond to community needs and cultural demands. Fourth, community leadership is mutually beneficial for the women individually (i.e., personal development) and for the community as a whole (i.e., community development). Fifth, personal invitations to become involved result in women stepping up as leaders.

Community-based leadership focuses on the development of leaders and their communities together. In addition, research has shown that this approach to leadership can be applied in diverse contexts with multicultural communities. Communities, then, may change their own destinies by turning to their traditions, values, and resources.

### **Women in Leadership**

Several sociohistorical events have led to the increase of women in leadership (Powell & Graves 2003). American women entered the workforce in large numbers beginning in the 1940s, when men were serving in the military during World Wars I and II. Higher educational attainment among women in the postwar years resulted in women pursuing other paths in addition to staying at home. The formation of the National Organization of Women (NOW) and equal employment opportunity legislation addressed discrimination in the workplace. Women, in many arenas, were seeking outlets for their voices and concerns to be heard. As a result of these events, women have made

significant advances.

In their research on women in leadership, Eagly and Carli (2007:2-6) contend there are three stages in women's access to leadership. The first is the concrete wall. During this stage, women faced unmitigated and explicit obstacles that blocked their paths to leadership and full participation in organizations and society at large. These obstacles included denial of legal rights, educational opportunities, and career advancement. The second stage, glass ceiling, describes women's ability to see the possibility of achieving executive-level positions while facing barriers that prevented them from doing so. In other words, although women were entering the workforce in record numbers and achieving great success in some areas, discriminatory practices and other factors kept them from being promoted to senior-level positions.

With a rise of more women in top-level positions, the glass ceiling metaphor no longer holds true. Eagly and Carli (2007:6) argue that the third stage, the labyrinth, is a more accurate depiction of women's experiences. Some organizations have facilitated opportunities for women to lead at the highest levels. In addition, new industries (e.g., technology) and entrepreneurial enterprises have opened doors for women to move up the corporate ladder. This labyrinth, then, represents the hidden, complicated, and intricate pathways that allow those women who can navigate through the maze to thrive while blocking those women who do not find them. In either case, challenges and structures within organizations make discovering the various roads to the top difficult to find.

One such challenge is the lack of role models and mentors for women. Both formal and informal networks are influential to the leadership development of women, especially women of color (Kilian et al. 2005, Turner 2007). Interpersonal connections

are critical for individual support, motivation, and information exchange. Interacting with women in leadership positions can help potential and rising leaders visualize the possibilities of developing their own leadership. In one study (Turner 2007), several women of color who were the first in their ethnic group to be named University President noted their commitment to mentoring. Not having had role models to pave the way for them, these presidents wanted to share their experiences and offer helpful advice to the new generation of women of color (Turner 2007).

Men, and particularly White men, have already understood the value of relationships through the “good old boy” network. According to Oakley (2000:328), “the members of the [good old boy] network transfer the competition and power advantages realized in the formal structure onto friendship patterns and alliances within the informal system.” These informal systems include conversations and networking over business dinners, on the golf course, and at social gatherings. These interactions place men at an advantage over women, who do not always have a network of support in their organizations or industries. Eagly and Carli (2007:144) note that these social interactions are so valuable that they “can be even more essential to managers’ advancement than skillful performance of traditional managerial tasks.”

Mentors and role models could change the ways Asian Pacific American women participate in leadership. In many cases they are the ones who emphasize service and leadership within the community (Fine 2007). In addition, mentors provide Asian Pacific American women with the knowledge, resources, and tools to develop their leadership, understand organizational structures, and cultivate partnerships to serve the needs of their communities. Therefore, it is important for Asian Pacific American women to both seek

out mentors and serve as mentors to rising leaders (Youngberg et al. 2001).

### **Intersectionality Theory**

Sometimes viewed as barriers, at other times advantages, the tensions involved in identity politics and the interconnection of various social group memberships make the leadership of Asian Pacific American women an important process to study. Kawahara et al. (2007) points out that very few research studies include intersections of gender and ethnicity in leadership. In many ways, the Asian Pacific American women's movement reflected the tension involved in recognizing the intersections of multiple identities, namely ethnicity, gender, and class. As APA women gathered on their own terms, they discussed how these identities influenced their lives as activists.

Sociologists and womenists (i.e., feminists of color who place the women of color experience at the center of their research or work) such as Leslie McCall, Patricia Hill Collins, and Audrey Lorde are credited with developing and expanding the theory of intersectionality. Beginning in the 1960s, increasing numbers of women critiqued existing notions of feminism, arguing that gender was not the only factor that influenced women's lives and that the narratives of women other than straight, White middle-class women (e.g., women of color, lesbians) were essential contributions to the discourse. In other words, womenists argue that issues of gender cannot be fully discussed without the considerations of race and class.

One identity alone does not determine an individual's lived experiences. Rather, the intersection of various identities makes up a person's experience. Furthermore, intersectional theorists recognize that dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression cannot be examined through purely gendered lenses. According to Patricia Hill Collins

(2000), these dynamics have to also address the matrix of domination that is formed through the interlocking components of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and other social group memberships. In her comments regarding the experiences of Black women in the United States, Collins (2000) describes the interwoven nature of this web, which makes the separation of oppressions as distinct experiences difficult to discern. One form of oppression alone cannot account for all of an individual's personal experiences.

Allan Johnson (2006) points out that specific forms of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism) are part of an overarching, intricate web of oppression. An individual, then, can be in both the dominant and subordinated positions at the same time. For instance, a wealthy Tongan woman may experience privilege as a member of a particular socioeconomic status, as well as oppression because of ethnicity and gender. These systems of privilege form a complicated web that could affect the way one leads and interacts with others.

### **Critical Hermeneutic Orientation**

Leadership and identity are concepts that can be explored through narratives within critical hermeneutic theory. Research that is conducted within this orientation allows for both the participants and the researcher to act as co-creators of texts by re-interpreting past events, re-configuring new narratives, and re-imagining different possibilities for the future.

Until the early 1900's, hermeneutics was primarily epistemological in orientation. Drawing upon the philosophical foundations of Descartes, the researcher's primary concern was to reach the truth *in* text. The object (i.e., text) was passive and controlled by

the subject (i.e., interpreter). Truth, therefore, was a permanent, fixed point that remained constant regardless of culture, sociohistorical context, or tradition. As hermeneutics shifted from an epistemological perspective to an ontological one, the previous paradigm proved problematic. Critical hermeneutics places understanding at the center.

Furthermore, language is an event to reach new understandings. The Hawaiian proverb, "*I ka 'olelo no ke ola, i ka 'olelo no ka make*" ("In language is life, in language is death") reveals the importance and power of language. Gadamer (1988:411) explains, "Whoever has language 'has' the world." Language, through conversations, uncovers new worlds and new ways of being.

Relationships, social milieu, and historical conditions influence both the interpreter (e.g., researcher and participant) and the text (e.g., narrative). Therefore, it is no longer appropriate to consider text as ahistorical, ethnocentric social phenomena. Social text (e.g., conversation, art, written document) is living text which can be told and interpreted differently in any given period of time and with any given narrator and hearer. Herda (1999:10) posits, "When we understand that language is an action that is the medium of our lives, we become connected to others in historical and current communities that have a future." Language, then, holds the possibilities for transformation in individuals, communities, and societies.

Ricoeur (1991b) expands this understanding by proposing that identity is a narrative identity (further discussed in the Research Protocol). The telling and interpreting of stories are powerful acts that project different possibilities. Stories allow individuals to reflect upon who they were in the past, who they are in the present, and who they want to become in the future. Language and narrative do not merely reflect an



individual's or a community's social realities. They are ways of being.

### **Summary**

Komives et. al (2007) propose that leadership is relational, collaborative, and ethical. Furthermore, it is a process and not a position. This study aims to enhance and expand their argument to include considerations of narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination in the study of leadership.

Chapter Two highlights key themes that are found in the review of literature. The first is historical and contemporary leadership theories. This overview reveals that most leadership models focus primarily on the White and male experience. Therefore, they are inadequate in explaining the experiences of Asian Pacific American women who serve in ethnic communities. The second is community-based leadership. This approach concentrates on community strengths, resources, and traditions. Whereas conventional theories highlight position and power, community-based models center on building capacity to address pressing needs. The third is women in leadership. This provides background information on the barriers and challenges that women face in attaining leadership roles in their organizations. The fourth is intersectionality theory. This discussion explains how sociologists and womenists consider the integration of race and class in their understanding of gender. The last theme is critical hermeneutics. This section describes the importance of language, interpretation, and understanding within a critical hermeneutic framework. The review of literature reveals a gap in information regarding Asian Pacific American women in leadership. The absence of this information provides further support for this study.

The next section, Chapter Three, focuses on the research protocol. It includes a

discussion of the research categories, data collection, and data analysis process for the dissertation research.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH PROTOCOL**

#### **Introduction**

The absence of Asian Pacific American women's perspectives does not provide leadership scholars and educators with a comprehensive or inclusive understanding of leadership. Including stories from leaders, such as Yuri Kochiyama, expand the current conceptualization of leadership to include ethical action. Kearney (2002:136) points out that "history-telling seeks to address the silences of history by giving a voice to the voiceless." This study hoped to end the silence of Asian Pacific American women's voices.

This research project employed a participatory inquiry protocol with an orientation in critical hermeneutics (Herda 1999) to account for the sociocultural complexity involved with Asian Pacific American women's experiences. A critical hermeneutic orientation also provided Asian Pacific American women with the opportunity to act as authors, actors, and agents of their own stories. The data was created in a collaborative partnership between the participants (i.e., conversation partners) and researcher. Through the exchange of stories and ideas, self-reflection, and continuous re-interpretation, both the participants and the researcher reached new understandings.

Chapter Three outlines the research protocol involved with this type of research orientation. It begins with an introduction to the theoretical framework of this study, with particular emphasis on narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination. This is followed by the details involved with the research sites, participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. The Chapter ends with the summary of the pilot study conducted in fall

2008 and background of the researcher.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This participatory inquiry on Asian Pacific American women in leadership is philosophically and theoretically grounded in critical hermeneutics. Herda (1999) explains that critical hermeneutics is ontological, where language is an interpretive event. In fact, “it is in language and our tradition that we have our very being” (Herda 1999:7). Social texts uncover and disclose deeper meaning about the worlds of individuals and their communities. Ricoeur (1991b:431) further clarifies that “a text is not an entity closed in upon itself; it is the projection of a new universe, different from the one in which we live.” Critical hermeneutics, then, takes into account sociocultural context, discourse, and interpretation to reach new understandings. This Chapter explores the three research categories that helped inform my guiding questions: narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination.

### **Narrative Identity**

Narratives disclose the world of the speaker. Arendt (1958:186) writes, “*Who* somebody is or was we can know only by knowing the story of which he is himself the hero – his biography, in other words; everything else we know of him, including the work he may have produced and left behind, tells us only *what* he is or was.” Stories are connected to one’s very being. They reveal culture, traditions, and memories.

Narratives help individuals make sense of their lives. Each story contains characters, critical incidents, a clear plot, and real actions. Ricoeur (1992:147-148) elaborates:

The person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her “experiences.” Quite the

opposite: the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted. The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.

Implications of this statement are threefold. First, personal identity is constructed through stories. Ricoeur (1991b:436) states, “It seems that our life, enveloped in one single glance, appears to us as the field of constructive activity, deriving from the narrative intelligence through which we attempt to recover (rather than impose from without) *the narrative identity which constitutes us.*” In the telling of one’s story, one creates a narrative identity. Second, narrative identity is dynamic. It changes over time in response to new understandings. Third, narratives may be told differently. One can choose which memories to recall, plots to form, and actions to take. When narratives change, identities change.

### **Idem and Ipse**

Narrative identity is a dual, temporal identity that mediates *idem* and *ipse* (Ricoeur 1999a:8). *Idem* is sameness, or one’s character. Ricoeur (1992:119) explains that character is “the set of distinctive marks which permit the reidentification of a human individual as being the same.” In other words, this part of one’s identity does not change over time. *Ipse* refers to selfhood, or promise. Ricoeur (1992:123) equates this with “keeping one’s word in faithfulness to the word that has been given.” This is the part of one’s identity that does change over time. *Ipse* also provides an “openness to others” (Kearney 2003:80). Narrative identity is not created in solitude. It involves interactions with others and the exchange of stories. Ricoeur (1992:302) writes, “What is ultimately attested to is selfhood, at once in its difference with respect to *sameness* and in its

dialectical relation with *otherness*.” Therefore, narrative identity is constructed and reconstructed through relationships with others. When one hears a new story and incorporates that new story into her own story, a new narrative is created. As a result, part of her identity is also transformed. Hence, narratives provide us with both individual and communal identity (Kearney 2002:4).

### **Ethical Aim**

The openness to others found in ipse underscores Ricoeur’s call for an ethical aim in our relationships and our stories. Specifically, he argues for “aiming at the ‘good life’ with and for others, in just institutions” (Ricoeur 1992:172). In other words, this ethical aim involves both bonds with others and an orientation towards action in the present (O’Dwyer 2009:4).

There are three phrases within Ricoeur’s statement. The first is the “good life.” This refers to an aspiration for a happy existence. Wall (2005:79) clarifies, “It is that which allows us not only to project ideal life plans but also, and even more importantly, to make genuine efforts to realize them in a narrative unity of life in the concrete situation of the here and now.” One can create this good life through the stories one tells and the actions one takes.

The second phrase is “with and for others.” The good life is only possible when one engages the other. At the heart of this ethos are considerations of reciprocity, solicitude, and self-esteem. Reciprocity is seeing one’s self as the other and the other as one’s self (Ricoeur 1999:46). It allows us to see the value and dignity of each individual. The good life for the self is precluded by the good life with and for others.

Solicitude is benevolent spontaneity (Ricoeur 1992:190). Ricoeur (1992:193)

states:

Solicitude adds the dimension of value, whereby each person is *irreplaceable* in our affection and our esteem. In this respect, it is in experiencing the irreplaceable loss of the loved other that we learn, through the transfer of the other onto ourselves, the irreplaceable character of our own life. It is first for the other that I am irreplaceable.

Solicitude includes both a deep concern and a moral obligation to others (Hall 2007:87).

The highest form of solicitude is friendship. Self-esteem cannot exist without solicitude.

Ricoeur (1992:193) writes, “I cannot myself have self-esteem unless I esteem others *as myself*.” When one values and loves others, one can value and love one’s self.

The third phrase is “just institutions.” The good life should exist not only within interpersonal relationships and friendships but in communities, organizations, and societies, as well. Within institutions, everyone is a “faceless” other (Ricoeur 1999:46-47). Therefore, just institutions promote distributive justice where resources, rights, and responsibilities are issued to everyone in an equitable, if not equal, fashion. In summary, one’s narrative identity is intertwined with genuine care for and responsibility to the other, as well as ethical action.

### **Mimesis**

Mimesis involves an understanding of narrative, time, and emplotment. Time, here, is not fixed or static. Nor is it governed by clocks or calendars. Rather, time is a liminal space. Ricoeur (1984:52) writes, “Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.” The past, present, and future, therefore, are determined and made real through the sharing of narratives.

Emplotment involves the synthesis and weaving together of seemingly disparate

and distinct events into an intelligible plot (Herda 1999:78). It allows us to make sense of history as it relates to present conditions and future hopes. Kearney (2002:145) describes narrative as “both a world-*making* as well as world *disclosing* process.” Through emplotment and re-emplotment, new worlds can be re-invented. Ricoeur (1999:9) writes, “It is always possible to tell it [narrative] another way. This exercise of memory is here an exercise of *telling otherwise*, and also in letting others tell their own history, especially founding the events which are the ground of a collective memory.” Stories, through emplotment, serve as meaning-makers.

Mimesis can be used by leaders not only to understand history and traditions, but to also re-envision new ways of being in relationship with others in the future. Kearney (2002:132) explains, “*Mimesis* is ‘invention’ in the original sense of that term: *invenire* means both to discover *and* to create, that is, to disclose what is already there in the light of what is not yet (but is potentially). It is the power, in short, to re-create actual worlds as possible worlds.” If leaders can re-interpret their pasts, they may be able to re-develop communities where solicitude is at the heart of action.

### **Three-Fold Mimesis**

Mimesis is comprised of three periods. Mimesis<sub>1</sub> is the prefigured world, or the world we enter (Herda 1999:78). This includes cultural traditions, practices, and value systems. Habermas (2008:14) states, “Inside each individual person, we find a reflection of the external social world.” Human beings are socialized by the relationships, institutions, and cultural artifacts of the world they were born into. It is within the contexts of their social milieu that individuals create their narratives and ultimately shape their identity.



Mimesis<sub>2</sub> is the configured world or the present (Herda 1999:78). It involves mediation and emplotment. Ricoeur (1984:54) states, “We are following therefore the destiny of a prefigured time [mimesis<sub>1</sub>] that becomes a refigured time [mimesis<sub>3</sub>] through the mediation of a configured time [mimesis<sub>2</sub>].” He continues that “mimesis<sub>2</sub> opens the kingdom of the *as if*” (Ricoeur 1984:64-65). Therefore, history, imagined futures, and the present are housed in mimesis<sub>2</sub> (Ricoeur 1991b:436). The present is an important time as it holds the possibility for re-plotment and re-interpretation.

Mimesis<sub>3</sub> is the imagined future, or the “intersection between the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader” (Ricoeur 1984:71). It is the refigured action (Herda 1999:78) achieved through the reading and interpretation of text. Housed in conversations (i.e., texts) are the possibilities for the future. Williams and Lang (2005:12) refer to Arendt’s work when they explain, “The world is a human artifice, an artificial place, and this both limits and renders limitless the potential for human beings to act. It is limited by the legacy of the past and its importance to the present; it is limitless because, as an artifice, the world can be remade.” Imagination can lead to action, which results in transformation.

### **Succession of Generations**

Related to mimesis are the communities that exist over time (Ricoeur 1988:113). These communities are those of the past (i.e., predecessors), present (i.e., contemporaries), and future (i.e., successors). They represent a succession of generations whose memories are kept alive through narratives. Ricoeur (1988:111) writes, “This is a ‘chain’ or a series arising out of the interlacing of the transmission of what was acquired and the opening of new possibilities.” Communities today inherit the stories of their past

and pass down their hopes for the future through the succession of generations.

Predecessors live before us. They are ancestors who were alive before our time. They inhabit our prefigured world, or *mimesis*<sub>1</sub>. Ricoeur (1988:114) explains, “A bridge is constructed between the historical past and memory by the ancestral narrative that serves as a relay station for memory directed to the historical past, conceived of as time of people now dead and the time before my own birth.” Predecessors are individuals from historical communities.

Contemporaries live with us. They include family members, peers, and strangers who influence us and who we, in turn, influence. Contemporaries reside in *mimesis*<sub>2</sub>. Those of our birth cohort and those who experience the same sociocultural events belong to the same generation (e.g., baby boomers, generation-x, millennials). Contemporaries are those of our present communities.

Successors live after us. They are generations that follow us. They occupy *mimesis*<sub>3</sub>. Their stories include ours and those of our predecessors. Moreover, the actions we take in the present will affect the world of successors in the future. For example, environmentally-conscious living now may improve the quality of life for our children and grandchildren later on. Successors belong to future communities. The succession of generations keeps our traditions, memories, and stories alive.

### **Imagination**

Kearney (1998:150-166) describes four phases of hermeneutical imagination: symbolic, oneiric, poetic, and social. The first, symbolic imagination, refers to the interpretation of cosmic signs (e.g., natural disasters, astrology) to explain common-place phenomena. For example, a storm may be read as a god being angry. Kearney (1998:151)

clarifies, “At this most basic level, the symbol is both a thing and a sign: it embodies and signifies the sacred at one and the same time. Or to put it another way, when dealing with cosmic symbols the imagination reads the things of the world as signs, and signs as things of the world.” These symbols, when expressed linguistically, provide individuals, communities, and societies with meaning for their lived realities.

The second phase, oneiric imagination, focuses on the symbolism found in dreams. Kearney (1998:155) writes, “It is the double texture of dream images – the internal transgression of one meaning by another – that invites our critical interpretation.” Dreams are not mere reflections or illustrations in and of themselves. On the one hand, events, people, and actions in dreams are symbols that may be interpreted to uncover deeper meaning. On the other hand, dreams may conceal secret desires. They may hide aspirations of power and sexual repression. Therefore, dreams provide opportunities to see the world differently through the reading and analysis of symbols. Dream interpretation is a sense-making activity.

The third phase, poetic imagination, also incorporates symbolism. It highlights metaphor and production. Metaphors help readers to produce new images of themselves and their futures. Kearney (1998:159) explains, “The metaphorical imagination not only combines the verbal and the non-verbal; it also produces new meaning by confronting a literal with a figurative sense.” Metaphors help readers to think of different interpretations of literal images. For instance, a path in a poem may symbolize one’s life journey. Productive images are created when reading and interpretation reveal new ways of seeing the world.

Poetic imagination promotes the construction of new futures. Whereas

reproductive images are those which are already in existence (e.g., recycled movie plots), productive images are those that uncover new worlds and ways of being (Kearney 1988:4). They project expectations for individuals and communities that are different from the world they live in now. Poetic imagination is also “creation-as-discovery” (Kearney 1998:160). One learns more about reality as one re-constructs it.

The fourth phase, social imagination, is not guided by symbolism. Instead, it concentrates on action and emplotment. Kearney (1998:165) writes, “It is this final stage of narrative imagination – the reader’s reception of the text – that the hermeneutic circle returns to the world of action. The act of reading is the ultimate indicator of the ‘refiguring of the world of action under the sign of the plot’.” Through re-plotment, one can re-envision new futures and re-remember the past differently.

Social imagination has two functions (Kearney 1998: 148,165-166; Ricoeur 1999b:15). One is to preserve ideology. Imagination here preserves communal identity, maintains stability, and promotes unity. The second function is to visualize utopia. This places hopes and dreams into the world of “as if.” It also provides individuals, organizations, and communities with the opportunity to envision possible futures.

Imagination is an ontological event that produces meaning through language. Kearney (1998:148) explains, “For new meanings to come into being they need to be spoken or uttered in the form of new verbal images. And this requires that the phenomenological account of imagining as *appearance* be supplemented by its hermeneutic account as *meaning*.” Therefore, images alone do not lead to change. Individuals and communities can uncover new worlds, think of different possibilities, and lead different lives through imagination.

### **Entrée to the Research Sites**

The research sites were all located in the United States. They included Chula Vista, CA; Sacramento, CA; Honolulu, HI; Corvallis, OR, and San Diego, CA. The formal research conversations took place between July 2009 and September 2009. The research study was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of San Francisco's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (please see Appendix A for the IRBPHS Approval Letter).

I began the formal conversations in July 2009. I traveled to San Diego and had a conversation with a group of three leaders working on local and national issues concerning Filipino and Asian Pacific American communities. Then I met with an executive director of a national Southeast Asian organization. Although the organization is based in Washington, D.C., I was able to meet with this participant at the conclusion of a three-day leadership institute held in Sacramento. I then traveled to Honolulu to meet with a businesswoman working on programs and services for Hawaiian girls and women. Next, I traveled back to the mainland to meet with an administrator at a public university who works on Asian Pacific American issues in higher education. My last conversation took place back in San Diego with an executive who organizes the city's annual Asian Film Festival.

### **Selected Conversation Partners**

Seven women participated in my research study (please see Appendix B for a complete list of the research participants). They included executive directors, administrators, and community members from various groups and organizations. Several conversation partners were selected based on their participation in national Asian Pacific

American organizations and initiatives. In addition, I used my personal connections and recommendations from colleagues of Asian Pacific American women who are serving their ethnic communities in meaningful ways.

I initially contacted each participant via e-mail to provide a brief description of the research topic, as well as the data collection and analyses processes. If these leaders were available and willing to participate, I extended a formal request for their participation (please see Appendix C for the Letter of Invitation). I followed up each invitation with a brief telephone conversation and additional e-mail exchanges to answer any other questions regarding the research process and approach. Conversation partners received a letter of confirmation after meeting details were finalized (please see Appendix D for the Letter of Confirmation). A brief description of my seven participants and our conversation location follows:



**Figure 1: Mamta Accapadi**

**Mamta Accapadi, Ph.D.**

Mamta Accapadi identifies as Desi American and is the Dean of Student Life at Oregon State University (OSU) (please see Figure 1 for a photograph of Dr. Accapadi).

She has been an advocate for the inclusion of Desi perspectives within the Asian Pacific American

narrative. She also works with community leaders to

promote social justice education through her work in the Social Justice Training Institute (SJTI) and other organizations. Her current projects include leadership and mentorship programs for Asian Pacific American college students and professionals. I have known Mamta for three years through our involvement in the Asian Pacific Islander caucus of

the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (APINCORE). Our conversation took place in her office at OSU in Corvallis, OR.



**Figure 2: JoAnn Fields**

### **JoAnn Fields**

JoAnn Fields identifies as Filipino American and is a Partnership Specialist for the U.S. Census Bureau (please see Figure 2 for a photograph of Ms. Fields). JoAnn is involved in several Asian Pacific American community organizations, including the Filipino American Educators

Association (FILAMEDA) of San Diego, National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA), and the San Diego Alliance for Asian Pacific Islander Americans. Her efforts are currently focused on providing an accurate count of all Asian Pacific Americans in San Diego County for the 2010 census. I was introduced to JoAnn via e-mail by one of my colleagues. I met JoAnn for the first time on the evening of our conversation. She was one of three participants in the group conversation, which took place in her home in Chula Vista, CA.



**Figure 3: Theresa Humphrey**

### **Theresa Humphrey**

Theresa Humphrey identifies as Filipino and African American and is an active member of the San Diego community (please see Figure 3 for a photograph of Ms. Humphrey). She has been involved with a number of groups and initiatives including her church, parental involvement in schools, and job development programs.

Her current priorities are attaining additional education and serving as a positive role

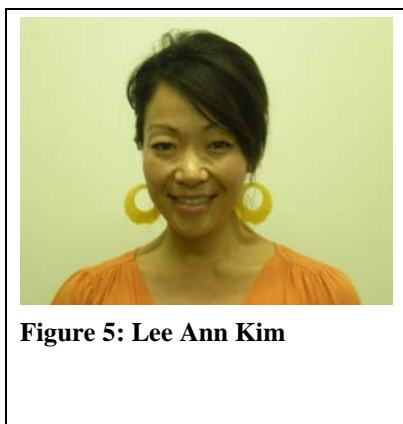
model for her friends and family. I was introduced to Theresa by JoAnn Fields and met her on the evening of our conversation. She was the second participant of the group conversation that took place in JoAnn's home in Chula Vista, CA.



**Cheryl Ka'uhane Lupenui, M.B.A.**

Cheryl Ka'uhane Lupenui identifies as Hawaiian, Chinese, and Caucasian and is president and chief executive officer of the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) of O'ahu (please see Figure 4 for a photograph of Ms. Lupenui). She is the youngest and first Native Hawaiian to hold this post. She has also

served as a board member of several organizations, including PBS Hawai'i and Hawai'i Alliance of Nonprofit Organizations. One of Cheryl's projects is the Women Leading Community Change retreat for female leaders in Hawai'i. I extended an invitation to her to participate in my study after reading her biography on The Center for Asian Pacific American Women website. I met her for the first time on the morning of our conversation, which took place in her office in Honolulu, HI.



**Lee Ann Kim**

Lee Ann Kim identifies as Korean American and is the executive director of the San Diego Asian Film Foundation (please see Figure 5 for a photograph of Ms. Kim). She was recently awarded Best Festival Director by the International Film Festival Summit in 2008 and is

involved with a number of community organizations in San Diego, including the



Orchestra Nova and the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau. One of her many projects includes the coordination and promotion of the foundation's annual film festival. I contacted Lee Ann upon recommendation from my colleague. Although I knew of her as a news anchor in San Diego prior to our meeting, I did not meet her in person until the afternoon of our conversation, which took place in her office in San Diego, CA.



**Figure 6: Vicky Lagula**

**Vicky Lagula**

Vicky Lagula identifies as Filipino and is a retired nurse (please see Figure 6 for a photograph of Ms. Lagula).

She is involved in the Asingan Association, Filipino Women's Club, and the Pilipino American Senior Citizens of San Diego County Corporation (PASCCO).

She has volunteered and mobilized community members on programs and campaigns focused on the aging and elderly such as a hot meals program and basic healthcare services. Her current campaign is the preservation of the San Diego Samahan Senior Center. I was introduced to Vicky by JoAnn (Vicky's daughter), who persuaded her to contribute to the group conversation as a third participant. I met Vicky for the first time on the evening of our conversation, which took place in her home in Chula Vista, CA.



**Figure 7: Doua Thor**

**Doua Thor, M.S.W.**

Doua Thor identifies as Hmong American and is the executive director for the Southeast Asian Resource Action Center (SEARAC) (please see Figure 7 for a photograph of Ms. Thor). She became the executive director of the national organization at age 28. Her

personal and professional passion has focused on policy development and political participation of Southeast Asian and refugee communities. Her current initiative is centered on programs and policies for the elderly and aging. I invited her to participate in my study upon the recommendation of my pilot study conversation partner. I met her for the first time on the evening of our conversation, which took place in Sacramento, CA at the conclusion of the Southeast Asian American Leadership & Advocacy Training.

### **Research Categories**

This section provides an overview of the three research categories that guided both my formal conversations and data analysis. As indicated above in the theoretical framework, these categories were narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination.

The first research category, narrative identity, provided Asian Pacific American women the opportunity to reflect on founding events (i.e., significant moments that resulted in a complete change in understanding), share their stories through conversations, and reach new understandings through the review and discussion of their transcript. These conversations also revealed the influence and evolution of their individual and communal identities in relationship to their leadership ideas and practices.

The second category, mimesis, created a space for each participant to make connections between her history and traditions, present situations, and imagined hopes for the future. Through reflection and sharing, participants emplotted and re-emplotted their leadership narratives.

The third category, imagination, highlighted the possible worlds for themselves (as individuals) and their communities. Their imagined futures, coupled with action, led to transformational change in their respective organizations and societies. Research

questions were developed keeping these categories in mind.

### Research Questions

Critical hermeneutic participatory inquiry relies on the organic and dynamic nature of conversations. The to and fro play that occurs in true conversations allow participants and the researcher to engage in one another’s stories, participate in self-discovery, and make meaning in their own lives. Bernstein (1983:162) states, “In a genuine dialogue or conversation, what is to be understood [*die Sache*] guides the movement of the dialogue.” He goes on to explain that Gadamer’s analysis of conversation “stresses not only the common bond and the genuine novelty that a turn in a conversation may take but the mutuality, the respect required, the genuine seeking to listen to and understand what the other is saying, the openness to risk and test our own opinions through such an encounter” (Bernstein 1983:162). The research questions below provided a general guideline during the research conversations (please see Table 1 for the list of guiding questions). They were not intended to be used as a standard ask-and-reply procedure interview. Rather, they helped frame the conversation so that participants and researcher, alike, were able to ask and answer these questions together.

**Table 1: Research Category and Research Question Guides**

<b>Research Category</b>	<b>Research Question Guides</b>
Narrative Identity	How do you identify yourself? What does leadership mean to you? How does your identity help shape your leadership?
Mimesis	Who or what influenced you to become involved in your community? How do these people or events shape your ideas of leadership? How have your ideas of leadership changed over time? What are the defining moments in your leadership journey?
Imagination	What are the important issues your community is facing? How did you become aware of these issues? What are your hopes and dreams for your community?

Research participants received a copy of these questions prior to the conversation to provide them with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences prior to our meeting.

### **Data Collection: Research Conversations**

Critical hermeneutic participatory inquiry relies on authentic conversation between the participant and researcher. Kearney (2002:133) writes, “Life is always on the way to narrative, but it does not arrive there until someone hears and tells this life as a story.” These conversations provided participants and the researcher the opportunity to share their narratives. Conversations took place at participants’ desired locations. All formal, follow-up conversations were conducted in English. Formal research conversations were also videotaped and audio recorded with participants’ written permission. After the conversations were transcribed, each participant received a copy to add, change, and delete as she saw fit (please see Appendix E for the Follow-up Letter). These edits were incorporated into the final draft of the transcript.

### **Data Collection: Researcher’s Journal**

A research journal was used to document my findings. In addition, I used this journal to record my thoughts, ideas, and observations as I conducted my research. The journal included new understandings, important events, and research notes. It served as a “life source” (Herda 1999:98) to help guide my data analysis and assist me with my own self-reflection.

### **Data Collection Timeline**

Data collection was completed during the summer 2009. The majority of conversations occurred in July 2009 and the last conversation took place in September 2009. All conversations took place in the United States.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis in critical hermeneutic inquiry is a creative and collaborative process where new understandings come to light. Throughout the data analysis process, both the researcher and the participants engage the text in the hope of learning more about themselves. Therefore, the researcher is not removed from the text as a neutral recorder of information. Rather, the researcher and the participants together co-create the text and interpret meaning.

Outlined below are the steps involved in my data analysis (Herda 1999:98-99):

- The first was the act of transcribing the recorded research conversations. Through the typing of the conversation and the reading of the transcript, I was able to re-remember the event from a different point of view.
- The second step involved both interpretation and initial data analysis. I noted emerging themes and key ideas that were revealed in the transcript.
- The third step was incorporating direct quotes with these emerging themes. These quotes drew attention to the themes using the participants' voices.
- Fourth, I supported the highlighted themes with notes and ideas from my research journal and observations from the videotaped conversations.
- Fifth, these key ideas and quotes were organized into my research categories (i.e., narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination). The research categories were considered in both the initial and secondary analyses (discussed below).
- Upon completion of the transcription, I provided a copy to each of my research participants, who had the opportunity to edit, add, or delete any parts as they saw fit. This was their opportunity not only to clarify their ideas and statements, but to

also engage the text for self-reflection and interpretation.

- Then, my conversation partners and I had individual follow-up conversations to share these reflections, note any key themes from the review of the transcript and the research process itself, and discuss new understandings.
- Next, I incorporated the information from our conversations and the edited transcript into my secondary data analysis. This was a deeper study of the text and drew heavily on critical hermeneutics theory.
- Afterward, I developed the written analysis. This newly created text integrated the participants' narratives with critical hermeneutic theory.
- The written analysis was followed by a description of implications of this research study.
- The data analysis concluded with suggested research topics for further study.

Participatory research within a critical hermeneutic tradition allows both the researcher and the participant to document the intersections and parallels between their lives, and note new understandings they have about themselves. Ricoeur (1991b:431) emphasizes that “the meaning of the significance of the story wells up from the *intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader*. Thus the act of reading becomes the crucial moment of the entire analysis. On this act rests the ability of the story to transfigure the experience of the reader.” This movement from interpreting texts to taking action is also known as appropriation (Herda 1999:86). Appropriation is an essential element for the development of individuals and communities alike.

The next section includes a brief description of the pilot study I conducted in preparation for this study, as well as key lessons I gained from that experience. These

lessons were incorporated in my research protocol for my dissertation research project.

### **Pilot Study Summary**

I conducted my pilot study in October 2008 (please see Appendix F for the Pilot Study and Conversation Transcript with Mai Yang Vang). The pilot study allowed me to field test my research questions, protocol, and categories in preparation for my dissertation study. The conversations that took place during and after my pilot study confirmed the necessity of this research and reaffirmed my commitment to my dissertation study.

My conversation partner was Mai Yang Vang, a recent graduate of the University of San Francisco (USF). She identifies as Hmong, and more broadly as Southeast Asian American. She is currently a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where she is pursuing her master's degrees in Asian American Studies, as well as public health. She is the oldest of fifteen children and the first in her family to attend college.

Mai was the inspiration for my research study. Although she received several leadership awards and honors while attending USF, she was uncomfortable identifying as a leader. I wanted to gain insight on her and other Asian Pacific American women's perspectives on leadership, particularly given the male-centered models of leadership that are found in traditional Asian and Pacific Islander cultures. The Hawaiian culture is an exception, however, as it honors strong female leadership (Youngberg et al. 2001). I was also intrigued by the ways Mai emerged as a youth activist both locally at USF and regionally through the Hmong Student Intercollegiate Coalition (HSIC). Lastly, in light of her service within communities of color, I was curious how her narrative moved into

the leadership domain.

The review of the transcript and follow-up conversations with Mai were revealing. Mai (telephone conversation, December 5, 2008) saw leadership as “one person on a pedestal” who possesses specific qualities such as charisma, intelligence, and approachability. As a daughter of the head clan leader, Mai was exposed to leadership where men made important decisions on behalf of the community. She explained,

If there's an issue in the Hmong community, then it's the elderly men, the clan people who come together and discuss about it. However they want to handle it, they handle it that way. Youth wouldn't have a say. The women don't have a say. It's basically the clan leaders or the elderly men with the clan leader. It's always been like that.

Another discovery was the intersection of Mai's ethnic identity development with her leadership development. Her leadership journey was influenced by three founding events: the discovery of her family's experience in the Secret War in Laos, her search for a Hmong student community, and her participation in social justice organizations on-campus. As Mai learned more about the Hmong experience, she began to develop a deeper sense of social responsibility towards her ethnic community. For instance, she participated in the HSIC to mobilize college students around issues concerning Hmong youth (e.g., higher education, gang violence, teen pregnancy). She noted that Hmong college graduates, in particular, had a special responsibility to work in the community:

We can't just get an education and walk out and start finding a job. We felt there was a need to go back and really help our community because then we really felt like there was a purpose to education because of all the stuff that we were seeing...We felt we definitely needed to take power in our own hands and mobilize the community and educate...The way I see it, you can only go so far. You can't really succeed if you can't bring your community with you.



As a Buck Scholar and Barbara Jordan Health Policy Scholar, Mai observed the exclusion of Southeast Asians in educational, social, and legislative initiatives. For example, during her last year at USF, she conducted research on the religious tensions between Shamanism and Christianity in the Hmong community. Through her research with the elders, she became more aware of the health disparities within the aging population. As Mai continued to explore her ethnic identity, she was able to serve as a leader both within and beyond the Hmong community. This supports Williams and Lang's argument (2005:14), "Community cannot thus be regarded as an overlay on top of an essential humanity; it must be recognized as part of the essential plurality of each individual." It was evident in the case of Mai that identity, gender, and sense of community influenced her leadership.

Despite her numerous leadership awards, Mai did not consider herself as a leader at all. She was more comfortable describing herself as someone who is "just trying to make change in the community." She admitted hesitance and uneasiness in using the term "leader" so she preferred to discuss the idea of role models. Her ideas of leadership appeared to be more aligned with traditional theories, where leadership is essentialized, gendered, and unidirectional. I wondered how many other Asian Pacific American women felt the way she did. Reconsidering leadership from a critical hermeneutic framework, particularly for Asian Pacific American women, holds numerous possibilities. Images could shift from positional power and characteristic-determined leadership to leadership as service grounded in narrative, identity, and being. Imagination, appropriation, and re-empotment could fundamentally change who a community is and how they want to be in the future. Counter narratives could be created

to reveal the stories of Asian Pacific American women and other marginalized groups. Interpreting and understanding leadership from a critical hermeneutic perspective may provide others with a voice.

The pilot study provided me with other key lessons. First, it solidified my dissertation research topic. As I completed the pilot study, I realized how important this work would be for current and future Asian Pacific American women and their communities. In short, there is still much to be learned about Asian Pacific American women in leadership. Second, the data analysis and follow-up conversations revealed the parallels and intersections between Mai's narrative and my own. I found myself wondering how it was possible that we shared very similar experiences despite our differences in age and ethnic backgrounds. I became more interested in the possibility of imagination as action to reach new understandings and help develop Asian Pacific American communities. Third, the participatory inquiry allowed Mai and me to create and interpret the data collaboratively. Both Mai and I agreed that the conversations, transcript review, and follow-up discussions were transformative. During our last informal conversation, Mai (telephone conversation, December 5, 2008) described the experience as "watching my life reveal itself to me" because it gave "a context to understand myself even more." In other words, new understandings occurred in front of the text, when we read the transcript and discussed it over the telephone.

In addition to those elements that were done well, I also gained insight on changes I incorporated in my dissertation study. I reclarified my data analysis process to explicitly include my research categories. I changed one of my research categories from founding events to mimesis to more accurately reflect the data. I also decided to eliminate the age

limit of my conversation partners (under 30 years old) to be more inclusive of Asian Pacific American women of all ages. The richness of data from women of any age would be valuable for this study. I integrated all of these lessons in my dissertation research study.

### **Background of the Researcher**

I was born in Olongapo, Philippines and immigrated to the United States when I was almost two years old. I was raised and educated in San Diego, CA, attending public schools until college. I received my bachelor's degree in sociology with a minor in Spanish at the University of San Diego. As a student leader in the United Front Multicultural Center, I was exposed to ideas related to social justice and I decided to pursue a career in higher education. Upon graduation, I moved to Westminster, MD to work as the Director of Multicultural Services at McDaniel College. My primary responsibilities were multicultural programming, leadership development, and community and alumni relations. During my time there, I also completed my master's degree in Human Resources Development with an emphasis on Diversity Management in Higher Education. After four years on the east coast, I accepted a position at Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, CA, as the Director for the Office of Mission and Diversity. As the chief diversity officer, I worked on campus climate assessment, strategic planning, and faculty development. Two years later I came to the University of San Francisco, taking on the role of Assistant Dean of Students for Multicultural Student Services (my current position). My responsibilities include developing and implementing division-wide cultural competence initiatives, overseeing social justice training for student leaders, and coordinating the Esther Madriz Diversity Scholars program in

partnership with sociology faculty. In all three positions, I was the founding administrator, which afforded me the opportunity to participate in strategic planning and organizational development. My real passion is leadership and multicultural affairs is my way of studying and engaging in it.

Leadership has always been an important part of my life. At a young age, I was exposed to leadership by observing the ways my mother and paternal grandmother cared for their families. My mother raised my brother and me on her own for several months while my father was away on aircraft carriers for the United States Navy. I saw how she managed finances, cared for our needs, and made important household decisions by herself. Similar to my mother, my grandmother raised her ten children in the Philippines on her own during the times my grandfather worked overseas as a merchant marine and migrant worker. As a devout Catholic, my grandmother also instilled in me the values of charity and caring for the other. In both women I witnessed resilience, strength, and courage.

My father also played an important role in molding my leadership ideas. His dream for me was to be the first female to serve on the United States Navy Sea, Air and Land (SEAL) Forces. At a young age, my father enrolled me in martial arts and swimming lessons to help me develop my confidence, independence, and leadership skills. He knew that martial arts, especially, was male-dominated and he wanted me to be able to interact in situations where I would be in the minority. My experience in martial arts was invaluable because in some ways it was a precursor to what I was going to face in my future. I see very few women in high-ranking positions at universities. In addition, I see very few Asian Pacific American women in my field.

I first became interested in this research topic when my former supervisor, a Korean American woman, left the university to take on a leadership post at another institution. Her departure was a glaring reminder of the lack of Asian Pacific American women in leadership who serve as important mentors. I cried at her farewell party not only because she was a wonderful supervisor and friend, but because I feared I would no longer have another Asian Pacific American woman as my supervisor in the future. My growing concern of the Asian Pacific American invisibility caused me to pause and take this research seriously.

My interest in this topic is also fueled by one of my personal interests: dance, and more specifically, *hula kahiko* (ancient style of hula accompanied by poetry, chants and percussion instruments). *Hula auna* (often-portrayed modern hula that relies on interpretive movements and musical instruments) is not as appealing to me, as this style of hula evolved as a form of entertainment for tourists. *Hula kahiko*, on the other hand, is a living text that engages memory and the imagined future in the present. *Kahiko* was originally performed as a form of religious and sacred ritual. The poetry and chants used in this style honor Hawaiian deities, nature, genealogy, and love. Through *hula kahiko* I learned about Hawaiian culture, history, and traditions. I gained a deeper sense of appreciation for the preservation of language. I understood the importance of passing down narratives while creating new narratives. I was taught to revere strong female leaders (e.g., Pele, Goddess of Fire). All of these lessons are integrated in my research topic.

### **Summary**

Participatory inquiry with an orientation towards critical hermeneutics allows

conversation partners to act as narrators, co-researchers, and co-learners in the research study. Herda (1999:4) explains, “Research is a reflective and communal act.” In the reading and interpreting of text, participants and researcher alike open doors to new understanding. Including the voices of Asian Pacific American women provides us with a broad spectrum of ideas and experiences that differ from commonly-held beliefs and theories about leadership.

Chapter Three begins with a discussion of the theoretical framework, including an overview of initial research categories (i.e., narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination) and research questions. Next is a description of the research sites and research participants. Seven leaders participated in the study and all research conversations took place in the United States. This is followed by a synopsis of the data collection and data analysis processes. Specific steps in the data analysis describe the collaborative process involved in field-based hermeneutic research. This is continued by a summary of the pilot study conducted in fall 2008. The pilot study with Mai Yang Vang allowed the researcher to test research questions and categories. The Chapter concludes with background information of the researcher.

Chapter Four presents the data within the research categories of narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA PRESENTATION**

#### **Introduction**

Several texts are created in field-based critical hermeneutic inquiry (Herda 1999:127). The first text is found in the transcribed research conversations. The transcript separates what was said from the speakers, thereby creating a fixed text. The second text is formed when the researcher draws selected excerpts from the transcripts, and reflections from conversation partners to discover a plot. This allows for interpretation and re-interpretation of the fixed text. The third text is formed when the researcher incorporates critical hermeneutic theory with the second text. This attaches meaning to the text (discussed further in Chapter Five).

Chapter Four discusses the second text and highlights themes from the preliminary data analysis. Herda (1999:127) explains, “The object is to configure a totality of scattered events.” Several plots unfolded in the narratives of selected Asian Pacific American women in leadership. These plots unveiled their ideas regarding identity, history, and imagined futures.

#### **Narrative Identity**

Narratives connect us to individuals and communities. The stories we tell about ourselves and others reveal our memories, history, and traditions. Narratives also help us see new ways of being. O’Dwyer (2009:10) writes, “The self is never a completed possession, it is never a fixed entity, it is never a self-sufficient cogito; rather it is living, and therefore a growing, changing, and responding ‘becoming’ which is in the process of interpreting and reinterpreting itself and its world.” As one gains new insight and ideas,

one's story (and in effect one's identity) changes. The narratives of most of the participants in this study revealed three themes related to narrative identity. The first two reflect the notion of ipse. Selfhood surfaced in their stories of ethnic consciousness and their individual paths to leadership. The third theme dealt with narrative voice and the power that lies in discourse as action.

### **Iipse: Ethnic Consciousness**

Many women in this study were aware of their ethnic identity at a young age. At times, this awareness was the result of taunting and teasing in elementary school. During Lee Ann's childhood in Chicago, she was one of very few Asian American children at school. Classmates called her "chink" and "flat face." Mamta recalled a Chinese American friend telling her, "You're not Asian" to which she responded, "Come on, y'all. Let's look at a map." Their ethnic awareness resulted from others identifying them as different.

Names were also sensitive topics for two of the leaders. JoAnn shared her frustration when people mispronounced her first name:

People make fun of my first name, which is very, very Filipino. It's Marivic. But I hate when people can't pronounce it right. It's "Maverick" or they'll start making fun of me. So, it happened in fourth grade. A substitute teacher stopped at my name. Everybody in the class knew who it was and they all yelled at her. They said, "Her name is Marivic Lagula!" And that's when she said, "Well it's not my fault that her parents didn't give her a normal American name."

Her frustration led to her choosing to use her middle name, JoAnn, in lieu of her first name.

Cheryl's name was also mispronounced. She shared, "My last name is Ka'uhane.



Nobody could pronounce it. They always mispronounced it through school. I was all, 'I'm going to get married and I'm gonna get a new last name.' That was the only reason to get married was just so I could change my last name so it could be Smith." As young girls, these participants realized that they were different from their classmates and teacher. At times, they felt shame, isolation, and embarrassment because of their ethnic difference.

Doua's experience was slightly different. She realized she pronounced her last name the same way the American government official who processed her paperwork did. She shared:

My last name is spelled T-h-o-r. It was just the interpretation when we came to the U.S. of...the person who was doing our documentation. As a child for a long time I would pronounce it, "Thor." I just remember one of my good colleagues, or my mentors, she was like, "Why do you pronounce it that way? Just because it's spelled that way doesn't mean it has to be [pronounced that way]."

This passing comment was a new revelation for Doua. From then on, she pronounced her last name the way her family and clan pronounced it.

Although ethnic identity awareness occurred at a young age, three of them did not cultivate a critical consciousness until adulthood. Doua remembered identifying as Hmong as a child but did not appropriate an Asian American identity until later in her life:

I've always had a strong sense of being Hmong and I don't actually remember when I knew that. I just always did. In terms of the Asian American piece, I don't think it was really until I decided that I owned that piece of my identity more. I would say probably not till after college, probably not even until graduate studies, where I was in that age range when I felt like I should really own this and claim it as part of my identity.

In our follow-up conversation, Doua noted that these reflections were likely due to her refugee experience. As a refugee, she had a strong connection to the United States. It was in the U.S. where she and her family were able to build a new life without threat of persecution or violence. However, as she grew older she was able to critique what it meant to be Asian in America. Seeing disparities in educational and income levels among Southeast Asians led her to question equity and equality in the United States. Exposure to these issues helped her develop a critical consciousness.

Mamta developed a critical consciousness after graduating from college, as well. As a microbiology student, she was not introduced to theories, ideas, or concepts related to identity development through her major. However, she did take courses in Asian Studies:

In my search for something I took Asian Studies classes and Asian Studies was outstanding. And yet it did not answer the questions that I was looking for. So, yeah, I was able to understand kind of some deep historic roots. I was able to understand kind of colonial pieces of myself which I think [are] very important, very nice, very necessary. But it wasn't answering some core answers about here [in the United States]. What are we doing here? So for me, the awareness came late.

As a doctoral student, Mamta took independent studies courses with Asian American Studies faculty. Her professors exposed her to critical race theory, law, and issues of domestic violence. Her newfound knowledge was transformational for her on a personal and professional level. These courses helped her answer some of her questions about Asian Americans that her Asian Studies courses did not cover.

Cheryl's journey toward developing a Hawaiian consciousness spanned several decades. During her junior year in high school, she made the intentional decision to

attend the University of Hawai'i at Manoa in order to explore her cultural identity. During our conversation she admitted, "Here I kept thinking this is a place where I would fit in physically but in every other way I didn't... I didn't know what it meant to be Hawaiian. Yet I was in Hawai'i but that wasn't enough. It started a whole other journey to figure out what that means to me." Cheryl joined a canoe club and took a social justice course taught by a prominent Hawaiian activist but neither activity made her feel a stronger connection to Hawai'i.

After graduating from college, she worked on the islands for a few years then pursued her master's degree on the mainland. She returned to Hawai'i to accept a job offer from her previous employer. She reflected, "It was probably when I came back to Hawai'i in the '90s...that I started to get on that path and start evolving." Her work, as well as her participation in a *hula halau* (hula school), helped her feel a sense of Hawaiian identity, pride, and belonging. After observing her *kumu hula* (hula instructor) incorporate history, tradition, and culture into his role as a community leader, she realized there were other ways of leading in addition to Western approaches. She shared, "So I was learning leadership in a whole different way.... I'm discovering I have a Hawaiian toolkit, as well." This new understanding helped her see the value of integrating cultural traditions with leadership practices. It also bonded her to the Hawaiian community in a meaningful way. The community's stories of land, language, and cultural preservation became her stories. The hopes and dreams of Hawaiian girls and women became her hopes and dreams. She was no longer *in* the community as an outsider. She was *of* the community as a leader.

Cheryl also shared that her mother checked "Caucasian" as her race on her birth

certificate because Native Hawaiian was not an option. After reading our conversation transcript, Cheryl considered changing her race on her birth certificate because she wanted to be acknowledged as a Native Hawaiian. However, after discussing this idea with friends, she decided not to pursue the change. She came to the realization that her identity was not determined by a check mark on a piece of paper. Her bloodline, relationships with the community, and stories of her people made her Hawaiian. Cheryl, like Mamta and Doua, developed a strong connection to her ethnic identity after interacting with teachers who were firmly rooted in their own ethnic identities.

### **Iipse: Paths to Leadership**

In their discussions of their individual paths to leadership, several participants admitted that they did not actively seek out leadership positions on their own. Rather, their colleagues, friends, and loved ones recognized their contributions and persuaded them to consider leadership roles that could influence change in the community. Youngberg et al. (2001:4) state, “Some Asian American and Pacific Islander women are reluctant to claim leadership positions, saying they were just in the right place and the right time.” Three women involved with the current study supported this claim. These women were not necessarily focused on climbing the corporate ladder. Instead, they listened to trusted friends and took advantage of the opportunities that presented themselves to rise as leaders and serve their communities.

JoAnn’s political engagement began when her son received unfair treatment from a teacher. Community members at his school encouraged JoAnn to speak to the Policy Council. Her persistence in addressing the issue led to an invitation to join the council. Since then, JoAnn has participated in a number of groups that influence policy

development, community organizing, and social change. She credits that Policy Council experience as having a significant influence on her leadership journey.

Doua was also encouraged to take on a leadership role by a respected colleague. Prior to accepting the executive director position at SEARAC, she was involved primarily in policy work. She envisioned a future in Capitol Hill that would allow her to influence legislation regarding Southeast Asian communities. However, after listening to her colleague's advice, she realized that she could contribute to SEARAC in a unique way. As a 1.5-generation immigrant (i.e., someone who was born in another country but immigrated to the United States at a young age), she had the ability to lead in a bicultural fashion. She understood and valued cultural traditions, and she was comfortable and familiar with Western ways and practices. She had a progressive perspective and could work with regional and national leaders on health promotion, education, and social services for immigrants and refugees. Speaking with her colleague helped convince her to apply and eventually accept her executive director position.

Cheryl's path to leadership was shaped by her passion for business. However, there were two points in her life when this passion was tested. The first was during an internship on Capitol Hill. This experience helped her realize that she was not aware of the rules of the political "playbook" and did not feel comfortable in the political arena. This reconfirmed her commitment to business affairs. She decided at that point to change her focus from international relations to international business. Then, in 1991 Cheryl was encouraged by a colleague to return to Hawai'i to accept a position at her former company. She was reluctant to move back at first because she had just received her M.B.A. and she had established a new life in San Francisco. After careful consideration,

she decided to return to the islands. Both she and her colleagues knew that she could best serve the Hawaiian community through her business acumen.

JoAnn, Doua, and Cheryl were encouraged by their peers to consider other roles that could mobilize their communities in positive ways. In her reflections on community-based leadership, Cheryl stated, “I don’t make myself a leader. I believe that leaders are born of their community. That’s a different approach than I think the training that I’ve gotten on a Western perspective of leadership which tends to start with a leader... And I end with a leader.” Although hesitant at first, the women took on the responsibility of leading their communities after peers and colleagues encouraged them to do so. They took action in their lives and altered their narrative identities. They credit those specific moments as the start of their leadership careers.

### **Narrative: Asian Pacific American Voice**

Another theme that emerged in relationship to narrative identity was exercising language as action. Language is an event that holds values, belief systems, ideas, and knowledge that a particular organization, community, or society deems important. In other words, interpretation and understanding create and reveal social, cultural, and political contexts of the individuals who use that language. Being a voice on behalf of the Asian Pacific American community and speaking truth to power were identified by four women as important responsibilities of community leaders.

As several of the women began to take on different leadership roles, they realized there was a need for more advocacy and political activism in their respective communities. JoAnn noticed a difference between Pinoy (Filipino American) activism of the past and activism in the present. Whereas in previous years, Filipino Americans

boycotted, protested, and rallied, today's Pinoys appeared more apathetic and complacent. She noted,

I don't think our community realizes there's still so many issues that affect our community. And how do we get involved without really rocking the boat so we don't get in trouble? Because some people are just comfortable in their positions. I got my job. I can provide for my kids. I can pay my mortgage and that's good enough. But there are things that are happening but we don't see people going on strikes...anymore. You don't see anybody going to city council.

She wanted to see more Pinoys speak out publicly against injustice in the community.

In addition, JoAnn observed how few Filipino Americans were involved at decision-making levels. This compelled her to step into more leadership roles. She noted, "I really felt like we needed a voice in our community... When you go to the table, you don't see that many of us [Asian Pacific Americans] at the table. So to be invited to the table now is great, I think, because we're able to give that Filipino point of view or that Asian Pacific Islander point of view 'cause sometimes you're the only one there amongst our colleagues." JoAnn felt a sense of moral obligation to use her voice and speak on behalf of the Asian Pacific American community members who were not at the table.

Lee Ann also felt compelled to provide the Asian Pacific American community with the opportunity to share their stories. She said, "I felt disenfranchised. I felt like I was marginalized, that my voice wasn't heard, that my people's voice wasn't heard. And I wanted to make sure as a journalist that I can not just tell my people's story but people who don't have a voice... I wanted to find a way for us to connect to the larger community with our stories." In her eyes, stories not only revealed different histories, traditions, and ways of being. Stories also served as bridges toward understanding and

connecting with others.

Doua noticed a shift in the Southeast Asian American community that she felt could ultimately influence the future direction for immigrants and refugees:

We're at a stage in our communities now where you do have traditional leaders and you have new leaders. I think the community is in a space now, more than ever, to shift the dynamic of the way that we've been framing our lives in this country. So I think for a long time, we've been seeing ourselves as victim, like "These poor refugees. They need resources." After doing this work but also just living in this community after a long time, there's more openness than there's ever [been] to challenging leadership.

Doua saw the present (mimesis<sub>2</sub>) as an opportunity to re-employ the ways Southeast Asian Americans could shape their futures. She considered conscious discourse as a means to motivate and inspire community members to see themselves differently. She continued:

What I think would really excite me is to see this kind of culmination of a building of a consciousness in our communities to be really engaged in deciding their own destinies... I would be really excited to see conscious community conversations happening all over the country that they would be inviting who wants to participate. And it would be led by community leaders. Even if there aren't specific actions, there are people talking about it and people creating some dynamic opportunities for people to process and look at how to resolve social issues.

Doua recognized that language is a powerful medium for new understandings. Gadamer (1988: 404) reminds us, "Language has true meaning only in conversation, in the exercise of understanding between people." Conversations in the Southeast Asian American community can help them imagine different ways to address their needs and shape different futures.

Mamta mentioned the importance of Asian Pacific Americans using their voices



through political activities. She described a continuum of activism, pointing out the different ways Asian Pacific Americans can participate. She said:

It's very important that for every angry me, that there's somebody working in the system around policy change, that there's somebody protesting, that there's somebody boycotting something. You know, all of us are in a collective system of activism together. And I think the realization that I probably didn't have earlier on is that connection.

Mamta realized that people could use their voices in various arenas to achieve their shared visions and become more politically active.

The absence of Asian Pacific Americans in conversations regarding civic and political issues was apparent. Noticing this absence created a sense of urgency and a call to action for four women in this study. In some ways, their leadership was driven by their desire to provide Asian Pacific Americans with various platforms to use their voice.

### **Mimesis**

Narratives in the present always carry the memories of the past and imagined hopes for the future. Ricoeur (1984:13) posits, "The present has no extension." Therefore, the present is not determined by enduring or historical time. Rather, the present is made real through the sharing of narratives.

During my conversations with several Asian Pacific American women, I discovered that their histories and traditions influenced the ways they understood themselves and constructed their identities. Their stories of colonization and family expectations reflect the influence of mimesis<sub>1</sub> on the here and now of their lives.

### **Prefigured World: Shared History of Colonization**

All except two participants discussed the traces of colonization on their lives

today. The acquisition of land, natural resources, and human labor was at a cost. The loss of cultural traditions, language, and lives fundamentally changed the ways Asian Pacific American communities developed, saw themselves, and visualized their futures. Consequently, their narratives also changed.

During our conversation, Mamta shared that identifying as Indian American was important for her as an activist and as an educator. She also stated that using the term “Desi” was significant:

I am Indian American and so I honor that identity. But I think that those political boundaries of the countries in South Asia were ripped apart because of colonialism and I think Desi captures all of the brown people in South Asia before British colonialism. So I prefer Desi American... I know there's a history of that term being used in a derogatory way. So it's also important for me, kind of as a reclaiming of the term... The literal, dictionary definition of the term *desi* means “of the homeland.” *Desh* means “land” or “country.” ... I'm very clear what home is.

Desi is a more inclusive expression that those of South Asian descent may use to identify with a homeland and a community. Therefore, those from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Fiji, and Sri Lanka could belong to the Desi community despite residing in different locations. Identifying as Desi American, then, connects Mamta to her ancestral homeland, as well as a larger cultural community.

Cheryl also discussed how a sense of place was tied to her identity and culture. The loss of land due to the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy was devastating, particularly in light of their reverence and relationship to the land. Ecological preservation, food, and sacred rituals were all connected to the land. Cheryl clarifies:

You hear us [Native Hawaiians] talk about sense of place a lot. And when you look at some of the struggles of Native Hawaiians, it's around land. Many of our indigenous

struggles are around land and land in the bigger worldview of land. I feel our culture has been displaced and dislocated, that we don't have our homeland truly, at least here in Hawai'i...So where are those places where our culture can live and where our culture can flow and it can help bring wholeness to the people and bring community together?"

Cheryl's statement revealed that place helps ground individuals in culture, identity, and being.

For many years Filipinos struggled with a sense of cultural identity due to centuries of colonization and occupation from Spain, Japan, and the United States. Years of repression, violence, and degradation resulted in internalized oppression among some Filipino Americans. In her observations of racist attitudes towards her, Theresa noted,

Whether it was here in the United States or when I went to the Philippines when I was four years old and again when I was eleven years old and being treated differently because I was a *mestiza negra*... They just don't look at you the same... I guess it comes from the European colonization, so forth, and the racism that occurred."

As a person of mixed descent, Theresa experienced racism from both Filipinos and Americans. She speculated that this was due to an oppressive history in the Philippines.

Racial bigotry was not the only inheritance of colonization. Filipinos also had seemingly contradictory experiences with leadership. On the one hand, Western rulers and their Filipino supporters were known to act in corrupt ways. They used their money, personal connections, and coercion tactics to sway votes and gain public support. Their authority and the authority of elders were not questioned. In her observations regarding the small number of Filipino Americans involved in political and civic affairs, JoAnn remarked, "There's that stigma that came from Philippines, too, that politics is dirty." Some leaders, then, found civic leadership unappealing due to their memories of

corruption in the Philippines. On the other hand, Filipinos also demonstrated grassroots organizing and community activism for equity and social justice. Revolutionaries, World War II veterans, and migrant farm workers were examples of this leadership.

In their observations of different Filipino American leaders, both JoAnn and Vicky noticed a similar contradiction in their local community. They noted that some leaders vied for high-ranking positions to receive public recognition and influence decision-making, while others worked in the background and avoided the spotlight. The competing narratives were reflected in Pinoy leadership today as much as they were in the past.

It was evident in the stories of these research participants that European exploration and Western expansion left indelible marks on their identities and their sense of being. Ricoeur (1999:8) writes, “Collective identity is rooted in founding events which are violent events.” Traces of their prefigured world were part of their lives today as leaders in their communities.

### **Tradition: Family Expectations and Saving Face**

Five women discussed the considerations of family expectations and saving face into their leadership. Specifically, gender roles within the ethnic community were articulated as important components of identity. Many of these messages were passed down by mothers, who learned from their mothers about traditional gender roles.

Mamta described Asian American women as “containers” of the community:

Asian American women, we are the containers of our communities. Or we’re seen that way or we’re expected to be that way... When my mother would say, “You have to behave in this way in our community,” that would make me angry. And now I’ve been able to take that skill and have that be a strength in how I just operate in the world.

From Mamta's perspective, Asian American women were charged with maintaining cultural connections and preserving traditional values. In addition, they were expected to behave in ways that were culturally appropriate. Rather than describing these expectations as burdens, she saw them as strengths.

When I asked Doua about her ethnic identity, she responded, "My initial gut reaction is to often say, 'I'm Hmong American'... I actually often tell people about being a Hmong woman, too. That's sort of the second sentence that comes out of it. I think that identifying myself as a woman is pretty important, too." Lee Ann also commented, "I identify myself as an Asian American. But of course within the context of being Asian American, I say I'm Korean American and then within the context of being Korean American, I am a Korean American woman." In other words, to identify as Asian Pacific American only or women only did not capture the complexity of their experiences as APA women in leadership.

As women within the Asian Pacific American community, Theresa, Lee Ann, Doua, and JoAnn were expected to fulfill particular roles (e.g., domestic responsibilities), excel in academics, and maintain a respectable reputation in the community. These expectations influenced the way they behaved in public. In their study on Asian American and Pacific Islander women, Youngberg et al. (2001:12) discovered that their participants "felt they were 'making their parents proud,' that their success was 'good for the Asian Pacific American community,' and that they served as 'role models for other women.'" Doing well, then, was not seen by the women as an individual achievement. Doing well was equated with community achievement.

In addition, the four women mentioned an underlying concern of "saving face."

Saving face refers to the efforts to maintain a positive public image and reputation of an individual or community. This is a common practice among different Asian cultures.

Theresa felt pressured by her mother to earn high grades and marry well. To not do so would bring shame to her family. Theresa wanted to achieve success so that she and her family could be praised rather than ostracized by members of the Filipino community.

Lee Ann, too, felt compelled to be excellent in her cultural activities, at church, and in her academics. She was admonished when she confessed to her mother that she wanted to be an Avon lady. Her mother exclaimed, “We did not come here to the United States for you to...become an Avon lady!” Lee Ann realized at that moment that this was not an acceptable career path in the eyes of her parents. Instead, she pursued a career in broadcast journalism. When Lee Ann shared the news with her parents that she was hired as a newscaster in Houston, her mother replied to her in Korean, “You are no longer my daughter. You are the daughter of the Asian American people... And that means whatever you do, my face is on your face, you know. And so, when you do something wrong or when you’re out there, you know, doing other things, people just don’t see you. They see me and they see all of us.” Lee Ann internalized this message. She confessed, “I may be the only Asian person that comes into somebody’s living room, you know. And because of that, I have to make a good impression.” Lee Ann understood that her personal image was equated with her family’s and community’s reputations.

Doua learned this in a different way. As a child, she was taught that Hmong women had certain responsibilities:

...for my mom, growing up, too, she had pretty strong ideas about what Hmong women should be like. She grew up in a particular culture where you had very strong roles that you had to play – traditional roles in terms of cooking and

cleaning, having a good reputation, being married at a certain age. As far back as I can remember, she was pretty headstrong about what women should be like in terms of traditional roles and very careful about my role as a girl.

Doua had to do well at school and in the home. Those were part of her responsibilities as a woman in the family.

Upon graduation, Doua moved to Washington, D.C. This was a difficult transition for her family. They did not know any parents who allowed their Hmong daughter to live by herself in another city. In her worry for her daughter, Doua's mother advised, "You shouldn't go. It's not appropriate. What are people going to think?" As the only girl and the oldest of three children, Doua was expected to stay at home and care for her family. In the end, however, she did leave.

JoAnn learned about saving face because of her gender and her age. Vicky reminded JoAnn that traditional Filipino ideas of leadership were based on seniority. JoAnn's challenges to elders' authority were not seen as appropriate behavior. Vicky stated, "You do not know the Filipino way. In my generation, you cannot really be just talking back to those older ones... That's not the Filipino way. Our things are already stuck to the bone." Filipinos, like other cultures, recognize leadership based on title and authority. Answering back and challenging ideas were considered disrespectful behavior. Despite these warnings, JoAnn continued to question authority and debate ideas. She wanted her voice to be heard and acknowledged.

The stories of Mamta, Theresa, Lee Ann, Doua, and JoAnn reveal that some Asian Pacific American women face additional pressures related to gendered ideas of success and saving face. They continually cross borders in their ethnic and gender identities. They also illustrate that tradition and history inform the leadership ideas and

practices of Asian Pacific American women today.

### **Imagination**

Through the sharing of narratives, one is able to reflect on her life and imagine different ways of being. Kearney (1988:396) writes, “Narrative identity is a *task* of imagination... In telling its story to the other the imaginative self comes to recognize more clearly its *unlimited* responsibility to others.” In their discussions of hopes and dreams for the future, all the research participants spoke about this responsibility to others. Specifically, they discussed the influence of the succession of generations in their ability to imagine themselves as leaders and their hopes for solicitude within the larger Asian Pacific American community.

### **Imagining Leadership: Succession of Generations**

Conversation partners acknowledged how difficult it may be for Asian Pacific American women to see themselves as leaders when the dominant narrative of leadership highlights gender, hierarchy, and position. For instance, similar to my pilot study participant, both Theresa and Vicky expressed hesitance in describing themselves as leaders. Theresa said she was more than happy to do the work that needed to get done but preferred to stay out of the spotlight. Vicky agreed, saying, “I’m more of a background thing – not really in the front spot.” Neither felt comfortable identifying as leaders because they did not want to serve as spokespersons nor did they place much value on public recognition. However, during our follow-up conversation, JoAnn pointed out that although her mother, Vicky, would not proclaim herself as a leader she was usually the first one to speak up and stand on the front line when she witnessed injustice. This brings attention to the internalized messages that Asian Pacific American women receive



regarding leaders and leadership.

Another example was shared by Mamta. She observed that when she facilitated leadership workshops, few Asian Pacific American students identified APA women as strong leaders. Moreover, the students were more inspired by men and White women. She commented, “I think it’s important for Asian American women to see: why am I not considering my own women as effective leaders?” If Asian Pacific American women do not envision themselves or their own community members as leaders, how would the population at large see them as leaders? Each participant discussed the influences of predecessors, contemporaries, and successors in their ability to imagine themselves as leaders.

Grandmothers and mothers were important figures and mentors for several of the participants in this study. Seeing them take active roles in their religious institutions, community organizations, and families helped create an alternate image of leadership that was compassionate, other-centered, and humble. Theresa took this seriously when she remarked, “My role as a parent is the most important leadership role that I have.” Mamta was reminded of her grandmother’s influence when her mother said, “[Grandmother] was a woman who has no formal education and she’s raised eight children all of whom are engineers and all of whom have income, educated families, whose children are all educated. So who has the accomplishment here and who is a leader? ‘Cause it takes a leader to do that.” Mamta realized then that mothers and grandmothers were leaders in their families and important sources for advice and guidance.

Throughout her life, JoAnn was aware of her mother’s involvement in Filipino organizations and church, as well as her grandmother’s participation in community

centers and political activities. She shared that her grandmother worked during elections and counted how many steps there were between the senior center and the voting poll. Vicky recalled how her mother was recognized as “Mother of the Year” and “Senior Citizen of the Year.” In their sharing of this legacy of leadership, it was evident that JoAnn’s grandmother influenced multiple generations.

Lee Ann, too, named her mother as an important mentor. She said, “My mom was my only mentor and she never meant to be.” Having grown up in a predominantly White area, there were few Asian people she could turn to for advice and support. This influenced the ways she modeled leadership for her sisters. In a follow-up conversation, Lee Ann noted that her role as the oldest influenced the ways her siblings imagined their own leadership.

In addition to their family members, some research participants identified their contemporaries as inspirational leaders. Seeing another woman of the same ethnic background take on a prominent leadership role made them believe that they, too, could accomplish great achievements. For example, although Doua was only 28 when she accepted the executive director position at SEARAC, she was confident that she could do the job because the former executive director, KaYing Yang, was young, as well. When Mamta learned that Renu Khator, a Desi American woman, was chosen as the first-ever South Asian president of a four-year research institution, she remembered, “For the first time in my life I believed that I could do that... I’m pretty sure I don’t want to be a university president. And that’s not the point. The point is at that moment in time, I could believe that it was possible.” Seeing women who looked like them and shared their cultural identity motivated them to hope, dream, and imagine their futures in ways they

had not thought of before.

It was also important for five of the women to remember their successors. They realized that mentoring future generations was as important as seeking out mentors for their own development. They wanted to create a world now that would provide brighter futures for generations to come. For example, JoAnn spoke of creating a pipeline for new leaders. She shared:

My hope and dream is that we do develop leaders to take position on a decision-making board, whether it's in politics, whether it's in administration at a hospital, or in the Department of Defense, but that someone be able to speak up for our community. And not necessarily just Filipino... Leaders to go all around the table and then advocate, that's my hope.

On several occasions JoAnn, herself, came across seasoned leaders who were reluctant to give up their roles for her to have a place at the decision-making table. She did not want other young people to face that same challenge.

Lee Ann realized that her visibility on television placed her in a situation where others may see her as a leader:

So by virtue of just being on t.v., I'm automatically a leader, a role model – even though I don't want to be. It's just people are gonna look at me that way. I know that and I accepted that a long time ago, you know. So, regardless of whether or not I consider myself a leader, the truth is that other people perceive me as one because they saw my name, they saw my face, my eyes, and the way I speak, the way that I act. And, you know, I had always put that into consideration.

When Lee Ann began her news career in San Diego, she received numerous phone calls from Asian American youth who were seeking out a mentor. Understanding the importance of mentors and role models, she never refused a request. For a period of time,

Lee Ann led broadcast workshops out of her apartment. Now, she works with other Asian Pacific American professionals in the field to create a support network for young adults. Her organization also offers internships and workshops for Asian Pacific American youth to create their own documentaries and films.

Cheryl described the passing down of leadership narratives as a “genealogy” of leadership. Using her kumu hula as an example, she stated, “The people that have taught my kumu, I realize that it extends so far back. And I’m a product of that. There’s a place, a seat that I hold and a responsibility that comes with it that I carry forth.” Cheryl realized that she was a part of her kumu hula’s narrative and his narrative was a part of hers.

Mamta also expressed accountability to future generations. She revealed, “[My commitment to Asian Pacific American communities] shapes my leadership style in that it reminds me to be responsible for the pathways that I have to pave because somebody paved pathways for me and for my parents. And so, then, I have an obligation to do the same.” This moral obligation was shaped by her experience of receiving mentorship and guidance from family members and professors along the way.

Predecessors, contemporaries, and successors played a role in the ways Asian Pacific American women in this study imagined leadership for themselves and others. Seeing their grandmothers and mothers as leaders expanded their own knowledge of leadership that did not rely on leadership positions or hierarchy. Peers also allowed participants to imagine themselves breaking barriers in their own lives. Young people helped the women deepen their commitment to opening more doors for future leaders.

### **Imagining Solicitude: Asian Pacific American Unity**

In addition to increased participation, half of the leaders in this study mentioned

interethnic solidarity as a hope for the Asian Pacific American community. Hall (2007:87) writes, “Solicitude toward another is not simply the recognition of another agent like me, but the recognition of a person who makes a moral demand on me, the recognition of another to whom I am responsible.” Standing with and for other APA communities was mentioned by four women as an important aspect of collective community development.

Theresa discussed unity in several areas, “With me, it starts with the family. It starts with the community. It starts... with Asian Pacific Islanders uniting. Just the Filipino community alone uniting and working towards us becoming a powerful force to where our children know about their culture, that they have cultural pride, that they know where they come from.” Theresa saw that promoting unity within her own spheres of influence might create change within the larger community.

Doua stated, “I’ve been thinking a lot more of a community around communities of color and my work and my identity in that space.” She contemplated how her leadership, advocacy, and identity within the Southeast Asian American community influenced how she worked with other individuals and communities of color. Rather than framing her work solely within the Southeast Asian American community, Doua reflected on different ways her community could interact with others.

Lee Ann discussed the challenges that nationalist thinking may pose in developing camaraderie among various Asian Pacific American communities. She argued, “We are still defining what it means to be Asian American. We still see ourselves as Filipino, Korean, Indian first and not as brothers and sisters. And for us to really have a say and a voice and an impact in this country, we have to see each other as brothers and

sisters... I think the whole pan-Asian concept is really important.” Lee Ann also articulated a desire for more philanthropy, charity, and volunteerism as a means to bridge the ethnic divide. She believes when separate communities are other-centered and inclusive they may help create a pan-ethnic identity and system of support.

Mamta shared that forming one larger Asian Pacific American community was as important as maintaining ties to specific communities. She shared,

In terms of my leadership style, to identify as Asian American, then, ethically requires me (and I say, “require” kind of from a moral standpoint) that I am bound and committed to supporting Asian American causes. So that way, when I hear about the Hmong experience, then that touches my heart even though that’s not my experience because from a pan-Asian American standpoint, then my commitment is necessary to support the strength of our collective communities.

Mamta considered her membership in the Desi American community as an obligation to support those causes and initiatives that benefited all Asian Pacific Americans.

Many of the research participants expressed hopes for Asian Pacific American solidarity. They wanted to see all APA communities collaborate, prosper, and celebrate successes together. Doua also considered the possibilities of relationship-building across various communities of color. Imagining interethnic solidarity as solicitude could change the ways Asian Pacific American women see and lead their communities now and in the future.

### **Summary**

Participatory critical hermeneutic research is ontological. Ricoeur (1984:97) states, “Understanding – even the understanding of another person in everyday life – is never a direct intuition but always a reconstruction.” Conversation partners interact with

the researcher and the text (e.g., transcript) to reach new understandings. Herda (1999:88) states, “Our social reality redescribed in a text is raised to fiction when it moves from our conversations to a written document. No written document replicates social reality exactly and, as such, is a fiction that carries with it the possibility of new selves and new worlds being proposed and appropriated.” By engaging in conversations and reading texts, participants can process what was said and identify themes for further exploration.

Chapter Four describes seven themes that were revealed in research conversations. Each theme is organized under the research categories of narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination. The first is ethnic consciousness. Several women discussed how their ethnic identity development deepened their commitment to the Asian Pacific American community. The second theme is paths to leadership. Three women described how their peers influenced their decisions to step into leadership roles. The third theme is the Asian Pacific American voice. Half of the women stated that speaking on behalf of the APA community was an important responsibility for them. The fourth is a shared history of colonization. All except three shared how colonization shaped their leadership practices. The fifth is family expectations. A few of the participants reflected on their dual roles as women and leaders. The sixth theme is succession of generations. Leaders of the past, present, and future influenced the ways all the women articulated leadership. The last theme is Asian Pacific American unity. Four of the women hoped for friendship and solicitude within the larger APA community.

Chapter Five focuses on the data analysis. Ricoeur (1988:159) writes, “The passage from configuration to refiguration required the confrontation between two worlds, the fictive world of the text and the real world of the reader. With this, the

phenomenon of reading became the necessary mediator of refiguration.” In this Chapter, critical hermeneutic theory is integrated with the data to interpret meaning. Five topics are discussed and organized under the research categories of narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination: ipse and leadership, narrative voice, history in the present, re-remembering legacies of leadership, and re-imagining solidarity as solicitude.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

New understandings that occurred in front of the text (i.e., transcript) are presented in the secondary data analysis. Herda (1999:137) explains, “To understand requires an interpretive act based in a risk-taking venture. As we interpret a text, we also are assimilated into a new tradition, changing our history and ourselves. As such, interpretation is not a methodological act, but rather a transformative act.” This transformation preserves memory, reveals different worlds, and facilitates potential action. In the reading and interpreting of text, the researcher acts as an interpreter and narrator. She is an interpreter in that she uses her worldview to attach meaning to the events, characters, and plots disclosed by conversation partners. She serves as a narrator by using poetic imagination to propose future actions that incorporate new understandings (Herda 1999:128).

Chapter Five analyzes the data presented in Chapter Four using the research categories of narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination. This Chapter begins with a discussion of ipse. Ipse is used to interpret meaning of several of the participants’ founding events. Specifically, experiencing otherness, integrating identity in their leadership, and envisioning themselves as leaders were mentioned by participants as significant turning points in their lives. This is followed by the participants’ reflections on narrative voice in leadership. Third is an analysis of participants’ prefigured worlds in the present. Finally, the Chapter ends with interpretations of imagination through the succession of generations and interethnic solidarity.

### **Narrative Identity**

Personal identity is narrative identity. Narratives help us discern where we come from, who we are today, and how we can change in the future. Narrative identity is also temporal. Our stories change when we incorporate the stories of others into our own. Lastly, stories may be re-narrated differently. O'Dwyer (2009:6) writes, "Concordance and discordance characterize the developmental nature of personal identity as it is constantly exposed to change and re-interpretation." In other words, stories are constantly re-emplotted, re-interpreted, and re-told differently. Nearly every research participant emplotted founding events, influential relationships, and voice as agency in her leadership narrative.

### **Iipse and Leadership**

The leadership journeys of five women in this study were intertwined with and inseparable from their journeys toward ethnic consciousness. Reagan (2002:15) explains, "The paradox of narration is that it transforms contingent events into necessary episodes by providing a context or link with other events." The necessary episodes that were incorporated into their leadership journeys included stories from their years as young children in elementary school and their time as young adults in their twenties. Their stories reveal that the ipse part of their narrative identities changed at specific points in their lives as they experienced founding events and developed relationships with individuals who exposed them to new worlds. Consequently, these changes influenced their leadership ideas.

### **Being the Other**

Being the other was articulated as a significant event in the leadership journeys of

several women. In their childhood, Lee Ann, Mamta, JoAnn, Cheryl, and Doua were told that they were different from the norm. Their physical features and names were causes of taunting and teasing by classmates and teachers. Back then, they experienced feelings of humility, anger, and loneliness. They were cast as the other without fully understanding why. At that time, their lifeworlds, or “spheres of sociality” (Finlayson 2005:51), were limited to what they were exposed to as young girls. They did not have the capacity to reflect on these experiences and make sense of them. They also did not have the language to articulate what the teasing meant to them and how they saw themselves in those moments.

Meaning was not attached to those experiences until later in their lives. As they learned more about their ethnic heritage through conversations with other Asian Pacific Americans, they gained a better understanding of who they were. Those experiences of otherness in the past transformed into sources of pride and strength in their leadership roles in the present. During research conversations, the women plotted those childhood events as markers of ipse. As their understanding of their ethnic identities changed, so, too, did their narratives.

### **Appropriating an Asian Pacific American Identity**

Appropriating an Asian Pacific American identity was important in deepening the commitment of several research participants to APA causes. As young adults, Doua, Mamta, and Cheryl developed close relationships with teachers, mentors, and peers who exposed them to different ideas about the Asian Pacific American experience. As they learned about these ideas and uncovered new worlds, they developed a critical ethnic consciousness. Their narratives support Habermas’ (2008:14) claim that “we humans

learn *from one another*. And this is only possible in the public space of a cultural stimulating milieu.” Conversations with others ignited the women’s passion to appropriate their ethnic identity, retrieve their histories, and address inequities in their communities.

Doua identified as Hmong early in her life but she did not claim an Asian American identity until her twenties. When she was growing up, she saw the U.S. as a safe place for her family to escape persecution and violence in Laos. However, her formal education, coupled with her personal experiences, helped her see the United States through new lenses. Ricoeur (1991a:53) writes, “It is in the unfolding of a narrated story that the dialectic of sameness and ipseity is played out.” Doua’s narrative revealed that as a Hmong American (i.e., *idem*), she still felt a sense of loyalty to the United States. However, as an Asian American activist (i.e., *ipse*), she questioned and challenged unjust American institutions and practices. As her *ipse* changed in response to new perspectives, her understanding of the United States changed, as well. Doua realized that the U.S. was both a rescuer and an oppressor.

Mamta’s *ipse* identity also changed in response to new understandings. In her search for answers about her ethnic identity, Mamta turned to professors to teach her about historical and contemporary issues within the Asian Pacific American community. These faculty members introduced her to critical race theory and sociological concepts. In turn she applied these frameworks to her life as an Asian American. As she learned more about her ethnic identity, she participated in social justice causes. Herda (1999:7) states, “A full and mature sense of self does not stem from a developmental process grounded in individualism but instead arises from a recognition that in one’s relationship

with others there resides the possibility of seeing and understanding the world, and therefore one's self, differently." Mamta's relationships with her professors changed the way she saw herself and her community.

Whereas in the past, Cheryl had a difficult time connecting to her Hawaiian culture, today she is firmly rooted in the islands' indigenous practices and values. She witnessed her kumu embrace and embed Hawaiian culture into his leadership. This observation presented her with an original approach to leadership that differed from the Eurocentric models she learned in college and graduate school. From then on, she modified the way she served as a leader in the Hawaiian community. Rather than ignoring culture in her leadership, she began to facilitate opportunities where culture brought people together. In addition, her experience in the halau helped her see herself differently. Ricoeur (1991a:53) explains, "The dialectic of sameness and ipseity is thus internal to the ontological constitution of the person." As she learned more about Hawaiian history, customs, and rituals through hula, she developed her own ethnic consciousness. Although her character remained the same, Cheryl's ipseity changed when she met her kumu hula. He helped her discover pieces of herself after years of searching.

Teachers and peers were influential in the development of a critical ethnic consciousness among several of the research participants. These relationships led to a transformation in their ipse identities. As the women learned more about their ethnic identities, they saw themselves and their communities differently.

### **Seeing Oneself Through the Gaze of Another**

Three women observed that it was others who identified them as potential leaders. They shared how the influence of colleagues shaped their ability to imagine themselves

as leaders. Kearney (1988:395) writes, “The identity of the narrative self is, consequently, one that cannot be taken for granted. It must be ceaselessly reinterpreted by imagination.”

When colleagues viewed the women as leaders, they viewed themselves as leaders.

JoAnn had no idea that her speech to Policy Council would start her political career. Her primary concern that day was to rectify a situation between her son and his teacher. When members of the council noticed her passion and ability to communicate effectively, she was encouraged to join the group. This incident was one of many to come where others saw JoAnn as an inspirational leader. When others believed in her, she believed in herself.

Prior to accepting the executive director position at SEARAC, Doua never imagined a career as a chief executive officer of a national organization. In a timely conversation with an esteemed colleague, Doua considered a career change from policy work to non-profit leadership. Her associate pointed out that she could offer a distinctive leadership style that blended cultural values with progressive politics. Like JoAnn, Doua did not see this potential until someone else pointed it out to her.

Cheryl described her return to Hawai'i as a blessing in disguise. After re-establishing herself on the mainland, she looked forward to a new life as a young woman in San Francisco. When a colleague offered her a position at her former company in Hawai'i, Cheryl was reluctant to go. Her colleagues were confident that Cheryl would be a good leader at the company so she accepted. She credits that homecoming as the beginning of her path towards culturally-based and culturally-informed leadership. Had her colleague not acknowledged her leadership capacity, Cheryl would not have acknowledged it herself.

It was not necessarily the intention of these participants to seek out leadership positions. However, peers and colleagues recognized their abilities and encouraged them to take on other roles that could influence change in their communities on a larger scale. Habermas (2008:15) writes, “Do we not first become aware of ourselves in the gaze of another person? In your gaze, as that of the second person who speaks to me as a first person, I become aware of myself not only as a conscious subject but also as a unique *individual*.” Trusted friends saw the unique contributions and limitless possibilities of several research participants. They knew that these women could offer something that others could not. Support and validation from trusted friends allowed several women to imagine themselves as leaders in their communities.

Narrative identity is temporal. Although *idem* remains constant over time, *ipse* changes in relationship to others. As they emplotted the various events in their lives, they made intentional connections between their ethnic identity awareness and their pathways to leadership. Their experiences of being the other, appropriating an Asian Pacific American identity, and seeing themselves through the gaze of others changed these participants’ approach to leadership where culture and identity were essential components.

### **Narrative Voice and Leadership**

Language and stories contain opportunities to imagine different possibilities and enact positive change. Habermas (2008:16) explains, “Language is not the mirror of the world, but makes the world accessible to us. In so doing, it shapes our view of the world in a particular way.” When speakers and hearers engage in conversation, they use language to produce shared meaning and values. Through this relational process, both

parties create a sense of trust and understanding. Acceptance and reciprocal negotiation of world views occur in conversations, therefore the words that are exchanged create and hold meaning for those individuals. Half of the research participants commented on the power of narrative voice in Asian Pacific American activism.

As JoAnn accepted various leadership positions in her local community, she became exposed to different issues affecting Asian Pacific American communities and her lifeworld expanded to include these issues. Gadamer (1988:402) states, “To have a ‘world’ means to have an attitude towards it.” Noticing the void of Pinoy and Asian Pacific American voices compelled JoAnn to speak up for APA communities in decision-making bodies. She envisioned different worlds for her community and she continually advocated for Asian Pacific American rights. In JoAnn’s current role as Partnership Specialist for the U.S. Census Bureau, she is acutely aware of the power of representation. Her efforts to record an accurate count of Asian Pacific Americans in San Diego will play a critical role in the funding, social services, and policies that regional and national agencies provide for the community in the years to come. After reflecting on her various experiences, JoAnn realized that sharing one’s story could affect decisions on a large-scale. So she created avenues for other Asian Pacific American leaders to exercise their agency and tell their stories.

Lee Ann also wanted others to have an outlet to share their individual and communal stories. As a broadcast journalist and foundation leader, she sought out concealed, counter, and resistance narratives of Asian Pacific American communities. O’Dwyer (2009:6) writes, “Story-telling, personal as well as fictional, helps one to make sense of one’s life.” Lee Ann knew that in the sharing of their narratives through film and



other media, Asian Pacific Americans could embark on journeys of self-discovery. Not only would they understand themselves better, they would connect to their communities on deeper levels. They could also contribute different portrayals of the Asian Pacific American experience. Providing this space allowed for a diversity of voices to reflect the complexities of Asian Pacific American lives. Lee Ann used film as a way to remember the community's stories and pass them on to future generations.

Doua and Mamta discussed the power of language through different forms of political activism. They mentioned dialogues, protests, and policy work as various means to express their community's voices. From their perspective, using one's narrative voice was a critical component of leadership. Therefore, they encouraged Asian Pacific Americans to share their previously unheard and unacknowledged stories to address the needs of their communities.

Communities, like individuals, have a narrative identity. JoAnn, Lee Ann, Doua, and Mamta appreciated the power of communities sharing their stories with themselves and others. Kearney states, (2003:80), "Narrative memory seeks to preserve some trace of those others – especially victims of history – who would, if unremembered, be lost to the injustice of non-existence." These leaders did not want the Asian Pacific American community to be non-existent. They shared their stories and encouraged their communities to do the same to avoid being faceless and voiceless others. Moreover, they told their narratives to enact change.

### **Mimesis**

Mimesis provides the speaker with a medium to create and re-create narratives in light of reflections, relationships, and expectations. In addition, mimesis has three

periods. Mimesis<sub>1</sub> is the prefigured world. It includes memories, traditions, and established norms. Mimesis<sub>2</sub> is the configured narrative. It mediates the past and the future through emplotment. Mimesis<sub>3</sub> is the refigured action. It encompasses one's hopes and expectations. Ricoeur (1988:112-113) explains, "We are oriented, as agents and sufferers of actions, toward the remembered past, the lived present, and the anticipated future of other people's behavior." The narrator uses human time in narratives to determine the past, present, and future.

All conversation partners in this study were deeply rooted in their cultural traditions and inherited belief systems. Examples of this include their narratives of European occupation and family pressures. They demonstrate how traces of their prefigured worlds are integrated into their leadership practices today.

### **History in the Present**

The leaders of this study brought to light significant events and traditional values that inform their leadership today. Ricoeur (1999:10) writes, "In preserving the relation of the present to the past, we become heirs of the past." In their own ways, research participants emplotted past events into their leadership narratives. History is in the present through their common experiences of colonization and family expectations.

### **Mimesis<sub>1</sub> and Colonization**

Five conversation partners narrated colonization as an important element of their prefigured worlds. For Mamta and Cheryl, Westernization resulted in their community's displacement and marginalization. Their understanding of the devastating effects of colonization strengthened their ties to ancestral homelands. In turn, their connection to the land was associated with their own sense of being. For instance, as Mamta

appropriated an activist identity, she reclaimed the term “Desi” to reflect her bond with the South Asian community. Gadamer (1988:411) states, “We know we are able to cope with an experience by grasping it in language.” Whereas previous usage of the term Desi was once considered derogatory and degrading, today’s usage conveys unity and pride. When we change our language, we change our lives.

Cheryl also understood the bond between land and identity. For native Hawaiians, the land is both literally and figuratively a source of life. Ricoeur (1991a:54) writes, “Every life story, rather than closing in on itself, is entangled with all the life stories of those with whom one mixes. In a sense, the story of my life is a segment of the story of other human lives, beginning with the story of my parents, and continuing through that of my friends, and – why not – that of my adversaries.” As Cheryl’s kumu and other Hawaiians recounted the stories of their ancestors, she realized that their sense of identity was bonded to the earth. After this revelation, Cheryl made intentional efforts to create welcoming spaces for Hawaiians to “preserve and perpetuate” their indigenous heritage.

Oppression was another outcome of colonization. Three women discussed how the consequences of previous Spanish rule and wartime occupation emerged in their present lives. Theresa experienced overt racism both in the United States and abroad. She was looked down upon by some Filipinos because of her African American heritage and discriminated against by some White people because of her identity as a person of color. Theresa attributed these racist attitudes to European colonization. However, rather than internalizing feelings of embarrassment or shame, she embraced her biracial identity. She also expressed hopes for more opportunities for young people to explore and express their cultural identities.

JoAnn and Vicky believed that negative depictions of Pinoy leadership were due to colonization, as well. In the Philippines, many in positions of power were considered dishonest and fraudulent. They were infamous for utilizing their networks, wealth, or violence to achieve their leadership. JoAnn and Vicky also observed that status and prestige were associated with leaders. JoAnn suspected that these images may have persuaded some Pinoys to step up as leaders while discouraging others who saw politics as “dirty.” Armed with this knowledge, JoAnn set out to change that image from leadership as corruption to leadership as ethical action.

Traces of colonization can be seen in the ways several conversation partners saw themselves and their communities. Ricoeur (1999:9) writes, “The duty to remember consists not only in having a deep concern for the past, but in transmitting the meaning of past events to the next generation.” Remembering their history helped many of the research participants make sense of their present conditions while taking actions for change in the future. Mamta called herself Desi American to reflect her ties to India. Cheryl organized events that honored and preserved Hawaiian culture. Theresa embraced her ethnic identity while encouraging youth to do the same. JoAnn took on different roles to represent Pinoy leadership in a positive light. Their narratives today incorporate the narratives of their past.

### **Mimesis<sub>1</sub> and Cultural Tradition**

Five of the participants named gender norms and saving face as significant influences on their leadership. Being a good daughter, sister, mother, and role model were kept at the forefront of their daily lives. Mamta described these expectations as being a container of the community. Williams and Lang (2005:12) point out,

“Community and identity with the community are vital for individuals because they can only know themselves and act in the world in relation to others.” The participants noted that their ability to serve as leaders was interwoven with their ability to understand and engage cultural mores.

Theresa, Lee Ann, and Doua felt pressured to excel in all areas of their lives. They were expected to achieve high grades in school. They were to pursue career paths that reflected intelligence and a strong work ethic. They should marry men who came from good families and occupied the same (if not higher) socioeconomic status. Finally, they were told that domestic responsibilities were top priorities. Oftentimes, these messages were passed down from their mothers. They reminded their daughters that others were watching them.

JoAnn also received messages from her mother regarding appropriate behavior. She was told that questioning authority and speaking up against established leaders were not the ways Filipinas conducted themselves in public. Vicky feared that some members of the community would consider her daughter’s behavior to be disrespectful. Although she appreciated her mother’s advice and did not want to be disrespectful, JoAnn continued to speak up when she felt it was important.

At the heart of their mothers’ concerns was the notion of saving face. They wanted their daughters to maintain a good reputation. Other members of the community also reinforced the ideas of saving face and gender roles. These traditions, then, were unavoidable and inescapable. They existed in their world even before the participants entered it. Kearney (1988:395-396) elaborates, “The notion of personal identity is thus opened up by the narrative imagination to include that of a *communal* identity. The self

and the collective mutually constitute each other's identity by receiving each other's stories into their respective histories." Their cultural values and traditions shaped their lives as Asian Pacific American women in leadership. In addition, their individual lives shaped the cultural values and traditions of their community. Kearney (2002:131) clarifies that mimesis "remakes the world, so to speak, in the light of its potential truths." As leaders in the community, they could re-interpret the past, re-emplot the present, and reconstruct the future. In other words, the women could conform to these traditions and create new ones, as well.

### **Imagination**

Imagination occurs in the reading and interpretation of texts. Moreover, its power lies in verbal expression. Mezirow (1991:83) writes, "Imagination is indispensable to understanding the unknown... The more reflective and open to the perspectives of others we are, the richer our imagination of alternative contexts for understanding will be." As identities change and new understandings are reached, it is possible to recall and retell stories differently through imagination.

Conversation partners imagined two visions for the future. The first was to reconceptualize leadership to include the narratives of Asian Pacific American women of the past, present, and future. The second was to promote solicitude within the larger Asian Pacific American community. Akrivoulis (2003:6) advises, "Rather than slipping their anchorage in past and present experience, our future anticipations should fall instead *within* the scope of social action." The leaders' actions in the present set the stage for brighter futures for their communities. They understood that the here and now of their lives were intimately connected to their pasts and their anticipated futures.

## **Re-Remembering Legacies of Leadership**

Narratives of leadership are passed down from generation to generation. As several research participants shared, the dominant narrative of leadership in the United States is that of males in positions of power. Therefore, it is important to include diverse perspectives and ideas to provide different depictions of leadership that include those of Asian Pacific American women. In doing so, Asian Pacific American women may see themselves as leaders. Cheryl heard stories of Hawaiian leadership from her kumu hula. Mamta, JoAnn, Vicky, and Lee Ann learned about community and family leadership from their mothers. Ricoeur (1988:113) writes, “The experience of a shared world thus depends on a community of time as well as of space.” Participants revealed that narratives from their predecessors, contemporaries, and successors influenced the ways they imagined themselves (and those who looked like them) as leaders.

Four women noted that their mothers and grandmothers were their first exposure to leadership. Their participation in churches, community groups, and families helped reinforce the notion that leadership was empathetic, service-orientated, and collaborative. Mamta spoke of her grandmother’s leadership in raising a family of eight. JoAnn and Vicky shared stories of their mothers’ participation in community organizations. Lee Ann revealed that her mother was her only mentor. Ricoeur (1976:692) writes, “Between us and our predecessors, and even, for a large part, between our contemporaries and ourselves, understanding is mediated by something like a text.” The stories of their predecessors and mothers helped these research participants to understand leadership differently. Leadership was not limited to the boardroom or battlefield. Leadership was also present at home, at church, and at the senior center. Imagining leadership in those

ways transformed their images of leadership to include Asian Pacific American women influencing change in their families and local communities.

Contemporaries were also sources of imagining themselves as leaders. When Doua was approached about applying for the executive director position, she felt certain that her age would not be a factor in the community accepting her or her ability to lead. The previous director was also in her twenties. When she saw that a young woman like herself could lead SEARAC, Doua was confident that she could, as well.

Mamta was able to picture herself in the highest levels of educational leadership after learning that Dr. Khator had been appointed as president of the University of Houston. As the first Indian American woman to lead any large American university, Dr. Khator was an inspiration for many Desi women, including Mamta. Mamta shared that although she had no aspirations to be a college president, she believed it was at least possible because another South Asian American woman had done so. Kearney (1998:147) writes, “The adoption of hermeneutics – as the ‘art of deciphering indirect meanings’ – acknowledges the *symbolizing* power of imagination. This power, to transform given meanings into new ones, enables one to construe the future as the ‘possible theatre of my liberty’, as a horizon of hope.” Peers in their lifetime helped the women believe that imagined futures were, indeed, attainable. In other words, when Doua and Mamta saw contemporaries achieve success, they could imagine success for themselves.

Five participants in this study also wanted to support the development of their successors. They realized that the images they portrayed and the stories they told would shape how future generations imagined leadership. During several points in our formal



conversation, JoAnn spoke openly about establishing a pipeline for future leaders. In her personal experience, she noticed that senior members of the community found it difficult to let go of their roles and make room for emerging leaders. JoAnn did not want future generations to experience the same obstacles and barriers that she had. She wanted young people not only to imagine themselves as leaders, but actualize these hopes, as well.

Lee Ann was cognizant of her portrayals of leadership as a public figure. Her arrival in San Diego inspired many young Asian Pacific Americans to pursue careers in broadcast journalism and film-making. In the same manner that Doua and Mamta were inspired, so, too were these young people. They turned to Lee Ann for advice, guidance, and practical wisdom. She soon realized that her leadership role came with the responsibility to mentor future generations.

Cheryl's participation in a hula halua allowed her to re-articulate the ancestral narratives she heard from her kumu as a genealogy of leadership. As an heir to this genealogy, she felt an obligation to pass on these stories of the past and tell new stories for the future. As a result, she incorporated Hawaiian traditions and customs into the YWCA's celebrations. She also sponsored programs for Hawaiian girls and women to develop their leadership skills. Recently, she brought Hawaiian women together to exchange ideas and share their stories in a Women Leading Community Change retreat. Cheryl wanted to provide avenues for future generations to learn their history and pass on their traditions.

Mamta also described a moral obligation to successors. As a benefactor of mentorship from professors and family members, she wanted emerging leaders to receive encouragement and support along their journeys, as well. Kearney (2003:79) clarifies,

“Others are ultimately bound up with selves in ways which constitute ethical relations in their own right.” Mamta used her role as a university administrator to guide future Asian Pacific American leaders. She also mentored college students both formally and informally. She facilitated leadership workshops for colleagues. She participated in conversations about social justice and Asian Pacific American issues. Mamta wanted to present successors with opportunities to develop their leadership.

Asian Pacific American women share the legacy of an activist past. In addition to the stories of the APA Women’s Movement, participants of this study inherited the narratives of their grandmothers, mothers, and peers. Predecessors, contemporaries, and successors inspired them to re-remember their past, re-create their present, and re-envision their future for themselves and their communities. They expressed a responsibility to pass down the narratives of the past and tell new stories for the future. Kearney (1998:149) writes, “The poetic imagination liberates the reader into a free space of possibility, suspending reference to the immediate world of perception (both the author’s and the reader’s) and thereby disclosing ‘new ways of being in the world.’” When Asian Pacific American women become the storytellers of their lives, they act as agents who can construct new futures for themselves and their communities. They also help us re-imagine leadership in different ways. Images of leadership can and do change over time. As more leaders share their legacies of activism, our understanding of leadership may broaden to include the narratives of Asian Pacific American women.

### **Re-Imagining Solidarity as Solicitude**

Many of the research participants expressed hopes for Asian Pacific American solidarity. Moreover, their visions of unity were more about genuine concern for one

other than temporary coalitions. For instance, Lee Ann wanted members of the Asian Pacific American community to see each another as brothers and sisters. Ricoeur (1991a:46) writes, “It is in friendship that similarity and recognition come closest to an equality between two non-substitutable terms, but in those forms of solicitude marked by a strong initial inequality, it is recognition that re-establishes solicitude.” Imagining interethnic solidarity as solicitude could change the ways Asian Pacific American leaders see, understand, and relate with one another.

Four women discussed Asian Pacific American solidarity. Theresa spoke of unity within her immediate surroundings. She noted her family, the Filipino community, and the larger Asian Pacific American community as those places where she could promote unity. Doua reflected on her capacity to develop relationships across other communities of color. Her vision included solidarity within and beyond the Asian Pacific American community. Lee Ann suggested philanthropy and charity to create a sense of family. She wanted to create a feeling of inclusion among the various ethnic groups. Mamta shared her thoughts about connecting to pan-ethnic causes. She felt an ethical obligation to do so. At the heart of each of their narratives was Ricoeur’s notion of ethical aim.

The participants’ vision for ethnic solidarity was an aim at the good life. They wanted both their individual groups and the collective community to experience prosperity together. Coupled with their expressed hopes and dreams were their actions. Participants mentored young people, served on interethnic advisory boards, and modeled collaboration for their communities. They desired the good life in the present, as well as in the future.

The four leaders also spoke of the good life in relationship to others. O’Dwyer

(2009:3) states, “The identity of the individual, at all the stages of life and development, is interlinked with, and perhaps inter-dependent on reflection, recognition and expectation of the other, in personal, cultural and social realms.” Having experienced otherness at various points in their lives, they could empathize with those in the community who felt marginalized and disenfranchised. Therefore, recognition, reciprocity, and solicitude were already evident in their narratives and imagined hopes.

Finally, the women believed that a bonded Asian Pacific American community could lead to just institutions. Kearney (2003:80) writes, “It is the other within who is calling us to act on behalf of the other without.” With solicitude as a guiding principle, some Asian Pacific American leaders feel a moral duty to stand in solidarity with one another.

### **Summary**

Chapter Five focuses on the secondary data analysis. Ricoeur (1983:77) states, “The act of reading is thus the operator that joins mimesis<sub>3</sub> to mimesis<sub>2</sub>. It is the final indicator of the refiguring of the world of action under the sign of the plot.” Through the reading and interpreting of text, one can refigure new worlds and re-imagine new ways of being. This Chapter analyzes data from conversation transcripts using three research categories. The first category is narrative identity. This includes an overview of ipse’s presence in the participants’ narratives of being the other, appropriating an Asian Pacific American identity, and seeing oneself through the gaze of another. Comments regarding narrative voice are also analyzed using narrative identity. The second category is mimesis. This provides a brief discussion of history in the present through the integration of history and family expectations in the narratives of participants’ today. The final

category is imagination. This offers a summary of two new ways of imagining Asian Pacific American leadership: through the narratives of predecessors, contemporaries, and successors; and through articulating solidarity as solicitude.

Chapter Six concludes the dissertation. It begins with a summary of the research findings. Next is a discussion of implications for practice. Then there are suggestions for future research. After that is the conclusion. The Chapter ends with a final reflection from the researcher.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The voices of Asian Pacific American women such as Yuri Kochiyama and the conversation partners in this study are rarely, if ever, included in leadership research and curricula. In addition, current leadership terminology does not capture the intricacies and complexities involved with their gendered and racialized identities. Studying leadership from a critical hermeneutic framework offers an alternative understanding of leadership that includes identity, tradition, and imagination. Ricoeur (1984:81) writes, “What is interpreted in a text is the proposing of a world that I might inhabit and into which I might project my ownmost powers.” Through the sharing and interpreting of their stories, research participants disclose their worlds, reflect on their present conditions, and envision new futures for themselves and their communities.

Chapter Six reviews the current research project. It provides a restatement of the research topic, a review of the literature, a description of the research protocol, and a summary of the research findings. In addition, this Chapter includes implications for practice, suggestions for future research, and concluding remarks. The Chapter closes with personal reflections from the researcher.

#### **Summary of the Research**

The focus of the research was to understand how identity and being were explored, articulated, and appropriated through the leadership narratives of selected Asian Pacific American women. Together, the researcher and participants reflected on the ways that narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination influenced their leadership journeys. To

provide context for the study, background information regarding Asian Pacific American activism and the Asian Pacific American Women's Movement was provided.

The research was significant for three reasons. First, it provided a forum for Asian Pacific American women to share their narratives. Re-centering research conversations to focus on their lived experiences as leaders in ethnic communities allowed them to reflect and share their leadership journeys from an inclusive approach. Second, it offered an opportunity for other Asian Pacific American women to see leaders who looked like them. Seeing their contemporaries achieve success in different ways may inspire emerging leaders to imagine new futures for themselves and their communities. Third, this study opened the possibility for leaders of different ethnicities and genders to consider identity and being in the study of leadership. Understanding the complexities involved with Asian Pacific American women may offer insight on their own leadership ideas and practices.

The review of literature discussed five main topics. The first was an overview of historical and contemporary leadership theories. Next was a description of community-based leadership. This was followed by literature regarding women in leadership. Fourth was a summary of intersectionality theory. Last were brief comments that introduced critical hermeneutic theory. Little information was available regarding Asian Pacific American women in leadership. This further supported the significance of this research.

A participatory inquiry protocol with an orientation in critical hermeneutics was used for this study. Research participants included seven women from various ethnic backgrounds and community organizations. Formal conversations took place in California, Oregon, and Hawai'i. Transcripts of these conversations were returned to each

participant and follow-up conversations were conducted over the telephone and via e-mail to discuss reflections and new understandings. The research data revealed seven themes. First, developing an ethnic consciousness was a significant event in the leadership narratives of several participants. Second, a few of the women changed the ways they saw themselves as leaders when they considered the perspectives of respected colleagues. Third, half of the women articulated the importance of using their narrative voices to speak up on behalf of the Asian Pacific American community. Fourth, traces of colonization influenced the leadership ideas and practices of some of the research participants. Fifth, many of the women negotiated their family expectations with their roles as leaders. Sixth, predecessors, contemporaries, and successors shaped the ways that Asian Pacific American women imagined leadership. Seventh, a number of the participants expressed an image of Asian Pacific American solidarity as solicitude. All themes were presented and analyzed using the research categories of narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination.

### **Research Findings**

Reframing leadership from positional power to identity and being provides Asian Pacific American women with a forum to share their stories and make meaning in their lives. Although there is documented history of Asian Pacific American activism, very little is known about APA women in leadership. Reconfiguring leadership as a social construct rather than a set of characteristics allowed for diverse perspectives, voices, and ideas to be considered in this study. The narratives of selected Asian Pacific American women revealed four key findings that reflect the influence of narrative identity, mimesis, and imagination on their leadership:



**1. Identity and being cannot be separated from leadership.**

Asian Pacific American women allow us to reconsider the role of identity and being in leadership. Research participants in this study revealed that the prefigured world is present in the here and now of their lives. Founding events, cultural traditions, and relationships with others influenced the ways these Asian Pacific American women led and served their communities.

**2. Asian Pacific American women feel an ethical responsibility to carry on their legacies of leadership.**

Leaders in this study expressed a sense of responsibility to both honor the past and develop future leaders. They accomplished this in several ways. They preserved and passed down the stories of their predecessors. They took into consideration their cultural traditions into their leadership. They guided and supported emerging leaders. Participants recognized that predecessors, contemporaries, and successors were sources of inspiration and imagination. When Asian Pacific American women see leaders who look like them, they can envision taking on leadership roles within and beyond their own communities.

**3. Images of leadership can and do change over time.**

The women in this study offered multiple illustrations of leadership that varied from traditional representations. They demonstrated that identity and imagination may inform ethical action. As Asian Pacific American women continue to share their stories, they allow us to imagine leadership in different ways. Jervolino (1996:74) writes, “The text says something about the world; it is a world project. The meaning of the text (in its fullness as sense plus reference) is

not something lying behind it (a hidden intention) but something situated before it that interrogates or engages us.” Therefore, everyone – not just Asian Pacific American women – can learn more about themselves through the leadership narratives of APA women.

#### **4. Asian Pacific American women in leadership place solicitude at the heart of action.**

Participants of this study shared their visions for interethnic solidarity. At the center of their hopes was Ricoeur’s ethical aim for the good life. They used phrases such as “brothers and sisters,” “unity,” and “commitment” to describe the ways they wanted to be in relationship with others. In other words, the women wanted recognition, reciprocity, and solicitude.

#### **Implications for Practice**

Re-imagining leadership as identity and being has implications for leadership educators, community leaders, and the Asian Pacific American community at large. Herda (1999:98) explains, “Implications in such research are often two-fold: the researcher sees the world differently than before the research, and the implications are manifest for looking at the everyday problems differently.” Conversations with several Asian Pacific American women in leadership revealed several ideas for further consideration:

- New language is needed to articulate and imagine leadership

O’Dwyer (2009:7) writes, “Meaning can only ever be temporary, as the openness to ongoing interpretation precludes completion and fixity.” The narratives of the women in this study reveal that leadership can be reinterpreted

and retold with new language. Considerations of identity, solicitude, and imagination provide a unique leadership paradigm that differs from the models and theories we have today. Therefore, our understanding of leadership could change if we change our language.

- Leaders learn from multiple generations

Intergenerational dialogues and interactions may help Asian Pacific American women understand themselves and their community members on a deeper level. The exchange of stories between generations could open different possibilities for re-remembering their pasts and re-envisioning their futures. Moreover, the opportunities for guidance, mentorship, and support may help emerging leaders take on leadership positions in ways they may not have imagined before.

- Asian Pacific American communities benefit from leadership programs that promote identity exploration

Communities benefit when resources are allocated to the leadership development of Asian Pacific American women. Cheryl reminds us, “It takes a community to raise a leader and a leader raises its community.” Activities that focus on self-reflection, storytelling, and Asian Pacific American history may help women appropriate identity through their leadership narratives. In addition, these programs may open the doors for emerging leaders to consider leadership roles earlier in their lives.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Asian Pacific American women need a forum to reflect on their experiences and

share their leadership narratives in their own words. Many other stories of Asian Pacific American women were not included in this study. The following are three suggestions for future research to build upon the current study:

- Focus on a specific ethnic group

Concentrating on a specific ethnic group may reveal new understandings. For instance, Doua noted that as a refugee, she had a particular connection to the United States that women of other Asian Pacific American communities did not. Another example is the Native Hawaiian experience. As citizens, Hawaiians may experience different realities in the United States than immigrants. Understanding how different ethnicities experience leadership and appropriate identity may provide additional insights on the current study.

- Have conversations with women who hold varied leadership roles

Most of the leaders in this study were executive directors or held senior-level positions. In addition, nearly all of them worked in the non-profit sector. Hearing the narratives of women in a diversity of roles may uncover different ways in which they explore and articulate their leadership journeys. Also, perspectives from Asian Pacific American women in other industries (e.g., healthcare, multinational corporations) may add valuable insight on leadership approaches and identity development.

- Conduct research in regions with emerging Asian Pacific American populations

There is little research about leaders in areas that are experiencing recent growth in Asian Pacific American populations. The lived experiences of APA women in cities such as Atlanta, GA; Minneapolis, MN; Houston, TX; Las Vegas,

NV; and Seattle, WA may provide new understandings on the ways Asian Pacific American women appropriate identity and practice leadership.

### **Conclusion**

The narratives of Asian Pacific American women in this study expose scholars and practitioners to new worlds and innovative approaches to leadership. They expand the current understanding of leadership as prescribed traits, skills, and positions to include leadership that is influenced by identity and being. Yet, Asian Pacific Americans have not been afforded the opportunity to share their narratives to broader audiences. The common depictions of them as model minorities, hypersexualized, or subservient are insufficient in reflecting the diversity of perspectives within the Asian Pacific American community.

When Asian Pacific American women tell their stories, they gain insight into their own identities. Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997:103) write, “Representations of the self can be seen as narratives or stories about the self, cultural texts which define subjectivity.” Stories may be sources of healing, self-discovery, and imagination. Mamta explains, “Women’s leadership [theory] doesn’t capture pieces of who we are and Asian American leadership [theory] doesn’t capture pieces of who we are, either... And so I think that there is kind of an interesting spin to what an Asian American woman leader looks like. I’m not sure if that’s been really articulated.” Asian Pacific American women may discover revelations and epiphanies about themselves in the telling, reading, and interpreting of their stories.

The narratives of Asian Pacific American women are also important for others to hear. When hearers and readers are exposed to new worlds, they develop new

understandings. Akrivoulis (2004:4) reminds us, “Each time we narrate or listen to a story we become the receivers of a narrative identity that becomes mingled with that of others, thus giving rise to new, second-order stories which encompass elements of many other stories.” The stories of Asian Pacific American women in this study call into question several stock stories of leadership and broaden our understanding to include their perspectives. They counter the theories that claim leadership is ahistorical and unaffected by culture. On the contrary, the narratives of Asian Pacific American women propose a unique paradigm that places identity and being at the core of leadership.

The appropriation of identity through the medium of leadership is rarely, if ever, considered by scholars. Understanding how identity informs leadership and leadership influences identity may provide insight on the varied ways that Asian Pacific American women such as Yuri Kochiyama and the conversation partners in this study lead and inspire their communities. Mamta realized, “There’s an Asian American experience. There’s Asian American history. And I’m a part of that history.” The narratives of Asian Pacific American women today reflect the stories of their pasts, as well as their reimagined hopes for the future. As Asian Pacific American women continue to create their own paths to leadership, they become history in the making. Kearney (2002:17) writes, “It is not history which will write [her] story but [her] story which will rewrite history.”

### **Personal Reflections from the Researcher**

My commitment to this research was not only for personal satisfaction but for the development of Asian Pacific American women and their communities who will come after me. This dissertation was an emotional journey for me. Since the beginning of my

doctoral work, I was committed to doing research for and about Asian Pacific American women. As an Asian Pacific American woman, myself, I wanted to provide an avenue for members of my community to share their experiences and uncover their hidden and resistance stories. I also hoped to meet women who were in the process of constructing new, counter narratives. At the heart of my inquiry was the desire to be inspired.

Along the way, I considered different topics. My initial research interest was the exploration of Filipina leaders in the United States, Philippines, and Spain. I wondered how Filipinas negotiated their gender identity in their leadership in traditionally patriarchal societies. I also wanted to investigate the influence of colonization on their leadership ideas and practices. Although the prospect of traveling abroad was enticing, I decided not to pursue the topic in order to re-focus the research on APA women in the United States.

Then I contemplated research on the leadership narratives of young Asian Pacific American women. In my work with college students, I noticed how women of color were recognized by their peers and mentors as leaders, but they were hesitant to claim that identity. They saw their leadership as helping out the community and not necessarily as motivating others to create change. I was curious about the ways they experienced and articulated their leadership development. My pilot study participant, Mai Yang Vang, had a tremendous influence on my research interest. She was a student who received numerous awards and honors but never labeled herself as a leader. I wanted to know what inspired her to work in the community and what prevented her from calling herself a leader. In the end, I chose to expand my research to include Asian Pacific American women of all ages rather than limiting my research to a specific age group. I realized that

hearing the stories from different generations may provide additional insight on the research category of imagination.

As I was developing my proposal, I thought very briefly about doing research on human trafficking. During one of my classes, I watched a film on Filipina sex workers in Olongapo. It moved me so much that I almost switched my research topic from Asian Pacific American women in leadership to Filipinas working on ending human trafficking. After several consultations with loved ones and many nights of prayer, I decided to stay with the topic of Asian Pacific American women in leadership. During this reflection period, my friends reminded me that I was passionate about women of color in leadership and that I should stay true to what I believe. Ultimately, I solidified my commitment to Asian Pacific American women and have no regrets about it.

This research was filled with disappointment, as well as moments of inspiration. My heartache was due primarily to the lack of responses to my invitation to participate in my research. With so few studies about our experiences, I was certain that the Asian Pacific American women I contacted would enthusiastically accept. I developed an initial list of 20 national and local leaders who represented various ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Chamorro, Chinese, Japanese, Tongan) and leadership roles, with the hope that at least half of them would participate. I was intentional about the inclusion of different perspectives as I hoped to provide a pan-ethnic perspective on leadership in different fields. After sending out initial and follow-up e-mails and telephone invitations, I was surprised with the silence and hesitance to participate in the study (e.g., “I don’t consider myself as a leader”). I was unsure whether this was due to the research topic itself, lack of confidentiality, or lack of availability. It shocked me that less than half accepted and



only seven actually participated.

Thankfully, the women I did have the pleasure of having research conversations with were wonderful. I was impressed and humbled by their incredible achievements. Seeing Asian Pacific American activists who were my age was especially meaningful. Hearing their stories made me so proud of all their accomplishments. I also appreciated meeting a woman close to my mother's age who was working on community issues and causes.

One aspect I valued in particular was their openness to join me in this endeavor. Their honesty, hospitality, and enthusiasm made this project so meaningful for me. I felt honored to hear their stories and include them in my dissertation. I also enjoyed our follow-up conversations. Hearing their reflections about their transcript was transformative. They confirmed for me that Asian Pacific American women's voices need to be heard. Their narratives hold amazing potential for new understandings. They defy the images of dragon ladies and submissive servants. Our community needs to hear their stories so that they can see other images of themselves that are powerful, motivational, and positive.

The most memorable event throughout this process was the evening I shared with the women in Chula Vista. Our group conversation was my first research conversation and it was at a stranger's home. Even before I arrived, I had a feeling that it would be a wonderful experience. I looked forward to connecting with Pinays from my hometown.

Throughout the hour of our research conversation, we exchanged laughter, nods, and the occasional, "Okay!" The instant chemistry we shared was undeniable. When I typed up the transcript from that evening, I remember seeing all the spikes on the monitor

where the digital recorder captured our laughter. I felt like I was at a family member's house that evening. After our conversation, Vicky and JoAnn invited me to stay for dinner. I met JoAnn's children, father, and cousins. We chatted and laughed for another hour, as we continued to share our stories. I believe our camaraderie developed so quickly because of our common bond as Pinays with San Diego roots.

After that dinner, I vowed to myself that I would write a book or produce a documentary on Pinays in San Diego. I want other Filipino Americans to hear and share their own stories. I would like my community to be proud of the accomplishments we have made in this country. Most importantly, I hope we can re-envision different futures to uplift our community.

As I conclude this dissertation, I cannot help but think of the women in my life who continue to inspire me everyday. The first is my mother. In recent times, she has had to deal with difficult situations and I have witnessed nothing but resilience from her. In the moments when she was weak and vulnerable, it was her strength and courage that I remember most. The second is my grandmother. She was the first person to teach me about compassion, faith, and family unity. As the matriarch of her family, she made sure that she took care of her family, served in the church, and prayed for those who were oppressed. She is one of my role models. The third is my goddaughter and niece. Even as a young girl, she has a zest for life, sense of wonder, and desire for independence. My hope is that she uses these qualities to be a leader in our community.

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Talk Story with Yuri Kochiyama 1 of 2

2008 Interview with Yuri Kochiyama.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**IRBPHS APPROVAL LETTER**

From: irbphs [mailto:[irbphs@usfca.edu](mailto:irbphs@usfca.edu)]  
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 11:12 AM  
To: [malmandrez@usfca.edu](mailto:malmandrez@usfca.edu)  
Cc: Ellen Herda  
Subject: IRB Application # 09-027 - Application Approved

April 9, 2009

Dear Ms. Almandrez:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #09-027). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.
2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.
3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP  
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

-----  
IRBPHS - University of San Francisco  
Counseling Psychology Department  
Education Building - 017  
2130 Fulton Street  
San Francisco, CA 94117-1080  
(415) 422-6091 (Message)  
(415) 422-5528 (Fax)

irbphs@usfca.edu

-----  
<http://www.usfca.edu/humansubjects/>

**APPENDIX B  
RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnic Identity</b>	<b>Organization/ Affiliation</b>	<b>City of Residence</b>
Mamta Accapadi	34	Desi American	Oregon State University	Corvallis, OR
JoAnn Fields	37	Filipino American	US Census Bureau	Chula Vista, CA
Theresa Humphrey	44	Filipino, African American	Community Member	National City, CA
Cheryl Ka'uhane Lupenui	44	Hawaiian, Chinese, Caucasian	YWCA of O'ahu	Honolulu, HI
Lee Anne Kim	39	Korean American	San Diego Asian Film Foundation	San Diego, CA
Vicky Lagula	65	Filipino	Filipino Women's Club	Chula Vista, CA
Doua Thor	32	Hmong American	Southeast Asia Resource Action Center	Washington, D.C.

**APPENDIX C**  
**LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPANT**

Date

Participant's Name  
Participant's Address

Dear Dr./Ms.,

I am currently a second-year doctoral student in the Organization and Leadership program at the University of San Francisco. I am exploring the ways Asian Pacific American women emerge and develop as leaders in their respective communities. I am interested in having conversations with Asian Pacific American women who have mobilized their community and who are willing to share insights and meaningful experiences. I intend to engage in research conversations this summer.

As part of the participatory research protocol that I will be using, I am requesting your permission to videotape, record, and transcribe our conversation. Once I transcribe our dialogue, I will provide you with a copy for you to review. At that time, you may add, delete, or edit any part of the conversation as you see fit. When I have received your approval, I will analyze the data. Please note that participation in this research, including all data, your name and affiliations, are not confidential, and before participating you will be required to sign a consent form.

Possible conversation topics might include:

- Our journeys of self-discovery and self-reflection regarding our cultural identities
- Significant events and people in our lives
- Ideas about leaders and leadership
- Visions for the future of our communities

I know that time is one of our most precious resources and I especially appreciate your openness to entertain this proposal. I will contact you within the next few days to follow-up on this letter and answer any questions you may have.

Kind regards,

Mary Grace A. Almandrez  
Researcher, Doctoral Student  
University of San Francisco  
Organization and Leadership, School of Education

**APPENDIX D**  
**LETTER OF CONFIRMATION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Date

Participant's Name  
Participant's Address

Dear Dr./Ms.,

Thank you for agreeing to have a conversation with me about your leadership ideas and experiences. I am writing to confirm our meeting on \_\_\_\_\_. Please let me know if this still works with your schedule and if you need to make any changes.

As a reminder, with your permission, I would like to videotape and record our conversation and will transcribe it into a written format, which I will provide to you for your review. At that time you will be able to make any changes as you see fit. Also, please note that the data for this research are not confidential.

In order to gain a sense of my research project, I have included a preliminary list of questions below. These questions are meant to serve as a guide for our conversation, and provide an overview of the areas that I would like to explore. The use of a research conversation, as opposed to an interview, invites you as a participant to ask questions and share any thoughts or insights that you think are important. I hope that through our conversation, we will have the opportunity to learn more about Asian Pacific American women in leadership together.

In preparation for our conversation and reflecting upon your leadership experiences, please consider the following questions:

1. How do you identify yourself? How has your identity help shape your leadership?
2. What does leadership mean to you? Who or what influenced you to become involved in your community? How do these people or events shape your ideas of leadership? How have your ideas of leadership changed over time? What are the defining moments in your leadership journey?
3. What are the important issues your community is facing? How did you become aware of these issues? What are your hopes and dreams for your community?

Once again I sincerely appreciate your willingness to participate in my research. I look forward to our upcoming conversation.

Kind regards,

Mary Grace A. Almandrez  
Researcher, Doctoral Student  
University of San Francisco  
Organization and Leadership, School of Education

**APPENDIX E**  
**FOLLOW-UP LETTER**

Date

Participant's Name  
Participant's Address

Dear Dr./Ms.,

Thank you for meeting with me on \_\_\_\_\_. Your insights and experiences have been invaluable to my dissertation research and I appreciate your willingness to participate in this project.

Enclosed is a copy of our transcribed conversation for your review. Please take a moment to read through the transcript and make any additions, changes, or deletions to clarify any points as you see fit and/or correct any misspellings. Feel free to use the track changes or insert comment tools to highlight significant comments, make changes, and include your commentary. If you are unfamiliar with this tool, I've numbered the conversation lines so you can use this as a reference when we review the transcript together. I ask that you also keep the following in mind as you read the transcript:

1. What ideas, comments, ideas did you find significant and why?
2. What questions did you have?
3. What insights and new understandings did you have?

I would love for us to reconnect sometime this week or next to see if you have any questions and to discuss any changes that you might have made.

After this is complete, I will use the edited version of our conversation to analyze along with other conversations and sources of data.

Thank you, again, for your participation. I have enjoyed our conversation and I hope that this process has provided you with new understandings about your experiences, as well.

Kind regards,

Mary Grace A. Almandrez  
Researcher, Doctoral Student  
University of San Francisco  
Organization and Leadership, School of Education

**APPENDIX F**  
**PILOT STUDY AND CONVERSATION TRANSCRIPT WITH MAI YANG**  
**VANG**

University of San Francisco

**HISTORY IN THE MAKING: THE NARRATIVES OF YOUNG ASIAN PACIFIC**  
**AMERICAN WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP**

A Research Project  
0704-715

Ellen A. Herda, Ph.D., Instructor

Mary Grace A. Almandrez  
December 6, 2008



## SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

*Kasaysayan at ngayon* is a Tagalog phrase that means “history in the making.” In some ways, young Asian and Pacific American (APA) women epitomize this idea, serving as leaders in their families, universities, and community organizations. In their activism and achievements, they break barriers and create avenues for more young women of color to lead, influence, and support others (Turner 2007). They also help reconstruct the image of traditional leaders from White men in positional power to women of color transforming ethnic communities (Buenaventura 1997).

This participatory inquiry is focused on revealing the ways APA women emerge and develop as leaders in their communities. Asian Pacific Americans are one of the country’s fastest growing racial groups. Although their largest presence can be found in New York, California, and Hawai’i, they are growing in number in metropolitan areas such as Atlanta, GA; Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN; Houston, TX; Las Vegas, NV; and Seattle, WA (Asian American Justice Center & Asian Pacific American Legal Center 2006). Despite these numbers, there are still few female APA leaders who are visible and widely-recognized (Kawahara, Esnil, & Hsu 2007). Conventional notions of leadership as gendered, racialized, hierarchical, and individual-focused experiences do not necessarily account for APA women’s leadership. On the contrary, their leadership may be more collaborative and may have emerged through their work in culturally-specific communities (Kawahara et al. 2007).

A broader and more inclusive understanding of leadership could be beneficial for many. If APA women can imagine themselves as leaders, they are likely to take advantage of opportunities that allow them to identify, cultivate, and practice their

leadership. In addition, when women of color achieve high positions in their organization or community, they also tend to open doors for other women to follow them or create their own paths (Turner 2007). APA women in leadership, then, may help inspire young people to envision new futures and imagine different possibilities.

It is equally important for others to see APA women as leaders, as well. Considering their narratives provides us with the opportunity to understand how APA women, as complex and multifaceted individuals, lead and serve in diverse contexts. This, in turn, may help us reconsider how we lead and serve others. Therefore, seeing a diversity of leaders benefits all – not just APA women.

With so few widely-recognized Asian and Pacific American women in leadership, it is likely that the young women today will be pioneers and innovators tomorrow in their various disciplines, community organizations, and universities. Asian and Pacific American women are movers and shakers, scholars and activists, rule breakers and rule makers (Turner 2007). They are the women to watch because they may one day be written about in history books.

This report begins with Section One, an introduction of the research issue. Section Two will discuss current literature as it relates to identity and leadership. Section Three focuses on research categories within a critical hermeneutic framework. Section Four introduces my conversation partner, Mai Yang Vang. Section Five synthesizes the data. Section Six provides the data analysis. Section Seven concentrates on several research implications. Finally, Section Eight summarizes the report.

## **SECTION TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (1998:68) define leadership as “a relational process of people together attempting to accomplish change or make a difference to benefit the common good.” Implied in this definition are the importance of relationships, collaboration, and social change. In their view, leadership is not one person standing in front of a vertical line. Rather, leadership is one or several individuals standing behind a horizontal line, pushing everyone forward.

The latter description is likely to reflect the leadership style of APA women. If educators valued leadership development among young women of color, then perhaps business, education, science, and public administration curricula would expand to include their diverse perspectives. An initial review of literature uncovered three key themes as they relate to young APA women in leadership: the absence of identity in leadership theories, the dynamics related to the intersections of identity, and the need for cultural capital among women of color.

### **Historical and Contemporary Leadership Theory**

Historical and contemporary theories do not include the role of cultural identity in shaping one’s leadership style or approach. Leadership theories have evolved from the Great Man approach where certain men are born with innate leadership traits to reciprocal models where the relationship between leader and follower is central to the leadership style (Komives et al. 1998). A select number of current models (e.g., leadership identity model, social change model) do include some language about individual characteristics, but they are intended to underscore the image of leadership as a relational process. These models do not, however, offer insight on the impact of identity, culture, or social group membership on the leaders themselves.

For example, the relational model emphasizes inclusiveness, empowerment, purposeful activity, ethical practice, and process-orientation (Komives et al. 1998). Inclusion in this model refers to leaders recognizing and honoring the different perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds of followers. It does not necessarily focus on the leader placing importance on her identity. Another model that highlights identity is the social change model (Higher Education Research Institute 1996). With social change as the goal of leadership, the first of seven values of the model is consciousness of self. In this value, the leader reflects on her identity in order to increase her awareness and consciousness about her various social group memberships. However, this value is centered on self-reflection and self-knowledge rather than engagement of identity in the leader and her followers.

Moreover, today's leadership models are largely Eurocentric and focused primarily on the White male experience (Buenaventura 1997, Chin 2007, Murtadha and Larson 2004). Several attempts have been made to expand leadership models to incorporate the perspectives of women, such as feminist and womanist critiques, but they are generally not included as part of the canon of leadership research and scholarship (Buenaventura 1997, Chin 2007, Murtadha and Larson 2004). When theories do not address diverse forms, contexts, and faces of leadership, it may be difficult for women of color to envision themselves and others like them as leaders (Kilian, Hukai, and McCarty 2005, Turner 2007).

In previous studies, researchers discovered that women of color did not initially see themselves as leaders nor did they have early ambitions to serve in high-ranking positions (Buenaventura 1997, Turner 2007). Perhaps these women did not see

themselves as leaders because traditional forms of leadership did not reflect their experiences. In addition, leadership among some women of color appeared in different environments in distinct ways. Leadership surfaced in their ordinary lives as parents, educators, writers, and artists (Buenaventura 1997). The lone soldiers or rebellious mavericks often portrayed in modern-day films and reality television shows were not necessarily the ways in which women of color expressed and demonstrated their leadership. APA women revealed styles that were more collaborative and participatory than traditional approaches that were more positional and hierarchical. Some women of color did not seek out leadership. Leadership came to them.

### **Intersections of Identity**

Sometimes viewed as barriers, at other times advantages, the tensions involved in identity politics and the interconnection of various social group memberships make the leadership of APA women an important process to study. Kawahara et al. (2007) point out that very few research studies include intersections of gender and ethnicity in leadership. Whether conscious or not, young APA women are constantly managing the intersections several identities such as age, gender, and ethnicity by virtue of their multiple social group memberships.

### **Womanist Theory**

Sociologists such as Leslie McCall and womanists such as Patricia Hill Collins and Audrey Lorde are credited with developing and expanding the theory of intersectionality. Beginning in the 1960s, increasing numbers of women critiqued existing notions of feminism, arguing that gender was not the only factor that influenced women's lives and that the narratives of women other than straight, White middle-class

women (e.g., women of color, lesbians) were essential contributions to the discourse.

In other words, one identity alone does not determine an individual's lived experiences. Rather, the intersection of various identities makes up a person's fate. Furthermore, intersectional theorists recognize that dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression cannot be examined through purely gendered lenses. According to Patricia Hill Collins (2000), these dynamics have to also address the matrix of domination that is formed through the interlocking components of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and other social group memberships. In her comments regarding the experiences of Black women in the United States, Collins describes the interwoven nature of this web, which makes the separation of oppressions as distinct experiences difficult to discern. One form of oppression alone cannot account for all of an individual's personal experiences. Furthermore, Allan Johnson (2006) points out that specific forms of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism) are part of an overarching, intricate web of oppression. An individual, then, can be in both the dominant and subordinated positions at the same time. For instance, a wealthy Hawaiian woman may experience privilege as a member of a particular socioeconomic status, as well as oppression because of ethnicity and gender. These systems of privilege form a complicated web that could affect the way one leads and interacts with others.

### ***Mestiza Consciousness***

Lesbian feminist poet, Gloria Anzaldúa (1999), offers another illustration. She posits that a *mestiza*, or woman of both Spanish and indigenous lineage, could potentially be the best equipped to navigate the tension of her simultaneous positions of power and oppression. She could do this if she acknowledged her multiple identities, negotiated the

conflicts associated with her privilege and oppression, and engaged the intersections of her identities in meaningful ways. She called this negotiation of identities mestiza consciousness. Mestiza consciousness requires an ability to apply critical lenses to see multiple perspectives, a deep understanding of historical struggles and their sociopolitical contexts, and the capacity to reflect upon the tensions and connections between various identities.

Similar to Collins, Anzaldúa's framework moves away from an either/or paradigm to a both/and framework concerning identity. The incredible complexity of this consciousness is a new and emerging consideration for leadership education. Some young women of color already embody a type of mestiza consciousness, which may have an impact on the ways they see themselves and the communities they serve.

### **Cultural Capital**

Cultural capital can provide young APA women with the knowledge, resources, and tools to sharpen their leadership skills, navigate organizational structures, and utilize partnerships to advance the goals of their communities. Cultural capital refers to "the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed on from one generation to the next" (MacLeod 1995:13). A common example of cultural capital is found in the "good old boy" network. According to Assistant Professor of Management, Judith Oakley (2000:328), "the members of the [good old boy] network transfer the competition and power advantages realized in the formal structure onto friendship patterns and alliances within the informal system." Relationships and affiliations seem to matter when developing and promoting leadership. In short, cultural capital can help perpetuate success or failure.

Both formal and informal networks are influential to the leadership development of young women of color (Kilian et al. 2005, Turner 2007). Interpersonal connections are critical for individual support, motivation, and information exchange. Research also indicates that mentors and role models are considered important (though scarce) resources for young women of color. Interacting with women in leadership positions can help them visualize the possibilities of developing their own leadership skills. In one study (Turner 2007), several women of color who were the first in their ethnic group to be named University President noted their commitment to mentoring. Not having had role models to pave the way for them, these presidents wanted to share their experiences and offer helpful advice to the new generation of women of color (Turner 2007). Mentors and role models offer valuable cultural capital and could fundamentally change the ways young APA women participate in leadership.

### **Summary**

Previous research reveals that there is still much to learn about young APA women in leadership. Is identity a key factor in their leadership development? How do they demonstrate leadership in their respective communities? How can they cultivate cultural capital? The answers to these questions could expose new ways of thinking about and reconceptualizing leadership where APA women are at the center. Section Two highlighted key themes that were found in current literature. Section Three will focus on critical hermeneutics as a theoretical framework.

## **SECTION THREE: CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS**

### **Introduction**

My participatory inquiry on APA women in leadership is philosophically and



theoretically grounded in critical hermeneutics. Herda (class lecture, October 5, 2007) explains that critical hermeneutics is ontological, where language is and interpretive event. In fact, “it is in language and our tradition that we have our very being” (Herda 1999:7). Social texts (e.g., conversations, art, photographs) uncover and disclose deeper meaning about the worlds of individuals and their communities. Ricoeur (1991:431) further clarifies that “a text is not an entity closed in upon itself; it is the projection of a new universe, different from the one in which we live.” Critical hermeneutics, then, takes into account sociocultural context, discourse, and interpretation to reach new understandings. Section Three includes the three research categories that helped inform my guiding questions: founding event, narrative identity, and imagination.

### **Founding Events**

Founding events are turning points in our lives where new understandings help us transform into agents, leading us to act. These events change who we are and how we want to be in the world. Herda (class lecture, September 3, 2007) notes that language is a founding event. Conversations and other founding events, then, hold incredible possibilities for change.

### **Narrative Identity**

Ricoeur (1991:436) states, “It seems that our life, enveloped in one single glance, appears to us as the field of constructive activity, deriving from the narrative intelligence through which we attempt to recover (rather than impose from without) *the narrative identity which constitutes us.*” Housed within narrative identity are the overlapping elements of *idem* (sameness) and *ipse* (selfhood) (Ricoeur 1992). In other words, part of one’s narrative identity remains constant. This is one’s character. Another part is dynamic

and temporal, changing in relationship to others.

The considerations of change and temporality are also considered in mimesis. In mimesis, time is not simply a tick of a clock or a passing of a day. Time is a liminal space. Herda (1999) describes the three stages of mimesis as the figured world (mimesis<sub>1</sub>), configured narrative (mimesis<sub>2</sub>), and refigured action (mimesis<sub>3</sub>). The figured world, or past, includes traditions, mores, and social norms. This supports Gadamer's claim (1988:401) that "language has no independent life apart from the world that comes to language within it." The configured narrative, or present, involves emplotment. Emplotment is the weaving together of seemingly disparate events into a cohesive story, which is sustained by a plot. The refigured action, or future, involves imagining and hopes for a better future.

### **Imagination**

Kearney (1998:147) argues that the "productive power of imagination is primarily verbal." Through the telling of narrative, one is able to reflect on her life and re-envision different ways of being. Herda (2007:25) writes, "Our stories change when our relationships change because the new stories contain different experiences and the social imagery comes into play as one emplots and re-emplots his or her life." As we continue to share our stories, we uncover new worlds, thus exposing us to different possibilities.

### **Summary**

The ontological and transformative nature of critical hermeneutics makes this framework an appropriate one to apply to Asian and Pacific American women in leadership. Conversations and storytelling places their narratives at the heart of the research inquiry, allowing for openness to different interpretations and new understandings. Section Three highlighted three research categories used to inform my guiding questions. Section Four is a description of my conversation partner.

#### **SECTION FOUR: PARTICIPANT**

“Life is always on the way to narrative, but it does not arrive there until someone hears and tells this life as a story” (Kearney 2002:133). The mimetic function of leadership will be explored through the narrative of Mai Yang Vang, a recent graduate of the University of San Francisco, who identifies as Hmong, and more broadly as Southeast Asian American. Mai was born and raised in Sacramento, CA. She is currently a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where she is pursuing her master’s degrees in Asian American Studies, as well as public health.

Although USF graduates many strong leaders, Mai is exceptional. At age 23, she has already accomplished a great deal. She is the oldest of 15 children and the first in her family to attend college. During her time at USF, she formed three organizations, served on student government, and delivered keynote speeches at local and national events. She received numerous university awards and graduated with two majors and three minors. In addition, she made a name for herself in the Hmong community as a grassroots organizer, youth leader, and community mobilizer. As a former officer of the Hmong Student Intercollegiate Coalition (HSIC), Mai worked closely with other college students to promote community development and social change. In the summer of 2007 she interned

in Washington, D.C. as a Barbara Jordan Health Policy Scholar, where she assisted with legislative initiatives affecting communities of color. As a Buck Scholar, all expenses related to her undergraduate and graduate education, including tuition, room, board, and books are paid for by the foundation.

I met Mai when she was a sophomore, during my first summer at USF. She caught my attention when she introduced herself to me during a diversity retreat. She spoke with endless enthusiasm, expressing herself with animated gestures and rapid speech. I was immediately drawn to her positive energy and contagious passion. I knew at that moment that she would be someone to watch.

Section Four introduced my conversation partner, Mai Yang Vang. Section Five will provide background of the research conversation and center on the synthesis of data.

## **SECTION FIVE: SYNTHESIS OF DATA**

Mai and I met for an informal dinner prior to our research conversation (please refer to Appendix 1 for the Invitation Letter for Participation) on October 16, 2008. During our meal we talked about the differences in Asian American activism between the bay area, southern California, and the east coast. We also discussed our common experience as graduate students, including the importance of finding a sense of community with our classmates. We noted how black/White paradigms leave our narratives, as Asian American women, out of the conversation around issues of race and racial justice. After two hours, we went to her apartment and had our formal conversation, which took place in her living room. The conversation was videotaped with Mai's permission (please refer to Appendix 2 for the complete transcript).

Although I prepared several guiding questions, I did not ask all of them during

our videotaped conversation. The questions included: How do you describe leadership? Who do you identify as a strong leader and why? Who inspires you? Who and what influenced you to serve your communities and enact change? What are the issues of which you are most passionate? What significance does your identity have on your leadership style?

As Mai described her leadership journey, I took note of several connections between her narrative and my own. First, she noted that feeling alone and isolated during her freshman year drove her to seek out others who were like her (ethnically and culturally) and could understand what she was experiencing. Second, her leadership emerged through participation in cultural organizations. Third, conversations with other student leaders exposed her to new ideas about privilege, oppression, and social justice. Fourth, she identified her parents and grandmother as role models in her life. Where we differed, however, was our image of leaders. Mai describes a leader as a charismatic individual who influences a large mass of people. This may be a reflection of the Hmong leadership structure, which is based in family clans.

My idea of a leader is similar to the definition provided by Komives et al (1998). The connections and difference are woven throughout the data analysis as a means to understand Mai's narrative as a Hmong woman in leadership. Section Five featured several topics that were drawn from the formal conversation. Section Six explores these themes further.

## **SECTION SIX: ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

Kearney (2002:145) writes that "narrative is a world-*making* as well as a world-

*disclosing* process.” It was evident throughout our conversations and data analysis process that Mai and I were learning more about each another, as well as our selves.

Herda (1999:137) takes note that

Learning is the creative act that takes place in the relationship between an event and understanding. To understand requires an interpretive act based in a risk-taking venture. As we interpret a text, we also are assimilated into a new tradition, changing our history and ourselves. As such, interpretation is not a methodological act, but rather a transformative act.

As I listened to Mai share her story, I saw my own narrative interwoven with hers. As she read the transcript, she came to a “new understanding” and noticed her own “transformation” (Telephone conversation with Mai Yang Vang, December 5, 2008). She recalled crying “happy tears” after realizing how much she had grown throughout college.

Mai and I were simultaneously authors, actors, and readers of our stories. Although our formal conversation was more of an interview, our reading of the transcript and our informal follow-up conversations yielded rich data. Together we highlighted important quotes and noted key themes, namely: identity and transformation, the importance of role models, community leadership, and images of leaders.

### **Identity and Transformation**

Prior to USF, Mai made conscious efforts to suppress, if not deny, her ethnic identity. She noticed how people looked at them in the grocery store when her mother paid with food stamps. She was exhausted from taking care for her younger siblings. She wanted to blend in with her classmates rather than stand out. Over the years, her feelings of shame and embarrassment grew into bitterness towards her parents. Throughout high

school, she surrounded herself with White friends to try to erase her ethnicity and distance herself from her family.

In college, however, she came to terms with her difference. She could no longer deny that she was the only Hmong student on campus. She felt isolated and marginalized. Her coping strategy did not work at USF. She recalls, “It wasn’t like high school where I could just hang out with some White folks and pretend that everything was going to be cool. I don’t think the White folks really knew who I was and they couldn’t understand where I was coming from.” During her first semester on campus, Mai contemplated returning home to Sacramento. During that critical period, Mai experienced three founding events that changed her life thereafter.

Her search for other Hmong college students led her to the Hmong Student Intercollegiate Coalition. HSIC is a statewide organization that brings Hmong college students together to promote higher education in the Hmong community. Mai was overjoyed at discovering the organization on the internet. She wanted to be with other college students who could empathize with her experiences. This was especially important because most of them were first-generation college students. Their parents, therefore, could not relate to any of their experiences on campus. So they relied on one another for on-going support and encouragement.

After contacting an officer of HSIC, she was interviewed and quickly appointed the Northern California Representative. Her participation in HSIC helped her develop leadership skills, such as community organizing, youth development, and public speaking. She remained involved throughout her college career and credits much of her personal and professional growth to the organization.

As she increased her sense of pride and confidence, Mai also learned of issues of social justice. Her attendance at the Freedom Alliance of Culturally Empowered Students (FACES) meeting exposed her to new ideas and new ways of thinking about the intersections of race, class, and gender. She heard terms she had never heard before such as deconstruction, racism, and classism. Although she was the only Hmong student of the group, she did not feel embarrassed. On the contrary, she felt affirmed. The other students of color asked her about her personal experiences and they seemed genuinely interested in what she had to say.

During that meeting they were also planning their annual political forum. She had no idea what a political forum was but she was excited to get involved in such groundbreaking work. This new language unveiled different ways of viewing the world and explaining her experiences. Similar to her involvement with HSIC, Mai emerged as a mature and thoughtful leader in FACES. While HSIC was her off-campus support network, FACES was her on-campus network.

The third founding event occurred in an Asian American Studies class. She remembered her surprise when opening a textbook and reading a paragraph about the Hmong people.

Oh my God! There's something about the Hmong people. I learned about the [secret] war. Then I realized I didn't know my parents were involved with the war. I knew they came here from Laos but I really never knew why they came here. I never asked my parents. I didn't know. I didn't. I just thought, "Okay. They came to America for a better life" but I didn't know about the life they had before.

After this discovery Mai called her father to discuss what she had learned in class. Her father told her that during the Secret War in Laos, the Hmong were recruited by the



CIA as guerilla forces to block the Ho Chi Minh Trail. After the withdrawal of American troops, the Hmong were left at their most vulnerable, subjected to violence, persecution, and genocide.

The family escaped Laos, crossed the Mekong River, and fled to refugee camps in Thailand. They eventually made it to the United States and resettled in Sacramento.

Her conversation with her father that evening was a pivotal event. She no longer felt bitterness towards her parents. She saw her parents through new lenses. She realized that they made incredible sacrifices to provide the life they could in the United States. Mai was able to see herself through her parents' story and her parents through her own story.

Mai's narrative identity changed as she heard new stories, developed new relationships, and even rebuilt existing ones. These conversations opened new worlds to Mai, where she not only saw others in a different way; she saw herself in a different way. As a result, Mai told new stories and re-emplotted her own narrative.

### **Importance of Role Models**

Researchers (Kilian et al. 2005) point out that mentors and role models are important for the leadership development of women of color. In many cases they are the ones who emphasize service and leadership within the community (Fine 2007). Mai identifies three family members as her role models: her parents and her grandmother.

As Mai continued to bond with her parents, she realized how much she wanted to be like them. "[In high school] I didn't want to be anything close to my mom and dad. But when I think about me going to school, really struggling with who I was, I found that my strength was through my mom and dad... If I can be more like them now and I could

have their strength that would be amazing. I don't think I have it, but I think I'm trying to strive for that." This realization strengthened her relationship with her parents. Their struggle also made her realize that change was needed and she renewed her commitment to the Hmong community.

Mai also considers her grandmother to be an important role model. She believes she and her grandmother share many things in common, including their sense of conviction, unwavering commitment, and the courage to speak their minds. Although her grandmother has a reputation of being "loud and gossipy," Mai admires those qualities about her. She believes if her grandmother had received a formal education, she would be making history right now. Seeing her grandmother speak up and speak out encouraged Mai to practice her own independence and break out of traditional gender roles.

### **Community Leadership**

Mai is firmly committed to creating a brighter future for the Hmong community. She notes poverty, teen pregnancy, gang violence, and health disparities among the elderly as critical issues. In addition, she believes college graduates have a social responsibility to serve the community. She turns to her experience with HSCI to explain why:

We can't just get an education and walk out and start finding a job. We felt there was a need to go back and really help our community because then we really felt like there was a purpose to education because of all the stuff that we were seeing...We felt we definitely needed to take power in our own hands and mobilize the community and educate...the way I see it, you can only go so far. You can't really succeed if you can't bring your community with you.

One of the ways Mai served the community was exposing Hmong youth to the possibility of college. She wanted them to see other options besides gangs and teen

pregnancy. During the Hmong New Year, she and other HSIC members wore their college sweatshirts and hosted an information booth to talk to the youth about their experiences on campus and the different ways to get to college. Mai hoped this exposure, as well as their conversations, would help other Hmong youth envision a different future.

Mai's own exposure to a different life has led her to consider a future in health law and public policy. Her experience in Washington, D.C. and her conversations with various faculty members have opened new possibilities for her career path. Mai would like to use her education to advocate for the needs of the Hmong community and create sustained change.

### **Images of Leaders**

Mai has witnessed community leadership through her father's role as the head clan leader. He inherited this role as the oldest male member of his family. His ability to articulate ideas in Hmong, carry on traditional ceremonies, and solve problems with thoughtful consideration also made him the ideal leader. Mai explained,

If there's an issue in the Hmong community, then it's the elderly men, the clan people who come together and discuss about. However they want to handle it, they handle it that way. Youth wouldn't have a say. The women don't have a say. It's basically the clan leaders or the elderly men with the clan leader. It's always been like that.

Mr. Vang, then, has an incredible responsibility on his shoulders, so much so that at times the needs of the clan came before his family's own needs. Observing her father may have influenced Mai's own ideas of social responsibility and leadership.

Mai believes that everyone possesses leadership qualities. In fact, a follower can be a leader (i.e., followership). However, informal conversations revealed that Mai (telephone conversation, December 5, 2008) sees leadership as "one person on a

pedestal” who possesses specific qualities such as charisma, intelligence, and approachability. In fact, despite her numerous leadership awards, Mai does not consider herself as a leader at all. She is more comfortable describing herself as someone who is “just trying to make change in the community.” She admits hesitance and uneasiness in using the term so she prefers to discuss the idea of role models. When I did ask if there was anyone she considered to be a strong leader, she mentioned Blong Xiong, the first Hmong immigrant to be elected to the City Council of Fresno. Interestingly, her ideas of leadership appear to be more aligned with traditional theories, where leadership is essentialized, gendered, and unidirectional.

### **Summary**

Participating in our conversations, recording new understandings, and reading our transcript were transformative experiences for both my conversation partner and me. Ricoeur (1991:431) emphasizes that “the act of reading becomes the crucial moment of the entire analysis. On this act rests the ability of the story to transfigure the experience of the reader.” Several times throughout the data analysis process, Mai and I seemed to switch from author to actor to reader.

New understandings occurred in front of the text, when we read the transcript and discussed it over the telephone. During our last informal conversation, Mai (telephone conversation, December 5, 2008) described the experience as “watching my life reveal itself to me” because it gave “a context to understand myself even more.” She identified areas where she had grown and matured and she remembered how her relationships changed her own narrative. Issues regarding identity and transformation, role models, community leadership, and leadership images were drawn from the data analysis process

and presented in Section Six. Section Seven continues the discussion of these themes as they relate to the implications of the pilot study.

## **SECTION SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS**

Conversations with Mai revealed several ideas for further consideration. First, the intersections of ethnicity and gender play critical roles in the way APA women emerge and inform their leadership. If this development is grounded in their work in ethnic communities and organizations, cultural identities need to be included in the leadership discourse to account for their varied experiences and approaches. In addition, learning happens in multiple places with multiple people. APA women benefit when they engage in conversations with people who are both different from and similar to them. Learning about others helps women learn more about themselves. Conversely, intense self-reflection results in deeper understanding of the other.

Second, role models are significant factors in the ways APA women may envision their futures. APA women not only need to see others who are like them succeeding; they also need to be those successful role models for others to see. Role models, along with their conversation partners, can inspire and reveal new ways of living and different ways of being.

Third, despite new definitions and theories of leadership, the images of leaders are harder to dismantle. Without a diversity of leadership images, we revert to hierarchal and positional leadership where (White) men are on top. If APA women could see leaders who looked like them, then perhaps they could envision taking on leadership roles within their own communities. Additionally, when others see APA women in leadership, they may gain new understandings of leadership that include collaboration, shared decision-

making, and social responsibility. Section Seven focused on three implications of the pilot study that could be considered for further inquiry. Section Eight will give a summary of the research study.

### **SECTION EIGHT: SUMMARY**

This report began with Section One, an introduction of the research issues, and more specifically revealing the narratives of Asian and Pacific American women in leadership. Section Two discussed current literature as it related to identity and leadership. Section Three focused on research categories within a critical hermeneutic framework. Section Four introduced my conversation partner, Mai Yang Vang. Section Five was a synthesis of the data. Section Six provided the data analysis, highlighting several themes: identity development, role modeling, community leadership, and leadership images. Section Seven concentrated on several research implications. Section Eight summarized the report.

Although Asian Pacific American women have extensive histories of serving as leaders in their communities, their stories are rarely shared. Kearney (2002:136) emphasizes that “history-telling seeks to address the silences of history by giving a voice to the voiceless.” The absence of the voices of APA women does not provide us with a comprehensive or inclusive understanding of leadership.

At the core of Mai's leadership are her family's history and memories, as well as her community's hopes and dreams. She demonstrates that when a leader is conscious and compassionate, great things can happen. Although she does not recognize herself as a leader, she has made great strides in creating change in her community. More importantly, she has already made history in her family through her accomplishments

thus far, including graduating from college, attending graduate school, and receiving several honors. Kearney (2002:17) writes, "It is not history which will write [her] story but [her] story which will rewrite history." Mai has already rewritten history. She is history in the making.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix One: Letter of Invitation to Participant

Appendix Two: Transcript of the Videotaped Conversation

## APPENDIX ONE: LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPANT

October 13, 2008

Re: Your help with my Pilot Project for Doctoral Research

Dear Mai:

I am currently a second-year doctoral student in the Organization and Leadership program at the University of San Francisco. I am exploring the topic of young Asian and Pacific American women in leadership. I will be conducting research for my dissertation through individual conversations with a number of participants around the country. I have selected you and other women for these conversations based on your community organizing and leadership experiences within Asian and Pacific American communities.

Your participation would be a valuable addition to my research. I anticipate our conversation to last approximately two hours. In addition, I request your permission to videotape our conversation for research purposes. After I transcribe our dialogue, I would e-mail you a copy for your review and approval.

Possible conversation topics might include:

- Our journeys of self-discovery and self-reflection regarding our cultural identities
- Significant events and people in our lives
- Ideas about leaders and leadership
- Visions for the future

I know that time is one of our most precious resources and I especially appreciate your openness to entertain this proposal. I will call you within the next few days to follow-up on this letter and answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Mary Grace A. Almandrez

## APPENDIX TWO: TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEOTAPED CONVERSATION

### Conversation with Mai Yang Vang

Conversation Partner: Mai Yang Vang (referred to as M)  
Researcher: Mary Grace A. Almandrez (referred to as MG)

Thursday, October 16, 2008

Mai recently graduated from the University of San Francisco and was a former intern for my office. We met for an informal dinner prior to our conversation to reconnect with one another and catch up on each others' lives. We discussed her experiences in the graduate program at UCLA and her frustration with the lack of community she felt among other Hmong students. We also talked about the differences between Asian American activism in the bay area and Los Angeles. After an hour, we went to her apartment and had our formal conversation, which took place in her living room. The conversation was videotaped with Mai's permission.

Mary Grace: Okay. This is my conversation with Mai. Mai, why don't you go ahead and introduce yourself and just share a little bit about who you are and where you're at right now?

Mai: Okay. I'm Mai, Mai Yang Vang and I'm currently a graduate student at UCLA. I've been going to UCLA for a month and a half now. I recently graduated from the University of San Francisco with majors in biology and sociology with crazy minors in Asian American Studies, chemistry, and business. And I'm at UCLA to get my master's in Asian American Studies and also my master's in public health.

MG: Okay.

M: What else?

MG: That's good. That's good.

M: Okay.

MG: And how old are you?

M: I'm 23.

MG: Okay.

M: Yeah.

MG: Share a little bit about who your family is and your family background, and how your family ended up here.

M: Okay. Well I'm Hmong and I guess I'm second-generation because my parents are first-generation because they came here. That makes me second-generation but first-generation to go to college. So I was born here and actually I'm the oldest of 15 children. And there are seven daughters in my family and eight sons. My parents were refugees from the Vietnam War because my grandparents and my father were recruited by the CIA to fight in the Vietnam War. Of course the United States lost the war and they withdrew the troops. Basically there was complete genocide of the Hmong people who helped the United States. So my parents fled Laos, went through the Mekong River, the jungle, and were able to make it safely to the refugee camps where they were then sponsored by the United States to come. My parents lived here in their late teens, got married, had kids (me being one of them). I grew up in Sacramento and I lived there all my life except I lived in Fresno for four, five years because my dad had a kung-fu dojo. Then we had to move back because there was family stuff because my great-grandma passed way. My dad is the oldest on his side so he had to come back home and kind of help out with the family. So we came back to Sac., which is where I was born, and so I lived there ever since. And then I went to school at USF. I had a lot of crazy stuff -- great stuff -- that happened there. I went to DC for the summer and now I'm here.

MG: So let's talk a little bit about your time at USF. What are some of the things you did when you were USF, whether they're activities or classes? What are the things that you were passionate about when you were at USF?

M: Well...okay. So real talk. When I came to USF, I was really lost. I was really confused. Actually I have to backtrack because I have to talk to you about how I got to college. I think that probably makes more sense.

MG: Good.

M: So I went to Sac. High and that was the second oldest high school west of the Mississippi River.

MG: Oh I didn't know that.

M: Yeah! But you know now it's a charter school. It's closed down. I was actually the last graduating class which is why I have to tell you this because it kind of relates to why I went to college.

MG: Please.

M: So here I am in high school. I never really thought about college. I really thought I was just going to go to high school, find a job. I heard about City College. That sounded kind of cool – something to do afterwards. I didn't quite know. I went through 27 English teachers. I was in school because that was the thing to do for our age. There was this really cool teacher, Ms. Jean Crowder, who came from Kennedy High School. I think she saw a lot of potential with me and my classmates. So she started this new program called the MESL Academy, which stands for Mathematics, Engineering, Science, Liberal Arts Academy. She saw a lot of potential in us and she kind of stuck with us compared to all those. She started as an English teacher – our English teacher – and what Sac. High did was if they were our English teacher our sophomore year they continued to be our English teacher till you graduate. But then we went through 27 English teachers because nobody wanted to stick with our class. So she stuck with us. And for some reason the students really listened to her because she was able to connect with all of us. So I would be in school with her until 11:00 or 12:00 at night, applying for scholarships because she was like, "You should think about college." I was like, "College? What's that?" She told me, "Well, you know you want to get far away from your family, right, because you're always stressed out at home. And you want some opportunities. You know, college is going to be able to help you with that." I was all, "Okay! Away from home! I didn't have to help do chores and all that. I was so stressed at home, a way to escape from home." So I was all like, "Okay, let's do this." And so I stayed with her till 12:00, sometimes 11:00 at night, until we were done working with my essays and scholarship applications. So that only happened my entire half of the year of senior year. Then I told her, "How was I going to pay for school?" I got into all of these schools but I don't know how I was going to pay for it. She was like, "Well there's this scholarship called Frank H. Buck. You should think about applying to it." I was like, "Okay." She told me it was a full-ride scholarship. I was like, "Okay. Why not? I mean, I'm applying to 30 scholarships anyway so it doesn't hurt to apply." So we applied. I remember coming back from school and getting an application, a big White envelope in the mail, saying, "We selected you as one of 45 participants to come for an interview. This is the date. Please show up." So then I told her, "I got an interview!" But I didn't really think I was going to get it, you know. Okay, this is just an interview.

MG: Uh huh.

M: So I went to the interview. Actually she prepped me before I went to the interview. I had to. She prepped me, Ms. Jean Crowder, and also Miss Washington, which was another teacher there. They prepped me on what to say, how to present myself, what to wear. So that was cool. But what was really interesting was when I went to the interview. They didn't ask me any community questions, grade questions, like what are you

interested in. They basically just said to me, "Can you please give us a typical day at your house, from the morning till night?" And I basically just told them what I did in the morning: wake up in the morning, help my brothers get dressed, cook breakfast, walk them to school, to the bus stop, and then come back. I just explained to them what a typical day at the Vang family, on a school day, was. And that's all I talked about. They're like, "Thank you very much." And I just walked out of there thinking, "That was really weird. I probably didn't get the scholarship but whatever. It's over now." You know, I still thought, "Okay, college, yeah." I never still thought of it until I came back from a Hmong fundraiser car wash. I went packing thinking, "Congratulations! You're a Buck Scholar!" And then all of a sudden I just started crying because it was like, oh my God! I just got a million dollars! I was thinking, that's basically like free education. They pay for everything, you know: books, if you want to study abroad, housing, your apartment, tuition, everything. My parents didn't have to pay one penny. And I remember jumping up and down, crying, and telling my mom, "I got it! I got it!" And my mom's like, "Got what?" I was like, "The Buck Scholarship." They're like, "What's that?" I explained it to them. They're like, "Oh, okay. Well, I mean you were born in America. You're supposed to get a scholarship to be able to go to college. You know, that's easy. You were born here." So I was like, "Okay." So my parents didn't really understand it. My teacher had to come and explain to them and I think they still didn't understand until I got my first bill. I showed them how much USF was. They're like, "Oh okay. We don't have to pay any of that." I got into Davis. I got into UC Santa Cruz. I just applied to California schools because I didn't want to go too far away from home. So my teacher was like, "You know, you should check out USF. It's in the bay area." And I've always heard of San Francisco and I never went there. So, okay, why not? Free ride. Scholarship. Oh my God! Just go to a private school because I've always gone to public school. Oh speaking of that. So my high school, when I graduated, I was the last graduating class because our high school shut down because I think there's a lot of political stuff. Our ex-principal signed a contract with the Sacramento School District saying that there was a certain expectation to be upheld by the school and I guess we didn't meet that mark. So students didn't meet that mark. So they shut down our school and it became a charter school, which is now taken over by Kevin Johnson. It's called St. Hope now. So I was the last graduating class: 2003. So now here I was at USF. I decided to go to USF because San Francisco, private school. Never knew about the USF mission, the social justice. I was chosen as one of the 20 participants for the Foreword Program. It's a program to get first-gen. or students who weren't familiar with college to kind of get situated. So I did that, the two weeks. It was really cool. I bonded with a few folks and it was great. Then school started. I was really lost because even though I met people in Foreword, I met a few key folks. I was taking classes and I was sitting here thinking, "Oh my God. I'm college and I really don't know

how to study. I don't have anyone I can talk to. Where are all the Hmong people?" Because in high school there was Hmong people. I had the Hmong Club but I hung out with all the White folks because I don't know. That was the teenage thing to do. I kind of feel ashamed to be Hmong because I grew up in a really poor neighborhood.

M: Mmm.

M: My parents raised me. We were really poor and my parents were on welfare. I remember going to the grocery store with my mom and her paying for our food with food stamps. There'd be people who would be looking at us. Or my mom would pay with, it's called WIC.

MG: Uh huh.

M: She would have to pull out coupons and sign it. People would be aggravated at Albertson's because it'll take awhile because my mom had to fill out paperwork. I would tell myself, "Oh my God. I don't want to live like this. This is so embarrassing." I was bitter towards my parents, you know. So that's why I had a lot of White friends in high school.

MG: Mm.

M: Well I can understand it now um because I took some soc. classes and I think it spoke to my experience. I can think about it now and make sense of it. Before I was really bitter. That's another reason why I wanted to go away from the family. When I got to USF, I couldn't find anyone to relate to. It wasn't like high school where I could just hang out with some White folks and pretend that everything was going to be cool. I don't think the White folks really knew who I was and they couldn't understand where I was coming from. I was actually thinking about going back home after my semester until a girl I met in Foreword, Jennifer Ratliff, introduced me to FACES. I was eating lunch and she's like, "Mai, come to FACES. You know, it's like really cool folks, like people of color and they're really chill. Just come." And I'm like, "Okay." So I went to the first general meeting. What was really cool about it was that people there, they talked a lot. They asked me who I was, tell us about yourself. What school do you go to? Are you native? You born here? Okay, you're from Sacramento. Tell us about yourself. So I sat in the meeting just talking about myself. I really felt like people were really listening to me. They actually thought it was really interesting that I came from a family of, at the time, 13 kids. Thirteen? Twelve kids. They're like, "Wow! Tell me more about yourself, your family, your culture." I was like, "Wow." The club is called FACES: Freedom Alliance of Culturally Empowered Students. They were listening to me. Okay. This is kind of cool. First meeting went well. I got to kind of express who I was. This is kind of cool. So then I came back again. They



had a political forum they were planning. At the time I didn't really know about political forums. I didn't know what organizing was or what the heck they were doing. But I just knew they were all really energetic and they were just talking about issues that I didn't understand like racism and classism. I was like, "What the heck is going on?" But I just knew they were really good folks and they really were there to provide support. That's all I knew until I took my first Asian American Studies and I learned about all this. There was a little paragraph about the Hmong people. I was like, "Oh my God! There's something about the Hmong people." I learned about the war. Then I realized I didn't know my parents were involved with the war. I knew they came here from Laos but I really never knew why they came here. I never asked my parents. I didn't know. I didn't. I just thought, "Okay. They came to America for a better life" but I didn't know about the life they had before. Until I took this course and Professor Rodriguez was like you know these are the reasons, you know. Push and pull factors. I was like, "What? Push and pull factors? What the heck is going on?" So I read about the Hmong people and there's one paragraph about the Vietnam War and the Hmong people were recruited. I'm like, "What the hell is going on?" Then I was, "Okay, I'm going to talk to my dad tonight. I'm going to call him." I talked to him and then he was like, "Yeah. We were involved with the war." I'm like, "What the heck is going on?" No one told me. My parents never talked about it. It wasn't until I took this course that I was like, "What? My parents came here because of the war?" I didn't know that I had an uncle who died because they overfed him with opium – all this crazy, traumatic stuff. No one ever told me. My parents never shared it with me. I think they would have eventually told me but if children never ask, why tell? How they see it, why burden them with our story? There's no point. So, I was able to do my oral report in my sociology/Asian American Studies class. That's when I got to find out the reasons why my parents came over here. At the time, I was still a bio. major and I decided to keep the bio. major because I didn't like all of bio. but I liked some parts of bio. I was like, "Okay it's too far now but I have to. I have to pick up soc. I have to do something. If I don't major in soc, I'm going to kill myself because this stuff is amazing and it was speaking to my experience." So I declared sociology and started taking classes. Even though I took classes, I was still trying to grip deconstruction, racism, and classism. I didn't really understand until I applied it to a lot of community stuff that I was doing. Like I was telling you before, there were really no Hmong students because I was the only one there. So I was trying to find Hmong folks. So I would Google "Hmong college students" and then HSIC came up, which stands for Hmong Student Intercollegiate Coalition. It was a coalition for Hmong college students throughout California. I was like, "Oh my God! There are Hmong college students! I'm totally going to be their friends or I'm going to try to reach out." So I Googled, found a number online, and called him. His name was Seng. I called him. He was like, "Yeah! We're having a

statewide conference at Sac State. Come out!" I'm like, "Okay!" So I came out to the meeting and it was really cool because I was around all these Hmong college students who really want to do some good stuff in the Hmong community like promote higher education because there aren't a lot of Hmong folks in school – in higher education. I was like, "Oh my God! This is amazing! This is cool!" They're really mobilizing, trying to get the Hmong issues out there. And I'm like, "Okay, this is cool. How can I get involved? Can I be on the board?" They're like, "Yeah! We need a Nor. Cal. Rep. Why don't we interview you over the phone?" They had phone conferences. "We'll let you know if you got it." So I did the phone interview and they said, "Yeah! You're on board." Next thing I knew, I was part of HSIC until I graduated. HSIC really helped build a lot of my connection to the Hmong community and helped me organize and stuff. But at the same time, I also felt that there's a lot of programs at USF that really helped me to be able to build my foundation for a lot of my skills, like MCSS (Multicultural Student Services), that really provided that support for me. Just you know, like you, MG, and Simon, always having your door open, you know, for me to be able to vent, or give me guidance about family, school, work, that kind of stuff, and just the kind of programs you guys had really helped engaged me using what I learned in class to have these kind of discussions and dialogues. So I grew. I've grown a lot. When I think about when I was a freshman till now, totally different. The stuff I did with the Hmong community, the stuff I did on campus, the clubs, the club I started (the Southeast Asian Student Alliance), being part of APASC, I mean, just all these different clubs, I think just shaped me. I don't know. As for drive, a lot of reasons why I did what I did were because I think I was just looking for that space. It was important for me to really be able to express who I was but at the same time I was also really concerned about what was happening in the Hmong community: poverty, education (not a lot of the folks), gangs, those kind of things. I still felt like the voice for Hmong Americans wasn't really heard and it really bothered me, you know? I think that was my drive to really be involved on campus – and even off-campus. HSIC was totally off-campus. It wasn't really part of school at USF but it was part of my school life. It was part of who I was. Even when I wasn't doing homework, HSIC was my life. When I was on-campus, FACES, MCSS was my life. Even when school's over, I think FACES and MCSS is still my life. I think it was part of school, part of who I was. Um, so yeah. So that's that. Yeah.

MG:

So, Mai, I want to go back to something that you had said. You didn't feel like the Hmong voice was being heard. What were the kinds of stories that you were hearing? What were the kinds of issues that you felt weren't being addressed that you started to become more passionate about?

M: I think what made me passionate was there were other Hmong college students that was going through what I was going through. Even before I started figuring, seeing the problems in the Hmong community, why is there not a lot of Hmong folks in college? Why are they dropping out of high school? Why are they marrying young? I knew those were issues, but I never really thought about discussing them to anyone because I was like, “Gosh! Hmong people! Why are you all getting married so young? Why are you guys not going to school?” It was because I felt like a lot of the youth didn’t have that support, right? Through HSIC I was able to speak and have discussions with people who were coming from the same space, same background that I was, seeing me struggle. I was like, “Well, let’s do something about, you know!” We’re all college – Hmong college students – and a lot of us, we’re all kind of similar, fighting for the same thing, just trying to help advance the Hmong community, you know? So I think that was the thing. I think it was really time for the youth to take ownership in that movement to say, “Our parents didn’t go to college. We’re able to go to college and we’re able to articulate things. We’re able to fight for things, the issues going on in the Hmong community. Our parents can’t do that, because they don’t know how to articulate it. And here we are. We’re educated. We’re first.” Most of the folks who were part of HSIC were all mostly first-gen., you know, and even second-gen. Most of most of us are first gen. because the Hmong people have only been here for 40 something years. Our parents came here but they never really got an education. They didn’t know how to write, couldn’t speak English. We were basically the ones that got a kindergarten all the way up to twelfth grade education. We were able to articulate that better and really fight for the Hmong people, or the issues that’s happening, the issues that the Hmong community was facing not just in California or not only in the United States. We focused on a lot of issues in California like teen pregnancy. Southeast Asians have the highest teen pregnancy in California and we’ll address that. Higher education. Why are a lot of Hmong folks dropping out of high school? Those kind of things. Going out to Hmong New Year, tabling, trying to recruit Hmong college students – I mean to recruit high school students to come to our colleges. There are Hmong college students in San Diego University, USF Berkeley, San Jose, DeVry, UOP, UC Merced. Why not wear our college sweatshirt? Let them what we’re going through in college – the excitement, things we’re learning and show them this is what we’re doing. We’re doing great things and you can decide to go to college and be like this, too. Trying to recruit the youth to go to school was our first goal. Then once we built that foundation, we wanted to tackle other issues like teen pregnancy and gangs. When I say that I feel like the Hmong voice was missing I think it was more like I don’t think anyone was really talking about the issues in the Hmong community. And I don’t think anyone was fighting for us. I think our parents didn’t know what was going on, thought college was the thing to do. Go to college. When we got to college we realized we can’t just get an education and walk out and start

finding a job. We felt there was a need to go back and really help our community because then we really felt like there was a purpose to education because of all the stuff that we were seeing.

MG: Mm.

M: I think by then we were able to realize there's a lot of shit going on in the Hmong community and no one's really doing anything about it. We felt we definitely needed to take power in our own hands and mobilize the community and educate. So, that's what I love about HSIC and I think a lot of my growth came from there and the orgs. and MCSS at USF. My life revolved around all of that – which is great, you know. I think I had the best undergrad. experience ever. Yeah.

MG: Knowing that there weren't a lot of Hmong folks on campus, and now that you have this place and this space and this forum to do connect with Hmong students off-campus, how has that led you into your leadership? How do you think that has affected your leadership?

M: [sigh] How has doing stuff with HSIC affected my leadership?

MG: Yeah and what kinds of experiences that you've had thus far? So all the things you talked about since high school on until your undergrad., and even what you're doing now. How you think that has shaped you? Or if you can pick one or two events or people that really really influenced who are right now, who or what would that be?

M: Who influenced me?

MG: Who or events or experiences.

M: I would probably say my parents even though you would think, "Why?" I mean people say their parents all the time and I know it sounds cliché that I'm saying my parents, but I really think it's my parents -- and also my grandma. I say my parents because they provided a home for me, clothes, food. I think a lot of their struggle made me realize that change needed to happen in the Hmong community. Also because of my grandma. I think she's always been known to be very gossipy and loud in our family. She's not afraid to say what's on her mind. I think I probably inherited some of her genes because Hmong women should always know their place, right? My grandma, she's not like that. She speaks whatever's on her mind. And I realize that's why her grandpa not with her anymore. My grandpa went back to Thailand to marry another wife. And my grandma's alone. Well she's not alone. She has us and she's doing great without my grandpa. She always voiced her mind – even to a lot of clan leaders. I think in some way, my parents are my role models because I see their struggle and I feel

like I'm going through not the similar struggle but kinda like the same struggle, you know, like seeing them progressing from the struggle. I feel like I'm also progressing from my struggle. But I feel like my grandma, if she grew up in my generation, I saw her. Let's say my grandma went to college. I feel like if she grew up in my generation, she would be the leader that would make history.

MG: Mmm.

M: Because she didn't get that education. But if my grandma did get that education, I really think she would be that loud, [laughs] that loud, angry, Asian woman who's always rocking the boat because she always has something to say. I think if she had the education then she would probably be the one making history right now.

MG: Do you see yourself making history right now?

M: I don't know, MG. To be honest with you, I don't know. I'm just following what I'm passionate about. Honestly, I don't know. And you know? I don't know. It depends on who defines "making history." I think everybody makes history in some way. Whether I show up in the books or not, that doesn't really matter. I think in some way I'll make history in my family. I made history that I was the first to go to college.

MG: Uh huh.

M: I made history that I'm the first grandchild in the Vang family to go to college. I'm the oldest grandchild on both of my parents' sides, you know. I think in some way I already made history in my family and I'm already happy enough that I was able to be the first to go to college, first to graduate, to be able to do things that I have. I know I'm still young and stuff. My parents never would have ever had this opportunity. So in some way I'm already making history.

MG: Uh huh.

M: I know that there are going to be a lot of challenges and exciting things for me in the future but I feel like I'm already making history.

MG: I want to go back to something that you said earlier about when you were describing your grandmother. You said that women should know their place – that Hmong women should know their place. What does that mean?

M: Okay. Hmong women should know their place. Well, we don't get to eat at the same time as the men. The men get to eat first, but that's changing

now. The men get to eat first and then the women. But it seems that a lot of the elderly women get to eat with the men now because they're also known to be very, very wise. But if my grandma was at the table with all the elderly, they would say she needs to know her place. It's not her place to talk because you the Hmong structure is really set up in clans. It's usually the man who's in charge of the clan. So they don't really get much say, you know, in what goes on in the Hmong community. I'm sure they can talk to their husbands and tell them how they feel. But at the end of the day, it's really the husband making that decision or influencing that clan person. My dad's the head clan person. Why is my mom not? That's just how the structure is. I mean that it's tradition. That's how the structure's always been. Maybe it'll change. Who knows? Maybe, maybe it'll change.

MG: Can you describe to me what that structure is? Is that by family? Can you talk to me a little bit more about the clan structure?

M: Yeah. It's by family by last name. There's the Vang clan. There's the Xiong clan, the Her clan. But within the Vang clan there are other Vang clans, too. So my dad is the head clan, the elder. *Tus coj* is what they call it – who is in charge. Basically if there are any marriage problems, any drama happening in the family, any finance problems, divorce, brotherly issues, family fighting, they go to the clan person to talk it out, figure out who's right, who's wrong. Whatever the clan person says after discussion, which sometimes takes hours or days to figure out who's right or wrong, they just leave it be. Whatever the clan guy, the head person says, that's it. It's always been like that. We don't go to the police or anything else. If there's an issue in the Hmong community, then it's the elderly men, the clan people who come together and discuss about. However they want to handle it, they handle it that way. Youth wouldn't have a say. The women don't have a say. It's basically the clan leaders or the elderly men with the clan leader. It's always been like that. That still exists. On Saturdays and Sundays my dad's not at work. My dad works Monday through Friday. On the weekends he's usually at someone's house because one day he's doing a shaman ritual or he's trying to solve some crisis that's happening in the Vang clan. Someone is on the verge of divorcing their wife or they're fighting because of finance problems or other times a family's having a lot of problems with their daughter-in-law because they say she's going out too much. My dad has to talk to the daughter-in-law and figure out why she's going out too much or what his family is saying. So basically my dad's always trying to solve the other family's crisis.

MG: How did he get in that position?

M: How'd he become that position? It was handed to him. He didn't expect it because my grandpa went back to Thailand, left my grandma because he

missed Thailand. He didn't like America when he came here. So he went back – not to Laos. Laos is where we fled. He went back to Thailand. So he's there now. When he left, my grandpa's brother, I call him grandpa, too, was in charge of being the clan person but he won six million dollars at the lottery. Yeah. And after that he didn't talk to anybody. The clan didn't know what to do because we couldn't contact him and he just distanced himself after that. I don't know his reason. Maybe he was scared that people would find out. People might be ask for money. You know, Hmong people talk about that kind of stuff. But, I'm really happy for my grandpa, my other grandpa who won. That's great. But I still feel like it was part of the cultural duty to be the clan leader. He was the one carrying the torch. He was carrying the torch for a long time but when this happened he decided to just drop the torch. So all the Hmong Vang, all the men in the family, the elderly, no one knew what to do and my father was the oldest son. They're said to my father, "Since your family went to Thailand and your uncle you is not the person, we don't know who else to do it. You know how to blow the Hmong instrument and you know *pau kev cai* (meaning traditions). You know how to speak." He has really good etiquette, rhetoric in Hmong. With the way my dad speaks, there's a certain way of approaching people and talking a certain way. My dad had that down. He knew what to do at ceremonies. He knew how to speak to people, what to do. So they're like, "We're going to hand you the torch." My dad, at first, I think he was hesitant. He's like, "No." My mom was kind of mad because the person who becomes the clan leader, their wife has to be very patient. Sometimes you have to put the clan before the family. People always say, "*poj niam*." The wife has to be "*siab ntev*" (meaning patient) because like I said, sometimes they have to serve the clan before the family. There's been a lot of issues. My mom and dad's been fighting a lot, too, but I think my mom's been very patient. They do have a lot of fights but she's been pretty patient about it. He got handed the torch because my grandpa left to Thailand and my dad's uncle dropped the torch. For the clan to keep going, you don't want to bring shame on the family. It was a lot on my dad's shoulders and he decided to take it on.

MG: What's going to happen when he's no longer the clan leader?

M: Someone else is going to pick it up. I don't know. One of my brothers, one of my cousins. Someone's going to pick it up but it's going to be someone who knows the traditions, someone who can speak the rhetoric, which is also kind of problematic because a lot of my brothers and my uncles don't really speak Hmong very well. That's going to be interesting how that's going to play out in the near future. I have no clue. But my dad's young. He's only 44. He'll be around for awhile. He'll be the clan person for awhile.

MG: So, Mai, when you were growing up or even now when you look back on your life, who were your role models of what leadership looked like or how did you develop a sense of leadership? Who showed you what leadership looked like?

M: Oh my God. I don't even think I know what a leader was. I know what sounds so silly, MG.

MG: Let's even start there. How do you understand a leader? What is leadership to you?

M: Wow. I think that's hard for me. I mean, if you want me to give you the definition of leader, I know what leader is. But growing up, I don't think I even thought about that term or saw myself as a leader. But I did see people that I wanted to be like.

MG: Okay.

M: Okay. So as a kid, or growing up, even in high school, people tell you what a leader is: someone who has certain characteristics, very likeable that people can follow because there is a leader and then followers. In high school I thought in those terms. But I think growing up I never thought in terms of a leader but I knew who I wanted to be like. So who did I want to be like? My teachers. And you know what's crazy? It's so bad that I'm saying this but I didn't want to be like my parents. When I think about it, I don't think I would ever be able to have the strength that my parents had. Now, I really wish I could have their strength completely because for them to be able to go through the war and live here, and go through the discrimination and struggle, even at Albertson's when everyone gave us dirty looks, I was just bitter towards my mom, towards my parents. I didn't want to be like them. I was ashamed. I didn't want to be like them. I wanted to be like my teachers who were all White. I don't know if that makes a difference but they were all White, basically. I wanted to be their kids. I didn't know what a leader was but I knew who I wanted to be like or how I wanted to live and those were my leaders. That sounds kind of bad. Bad or good, I wanted to be like my teachers. I wanted to be like my friends. I didn't want to be like my mom and dad. I didn't want to be anything close to my mom and dad. But when I think about me going to school, really struggling with who I was, I found that my strength was through my mom and dad. You know? I don't think I have as much strength as they do, how they were able to make it through you know, Laos, Thailand and now here. If I can be more like them now and I could have their strength, that would be amazing. I don't think I have it, but I think I'm trying to strive for that. I wouldn't say they're leaders but those are the people I wanted to be like, that I looked up to. It wasn't until I was really struggling in college and I didn't have people around that I realized



that. I started trying to figure out who I was and my own personal struggles and being able to find myself through my parents. And so now I say my parents are my role models, right? But before I didn't want to be anything like them. I think it's been a whole 360.

MG: So do you have a concept of leadership now and what that means to you?

M: Yeah, but you know what's weird, MG? I don't really see myself as a leader. I think for me, I think I see myself just trying to make change in the community. Because when I think about a leader, it's great. You lead your folks. You lead people. You give them guidance. You're kind of the spokesperson. Sometimes you're a spokesperson for a group. I mean leadership can have so many different definitions but it's kind of like that person who has those characteristics to lead. Maybe I possess some of those characteristics that people define as a leader, but I feel like I'm just trying to make change in the Hmong community. That's most important to me. In some ways I feel like there are a lot of young folks out there who are making change in their neighborhood, in their community, and in some ways they're leaders. I'm sure other kids look up to them. They'll be like, "Wow. I want to do what they're doing." I don't see myself as a leader. I just see myself as an agent of change. I'm just trying to make changes because I don't really agree with what's going on. You know?

MG: So say more. What are the kinds of changes that you want to see in the community?

M: Okay. So, trying to get the Hmong folks to stay out of poverty so they can be self-sufficient. They can take care of themselves and not have so much worries. That's important to me. That's not happening. I mean, it's slowly, gradually because I think a lot of youth are mobilizing Hmong folks. Hmong students who are already working in the professional field. And some folks are really trying to go back and bring the community with them because, the way I see it, you can only go so far. You can't really succeed if you can't bring your community with you. And so some folks are definitely doing that. MG, can you say that one more time? What was the question?

MG: What kinds of changes do you see?

M: So, making sure that the Hmong can get out of poverty. I think that there are a lot of people in poverty still. I think educating young Hmong women about teen pregnancy and I wouldn't say consequence. If they had a child, I know they would take on that responsibility and I'm sure they would make great moms. But, the limitations, what you're not able to do when you're a mother at such a young age, to let them know of other opportunities. I think if they knew of those other opportunities and saw

them it might be different. I think a lot of young Hmong women who do have kids and decide to get married, I don't think they see those opportunities. I think if they saw them, if they didn't have role models, if they saw those opportunities, like, wow! She didn't make that decision when she was young and look at her now and she's doing awesome things, you know. She's traveling, living the life, really out there. I think if they saw that, they would want that too. I know it's a choice for them to have kids but I think that they're not given that choice. They don't see the different opportunities. They don't know any better. So that's one thing. The poverty, the teen pregnancy, and the education, trying to get young folks to stay in school and go to college because a lot of Hmong youth drop out of college. Telling them the opportunities that college can give you. Maybe you don't have money to go but to let them know hey, there are certain scholarships you can apply for. There are other ways to work the system to find money. It's hard but you can do it. It's hard because they don't know about it. I'm not saying that you know anyone can pull themselves up by their bootstraps. I feel like they need to know the resources. If they don't have the resources, they're not going to go in that route. Making sure that Hmong youth have those resources so that they have the choice. They know the different opportunities that they can choose from.

MG: So I have the last question that's a two-part question. If you can just share what you anticipate your research to be in your master's program and then what are your future aspirations?

M: Okay. So, currently at this moment, I am doing my master's in Asian American Studies and public health. What I'm really really interested in was, well. What I should probably tell you was in my undergrad for my Asian American honors thesis I did my research on religion because I practice Shamanism. But there's been this tension on the Hmong community between those who practice Christianity and those who practice Shamanism. Are you staying true to the Hmong roots if you convert? So I looked at the tension and how that plays out in the community. Not to say anything about Christianity because I have a lot of friends who practice Christianity and they have a lot of conviction and it's great. Even the people who do practice Shamanism – it's great, too, because I practice it. But I just noticed that there's been a lot of clash in the Hmong community and families separating because of the religion. So I did my thesis on that. Towards the end of my senior year, I focused on shamans and the elderly in the Christian community, like the pastors, that kind of stuff. Then I got really interested in southeast Asian elderly, which is Hmong elderly. Being a bio. major, I'm very interested in the health aspect – but prevention, the public health aspect of it. So what I'm trying to do for my master's thesis? Well it's only been two months since I've started graduate school but I want to study the aging population among

southeast Asians because California has the largest population of southeast Asian elders. I really want to look at the different health challenges and the cultural challenges and barriers that they face because we talk a lot about baby boomers and a lot of this research is really just focused on White, middle-class. I really want to be able to have that research so that policy makers can see that there are other elders who exist, like elders of color, those who are disabled. Seniors and the aging population, it's getting pretty diverse, really soon, in a couple of years and you have to be prepared for it. So that's really important to me and that's what I want to study. As for what I want to do in the future, I don't know! But it's so crazy because when I started school I thought I wanted to be a doctor because that's all my parents knew. People go to school to become a doctor. I found out that I can't put a needle in someone and I faint when I see the sight of blood. What I'm very interested in is actually prevention – preventing it before someone gets sick. That's really important to me. I got really interested in the policy aspect of it so that's why I'm doing public health now in Asian American Studies. Now I'm realizing that I'm so interested in policy that I want to go into health law. So now I'm thinking about law school! But it's crazy because my parents never saw that coming! My dad thinks it's great because he's the head clan leader. He's like, "Oh hey, a politician. That's great! You know, it's in my blood because I'm the head clan person. You should be fine." But my mom is like, "Oh you shouldn't do that. That's law. That's a lot of talking." My mom will say, "Don't talk too much or else *koj yuav poob ntseg muag*." If you don't say the right thing then you'll lose face (if you don't know how to articulate things). She's worried about that so she doesn't think that's the career for me. But you never know! I don't know what's going to happen but I'm thinking about going to law school after this and doing some policy stuff – health policy stuff and doing a lot of stuff on health disparities. So that's what I want to work on.

MG: Thank you.

M: Thanks, MG.