A Critical Feminist Case Study of the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program

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ABSTRACT

Asian American women are chronically underrepresented in leadership positions in almost every sector including higher education, government, private, and non-profit (Youngberg et al., n.d.). Many researchers have suggested the need for more leadership development programs specifically designed to support the needs of Asian American women (Akutagawa, 2014; Canlas, 2016; Gee & Peck, 2015; Lin, 2007; Youngberg et al., n.d.). Though there are a number of leadership programs geared towards Asian Americans, there are very few that cater to Asian American women explicitly. Historically, cultural pageant programs in the Asian American community have played this role and one such program is the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program (NCCBQP). This study utilized Critical Feminist Theory to explore the role that the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program plays in the Japanese American communities of Northern California, especially in regards to leadership development, intersectional identities, and dealing with racism and sexism in the workplace and community. This case study consisted of seven women who participated in a series of interviews and focus groups between March 2021 and July 2021.

Three major themes emerged from the data in this study. First, the women associated the Queen Program with the philosophy of servant leadership and felt that this type of leadership style was cultivated through the program’s training and consistent with the standards that were prescribed and established based on traditional gender norms and cultural expectations. Second, the rule that the women must be at least 50% Japanese to participate is a refinement of the Japanese American values and norms into a racial form
coupled with the cultural knowledge that has created a ranking of cultural belonging and legitimacy. Third, participants shared their experiences of racism and sexism that they experienced through the context of the program and that the program did not prepare them to navigate discrimination in the community or workplace nor did they feel equipped to be allies to others.

Keywords: Asian American women, leadership, critical feminist theory, intersectional identities, leadership development
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.

Alison K. Nishiyama-Young January 7, 2022
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CHAPTER I: THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial group in the United States (Budiman et al., 2019), however, continue to be underrepresented in positions of leadership (Gee & Peck, 2015; Youngberg et al., n.d.). In a multi-year analysis from 2000-2015, Asian Americans outnumbered white Americans in entry-level professional positions, yet white Americans were twice as likely to become executives and held almost three times the number of executive positions (Gee & Peck, 2015). Despite their lack of representation in leadership positions, Asian Americans are often touted as the “model minority” based on a collection of stereotypes that frame them as the exemplary minority group while contrasting them with the “problem minorities” (Oluo, 2017). The myth of the “model minority” is based on “presumptions of academic and financial success, social and political meekness, a strong work ethic, dominance in math and sciences, and strict parenting” (Oluo, 2017). This racialized stereotype creates a monolith that erases the lived experiences of those who do not live up to the burdens of the myth (Poon et al., 2016), and allows for racism against Asian Americans to be overlooked (Oluo, 2017). Research has also shown that the “model minority” label often associated with submissiveness has also led “to the perception that people of Asian descent are ‘not leaders’ or ‘lack leadership ability,’ a perspective that hurts Asian Americans across all sectors, all industries, and all the various roles that they assume” (Akutagawa, 2014, p. 277). Jane Hyun coined the term “bamboo ceiling” to describe the obstacles and barriers that Asian Americans face in reaching executive and management positions (Kawahara, 2007).
Asian American women, in particular, are chronically underrepresented in top positions in almost every sector including higher education, government, private, and non-profit (Youngberg et al., n.d.). Stereotypes such as the submissive China Doll or the frigid Dragon Lady have painted Asian American women as the antithesis of a typical leader in the United States and precluded Asian American women from leadership positions (Akutagawa, 2014). In 2018, Asian American women made up 1.79% of the total number of “Executive/Senior Level Officials & Managers" in U.S. private industries (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018). In the federal sector workforce, Asian American women represent less than 2% of senior executive service level, the highest levels of management for the federal government (Youngberg et al., n.d.). Numbers for Asian American women in higher education are just as bleak. Akutagawa’s (2014) research shows that in 2011 only 1% of all college presidents were Asian American. Finally, Asian American women hold fewer than half of 1% of board and executive positions in non-profit organizations, except those serving ethnic communities (Youngberg et al., n.d.). Many researchers have suggested the need for more leadership development programs specifically designed to support the needs of Asian Americans (Akutagawa, 2014; Canlas, 2016; Gee & Peck, 2015; Lin, 2007; Youngberg et al., n.d.). Furthermore, Youngberg et al. (n.d.) point out that in addition to preparing women to be in leadership roles, leadership training also educates the public about the challenges that face Asian American women in their rise to positions of leadership. Though there are a few leadership programs geared towards Asian Americans, there are very few that cater to Asian American women explicitly.
Historically, cultural pageant programs in the Asian American community have played this role. One such program that is focused on leadership development for Asian American women is the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program (NCCBQP). The Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program is a cultural pageant dedicated to developing young women of Japanese descent to become community leaders. Their hope is that these future leaders will bring forth new ideas for the community while preserving and perpetuating traditions (Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program, 2020a). While the Queen Program plays an important part in the Northern California Japanese American community and participants are seen as future leaders and representatives of the community, King-O’Riain (2006) points out that these kinds of programs were created “to maintain a particularly antiquated and nostalgic sense of Japanese Americanness-- once racialized by others in internment and now imposing race itself, not as self-delusion or self-hate, but as a form of self-preservation” (p. 229). This form of preservation sustains stereotypes like the “China doll” or “lotus blossom” and contributes to the underrepresentation of Asian American women in leadership (Leng, 2013; Youngberg et al., n.d.).

Ethnic leadership programs that embody the appearance of a pageant like the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program are rarely examined by researchers. According to Wu (1997), these programs “provide an opportunity to examine how idealized versions of womanhood reflect broader concerns about power and culture” (p. 6). In addition, Cohen et al. (2013) maintained that pageants are a reflection of the “values, concepts, and behavior that exist at the center of a group’s sense of itself and exhibit values of morality, gender and place” (p. 2). There is a lack of research on these
arenas that are used to construct and perpetuate social identities that influence the way that Asian American women are perceived as leaders. Much of the research available regarding Asian American women is focused on cultural beliefs and values as well as familial roles (Kawahara, 2007). The literature concerning cultural pageants and leadership is limited; most research regarding ethnic pageants examines the history and relationship between gender, race, and national identity in pageants but does not delve into its connection to leadership or leadership development (King-O’Riain, 2006; Mabalon, 2005; Ofori-Mensa, 2010; Wu, 1997). The nexus of factors that prevent Asian American women from attaining leadership roles calls for further exploration.

Asian American women face a plethora of obstacles to reach positions of leadership and their leadership development needs are often not perceived or unmet (Kawahara, 2007). Though there are some community programs, such as the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program, that seek to address these gaps, these initiatives were created with a particular purpose, which may not address the current needs of Japanese American women (King-O’Riain, 2006). Though the program’s intention was to train Japanese American community leaders, it has nonetheless had an effect on the leadership development and identities of Japanese American women in a larger context. This study’s intention is to explore the role that the Queen Program plays in the Northern California Japanese American community through the experiences of women that participated in the Queen Program. It is particularly focused on the influence it has on the leadership beliefs of women that have engaged in the program as well as how it shapes the intersectional identities of Japanese American women. The study also
plans to explore how the Queen Program prepares the participants for leadership challenges, including discrimination.

**Historical Context of Japanese American Cultural Pageants**

The leadership ceiling for Asian American women is a product of a history of anti-Asian sentiments and patriarchy. Asian Americans are often portrayed as “perpetual foreigners.” In the best light they are seen as “exotic, different Americans” and at worst deemed “foreign invaders” (E. Lee, 2015). The history of anti-Asian sentiment in the U.S. began with the arrival of the first Asian immigrants from China in 1848 (Japanese American Citizens League, 2011). The developing industries of America discovered that the cost of Chinese labor was two-thirds the price of white labor, which fueled white workers’ fears of losing their jobs and prompted a demand for exclusionary laws against the Chinese (Zhou, 2012). When California became a state in 1850, lawmakers codified the discrimination against the Chinese in Article 19 of the California State Constitution. With the Chinese population dwindling due to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and less people willing to do menial work for low wages, a labor shortage developed in the west as well as the Protectorate of Hawaiʻi. The agricultural industry turned to Japan as a new source of labor (Japanese American Citizens League, 2011).

The first Japanese immigrants arrived in Hawaiʻi to work in the sugarcane fields in the 1860s and many continued on to the West Coast to work as farmers and fishermen (National Museum of American History, 2017). The neighborhood of Little Tokyo in Los Angeles first began to develop in 1885 when a former Japanese sailor opened an American style cafe on East First Street (Creason, 2016; U.S. National Park Service, 2019). Many Japanese immigrants, mostly men, who had come for short working stints
found lodging in the boarding houses surrounding East First Street. Los Angeles entered a period of growth at the turn of the century and many Japanese immigrants decided to remain in the United States to open businesses and build a community (U.S. National Park Service, 2019). As the population of Japanese began to grow, Little Tokyo developed into the economic and cultural center for *issei* or the first wave of immigrants from Japan.

In 1906, in response to pressure from the Asiatic Exclusion League in California, whose main goal was to extend the Chinese Exclusion Act to include Japanese and Korean immigrants, the San Francisco Board of Education mandated that Japanese students who were attending public school be transferred to a segregated Chinese school. When Japanese Americans protested and were unable to change the School Board’s decision, they alerted Japanese officials. President Theodore Roosevelt was forced to oppose the San Francisco School Board’s decision in order to avoid instigating an international incident with Japan, especially so soon after the Russo-Japanese War that had propelled Japan into a position of military power. Through what became known as the Gentlemen’s Agreement, San Francisco representatives agreed to rescind the segregation order and President Roosevelt ordered the end of Japanese immigration to the U.S. through Hawai‘i, Canada, and Mexico (Lyon, 2020). Japan also agreed to cease granting visas to laborers seeking to immigrate to the U.S., however, passports were still issued to business men and wives, children, and parents of those already residing in the United States. Between 1910 and 1920, many wives joined their spouses, many as “picture brides,” whose marriages had been arranged through the exchange of photographs prior to their arrival in Hawai‘i or America. This helped to establish and
grow the Japanese community and deviated from other waves of Asian immigrants like the Chinese, Filipinos, and Indians who were largely bachelor societies (Imai, 2019; Nakamura, 2014).

Upon arrival in San Francisco, immigrants were ferried to Angel Island where they were interrogated by immigration inspectors who determined whether to admit or deny entry to the applicant. Race, gender, and class were the main concerns and ideologies used to screen Asian immigrants and resulted in differential treatment for Asian immigrant men and women (Hune & Nomura, 2003). According to Gee (2003), “central to immigration officials’ decisions to admit or exclude Japanese and Chinese women were concerns about women’s labor, domesticity, identities, and sexual morality” (p. 91). Women who stated they would perform “household duties” were readily admitted as they supported the class biases of the Gentlemen’s Agreement and met the prevailing standards of women’s proper roles and behaviors set by the bourgeois class among white Americans in early 20th century American society (Hune & Nomura, 2003).

Though they faced exclusionary legislation at the federal, state, and local levels, Japanese immigrants were able to find economic success in agriculture, wholesale produce, fishing, and retail. Their children, or nisei, were American citizens by birth and were allowed to vote and acquire property. This new freedom pulled families away from downtown and Little Tokyo started to lose “its social cohesion” (Several, 1998). As a way to strengthen the community and reestablish Little Tokyo as the economic and cultural center, community leaders organized the first Nisei Week Japanese Festival in 1934 (Muranaka, n.d.). The festival was a showcase of Japanese cultural exhibits, food, traditional arts and crafts, music, and entertainment (Nisei Week, 2020a). These
traditional displays of Japanese culture were paired with typical American events such as
the beauty contest (Several, 1998).

The Nisei Week Queen Pageant was added the following year becoming the first
Japanese American beauty pageant in the United States and was seen as a way to increase
business by awarding ballots to patrons who frequented Little Tokyo businesses. The
pageant was also used to symbolize to the surrounding white community that the
Japanese American community was “not a threat” to them and ease racial tensions (King-
O’Riain, 2006). Tensions had reached new levels since Japan had embarked on a military
campaign to create a Pacific empire beginning with the invasion of Manchuria in 1931.
This display of military prowess was counter to the United States’ interests in the east
and proof of burgeoning hostility teetering towards the brink of war (Kumamoto, 1979).

Aware of the continuing tension, the United States government took precautions
by dispatching a special investigator, Curtis B. Munson, to assess the disposition of
Japanese Americans and their communities on the West Coast and Hawai`i (Japanese
American Citizens League, 2011). This was a direct reflection of America's prejudice
against Asians and the “peculiarity” of their languages, customs, religions, and physical
appearance (Kumamoto, 1979). As Kumamoto (1979) described it, “Once considered
inferior and insignificant, these ethnic distinctions were now considered by the
government as anti-American, potentially subversive and somehow threatening to
American security” (p. 47). Mass media outlets leveraged the belief that “the
homogeneity and ethnic loyalty of the Japanese would lead to acts of sabotage against the
United States” (Kumamoto, 1979) to depict Japanese Americans as secret agents for
Japan and inflamed the “Yellow Peril” myths on the West Coast (Japanese American
To counter claims of the “Yellow Peril,” the Nisei Week Queen Pageant and Festival were promoted as a patriotic celebration of Japanese Americans’ allegiance to the United States (Several, 1998). The Nisei Week Queen Pageant was intentionally created to mirror the structure of the Miss America Pageant. The parallel forms of the pageants allowed Japanese women to mimic and espouse American values by dressing in Western styles and emphasizing their “native-born ability to speak English” (King-O’Riain, 2006, p. 61), which aided in featuring Americanness on a Japanese American body. “The rationale was that if Japanese Americans, symbolized by the queen, were seen to be truly American, they could make claims that they were good and loyal Americans” (King-O’Riain, 2006, p. 60).

However, neither the festival nor the United States Constitution was enough to prevent the deluge of racial injustices precipitated by Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Fueled by incendiary rhetoric from the media and mounting pressure from public officials, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, which broadly authorized military commanders to remove any person deemed a threat to national security from the West Coast to relocation centers further inland (Several, 1998). In the spring of 1942, near the temple that had hosted the Nisei Week Festival and all over the West Coast, thousands of Japanese Americans were lined up and shipped off to mass detention camps in the isolated areas of Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming bringing only what they could carry with them (Muranaka, n.d.).

Families were forced to sell, abandon, or give away their property and those who
were lucky enough to sell their property, did so for a fraction of its worth. Bank accounts were frozen or confiscated as “enemy assets” and because of this many lost titles to homes, businesses, and farmlands. In the internment camps, Japanese Americans were forced to live in cramped barracks with no privacy and under heavy security. To add insult to injury, a questionnaire went out to all detainees that were 17 years of age or older, asking Japanese Americans to swear their loyalty to the United States and gauging their willingness to serve in the United States army. In order to prove their allegiance, more than 1,400 second generation Japanese Americans signed up to protect a country that had labeled them the enemy (Japanese American Citizens League, 2011).

The war ended in 1945 but the last concentration camp did not close until October 1946 and the last specialized camp did not close until 1952. Though they were allowed to return home, they were met with violence, discrimination and continued campaigns to keep them out permanently. Elderly issei had lost their lives’ work, and in the 1970 Census about 20% were below the poverty level. Most nisei had their education interrupted and could no longer afford to go to college as much of the responsibility to support their families and rebuild their lives fell upon their shoulders. “Losses were compounded by long-lasting psychological damages. Families disintegrated under the prison-like conditions, individuals became embittered, and people lost their sense of self-esteem. Most importantly, Japanese Americans suffered the indignity of being falsely imprisoned by their own government” (Japanese American Citizens League, 2011, p. 16).

In 1949, as Japanese Americans continued to rebuild their lives, the nisei of Los Angeles resumed the Nisei Week Festival as a way to bring solidarity to Little Tokyo (Muranaka, n.d.). Wu (1997) also explained that these cultural celebrations were meant to
demonstrate the power of the democratic society and freedom to celebrate heritage. The Cold War had brought attention to race and segregation in America and it was used as evidence that communism, not democracy, was the more equitable and just socio-political system. That same year the Honolulu Japanese Junior Chamber of Commerce Vice President, Akira “Sunshine” Fukunaga visited the Nisei Week Japanese Festival and was inspired to bring the idea of a cultural celebration to Hawai’i.

In 1953, the inaugural Japanese Ethnic Festival in Hawai`i debuted with various exhibits and demonstrations of Japanese culture; the highlight was the Queen Pageant featuring 72 young women and the crowning of the first Cherry Blossom Festival Queen under a display of fireworks (Cherry Blossom Festival Hawai`i, 2020). Soon other cities followed suit, in 1959 Seattle presented the first participants of the Japanese Queen Scholarship Organization of Washington at the Seattle Cherry Blossom and Japanese Cultural Festival (Northwest Asian Weekly, 2012) and nine years later the Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival and Queen Pageant made their debut (Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program, 2020a).

The 1970s and the women’s liberation movement for equal social and legal rights brought about waves of change for the Japanese American pageants. Though feminist movement was deemed to be too radical and “not culturally sensitive enough to be considered Japanese American” (King-O’Riain, 2006, p. 65), participants began to develop their own brand of feminism. Participants began to put pressure on the organizers to change aspects of the competition that they believe objectified the women such as the bathing suit segment and the height, weight, and body measurements.

In 1988, the chair of the Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival cancelled
the pageant believing it to be sexist and outdated. The community vehemently disagreed and the pageant returned in 1989 with a new format. It shifted its focus away from the beauty judging criteria and towards community service and professional development. The repositioning of the pageant to include professional development allowed for networking opportunities with politicians, business people, dignitaries from Japan, as well as those heavily involved in the media and entertainment industry (King-O’Riain, 2006).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the percentage of mixed-race people in the Japanese American community increased, sparking debate over cultural identity and over assimilation. The pageants became the arena for these debates over racial identity to play out. The shift in the racial demographic and the use of whiteness as the norm was embodied in the multiracial women that entered the pageant and the number of “half” Nisei Week Queens. This also manifested itself in the “blood quantum” rule or the racial eligibility rule that mandated the percentage of Japanese ancestry one must have to participate (King-O’Riain, 2006). Currently, Nisei Week and the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program require that the applicants be of at least 50% Japanese ancestry, while the Japanese Queen Scholarship Organization of Washington had no racial eligibility rule but hoped that by having “Japanese” in the title of the program would ensure that candidates would be of Japanese descent (Cherry Blossom Festival Hawai`i, 2020; King-O’Riain, 2006; Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program, 2020a). Hawai`i originally had a requirement of 100% Japanese ancestry, but changed the requirement to 50% in 1999 (King-O’Riain, 2006).

The new millennium brought about changes for the program as each organization
evolved to appeal to young Japanese American women. The Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program changed its name in 2004 from “The Cherry Blossom Queen Pageant” to deemphasize the pageantry aspect and highlight the community service, leadership, and cultural education aspects of the program (Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program, 2020a). With the closure of the Japanese Queen Scholarship Organization of Washington in 2014, the remaining programs reaffirmed their commitment to developing the next generation of Japanese American community leaders (Cherry Blossom Festival Hawai`i, 2020; Nisei Week, 2020b; Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program, 2020b).

Today, the three remaining programs, the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program, the Cherry Blossom Festival in Hawai`i, and the Nisei Week Queen and Court Program in Los Angeles, focus on three core opportunities: leadership development, cultural enrichment, and community connections (Nisei Week, 2020b; Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program, 2020b; Yano, 2006). All three programs have differing sets of qualifications, but all require that applicants: (1) be of at least 50% Japanese ancestry, (2) be single with no previous marriages or children, and (3) be a resident of the programs’ location.

The first four months of the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program and Nisei Week Queen and Court Program are spent in preparation of the Queen Program Night or Coronation. Candidates practice their speech and interview skills in traditional furisode (kimono dress) and dance and procession routines in formal gowns. The Northern California program has an added element of a creative expression or talent portion during their Queen Program Night. This night ends with the crowning of a new
Queen, First Princess, and Princesses, and Miss Tomodachi or the equivalent to Miss Congeniality for the Nisei Week Program (Nisei Week, 2020a; Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program, 2020b).

The Hawai`i Cherry Blossom Festival Queen and Court program offers cultural and leadership development classes to 15-20 women over seven months and culminates in the annual Festival Ball and coronation ceremony. During this time, a panel of judges select and crown a Queen, First Princess, three Princesses, Miss Congeniality, and Miss Popularity (Cherry Blossom Festival Hawai`i, 2020).

For all three of the programs, once the tiaras, sashes, and titles are bestowed upon the candidates and they become the official “Queen and Court,” they begin their yearlong commitment to volunteering with local organizations and events as well as traveling to and hosting their national and Japanese sister Cherry Blossom Festivals’ courts and Committees, known as Goodwill Tours (Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program, 2020a).

**Theoretical Framework**

This study utilized Critical Feminist Theory to explore the role that the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program plays in the Japanese American communities of Northern California, especially in regards to leadership development, intersectional identities, and dealing with racism and sexism in the workplace and community. Critical Feminist Theory is rooted in critical race and queer theory and incorporates bell hooks’ (2015) definition of feminism, “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (p. 1). The theory is built upon the contributions of Black feminist scholars like bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Kimberlé Crenshaw and countless others.
Critical Feminist Theory takes an intersectional approach to understand discrimination and oppression by examining the ways in which social identities converge and overlap to create inequality and compounded experiences of injustice (Crenshaw, 2017). It also recognizes the deficiencies of the various waves of feminism (Davis, 1983; hooks, 2015; Lorde, 2007) and acknowledges that gender as a social construct is limiting and instead embraces traits that are attributed to those who identify with marginalized genders (Bleasdale, 2020). Critical Feminist Theory seeks to eliminate all discrimination and oppression and relies on liberatory practices (Okazawa-Rey, 1997) and most importantly foregrounds the experiential knowledge and voices of those who have been marginalized (hooks, 2015). These systems of oppression are endemic in society’s structures and are so normalized that they often go unrecognized or are challenging to identify.

This research employs Critical Feminist Theory to disrupt the current narrative surrounding the social status of particular genders, races, etc. that contribute to the underrepresentation of Asian American women in top-level positions (Seo et al., 2017) and to examine the power and inequity present in current notions of leadership. Critical Feminist Theory validates the experiences and knowledge of women of color, specifically, the Japanese American women in this study, as a tool in the work towards equity in leadership positions. The study aims to capture the experiences of Japanese American women as they maneuver through a system built by white men for white men (Seo et al., 2017). It works to gather the intersectional experiences of Japanese American women and generate space to undertake these difficult but vital conversations in the community (de Saxe, 2012). Critical Feminist Theory is also appropriate for this research because it recognizes the significance of the historical context in challenging unjust
practices (Geisinger, 2011). In this study, the historical and global frame of reference, such as immigration and internment, needs to be explored to understand the context of the program in the community and the function it plays in the role of leadership development. Leng (2013) noted that “Launching a feminist critique of society is necessary to disenable patriarchal power and draw attention to the way gender hierarchies informs every aspect of social life by shifting the focus of attention onto the specific experience of Asian American women” (p. 21).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to engage Japanese American women who have participated in the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program and explore their experiences in the program through a critical feminist lens. This qualitative case study is particularly geared towards how the program shapes the leadership and social identity categories (i.e., race, gender, class, etc.) of participants, and prepares or fails to prepare participants for leadership challenges.

**Research Questions**

I. In what ways do cultural pageant programs like the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program shape the leadership beliefs and actions of Japanese American women?

II. In what ways do cultural pageant programs like the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program shape the intersectional identities of Japanese American women?

III. In what ways do cultural pageant programs like the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program prepare or fail to prepare Japanese
American women to respond to the racism and patriarchy in their workplace and communities?

**Limitations and Delimitations**

The delimitations of this case study are related to the selection of the site and sample. Though there are different ethnic pageant programs across the U.S. and three Japanese American programs, I chose to focus on the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program for this case study. Thus, the findings of this study are specific to this program although there may be some commonalities across programs. This also limits the sample of the study to Japanese American women who have participated in the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program. The impact of the study on the leadership and identity of non-participants is not examined. Due to the requirements of the program, being Japanese is defined as being of at least 50% Japanese ancestry.

The COVID-19 pandemic created many limitations for this study; data collection was limited to interviews via videotelephony on platforms such as Zoom. Videotelephony made it difficult to read nonverbal cues due to inconsistent and delayed connectivity and the limited camera angle of the participant. Additionally, extra caution was needed to secure recordings as Zoom was used to record sessions. Conditions did not improve enough to allow in person interviews.

**Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to the research on Japanese American women and leadership using an asset-based approach and shifts the focus to critique the systems that obstruct Asian American women from attaining leadership positions. This means illuminating the historical context of the Queen Program and exploring its role in the
Northern California Japanese American communities. This study will contribute to the field of Critical Feminist Theory as the literature and research available are limited, especially critical feminist work with the Japanese American communities and in the realm of leadership studies.
Definitions of Terminology

Asian - The United States Census Bureau defines Asian as “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent.” This includes: Asian Indian, Bangladeshi, Bhutanese, Burmese, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Malaysian, Nepalese, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Thai, Vietnamese, Other Asian, specified, Other Asian, not specified.”

Bamboo ceiling - “a combination of individual, cultural, and organizational factors that impede Asian Americans’ career progress inside organizations” (Hyun, 2005).

“Good Japanese American Woman” - The “good Japanese American women” is constructed using many of the stereotypes attributed to Japanese American and Asian American women including Youngberg et al.’s definition of the “good girl” or “good daughter,” the “geisha girl,” and Erika Lee’s “good Asian American” in antithesis to the idea of the “bad Asian American.” According to Youngberg et al.’s a “good girl” or “good daughter” is “obedient, set[s] aside their own desires and needs for the benefit of their family or to please their parents. At times, this has led to unfortunate choices in schools, careers, and spouses or has resulted in lost opportunities” (p. 21). Youngberg, Miyasato, & Nakanishi also describe the “geisha girl” as a media portrayal to make Asian American women into sexual objects and trivialize them (p. 20) into “just the compliant, passive, beautiful [women] whose only purpose in life was to please a man” (“Good Americans & Generation Rising,” 2020). Historian Erika Lee described the “good Asian American” as “someone who identifies first as an American and maybe the Asian part is something that you celebrate through occasional cooking, nice exotic clothes that you
bring out on festive occasions, but that it is not at all the primary way that you identify yourself. You’re probably Christian, you work hard, you believe in America, you are not asking for any handouts, you are not protesting, in fact, you are very, very grateful for everything the United States has given you, and for the opportunity to be in the United States and to achieve the American Dream if not for yourself, then for your children and for your grandchildren” (“Good Americans & Generation Rising,” 2020). In contrast, the “bad Asian American would be the critic, who is aligning themselves with the African Americans, and labor organizers, and activists, and communists, socialists, radicals, anarchists who threaten the United States and everything the United States stands for” (“Good Americans & Generation Rising,” 2020).
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Asian American women are routinely marginalized in the upper echelons of organizations (Kawahara, 2007; Youngberg et al., n.d.) and lack opportunities for leadership development that meet their specific needs. The Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program is one of the few programs that combine leadership and culture. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact that the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program has on the Japanese American women of Northern California that have participated. Specifically, it aims to understand the ways in which the program shapes leadership beliefs and social identities for Japanese American women as well as the ways in which the program prepares them for challenges related to leadership using a critical feminist lens.

In order to understand how the program shapes social identities and leadership beliefs for Japanese American women, a thorough review of the literature is necessary. The literature review is organized into four parts: Critical Feminist Theory, gender and leadership, Asian Americans and leadership, and then specifically Asian American women and leadership. The study uses a critical feminist lens and tools to center the voices of the Japanese American women and uses historical contexts and the experiences of Japanese American women to challenge stereotypes and the underrepresentation of Asian American women in leadership positions.

Critical Feminist Theory

This study examines Japanese American women in leadership through the framework of critical feminism. Critical Feminist Theory is a coalescence of principles and theories put forth by feminist writers and scholars of color, including adrienne marie
brown, Kimberlé Crenshaw, bell hooks, Grace Lee Boggs, Sara Ahmed, Audre Lorde, Stacy Abrams, Chimamanda Ngizo Adichie, and many others. It has its roots in queer, critical, race, and feminist theories and is driven by the following principles: authentic relationships, inclusion, removing barriers to build consensus, and disrupting oppressive systems. Critical feminism acknowledges the limitations of gender as a social construct therefore understands the ways in which it can limit a person’s expression of themselves in their relationships; critical feminism encourages people to engage with their whole being rather than just one part of their identity (brown, 2017).

While feminist theory focuses on power relations, agency, voice, socially constructed knowledge, and individual experience (Howell et al., 1999), the feminist movement has historically disregarded and further oppressed women of color and women with marginalized identities (brown, 2017). Critical feminism is always evaluating current practices and awareness of and seeking opportunities beyond advocacy but true inclusion and engagement. Critical feminism aims to remove barriers to building community in partnership with others and a space where all have an equal voice in the process. Critical Feminist Theory looks to center voices of the Black, Indigenous, People of Color and disrupt the oppressive canon that gives preferential treatment to the white, middle to upper class members of our society, which includes actively questioning, contesting, and working towards the eradication of hegemonic leadership rooted in white supremacy (de Saxe, 2012), while building new spaces of resistance and liberation (de Saxe, 2014).

Critical feminism lends itself to this work because it centers the voices of those who have been marginalized and allows their experiential knowledge to be at the heart of
the work. Stereotypes and discrimination are built into every system and often go unrecognized. However, critical feminism uses historical context, in this case the history of Asian Americans women in the United States and their experiences, to confront long held stereotypes of Asian American women in leadership positions. This research employs critical feminist theory as the framework to disrupt the current narrative surrounding the social status of particular genders, races, etc. that contribute to the underrepresentation of Asian American women in top-level leadership positions (Seo et al., 2017). It also lends itself to questioning the ways in which sociocultural identities are constructed through patriarchy (de Saxe, 2012). The study is working towards making sense of the intersectional experiences of these women and “create[s] spaces to begin and renew vital conversations” (de Saxe, 2012, p. 199).

Critical Feminist Theory gives a clearer understanding of the historical context in which the Queen Program was created and through which it developed. The theory is built upon the premise that gender and racial oppression is endemic in our society and can be found in nearly all contexts (Geisinger, 2011). It provides a lens to confront, question, and critique the process and means in which racism, sexism, and other oppressive ideologies have shaped the program as well as the perceptions of Asian American women.

**Gender and Leadership**

Research has shown that there is a dearth of women in leadership positions in business, politics, academia, law, religious institutions, and philanthropic organizations (e.g., Hill et al., 2016). The “glass ceiling” is the metaphor used to describe the invisible barrier that keeps women from attaining positions of leadership in organizations. These
studies are used to contextualize the gender gap in leadership positions and the different factors being explored to explain the difference.

One sphere of gender and leadership studies uses gender differences to explain the gender disparities in leadership. However, Paustian-Underdahl et al.’s (2014) meta-analysis of 95 studies that examined gender differences and perceived leadership effectiveness, supported Eagly et al.’s (2002) idea that gender is “not a reliable indicator of how that person would lead” (p. 586). The second sphere of studies show that there are no substantial differences in leadership styles between women and men and provide a different perspective from the prevailing theories of gender differences. Seo et al. (2017) turn to the question of the “underlying mechanisms” of gendered social status within the structures of organizations and society that allow men to maintain their dominance in leadership positions.

Under a patriarchal system, men have established work roles based on gender which contribute to gender stereotyping and discrimination. This gendered social status perspective draws from various theories including social identity theory, similarity attraction theory, expectation states theory, and threat-rigidity theory, which explain the role of gender in determining the social status or positions of women and has been built, maintained, and perpetuated in organizations. Additional research has pointed to issues with the pipeline, persistent sex discrimination, balancing work and family responsibilities, lack of effective networks and mentors, and stereotypes and biases are some of the barriers and challenges that women face in pursuit of leadership positions (Haile et al., 2016; Hill et al., 2016; Huang et al., 2019) Huang, et al. saw the biggest obstacle for women in the climb to the senior level is becoming a manager or the “broken
Women only hold 38% of manager level positions and “[f]or every 100 men promoted and hired to manager, 72 women are promoted and hired” (Huang et al., 2019, p. 4). The “broken rung” causes more women to get trapped at the entry level.

Existing research has shown that characteristics are that stereotypically associated with men like dominance, independence, competitiveness, aggression, rationality, and objectivity are traits that current leaders are expected to possess. Women face the double-edged sword of “role incongruity” (Hill et al., 2016) also known as the “double-bind” (Costigan, 2018). When women’s leadership styles do not match female stereotypes, they are viewed as competent but not likeable. However, when women’s leadership style does match stereotypes, they are liked but viewed as less competent; rarely are they seen as both competent and likeable (Hill et al., 2016)

**Asian Americans and Leadership**

Race continues to be a fundamental structure of society in the United States and plays a significant role in how communities and individuals define themselves. Therefore, if society, communities, and individuals are all significantly informed by race, then the views about leadership and leaders must be shaped by race as well (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). According to Opsina & Foldy’s (2009) literature review of race and ethnicity in leadership, there are three different categories of research: (1) how the race of the leader and/or followers influence the perceptions of leadership, (2) how race contributes to the ways leadership is enacted, and (3) how leaders and/or follower grapple with the concept of race (Ospina & Foldy, 2009).

Studies investigating the effects of race on perceptions of leadership find that race is often a hurdle that must be overcome by a person of color and they often face
stereotypes and biases which are detrimental to the way they are perceived. These stereotypes and biases are due to racism or aversive racism, a modern form of racism that avoids outright white supremacy while more insidiously rationalizing white dominance (Hartlep & Baylor, 2016). Rosette et al. (2008) acknowledge the presence of negative based racial bias and stereotypes and believe that “being white” is part of the business leader prototype and therefore whites are more likely to be seen as leaders. While there is a call to action for more people of color in leadership positions, Hartlep & Baylor (2016) urge that the discourse shift from “we-need-more-leaders-of-color” to intersectional identities and a consideration for communal, linguistic, institutional, and ethnic diversity.

In particular, the “bamboo ceiling” is the term coined to describe the phenomenon of Asian Americans remaining underrepresented in leadership positions “despite their apparent educational, economic, and professional success” (F. Lee, 2019, p. 93). Several researchers have hypothesized the reason for the sustained lack of Asian Americans in positions of leadership, including Yamagata-Noji’s (2005) research pointed to a pipeline issue and surmised that Asian Americans may not be “senior enough” or “accomplished enough” to qualify for leadership positions. Others have proposed that Asian Americans may not seek leadership positions in individualistic cultures because of their Confucian and collectivist values which endorse ‘blending in’ and discourage ‘standing out’ (Akutagawa, 2014). Another vein of researchers attributed the bamboo ceiling to the fact that Asian Americans are more likely to be immigrants and therefore not accustomed to the U.S. cultural norms (F. Lee, 2019). Other researchers have cited role congruity theory as a factor of the bamboo ceiling. Eagly and Karau (2002) explain that role congruity is:

a potential for prejudice exists when social perceivers hold a stereotype about a
social group that is incongruent with the attributes that are thought to be required for success in certain classes of social roles. When a stereotyped group member and an incongruent social role become joined in the mind of the perceiver, this inconsistency lowers the evaluation of the group member as an actual or potential occupant of the role. (p. 574)

Leadership is often narrowly defined and tends to reflect characteristics of predominantly White, upper-class men. Traits like communication, team building, and charisma are often touted as the hallmark of successful leaders, but racial stereotypes that depict Asian Americans as “Quiet. Respectful. Highly technical” (Akutagawa, 2014, p. 277), “exceptionally competent but socially deficient” (Burris et al., 2013), and “unassertive, passive, and quiet” (Lin, 2007) undermine perceptions of Asian Americans as effective leaders. In a study that investigated the effects of race on perception of managers, Burris et al. (2013) found that the racialized stereotypes attributed to Asian Americans are enduring and impact how Asian American managers were viewed and less transformational than the “successful manager ideal” (p. 263).

Asian Americans are far from the monolith that they might be described and characterized as. Asian Americans come from over 20 countries in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent each with unique histories, languages, cultures, and characteristics. Asian Americans have benefited from the prevailing system of patriarchy and whiteness in the United States (Elaine W. Leigh et al., 2020), but this has also created a wedge between minority groups as well as obscured the varying experiences of Asian Americans. This history of some groups experiencing economic and educational success has been used by the white media to drive a wedge between minority groups. Historian
Erika Lee (2019) explains:

We see some early press reports that are touting the success, the economic success, of Chinese and Japanese Americans in particular, and the message is that these groups have overcome great adversity, some of the worst racial discrimination in the United States, but had somehow risen up, had pulled themselves up by their bootstraps to a place of economic security, to a place where they could function as a participant in and give back to the United States. They were now ‘Good Americans,’ they were the ‘model minority.’

The myth of the model minority is used as evidence to delegitimize or minimize racism and discrimination towards people of color in the United States. The myth is perpetuated consciously and unconsciously by Asians as a way to maintain proximity to whiteness and perpetuate anti-Blackness. The myth has put people of color in competition with one another and distracts from the oppressive systems and institutions that have been manufactured.

Claire Kim (1999) argues that Asian Americans have been “racially triangulated” in what she calls the “field of racial positions.” The field of racial positions is defined by the superior/inferior axis and the insider/foreigner axis. It is created by public discourse about racial groups and their relative status and “profoundly shapes the opportunities, constraints, and possibilities with which subordinate groups must contend, ultimately serving to reinforce White dominance and privilege” (Kim, 1999).

**Asian American Women and Leadership**

There are many stereotypes that have been ascribed to Asian American women through the course of history (Leng, 2013). Stereotypes like the China Doll or the Lotus
Blossom or the “docile archetype infantilizes and hypersexualizes the diverse communities of people of Asian descent, suggesting a demand for White domination” (J. Lee, 2018, p. 1) were popularized by Hollywood and the media. The stereotype aims to emphasize the servile and fragile nature of Asian American women and is antithetical to the prototypical leader. Leaders cannot be seen as subservient or delicate, so their portrayal of Asian American women as the China Doll or the Lotus Blossom help to reinforce the notion that Asian American women are unfit to be leaders.

Ironically, the opposite representation of the Asian American woman is the Dragon Lady or “the inhuman robot that is unfeeling, savage, sexual, and absolutely self-serving” (J. Lee, 2018, p. 3). Though this is considered to be the opposite of the China Doll and Lotus Blossom stereotype, the Dragon Lady stereotype is used as a pawn to reinforce and glorify white imperial superiority (J. Lee, 2018). Lee (2018) considers the Dragon Lady, a representation of apparent independence and power, to be an improvement on the China Doll archetype, however, this aggressive representation is not congruent with stereotypical female gender roles. Eagly et al. (2002) use role congruity theory of prejudice to explore the two kinds of prejudice that occur when there is incongruity between female gender roles and leadership roles. This perceived discordance between these two roles leads to a less favorable perception of women as leaders versus men as leaders. The second form of prejudice comes in the negative evaluation of behavior enacted by a woman that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role. These two forms of prejudice make it not only more difficult for women to become leaders, but for women to achieve success in leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002) thus creating more opportunities.
Though there are a limited number of studies on Asian American women in leadership there are a few that explored social identities and leadership. Kawahara et al. (2008) conducted interviews of twelve Asian American women leaders considered to be “high achievers” in their various fields in order to capture their experiences contextualized by the multiple intersections of gender, social locations, and race. Though many themes emerged from the study, the researchers concluded that more sophisticated models are needed in order to fully capture the complexity of the diverse identity dimensions and interactions (Kawahara et al., 2008).

Leigh et al. (2020) used collaborative autoethnography to explore how being Asian American women shaped their leadership development as doctoral students. Through their process they concluded that their identity as “agentic, activism-oriented leaders,” which are shaped by an amalgamation of personal and institutional factors, which do not fit the traditional conceptions of leadership and activism. Their findings also noted that there are many types of strong women leaders and they should not feel pressured to fit into one mold. The researchers aim to break the prescribed mold of leadership that is often associated with the patriarchy and calls for new models of leadership.

This chapter provided a review of the research that has been done on gender and leadership, race and leadership, and the intersection of race and gender, specifically for Asian American women and leadership, using Critical Feminist Theory. The first two sections highlight the research regarding the various obstacles that women and Asian Americans face, respectively. The glass and bamboo ceilings bring their own set of unique challenges, and the third section focuses on where these two areas of research
converge. This study hopes to include other dimensions of intersectional identities such as sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, (dis)abilities, etc. to give a holistic view of Asian American women and leadership.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Using a critical feminist lens, this study investigated the role of the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program in the Northern California Japanese American community specifically focused on the lived experiences of the women who participated in the Queen Program and the ways in which the program shaped their beliefs and actions regarding leadership and their own leadership development. It also explored how intersectional identities such as race, class, gender, etc. are molded and maintained through the Queen Program. Furthermore, this study aimed to understand how the program equips their participants to respond to racism and patriarchy in their communities or workplaces. Thus, the research was done in accordance with these three questions:

I. In what ways do cultural pageant programs like the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program shape the leadership beliefs and actions of Japanese American women?

II. In what ways do cultural pageant programs like the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program shape the intersectional identities of Japanese American women?

III. In what ways do cultural pageant programs like the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program prepare or fail to prepare Japanese American women to respond to the racism and patriarchy in their workplace and communities?

Research Design

My initial intention was to use Participatory Action Research (PAR) as it aligned with my critical feminist background and my desire for collaborative research that
facilitated change. PAR is “collective, self-reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake, so they can understand and improve upon the practices in which they participate and the situations in which they find themselves” (Baum et al., 2006, p. 854). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and time constraints, I used a case study research design rooted in the tenets of PAR. The research design reflected PAR’s emphasis on collaboration and making sure that as many of the people who are directly involved in the program and affected by the program were invited to participate in the research. I hope that this research is the beginning of a larger undertaking in which participants are able to create a systemic learning process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. My goal was to build on the strength and resources of the community as a form of support, but also involves making critical analysis of the program to create knowledge as a way to expand consciousness and act politically by spurring change (Wadsworth, 1997).

Yin (1984) defines case study as a qualitative research method “that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). This inquiry required the structure of case study as it sought to understand the historical context of Japanese Americans in the United States and the conditions under which Japanese American cultural pageants were created in order to examine the role that the program plays in the community and in the identity development of Japanese American women as well as their development as leaders. This research benefited from case study’s extensive research strategy that managed the plethora of variables of interest given the program as the only data point. This type of research relies on various evidentiary sources, in this case
interviews, focus groups, and the deliberate creation of guiding theoretical principles to find themes through the use of triangulation (Yin, 1994). The methods used in this study were designed to gather and analyze data towards developing a holistic picture of the ways that the Queen Program operates in the Japanese American community of Northern California, especially in its shaping of intersectional identities and its training of young, Japanese American women as leaders. This study utilized qualitative interviews and focus groups with former participants in order to further understand the Queen Program.

Case Site

Since 1968, hundreds of women have participated in the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program. The program, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is a sub-committee of Sakura Matsuri, Inc., the parent organization of the Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival. The Queen Program Committee is composed entirely of volunteers. The program is advertised as a “leadership program for young women becoming or already involved in the Northern California Japanese-American community” (Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program, 2021). They are dedicated to “mentoring young women through community service, leadership and cultural education” (Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program, 2020a). It is overseen by three Program Co-Chairs, who run the day-to-day operations and serve as Directors of various pieces of the operation and as chaperones to the current members. Decisions regarding the program as a whole are run through the Committee, though the final decision is left up to the Program Co-Chairs and Program Chair (Emeritus) Advisor. The Program Chair (Emeritus) Advisor previously served as the Program Chair for over 20 years and recently stepped back from the day-to-day operations.
The Director of PR/Social Media Manager is in charge of advertising the program through social media outlets as well as formal invitations to participants of Asian interest sororities such as Sigma Omicron Pi at UC Berkeley. However, most women are recruited through word of mouth and by the Cherry Blossom Alumnae, a nonprofit organization composed of former Queen Program court members. The applicants undergo a thorough vetting and interview process at the end of which the Committee selects between three to six women to become candidates. The women attend all day training on Saturdays for four months to practice interviewing, public speaking, Japanese dancing, and kimono dressing. During the annual Queen Program Night, the candidates demonstrate their speech and interview skills and showcase their “creative expression,” better known as their talent. The selection of the Queen and subsequent title designations of First Princess and Princesses falls to the judges and crowns and sashes are bestowed to officially install the new Queen and her court. The Queen Program Night has become one of the highlights of the Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival.

The Queen and court spend the rest of their year volunteering with local organizations, attending cultural events, and continuing to polish their public speaking and networking skills to develop their professional and leadership skills. Participants usually take part in 30-40 events over the course of their year with certain events being mandatory. Events range from the Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival to golf tournaments and fundraisers. Court members are asked “to sell raffle tickets during the event, serve tea or food, bus tables while talking to and helping make the guests feel welcome, while others may be an appearance or photo opportunity only event” and expected to “be prepared at all times to speak in front of the guests as well as help with
set-up/clean-up” (NCCBQP, 2021). The Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program uses cultural displays and art exhibitions such as *ikebana* (flower arranging) or *origami* (paper folding) demonstrations at events and *obon* festivals (a Japanese Buddhist custom to honor the spirits of one’s ancestors) to fulfill the cultural education component, whereas the Hawai’i’s Cherry Blossom Festival Program organizes cultural classes for the participants.

**Participant Demographics and Profiles**

This study identified seven women who participated in a series of interviews and focus groups between March 2021 and July 2021. The participants in this study were all involved in the Queen Program and in accordance with the program’s eligibility criteria, all participants are at least 50% Japanese. The program’s blood quantum rules dictate the amount of ancestry and were established at the founding of the program, though the requirements have decreased over the years with the changing demographic of the Japanese American community. These rules were established to ensure that the program was preserved for Japanese American women, the participants had a connection to the Japanese American community, and the appearance of the queen physically reflected the Japanese American community (King-O’Riain, 2006).

The participants in this study provided a unique perspective shaped by their experiences in the Queen Program. The profiles serve to provide context to the findings and conclusions discussed in the following chapters. These lived experiences help to create a clearer understanding of the role that the program plays in the community and the impact that it has on Japanese American women.

*Alicia*
Alicia is a third generation Japanese American (*sansei*) born in San Diego but moved to the Bay Area when she was ten. She identifies as half-Japanese and half-Persian, but feels closer to her Japanese side because she spent most of her time with her maternal grandparents attending events in the Japanese American community or at the Veterans of Foreign Wars post. Her grandfather was interned at the age of seventeen though he never talked about his experience. She remembers he would always speak English and identified as American rather than Japanese. However, her grandparents passed away when she was fairly young and she grew up curious about her Japanese culture and background and participated in the program in the early 2010s as a way to learn more about her Japanese heritage and build relationships with the Japanese American community. She currently works in Silicon Valley as chief of staff at a venture capital company.

*Harley*

Harley is a second generation Japanese American (*nisei*) from the East Bay. She spent her youth at the festivals learning about the history of the community through the context of the traditions and her grandparent’s stories. She participated in the program in the early 2010s, which became a formative experience for her. Harley is working on her doctoral degree in education at an urban university in California, where she is studying to understand educational systems within diverse contexts. Professionally, she is a professor of leadership development and a student leadership and engagement administrator at a community college in California.

*Bethany*

Bethany is a fourth generation Japanese American (*yonsei*) from the South Bay.
Bethany identifies as half-Japanese and half-Chinese and grew up around the Asian community, playing in the Asian basketball league and going to Japanese language school. She participated in the program in the late 2010s and currently works as a researcher in the medical technology industry in the healthcare sector. Bethany is still involved with the Queen Program and serves in many different capacities. She also served as president of her student club while completing her master’s degree focusing on the development and application of human-system interface technology.

**Suzie**

Suzie is a *shin-nisei*. *Shin-nisei* refers to the “new second generation” whose families came after World War II, during the ‘80s and ‘90s. Suzie was born in Japan and moved all over the world but is currently located in Southern California where she is a doctoral student in social ecology and mental health researcher. She grew up very familiar with the Japanese culture and language and lived in Japan for some time. However, it wasn’t until she joined the program in the late 2010s did she learn the differences between Japanese and Japanese Americans. Suzie is very active in the Japanese American communities in Northern California and Los Angeles; she serves on the NCCBQP Committee as well as volunteers with many Japanese American organizations in Los Angeles. Suzie identifies as half-Japanese and half-Mexican American.

**Danielle**

Danielle is a fourth generation Japanese American (*yonsei*) from San Francisco. She identifies as half-Japanese and half-Chinese, and struggled at an early age to figure out where she belonged given, she didn’t speak Japanese or Chinese. However, she was a
regular fixture at Japanese American festivals given her grandparents were a part of a Japanese band and were very active in the Buddhist Church of San Francisco. To fulfill a childhood fantasy, she signed up to participate in the program in the early 1990s and joined the Committee after her time as a participant. She worked her way from the backstage coordinator to program director. She works as a teacher in the Sacramento area.

**Johanna**

Johanna is a fourth generation Japanese American (*yonsei*) and refers to herself as her mother’s “post-civil rights baby.” She is from the South Bay and was raised going to a Buddhist temple for *obon* or basketball and taking *okoto* lessons. She identifies as 100% Japanese but grew up in a very white neighborhood. She went to college in Southern California and spent time living abroad in Japan. She had always dreamed of participating in the Cherry Blossom pageant and finally participated in the program in the early 1990s. She is currently located on the East Coast where she works for a national consulting firm as a national leader in mental-health and substance-use policy, data program, and practice improvement.

**Veronica**

Veronica is a second generation Japanese American (*nisei*) born and raised in San Francisco. She grew up attending all of the Buddhist/Japanese events at the Soto Zen Mission of San Francisco- Sokoji. She identifies as 100% Japanese and participated in the program in the late 1980s just as the program began to change from an emphasis on physicality to personality. She works for the state of California, but has remained extremely active with the Queen Program and the Cherry Blossom Festival General
Committee. She played an integral part in the evolution of the Queen Program.

**Data Collection**

To understand the role of the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program in shaping intersectional identities and leadership development for Japanese American women, the research focused on the perspectives of seven previous participants. Their thoughts and experiences were captured through a series of interviews and focus groups. Participants were identified through various means including the use of personal invitations, a request for participation through the Cherry Blossom Alumnae, and snowball sampling.

Six of the seven participants engaged in an introductory one-on-one interview, followed by two focus groups with fellow participants, and then concluded with a final one-on-one interview. Johanna was only able to participate in the one-on-one interviews due to time constraints and the time difference. The interviews and focus groups used a semi-structured interview and focus group guide that allowed for open-ended questions and built a dialogue rather than a strictly question and answer process (Patton, 1990). The interview guide also helped to ensure that the interviews were systematic and covered all of the research topics. The questions were designed to provide space for participants to reflect on their experiences and expand on what Weiss (1994) calls “inner events.” Inner events are “perceptions, what the respondent heard or saw; cognitions, what the respondent thought, believed, or decided; and emotions, how the respondent felt and what strivings and impulses the responded experience” (p. 75). Their experiences helped to understand how the work of the Queen Program is interpreted and internalized (Weiss, 1995).
The first interview or the introductory interview began with a reiteration of the purpose of the study and a review of the informed consent form. Warm up questions regarding their background information were followed by questions about their involvement and experiences in the Queen Program. The last set of questions asked for their definition of leadership and explored the genesis and evolution of their leadership definition. See Appendix A for the Introductory Interview Protocol.

The first focus group started with the reiteration of the purpose of the study, introductions, and an activity designed to engage the participants in conversation and allow them to become acquainted with each other. The questions then probed participants about leadership, specifically how the program shaped their ideas about leadership and their leadership style. See Appendix B for Focus Group #1 Protocol. The second focus group provided time for the participants to reintroduce themselves before discussing the formation of intersectional identities. Participants answered questions regarding how the program addressed different identities and represented Japanese American women. The final set of questions focused on racism and sexism in the workplace and community and how the program prepared or did not prepare the participants to face these challenges. See Appendix C for Focus Group #2 Protocol.

The final interview session gave the chance for participants to revisit and reflect on the questions that were asked in the focus groups and add thoughts that they weren’t able to share or new thoughts that had arisen since the focus groups. The interviewee was then asked questions regarding the role and the future of the Queen Program in the community. See Appendix D for the Final Interview Protocol.
**Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed using Creswell’s (2004) five step approach. Each interview was recorded and transcribed using Zoom. Once downloaded and secured on a cloud server alongside the consent forms and participant information, the interview transcripts were cleaned using the recording and anonymized using pseudonyms. The consent forms as well as the video files will be destroyed after 5 years. However, the transcripts will be kept and filed under a pseudonym. An initial read through of all of the transcripts gave an initial understanding of the depth and breadth of the data collected. The transcripts were then read a second time to create segments of information and identify significant sentences or quotes that contributed to understanding the participants’ experience. The segments are then labeled with codes, in this case, codes included discrimination, identities, leadership beliefs, leadership actions, etc. After codes are assigned to the segments, codes that are repetitive or redundant are eliminated before collapsing the codes into themes.

**Ethical Considerations**

In order to ensure that all participants of the study are cared for and do not experience harm during the interview process, there were a series of precautions and procedures put in place. The University of San Francisco’s Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) received my application, informed consent, and interview protocol and verified that the study did not contain any objectives or questions that were detrimental to any of the participants. Each participant signed an informed consent form that clearly laid out what the study entailed. Participants were also
granted anonymity as well as the right to withdraw from the study at any time including any data that precipitated from their interview.

**Positionality/Researcher’s Profile**

I identify as Hawaiian, Chinese, and Japanese American woman born and raised in Honolulu, Hawai`i. Growing up in a multicultural community, where I was a part of the majority has afforded me many privileges. Being Asian in Hawai`i, the quintessential mixing pot of the Pacific, created a situation in which I did not have to examine my social identities and how they intersected until much later in life. I moved to San Francisco to attend the University of San Francisco (USF) and discovered a space that pushed me to question and explore my own identities and leadership skills. After graduation, I found employment at USF in the Provost’s Office and continued my leadership journey through the part-time MBA program in USF’s School of Management. During this time, a family friend suggested that I apply for the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program; she had participated in the Hawai`i program and was a committee member of the Northern California program. I ultimately decided to apply as I was told it was a way to be more involved in the community while continuing to work on my leadership skills and learning more about my Japanese heritage. However, the program was not what I expected and lacked what I was looking for in a leadership and cultural education program. During my time in the program, I struggled with my identity as an Asian American woman and a leader, especially because we were often treated as children, being told when we were allowed to perform basic functions like eating, drinking, or using the bathroom. I found the leadership development component lacking and instead often felt myself being forced to assume a role that left me feeling powerless and
etiolated. I never felt comfortable being the figurehead of the program especially when required to wear the crown and sash. I had hoped that the pomp and circumstance of the tiaras and titles were only a small part of the program but soon discovered that the program was driven by the fanfare that the crowns and sashes created. By the end of the program, I was disoriented, dejected, and questioned my ability to be a leader.

After completing my obligations to the program, I applied to the Organization and Leadership doctoral program at USF’s School of Education. Through the Organizational and Leadership program I engaged in a critical feminist research class, Critical Feminist Perspectives on Leadership, which allowed me to explore how intersectional identities and leadership intersect through a critical feminist lens. With the guidance of Dr. Jane Bleasdale, the class blossomed into a larger Participatory Action Research project, Flip the Table Feminism, that brought together a network of women committed to engaging in discussion about and applying critical feminist principles to leadership, known as the FEM 10. Through reading, reflection, and discussion, we continue to build community and our understanding of critical feminist leadership. This PAR experience spurred reflection on my time in the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program, leadership development for Asian American women, and my identity as a critical feminist leader.
CHAPTER IV: THE FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program (NCCBQP) shapes the identities and leadership development of Japanese American women by examining the experiences of women who have participated in the Queen Program. Specifically, I examine the ways in which the program influences leadership beliefs and actions and molds intersectional identities for Japanese American women. I also explore how the Queen Program prepares or fails to prepare Japanese American women to respond to racism and patriarchy in their workplace and communities. Chapter four focuses on the data collected through a series of interviews and focus groups and are presented to provide insight and an analysis of the research questions and auxiliary findings.

Findings

The role of the Queen Program

At its inception in 1968, the Cherry Blossom Queen Pageant was an ethnic spin on the quintessential Miss America beauty pageant. The program’s goal, as explained by one of the participants, was to find the “perfect Japanese American girl because that is what the Queen Program still signified at that time.” Pageant contestants were expected to act like model citizens and follow behavioral and physical guidelines. One participant described the pageant:

They judged on not only your looks, but what you chose to wear, how you looked in what you wore, and how you looked in a kimono, so everything was more about looks… They expected a very stereotypical Japanese woman: being two
steps behind, bowing, and quiet. It was almost too stereotypical of what nikkei
people thought a Japanese woman should be… you were supposed to follow
directions, not have an opinion, or have an opinion but say what they needed you
to say.

In the 90s, the program was rebranded as a scholarship program and became the Northern
California Cherry Blossom Queen Program. About two decades later, in an attempt to
shed the stereotypes of the 50s and 60s and keep up with the times, the program
redirected its focus to community service, leadership, and cultural education. Johanna
said the changes “track the evolution of our community or sub-sector [Japanese American
women]; moving from object to model minority to now leaders, movers, shakers,
influencers.” However, even with all of the transitions the program has been through,
there are still those that feel that the program needs to make fundamental changes to
move away from its pageant history and to continue to evolve to meet the needs of
today’s Japanese American woman. There are some participants who said that the
descriptions of the old, antiquated program still apply and are an accurate representation
of the current program. There are still instances of program participants being asked to
censor themselves to avoid controversy or directed to act and dress in a certain way to
portray a certain image. Women described being addressed as “girls” in an attempt to
infantilize them and told when they are allowed to eat, drink, or use the restroom. These
participant experiences were all shared during the sequence of interviews and focus
groups. During these discussions regarding the role of the Queen Program in the Japanese
American community of Northern California, four themes emerged: (a) a symbol, (b) a
source of entertainment and funding, (c) a bridge, and (d) an educational program.
A symbol

The Queen Program is one of the most recognizable symbols of the Japanese American community in Northern California and the Cherry Blossom Festival and the women of the program viewed as a symbol and representative of the Japanese American community. In turn, they also signify what the community believes is the quintessential Japanese American woman. Participants acknowledge this is problematic as the program does not accurately represent all Japanese American women. Furthermore, participants shared that Japanese American women who hold certain social identities are excluded from the program for reasons that will be explored later in the chapter, but by highlighting and representing only particular types of Japanese American women, the program is defining what Japanese Americanness, womanhood, and leadership look like.

The program is also a reflection of a community in transition. The community is still wrestling with its Japanese identity vs. its Japanese American identity and how to accurately represent these very different cultures. The history and culture of Japanese Americans are very distinct from the history and culture of shin issei. Japanese Americans share the history of the discrimination during World War II and the internment camps, which is not shared by shin issei as they are the first generation to be live in America and don’t necessarily have this frame of reference. Veronica provided additional context:

Japanese Americans grew up knowing community activities and being volunteers. That's something that you don't do as a shin issei; there's no real volunteer work… It's not out of your own volition that you would actually seek out organizations to volunteer at, whereas with the Nikkei group after the war, everybody was stuffed
into the gym of the San Francisco Buddhist Church, everybody slept in the auditorium for years until they found their own places to move out and everybody had *tobans* [assignments] like KP [kitchen patrol]. There were planning committees for the basketball teams, the women's group, the men's group, and bible study. So that's where the sense of community and volunteerism comes in; you had to seek out your own groups, you had to volunteer, and then because you saw each other suffering, hospitality and comfort in the form of, “Do you want some tea? Do you want some food?” came into play and that became innate in our Japanese American culture versus the *shin issei* culture. Unless you live it and unless you understand both sides it's really hard to teach it.

These differences have profound effects on how each group views their role and how they relate to the community. It also forces organizations to understand how they are representing the two distinct groups. Specifically for the Queen Program and the Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival, Veronica posed various questions to bring awareness and ignite conversation regarding these two distinct identities as the programs begin to look toward the future:

I asked this question every single year: who is the Queen Program and who should we represent, as far as the Japanese or Japanese American Community. We are Japanese Americans, yet, we have the *shin issei* coming from Japan; it's a different culture, it's two different cultures. You can't say that the Japanese Americans are Japanese from Japan because it’s very different. Who do we represent? What is the commonality? Where is the bridge? We are of the same
race per se. We are not of the same culture, so it's kind of interesting. I don't know what we can do as far as this particular discussion and which way to go.

These questions and discussions are complex and intricate and yet only represent a fraction of social identities of the community, not to mention the interplay between the identities. Suzie reflected on the changing program, community, and the role that women play which is a direct reflection of the community’s evolution:

I feel like that's changing right now. I think for me it's very much an outsider's perspective because I didn't grow up in the community… In this current moment of time, I think we're this blend of ambassadors. We represent San Francisco J-town [Japantown] or Northern California more broadly, but I think also we represent this breaking of the glass ceiling of typical Asian American or Japanese patriarchy in a way, and maybe more in the current times. I feel like San Francisco [the program] is the least externally polished [compared to Hawai‘i and Los Angeles], like we're not asked to wear to have the expectation to wear red lipstick every time we're in J-town, and so people are starting to view us more as these community service liaisons and people who are wanting to give back to the community and help without any kind of incentive in mind… I see Queen Program as kind of ambassadors, women ambassadors for the community and just a reminder to the community that women can do more than just be at home and be the housewife.

Suzie’s ruminations reflect the evolution of the program and the long-awaited breakthroughs for women in the program as well as in the community, but it also reflects how much work still needs to be done. New exceptions to the participants’ behavior and
their physical appearance like not being expected to wear red lipstick while in Japantown shows how truly ingrained patriarchal norms are embedded in our society and the expectations of women.

**Source of entertainment and funding**

Participants also indicated that the Queen Program serves as a source of entertainment and drama for the festival. Though the program’s main focus is community service, leadership, and cultural education, the pageantry adds tension and excitement to the program that Committee members may feel is necessary to keep the community engaged in the Queen Program. Alicia stated that she felt that “adding the crown and sash adds this extra drama, where we don’t even focus on what the real objective is… I think the main focus of the community gets put on the backburner.” Alicia expressed that there is more of a sense that the women exist as a living display of what Japanese American women should be and a picture opportunity for the real-life princess fantasy. These women are paraded around on exhibition and often felt like they are decorations instead of being seen as the dynamic people that they are.

The Queen Program is also used to do fundraising for other community organizations and programs. However, rather than just selling raffle tickets, some of the women thought they could be of more use discussing better ways to advocate on behalf of organizations and programs rather than asking women to sell raffle tickets at the events.

**A bridge**

The Queen Program serves as a connection point between many different parties. On the surface it brings the community together to celebrate Japanese American women,
but it created a deeper connection between the Japanese American women who participated in the program. It was formative for Harley to be surrounded by women who had similar experiences given their congruous intersecting identities and similar visions. Women described the lifelong friendships, the sisterhood, and community that they have found with each other. Johanna also pointed out that the program exposed her to the diversity of Japanese American women within the community:

> We were more diverse than I expected, even I have my own stereotypes of what Japanese American people are like, and we had several people who were *hapa*, we had people who are from Japan, and people that were *sansei/yonsei*, and so it was interesting to just meet people from those diverse backgrounds, even though we're sort of within quite a niche. We're young Japanese American women of a certain age, but even there's quite a bit of diversity. People were at big universities, headed to graduate school, already working, and other people were a little bit less clear where they were going to go with their lives, so that was eye opening and something that I took away from the experience.

Being able to learn from people who were in different stages of their lives, expanded the horizons of the participants and many took the opportunity to learn from each other’s life experiences. However, there were instances where the competition of the program and the fabricated sense of contention came in between the women. These conflicts between the participants seem to have dissipated or lessened from years past as the Queen Program tries to move away from the inflated sense of hostility between the contestants.
In some way the Queen Program helped participants connect to their family and cultural history more. Alicia reflected on how the process made her feel closer to her grandparents even if they were no longer here:

I thought that also would make me feel closer to my grandparents, have a better understanding of them, why they were the way they were, and why we did things certain ways. It explained why we didn't speak Japanese in the house, and those kinds of strange things.

Bethany had a similar experience and shared that one of the most impactful activities was learning about her family history and the role that her grandfather played in World War II as a military intelligence service member. She even opened up dialogue with her relatives to understand the stories of who her grandparents were. Beyond her own immediate family, Bethany was able to tap into and learn not just about the Japantown community, but other Japanese American communities across the country.

Bethany also felt that “the program also served as a two-way introduction. An introduction for the person to the community and what organizations are out there, and then it's the community learning about that person.” In other words, the program acts as the bridge between the community and the women and functions as an inauguration into community organizations, especially for women that were not born into the community. However, some of the women felt that they were given demanding and often sexist standards to prove that they are worthy to be a part of the community but reconciled it by reasoning that “it was the price to pay” to be “part of a tradition that we had to respect or uphold in order to gain these connections and skills.” However, it was hard for them not
to notice that men were still the main occupants of leadership positions in community organizations and companies.

Johanna felt that one of the highlights from the program was interacting with the community. She felt like she had missed out on the opportunity to interact with the Japanese American community because she did not grow up in the city and grew up in “mainstream white America.” She enjoyed feeling as though she had a community behind her, a place where she belonged. These introductions lead to expanded networks and becoming a part of the community in a different way. It even allowed some participants to have meaningful conversations that they would not have otherwise had the opportunity to have.

*An educational program*

The program is regarded as an educational program for Japanese American women. While for some it gives tools to be a better leader such as public speaking skills and interview skills, for others it was a start in their journey. Bethany shared that she may not understand what it means to be a Japanese American woman in a leadership role, she is still questioning her what that means for her own journey as she looks for role models and an opportunity for personal growth.

The Queen Program also advertises a cultural education aspect, and while there are some educational aspects like learning to dress and walk in kimono or visiting the crafts booths at the festivals, some of the women felt that it would have been beneficial to engage in classes that give a deeper history, understanding, and hands on experience in arts, crafts, and traditional ceremonies.

*Leadership beliefs and actions*
The initial research question focused on the ways in which the Queen Program influenced the participants’ actions and beliefs related to leadership. Analysis of the responses collected from the interviews and the focus groups revealed three main concepts: (a) a servant leadership philosophy, (b) traditional gender norms and cultural expectations, and (c) self-doubt and loss of identity and autonomy. Participants shared that the program encouraged a servant leadership philosophy that centered around listening, empathy, and relationship building, however, participants found it disorienting when trying to reckon their own leadership styles, hegemonic expectations of leaders, and the leadership style and expectations of the Queen Program. Participants also discussed the physical and behavioral standards that they were required to adhere to based on traditional gender norms and cultural expectations. The combination of the servant leadership philosophy and the physical and behavioral standards created a prototype of what the Queen Program and the Japanese American community believe a Japanese American female leader should be. To participants, these standards could feel suffocating and not congruent to their nature. For some of the women, the inner turmoil and misalignment of the behavioral and physical standards with their own beliefs often caused self-doubt and a feeling of identity loss. These emerging concepts are expanded upon below using the words of the participants.

Servant leadership philosophy and principles

A range of reflections captured the Queen Program’s emphasis on a servant leadership philosophy, especially highlighting the importance of principles such as building community, empathy, and listening. Servant leadership is often characterized by service to the leader’s community by tending to the community’s highest needs and well-
being (van Dierendonck, 2011). The participants readily noted that servant leadership is often synonymous with the leadership style of Japanese/Asian American women and that while the principles resonated with the participants, they also acknowledged that servant leadership might be thrust upon participants through the program and on Japanese American women by the community, the style may not be authentic to all. Often servant leadership is prescribed to Asian American women due to stereotypes and upon closer examination through a critical feminist lens, servant leadership shrewdly perpetuates Christocentric, patriarchal, and oppressive norms (Eicher-Catt, 2005) and has been misconstrued as “a function of femininity” (Hennighan, 2015) as certain aspects of servant leadership are similar to traditional gender roles prescribed to women.

Servant leadership philosophy. Servant leadership is emphasized by both the Queen Program and the Japanese American community. Harley noted:

I learned a lot more about servant leadership from the Queen Program and I feel like that was the all-encompassing leadership style of how do you serve your community, how do you give back, how do you respect elders, build up the youth, and how do you always find ways to ensure you're doing something to support others.

In the focus groups, participants concurred that servant leadership was the style that first came to mind when thinking about the leadership style of Japanese American women and the style of leadership encouraged by the Queen Program.

Relationships and community building. One principle of servant leadership that is deeply ingrained in the Queen Program is a profound respect and emphasis on relationships or community building. Danielle noted:
The first thing that popped into my head is relationships and especially within the JA [Japanese American] community and within J-town [Japantown] itself, who you know, and the relationship that you have with them is important because those connections are helpful… Relationship building is always important and especially within the Japanese culture in Japan, you have to have those kinds of relationships and the connections to really move you forward, whether it be in business, whether it be in personal relationships too.

Danielle articulated the importance of relationships and relationship building not just in the community, but in Japanese culture. This underscores the tight knit community that Japantown has created and why the Queen Program puts an emphasis on connecting with community members and organizations. These relationships also afford members of the community an opportunity to explore their leadership skills within a safe environment that poses less risk. After her year on the court, Danielle volunteered to be a Queen Program Committee member and over the years worked her way from a backstage director to the program director. The Queen Program Committee serves as a sandbox in which newly emerging leaders can explore leadership in a very magnanimous setting.

She shared her experience as a member of the Queen Program Committee:

The [Queen] Program Committee gave me that opportunity to test those skills in a safe place because I probably made a lot of mistakes, but because the Queen Program is such a family environment, I felt like I could be forgiven and if I made that mistake, they would point it out and move on, but I learned from it, and it was an opportunity to do all those things in a safe place.
Though these opportunities may occur after a participant has finished the formal program, the Queen Program still provides these opportunities for the women and uses it as an extension and continuation of their training.

Suzie shared how the Queen Program helped her to expand her network and gave her a community to be a part of especially when she moved to Los Angeles. The ease in which Suzie was able to engage with the Japanese American community of Los Angeles is a testament to the power of the relationships that were forged during the Queen Program. Participants are able to continue developing their relationships and social networks by finding causes they are passionate about and continuing to build culturally meaningful programs. However, this also indicates how exclusive the community can be, given the limited access points and the strict eligibility rules (i.e., blood quantum, age limit, marital status, etc.) of the program that grants certain people access to the community, but locks others out.

Empathy and listening. Several participants mentioned that part of being a servant leader was empathy. They also noted that these are the most valued characteristics in the Japanese American community. Suzie drew from her career and community experience:

Part of being a leader is expressing empathy or understanding the people that you're working with. I think it's often easy to forget the different contexts that people are living in or coming from and I definitely have found, especially in the JA [Japanese American] community, empathy is a necessity in order to provide the best type of leadership or guidance to other people around you.

The Japanese American community is complex and can be challenging to navigate given the different generations that have very distinct points of view based on their unique
histories. Without empathy, it’s very difficult to understand the intricacies of the community and make decisions that best align with the community’s needs. Along with empathy, a leader must be a good listener. Veronica believes that in order to best support the community, “a good leader must listen, think about where they [each generation] is coming from, understand their side of the story, and then try to build from there.”

Bethany agreed that listening and empathy helped her to realize all of the ways that she could impact someone or the community with the decisions she made as a leader, understand how she will be perceived, and acknowledge how it will make people feel, which she thought was a very “Japanese way of thinking.” However, she also mentioned that this way of thinking can also lead to “worrying about others to a fault and almost where it’s paralysis.” Bethany also struggled with navigating between a leadership style rooted in her Japanese culture and values and the expectations as a leader in a dominantly white male space. When asking for advice about bringing her authentic form of leadership ingrained in her life experiences and values as a Japanese American woman, her mentor told her, “You’re American, you don’t have to adhere to your Japanese way of thinking.” This advice left her confused and forced to toggle between leadership identities.

This confusion and the pursuit to find one’s authentic style of leadership was a common theme for the younger participants, especially those just starting their leadership journey. They struggle with defining what is authentic to themselves amidst the hegemonic expectations pushed by white androcentric leadership stereotypes and traditional gender norms and cultural expectations thrust upon them by their community through the framework of servant leadership. While servant leadership seems like a
natural fit for Japanese American women given the alignment of community values, Eicher-Catt (2005) argues that while seemingly benign and gender neutral in nature, servant leadership reifies the long-standing master-slave political economy and accentuates gender bias and the binary logic. Furthermore, Eicher-Catt maintains that “its artificiality as a myth prevents [servant leadership] from developing “true” ethical leaders, i.e., leaders who are visionary meaning-makers not merely meaning reproducers” (p. 18).

Johanna also recounted her leadership journey but has had the benefit of experience when bringing her authentic style of leadership to her workplace. She was very fortunate to have supervisors that did not let their biases prevent them from seeing that she was in fact a very strong leader which led to promotions. However, she did realize that her behavior was shaped by the stereotypes assigned to her gender, race, and age:

I do respond to that type of cultural stereotyping. I avoid being overly commanding or overly harsh because people are quicker to judge me for being bad. It doesn’t actually stop me because I’m pretty opinionated and hasty, so my natural tendency would be very dragon ladyish, but I can modulate that because what I can do and what a white man can do are different. I would get interpreted differently and they have different permissions.

The pursuit of an authentic form of leadership for Japanese American women is complicated and made almost unfeasible without the dismantling of the hegemonic forces of white patriarchy in leadership styles like servant leadership as well as challenging the
community’s traditional gender norms and cultural expectations that are rooted in patriarchy.

**Traditional gender norms and cultural expectations**

The traditional gender norms and cultural expectations have created certain physical and behavioral standards for Japanese American female leaders and together with the servant leadership framework have perpetuated stereotypes that have a direct and limiting impact on Japanese American women undertaking leadership roles. Though the women in this study participated during different decades, they all expressed similar experiences when it came to expectations regarding appearance and behavior, including being poised and polished with the “perfect look” as a figurehead in the community. They spoke about the weight of not only representing themselves and the Japanese American community of Northern California, but the Japanese people as a whole. Suzie responded to this expectation based on her understanding of the Queen Program’s framework:

> I do think in the Queen Program we are taught to be more poised and polished in front of other people, and I think that's definitely a part of the Japanese culture in terms of you got to look a certain way in order to fit in and that collectivistic approach, conforming to society's norms. It definitely has some of those qualities, so the program itself does represent a bit of the culture, which then inherently probably represents Japanese American women at this moment in time.

The program had a prescribed look designed to make all of the women look indistinguishable to parallel the collectivistic approach. By controlling the physical appearance of the participants through the use of makeup and clothing in the name of
“making the best impression,” “upholding appearances,” and “making yourself presentable,” they were able to force women to conform to society’s gender norms. Suzie shared that she had to learn how to put makeup on:

Before, I had no idea how to put my face on. I said this is not for me, but unfortunately, being a woman, we need to look presentable and that’s maybe some part of the skills of how to convince other people that you are respectable and people should listen to you and part of that, unfortunately, is appearance.

Suzie’s anecdote is just one example of the ways that patriarchal ideologies are reflected in the leadership beliefs and actions of Japanese American women. By equating appearance with respectability, the institution exerts control of the individual and defines the relationship between femininity and leadership.

Clothing is another piece of the participants’ physical appearance that is closely regulated. The women are assigned matching outfits for a coordinated group look and uphold traditionally feminine standards of dress. The format of the program in which the women are evaluated and given a ranking by a panel of judges implicitly encourages the objectification of their bodies, not just for the judges but for the community at large. Participants’ bodies are so policed that on several occasions community members approached participants and commented on their clothing choices. In one such instance, Harley was questioned about her choice to wear pants with her suit. She was reprimanded and told, “Women wear skirts with their suits.” Suzie also mentioned her experience being chastised for wearing shorts. “The Queen should never wear shorts; you should never expose your legs like that. I am so appalled that you came here in shorts.” The community continues to enforce their ideologies of traditional gender norms for Japanese
American women on to the participants, as the participants are seen as representatives of the community and therefore open to public scrutiny.

In addition to physical appearance, it was important that program participants’ public speaking skills reflect a sense of composure and cultivation as well. Alicia felt that much of the leadership training was spent practicing canned speeches and was akin to learning how to recite pageant answers in order to maintain the air of perfection, which was not conducive to being authentic. Bethany reflected on her experience:

You're rolling up your sleeves, you're working together with the volunteers and the community, but then you also have to make it look good and make it look pretty or make it sound really great, but I didn’t or we couldn't really talk about the true issue of what's going on or have an honest conversation.

Women indicated that at times their interactions with the community felt disingenuous because they were expected to prioritize appearance rather than substance. Part of being polished and poised meant being docile and making sure that speeches were agreeable for audiences and conversations maintained a levity to them even when they were confronted by inappropriate comments and questions that were often racist and/or sexist in nature.

The women were advised to overlook these instances and “react in a very deflected way.” Danielle recalled answering a particularly difficult question regarding how being only half Japanese affected her participation in the Queen Program. Her initial reaction was anger but quickly pushed that down and asked herself how to go about answering the question “without sounding like the angry Asian woman” or offending anyone. Though her answer came out sounding more heated and serious than she had intended, she smiled at the end in hopes of making a graceful exit and alleviating any
tension that her answer may have caused. Incidents like these show the ways in which women must make micro adjustments in order to avoid stereotype pitfalls. It also demonstrates the limited emotions that women are allowed to display. Women are encouraged to mask emotions like anger and pride at the risk of appearing unladylike and often women who do show emotions are demeaned and labeled as emotionally unstable, crazy, or out of control. For Asian American women especially, they are labeled the “dragon lady” or the “angry Asian woman” and being labeled unsuitable for leadership positions.

**Self-doubt and loss of identity and autonomy**

The servant leadership philosophy combined with the traditional gender norms and cultural expectations create a prototype of what the Queen Program and Japanese American community think a Japanese American female leader should look and behave like. However, if a participant does not fit into this mold, it can cause them to question their identity and their leadership ability. The enforcement of these expectations can also lead to loss of autonomy. Harley shared her experience:

I really struggled with my identity and my agency the most when I was in the Queen Program. Even in the beginning years on the Committee, I didn't feel like I had a voice or a choice. So, it affected me in a way. I came out of my master's program super confident and then the Queen Program really shook me. I always want to be positive and say it was good to have that experience on that team and hindsight is 20/20. I would love to go back and tell myself; you are enough. Though Harley was capable and confident going into the program, the rigid standards and taxing rules wore down her spirit and challenged her identity and sense of agency as
oppressive institutional systems like patriarchy and white supremacy are wont to do. The program’s intention was to build the confidence of young Japanese American women and support their leadership journey, instead it had the opposite effect.

Several other participants reflected on their post Queen Program experience and expressed the same sense of disorientation as they tried to reconcile their leadership styles and personal belief systems with those dictated by hegemonic norms and expectations. Alicia expressed that she felt the program” took a piece of our identity away because now we're just labeled Princess One, Princess Two, Princess Three. You don't know what my actual name is, you don't know anything about me, except that I'm Princess Number One.” She became less of an individual with a personality and more of a site for racialized and gendered work (King-O’Riain, 2006). This loss of identity also extended to a loss of autonomy:

I didn't feel like we had a voice. I felt like I was treated like a child. I wasn't able to speak, I was told what to do, I was told when I could use the restroom, I was told when I could eat, I was told when I could have a drink of water, I was told how to do my hair and makeup. You have no autonomy or agency for your own body. It just didn’t feel as though the way we were being trained or spoken to was necessarily conducive to building leaders.

Once stripped of identity and voice and given explicit instructions to follow in order to be a “leader” or the program’s version of a leader, Alice’s sense of autonomy and safety was lost. To prevent reprimand and punishment many women complied with the demands.

Participants were asked to bring only the parts of themselves that were deemed “polished” and “acceptable” for the community to see, i.e., what fit within the traditional
gender norms and cultural expectations, which meant leaving large pieces of their identity in the shadows. These responses provided insight into understanding how the Queen Program shaped their beliefs about leadership and actions and room to explore the need for a shift in the leadership paradigm.

**Intersectional identities**

The Queen Program plays a significant role in the community as well as training and developing Japanese American women to become leaders. In doing so, it not only shapes the identities of Japanese American women, but molds the shared identity of Japanese Americans. While discussing intersectional identities, three themes emerged: (a) belonging, (b) lack of acknowledgement and representation of social identities, and (c) censoring due to traditional values. The blood quantum rule or questions about nationality, set up what King-O’Riain (2006) refers to as a hierarchy of authenticities which is used to determine cultural legitimacy or belonging. These hierarchies play into who receives access to the community and therefore who and what parts of identity are acknowledged by the community. This gatekeeping and censoring of certain populations within the Japanese American community is linked to the traditional values and the historical treatment of Japanese Americans in the U.S.

**Belonging**

During the section on identity, there was a lot of discussion about belonging and legitimacy within the context of the program and the community. They grappled with the issue of feeling “Japanese enough” and how the program, community and the women themselves determine their belonging as members in the community using blood quantum and cultural knowledge. They wondered who determines who is Japanese
enough and what makes someone more Japanese than another? They noted that there seemed to be an ever-moving barometer for what makes a person Japanese enough in the eyes of the community.

One of the first requirements to determine qualification for the Queen Program is the blood quantum rule. The blood quantum rule is the requirement that all participants be of at least 50% Japanese ancestry. According to King-O’Riain, the rule was created to preserve the Queen Program for Japanese American women, certify that the women had a connection to the community, and ensure that the queen physically reflected the Japanese American community (2006, p. 188). The blood quantum rule created a hierarchy of who was deemed a legitimate candidate to be queen. Alicia’s mixed heritage, features, finite knowledge of the culture, and non-Japanese last name drew attention from the Queen Program Committee, judges, and community:

I felt like I was being profiled and felt like I was being judged because I am only 50% Japanese.” “I was ‘dirty’ in a sense; I wasn't the most clean, polished image for them to present as the candidate who's the winner… It made me feel I’m not Japanese enough for them.

Alicia felt as though she was immediately eliminated from the running because she did not possess the physical embodiment or the ancestry that would make her the most marketable for the Queen Program or what was consistent with the program’s vision for the perfect representative.

There seemed to be emphasis on being 100% or pure Japanese with a negative connotation around being mixed, especially being mixed with another race outside of Asian. Suzie recalled her interaction with the press and the community:
When the announced the results from the program in the local Japanese newspaper, the Nichi Bei, they didn’t use my name instead they called me the “mixed race first princess,” and I think that's one part of the program that really stung, where it wasn’t addressed appropriately or wasn’t seen, and I realized how very exclusive this community felt at certain times. I mean people didn't treat me necessarily differently, but there is always a part of me that says I have to work a little harder to prove to them that I am Japanese or Japanese American.

The media’s emphasis on Suzie’s status as “mixed race” reveals the significance of race to the community and how resistant the community can be to “others.” It also spotlights the program’s disregard or reluctance to discuss issues of race. It also reveals the burden that is placed on the women to ingratiate themselves to the community and gain acceptance by going above and beyond.

The second dimension that the women felt they were being judged on was their cultural knowledge, even though the program is advertised as a cultural education program, there is still an expectation of having a basic understanding of Japanese American culture including implicit and explicit customs. Suzie recalled feeling detached from the community not because she was not Japanese enough but because she was not Japanese American enough:

I often felt more Japanese than a lot of these people [in the program], but I'm not pure Japanese, I’m not Japanese American, and as someone who speaks the language fluently and lived in Japan, I was excited to be with people with similar experiences but then I quickly realized that was not the case. It was a weird conflicting paradox of being Japanese enough on paper, but maybe not Japanese
American enough to be a part of certain parts of the community or certain events… I felt more at home during events with dignitaries or visitors from Japan, but even then, they look at me and they don't expect Japanese to come out of my mouth. It was interesting to have this really weird paradox of identity.

There is a very clear distinction between identifying as Japanese and Japanese American. While from an ethnicity and heritage standpoint both share the same roots, each identity carries its own unique set of mannerisms, sensibilities, and culture. Even though Suzie was fluent in the language, customs and traditions of Japan, she was not familiar with the Japanese American culture created by the historical context of World War II and the integration of American values and ideals and therefore found herself on the outside looking in. However, the Queen Program has undertaken the task of bridging the gap between those that identify as Japanese and those that identify as Japanese American by strengthening the ties between the two groups through continued education and acting as liaisons.

While some women in the program find themselves as outsiders to the community either due to their blood quantum or lack of cultural knowledge or context, there are others that find themselves completely invisible to the Queen Program and the wider Japanese American community. Due to recent events surrounding the Black Lives Matter and the Stop AAPI Hate movements, the Queen Program has been more open to broaching previously taboo topics, there is still a noticeable silence when it comes to sexuality, socioeconomic status, and ability.
Lack of acknowledgement and representation for social identities

The participants that were interviewed agreed that the program ignored and often censored social identities like sexuality, class, and ability. They also failed to address the ways in which those identities intersected with each other as well as race and gender. Participants in the program are explicitly told not to do or say anything political and that meant not discussing LGBTQIA issues or talking about intersectionality. The study’s participants discussed the pervasiveness and social acceptance of heteronormativity within the Japanese American community that sheds light on the oppression that members of the LGBTQIA community face within the Japanese American community and the continued pressure to choose between personal safety and being one’s authentic self.

Another social identity that the Queen Program does not address is socioeconomic status. Harley pointed out that the opportunity to participate in the Queen Program is often limited by one’s financial situation:

Your success and leadership are linked to capitalism. You have to have this certain amount of money to succeed in the program, and to be able to bring the best omiyage [gifts] to honor people who are dressing you for kimono, or doing certain things, or in these events and wearing certain things, and I think I struggled with that immensely and then to question and be critical of how is this program linked to that and how do we support folks who might not be able to participate because of money.

Harley highlighted the very real issue of being able to afford participating in the program given the financial demands and how that affects the representation of women with
different socioeconomic statuses and experiences. It also calls attention to the privilege that goes unrecognized in regards to socioeconomic status and the group membership, norms, and socialization patterns that are carried within that status’ culture.

Committee members disregarded the ways that a person’s socio-economic status could affect their ability to participate in the program, choosing to instead concentrate on if the candidate’s talent for the creative expression portion of the program or the candidate’s parents or lineage:

It wasn’t a matter of if they could afford it, it was just what is their talent, what are they going to do for their creative expression. Then we look at their families, and if we knew who they were or if we didn't know who they were. We were more interested in if the candidate was willing to get to know who they are, in terms of being a Japanese American woman… finances were never talked about.

There is a level of privilege that goes along with not having to think or discuss finances or not worrying about the financial burden that participating in the program might cause. The program’s refusal to question their own privileges and: Where does “talent” come from? Who is or is not afforded the opportunity to develop their talents? Who is being left out due to the affordability of the program? However, the omission and lack of acknowledgement of certain social identities are a result of the amalgamation of the spiritual, philosophical, economical, and social epistemologies of Japanese Americans, the rhetoric of race and racial treatment of Japanese Americans in the U.S., and prevailing hegemonic norms and beliefs in America.
**Censoring due to traditional values**

The participants acknowledged that the community has a history of being exclusionary and dismissive of people belonging to certain marginalized social groups. Though the Queen Program was formed in the likeness of the Miss America Pageant as a way to align with white dominant culture and adopted various aspects of American culture and society’s systems of oppression such as sexism, ableism, classism, etc., there are dimensions of Japanese philosophy and social norms that act as cultural drivers for the community. Traditional concepts like *mentsu wo tamotsu*, “saving face;” *wa*, “harmony, peaceful unity, and conformity;” and reverence for the elderly are underlying concepts that shape community beliefs and structures.

Due to the cultural values of deference towards one’s elders, many felt that the program was sensitive to the feedback from the older generations, which prevented the program from being progressive and moving towards a more inclusive program. Danielle recalled being cautious and asking women to change their speeches:

> We didn’t know how the community was gonna react, so it was playing both sides trying to balance it without saying no you can't say that, but the community needs to hear this, but they're not ready for it… I felt like the community dictated certain things, it wasn't meant to be derogatory or to make someone feel bad; it was just that's how they thought, and so we heard those voices and you tried to balance what people wanted to see and what was being said and that sucked… Most of this is because you don't want to disappoint the elders. Back then there were a lot of outspoken folks and they had a definite opinion and if you didn’t agree with
them, they made your life kind of hard. It wasn’t on purpose; it was just what was done.

The *issei* and *nisei* experienced tremendous discrimination, especially after World War II, and in order to cope with the racism, they adapted to become a part of mainstream America. The experiences from internment camps and discrimination that they faced had a profound effect on their identity as Japanese Americans, relationships, and acculturation strategies.

In order to negate American fears about being the enemy, Japanese Americans took on the persona of the “good American” and this meant sacrificing identities that were not deemed socially acceptable, even if it meant silencing younger generations. Harley agreed:

In the program there's so much that's connected to tradition and history. When I was on the Committee and made a suggestion, there was a sense that we were changing the traditions or the history. We fear that we’ll disrespect our elders and we’ll lose that support or respect from them.

The preservation of *wa* or harmony is important to the community and any changes to the program would throw harmony out of balance. *Wa* also denotes conformity and any trait or identity that does not conform to what is considered normal or acceptable, is deemed as detrimental. The adage “the nail that sticks out gets the hammer” is often used in Japanese culture to denote that those who are too different will be disciplined or rendered invisible.

Even as the program looks to become more inclusive and accepting, Committee members are still very careful in the ways they discuss opening up the program to
participants that hold identities that may be controversial. They are careful to keep the program focused solely on women’s leadership, community service, and sticking to traditional values.

**Leadership challenges and coping mechanisms**

Most participants agreed that the Queen Program did not address leadership challenges like discrimination directly. There were two themes that emerged in the findings: (a) denial of racist or sexist incidents and (b) coping mechanisms. While the Queen Program did not directly address discrimination, participants often found themselves dealing with sexism and racism through the context of the program with little to no support from Committee members. In fact, these instances often went unacknowledged. The prevailing advice they were given to deal with these instances of racism or sexism was to grow thicker skin. While this helped some of the women, it left many feeling isolated and it did not address the racist or sexist behavior in the community. However, some participants were fortunate enough to find support and comfort in their fellow participants.

**Denial of racist or sexist incidents**

The Queen Program did not directly prepare women for challenges such as discrimination and women often felt as though they were being subjected to sexism or racism through the program. One of the main activities that the women were asked to participate in during events was the selling of raffle tickets. Many participants experienced being asked to smile more or flirt with men to get them to purchase more tickets. When Alicia brought up that the task was sexist and she felt preyed upon and uncomfortable with the position the program put her in, she was told by a Committee
member that it was for the greater good because the raffle ticket sales were some
organizations only way of raising funds for the year:

We use the notoriety of the Queen Program, the Court, the tiaras, and sashes to
help organizations raise funds that way because, it's part of psychology, not many
people would just go ahead and buy raffle tickets just because. Unfortunately, it
still exists, but there's gentlemen that do like women very, very cute young
women like yourself. They're basically using the Queen and Court, but it’s the
only way that we could actually quantify us going… As far as young women
selling to older men, I think it's just a bit of perspective. It does feel that way, but
it's not necessarily taken that way.

Not only was Alice made to feel that her feelings were invalid, but the Committee
member actively denied that these raffle sales were inherently sexist. It made Alicia
question how the Queen Program could move forward to empower women if the
leadership was not going to actively deny the sexism present in the structure of the
program. She believes that part of empowering women in leadership positions is to give
them the tools to recognize and break the cycle of discrimination, but how can that be
done if such blatant incidents are ignored or denied, and how can more furtive instances
be recognized.

Though not explicitly stated, in the analysis of some of the examples that the
participants gave, there was a pattern of second-generation bias or practices that are
seemingly gender neutral but in fact discriminate based on gender because they are
reflective of the male dominant culture. When asked if she had ever been discriminated
against, Johanna couldn’t identify one particular instance but came up with a few
examples of her supervisor being condescending when he pet her on the head and told that she was a “good little analyst,” but she chalked it up to rude and demeaning behavior, “not discrimination or something I felt held me back from achieving my goals… I was more oblivious or tend to personalize things.” These microaggressions and subtly sexist comments are often insidiously delivered so they are unrecognizable but point at a larger institutional problem of discrimination or second generation bias a term coined by psychologist Faye Crosby. Second generation bias is “hidden, invisible, planned, organized and has a more neutral face, but the underlying practices, values, and beliefs remain distinctly male oriented” (Grover, 2015). Like Johanna noted, it wasn’t something directly aimed at holding her back from her goals, but it creates a context in which women fail to reach their full potential.

In Suzie’s reflection regarding the incident in which she was chastised for wearing shorts and exposing her legs at a community event, Suzie said, “I don’t think her comments were sexist, but it’s like the stereotype of the Japanese woman is still perpetuated.” Some of the fellow participants pointed out that the comments were sexist. Often women are socialized not to recognize sexism, excuse it as a one-off incident, or diminish its impact, which renders it acceptable and the norm. Veronica shared her experience being the co-chair:

Being the co-chair last year and this year, I was under the gun for everything, but I had to come up and talk to people about the pandemic and people are in my face yelling at me, and they were saying that I was the one who's making the decisions so it's my fault. I was literally being attacked and my former co-chair actually stated that he could not reconcile our management differences. He didn't even talk
to me. How can we have management differences if there's no communication. I tried to call him, I tried to email him, he was invited to every single meeting that we had last year… People will say all sorts of stuff. One of the board members actually told me, “You're all business, you have no heart.”

Another way that second generation bias can prevent women from being successful in leadership positions is by using neutral terms like management styles, but aimed at undermining them in a way that is not seen as sexist.

*Coping Mechanisms.* While not a formal lesson during the training, one of the messages that participants grasped during the program was the notion of growing a thicker skin. In her role as program director, Veronica touted the idea of developing a thicker skin as a method of coping:

I say every single year, you have to have thicker skin. If I let everything get personal and if I let everything get to me, I'm not going to be in the position that I am in and then moving upward and if every little thing gets to me and if I allow it to become personal and yes, these things may sound personal but it's not. It's just how you handle it, how you divert it.

Coping mechanisms like growing a thicker skin, show the ways in which women have dealt with sexist comments and have found ways to become stronger. However, in Harley’s experience the trauma and reductive way she was treated during her year as well as the comments or feedback that she received from community members were inherently racist and/or sexist. She recognized that the notion of growing a thicker skin was a “colonized notion of *gaman*” or perseverance, another tool in the system of oppression.
She saw that in a lot of her team and how it seeped into her work and negatively affected her students.

Alicia pointed out that each generation had a different way of recognizing and dealing with various forms of racism and sexism. The difference in the way that each generation processes and chooses to deal with racism and sexism stems from their experiences and their generation’s history. The Queen Program did not provide the support or guidance needed to navigate and cope with the racism or sexism that they experienced during the program, and therefore turned to create their own support system with the women in their cohort. This was the case for Suzie:

The way it's helped me personally is that it gave me a safe space to talk about it with people in similar positions. My court, most of us were half, and so I think we talked about identity, how it translates in the workplace, how we feel, and being in different spaces, but I don't think it ever came from the Committee. We still feel hesitant to say anything to the Committee because we don't know if they’re going to get mad or what they're going to do.

Suzie speaks to a deeper issue of trust between Committee members and participants. Committee members could not be entrusted to give the kind of support or guidance that the women were seeking. Harley still keeps in touch with the members of her year and is able to turn to them to vent or ask for advice. Her support system has been very critical and helpful as she navigates her leadership roles at work.

*The future*
Opinions of the future of the program differed. Many believed that the structure of the program needs to change. For example, Harley pointed out that the judging needed to align with the program's stated outcomes. She revealed:

The rubric for which these women are judged, it's not a rubric of someone who makes rubrics or is part of the training process. I feel like JA women are being judged on stuff that they're not really truly trained to do, but I remember it was a lot of, like, poise and it didn't have [an explanation] of what poise means; it was very subjective.

The rubric did not necessarily look at the leadership qualities or credentials of the participants, but seemed to judge them on subjective terms that could be interpreted as sexist characterization of women. Many participants brought up the need for the program to be expanded to include men. They thought that if the program were not confined to women, it would be less gendered. It would also help to get away from the pageant type show. Alicia was not hopeful that they would be able to step away from the tiaras, sashes, and titles until the older generations were ready to pass the torch and allow the next generation to rebrand the program. A progressive program might be too much to ask for given that allowing people with marginalized identities into the program might be antithetical to what the program stands for. Given the deeply ingrained history and traditions of the program, it may be too difficult to create a program to meet the needs of today’s Japanese American women from the current iteration of the program. However, Bethany was optimistic and thinks by removing the crown, sash, and titles, the Committee would be flipping the script and giving the program new life.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter gives a summary of the study and discusses the findings that were laid out in Chapter 4. The significance and implications of these findings are presented in the conclusion. Finally, recommendations for both the individual and organization are provided as well as directions for further research.

Restatement of the Problem

Asian American women are caught at the intersection of the bamboo ceiling and the glass ceiling, the term used to describe the obstacles and barriers that women face in reaching leadership positions. They are underrepresented in top positions in government, higher education, private, and nonprofit organizations (Youngberg et al., n.d.). Researchers have called for more leadership development programs designed to support the needs of Asian American women (Akutagawa, 2014; Canlas, 2016; Gee & Peck, 2015; Lin, 2007; Youngberg et al., n.d.), yet there are few culturally sensitive leadership training programs geared toward Asian American women. The Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program seeks to fill this void by offering a leadership development program focused on leadership development for Japanese American women in Northern California. The program is dedicated to developing young women of Japanese descent to become community leaders (Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program, 2020). Although the Queen Program is an important part of the Northern California Japanese American community, some scholars argue that it was created “to maintain a particularly antiquated and nostalgic sense of Japanese Americanness-- once racialized by others in internment and now imposing race itself, not as self-delusion or
self-hate, but as a form of self-preservation” (King-O’Riain, 2006, p. 229). Scholars posit
that the form of cultural preservation practiced in the Queen Program serves to sustain the
model minority myths and the stereotypes the myth represents.

The purpose of this study was to engage Japanese American women who had
participated in the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program to explore their
leadership experiences and their leadership development. This study investigates the role
that the Queen Program plays in influencing the leadership beliefs and intersectional
identities of Japanese American women. The study also analyzes how the Queen Program
prepares the participants for leadership challenges, including discrimination in the
workplace directed towards themselves and others.

**Research questions**

The research questions that drove this study include:

1. In what ways do cultural pageant programs like the Northern California Cherry
   Blossom Queen Program shape the leadership beliefs and actions of Japanese
   American women?

2. In what ways do cultural pageant programs like the Northern California Cherry
   Blossom Queen Program shape the intersectional identities of Japanese American
   women?

3. In what ways do cultural pageant programs like the Northern California Cherry
   Blossom Queen Program prepare or fail to prepare Japanese American women to
   respond to the racism and patriarchy in their workplace and communities?

To explore these questions, I conducted a case study relying primarily on interviews and
focus groups. Observations were not possible given the COVID pandemic. Seven women
who had completed the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program participated in two individual one-hour long interviews and two one-hour long focus groups via Zoom. The interview protocols were focused on the participants’ experience in the Queen Program as well as their leadership experience. In line with the focus group protocols, the focus groups concentrated intersectional identities and leadership challenges, including discrimination. It was important that the women came together in community to hear each other’s experiences and engaged in the reflective process of Participatory Action Research using the local context, culture, and history of the social relationships. Case study was used to conduct an in-depth exploration of the intricate phenomena of the participants’ experiences within the Queen Program using a critical feminist lens which aids in the analysis of patterns regarding thoughts, values, power, and behavior.

Discussion of Findings

After analyzing the data from the interviews and focus groups, several key findings emerged. First, the women associated the Queen Program with the philosophy of servant leadership and felt that this type of leadership style was cultivated through the program’s training and consistent with the standards that were prescribed and established based on traditional gender norms and cultural expectations. This recipe of servant leadership philosophy as well as behaviors and physical standards created a model that speaks to what the community and program believe the ideal Japanese American female leader should be. For women in the program exploring their own leadership styles, it created a dissonance between what the leaders they were expected to be and the leaders they wanted to be. Many women reflected on their experiences with self-doubt and identity loss as they worked to reconcile these the friction of expectation and their own
leadership identity.

Second, the blood quantum rule is a refinement of the Japanese American values and norms into a racial form coupled with the cultural knowledge that has created a ranking of cultural belonging and legitimacy. Access and acknowledgement from the community stem from these hierarchies and can often lead to censoring of certain minority groups within the Japanese American community. This is due to the adoption of dominant systems of oppression and traditional Japanese philosophy.

Third, participants shared their experiences of racism and sexism that they experienced through the context of the program. Furthermore, they revealed that the program did not prepare them to navigate discrimination in the community or workplace nor did they feel equipped to be allies to others. They also shared their experiences in the workplace and community that pointed to a pattern of second-generation bias, which is something that is not widely recognized or discussed. While some coped with the instances by “growing thicker skin” as encouraged by the program, others found solace in their fellow participants or outside support systems.

Evolving leadership paradigm

Gendered racialization of Japanese American women often causes them to be seen as subordinates rather than leaders. They must navigate the intersection of the glass ceiling and bamboo ceiling as they strive to become leaders and develop their leadership style. In contrast to the traditionally white and authoritarian form of leadership, the Queen Program offers Japanese American women a model and philosophy of servant leadership in which the goal of the leader is to serve (van Dierendonck, 2011). However, such a dichotomous choice without room for exploration into leadership styles that feel
authentic to program participants has caused self-doubt and a loss of identity. Participants in the study expressed the necessity for an evolving leadership paradigm beyond the leadership styles defined by white supremacy culture and a leadership style that can reinforce stereotypes through traditional and cultural gender norms.

Though an improvement from the inception of the program, the Queen Program and community still seeks to control the physical appearance and acceptable behavior of participants through censoring and uniformity, as seen through emotion regulation and loss of autonomy. Participants also felt that wearing makeup and maintaining their appearance was imperative to garner respectability and convince people that they were worthy of being listened to. This coupled with the emphasis on servant leadership philosophy as the prevailing leadership style, did not feel natural for all participants and led to a questioning of leadership ability and loss of identity. They found themselves not quite fitting the mold of the Queen Program’s expectations for Japanese American female leaders, but also not fitting the ideal leader based on prevailing hegemonic norms that persist due to white privilege. This is consistent with what Costigan (2018) calls a “double bind” between reinforcing the gendered and racialized stereotypes of Asian Americans or behaving in such a way that is inconsistent with normalized racial and gendered norms; either choice leading to the same result: deemed an unappealing candidate for leadership positions.

Research shows that gender is not an indicator of how one will lead (Eagly & Karau, 2002), yet it still contributes to how women are viewed as leaders. Veronica’s experience of being reprimanded for expressing anger and standing up for herself in reaction to a judge’s rude comment is an example of how men are often lauded for their
assertiveness or confidence, traits associated with strong leaders, while women are labeled bitchy or abrasive and penalized for their unlikability, which has an effect on their leadership suitability. Through this and many other similar experiences, Veronica learned that it was better to self-censor. She and other participants were told implicitly and explicitly to self-silence in the name of averting confrontation and showing any emotion that might be construed as “unladylike.” Regulation of emotion was necessary if you wanted to be taken seriously as a leader.

According to Lee et al. (2009), the model minority concept urges self-censoring or self-silencing to conceal any issue or problem that may break the facade of the model minority construct. By instructing the Queen Program participants to “react in a deflected way” or be passive in their actions, they are reinforcing the stereotype that Asian American women are docile and deferential. For Asian American women, race and culture are also factors on top of the gendered expectations of leadership. Asian American women face stereotypes that depict them as submissive, quiet, and passive, which is not representative of the women incorporated into the socially constructed label of “Asian American women.” The stereotypes give rise to the exploitable and exotic, “China doll” or “Suzy Wong” or the domineering, confident “dragon lady” or “tiger mom.” The gendered racialization of these labels not only prevent Asian American women from being able to attain leadership roles but also make them more susceptible to microaggressions, prejudice, and violence (M. C. Hwang & Parreñas, 2021).

Self-censoring also allows for problematic behavior against the participants to persist without the women feeling as though they can stand up for themselves and speak out against instances of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. Many women felt as though
they could not “speak to the heart of the matter” and by addressing the problem, they might bring shame upon themselves, their family, the program, or even to the offender. The program is still based on white, patriarchal beliefs such as promoting standards of beauty that are unrealistic and objectifying women and along with the community continue to reinforce dominant expectations on the program’s participants, especially physically and behaviorally.

The prototypical leadership roles are typically created and filled by white males, which limit opportunities for women and people of color. The norms regarding the white Western style of dress code, work style, speech, and attitude are accepted as universal and other forms of leadership or culture in leadership are deemed unworthy. Those women and people of color feel that they must fit into a mold less they are considered illegitimate by their white counterparts. One of the reasons cited for Asian American women experiencing career setbacks and plateaus is the lack of culturally sensitive and relevant mentors and role models. Bethany shared her experience with her culturally insensitive mentor who told her “You’re American, you don’t have to adhere to your Japanese way of thinking” and the confusion that it caused. It was also a missed opportunity for Bethany to understand how to bring the richness of her experiences and cultural values to her leadership style. Instead, Japanese American women are left to navigate choosing well-established norms and expectations of being a leader in a male dominated world or being authentic to their own values and leadership style.

The Asian American experience in leadership continues to be a construct of whiteness and white supremacy and the ability of dominant parties to set and perpetuate the norm. The system reinforces false and harmful stereotypes that force Asian American
leaders to uphold and align with these norms less be deemed unfit for leadership positions or risk losing their authentic selves causing dissonance and stress. Asian American women in leadership require an evolving leadership paradigm that fits their unique situation in which their leadership reflects their cultural wealth and experiences.

**Examining intersectional identities and privilege**

The participants’ experience in the Queen Program was marked by their own journey of belonging and relationship with the Japanese American community. Their membership status was often determined by a combination of blood quantum and cultural knowledge.

Throughout the study, it became evident that social identities such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation and their intersections had gone largely unacknowledged and certainly unexamined. Many participants attributed the lack of discourse due to stigma stemming from traditional Japanese culture and concepts ingrained in the community such as *mentsu wo tamotsu* or “saving face.” Participants expressed that they were very aware that because they were not only representing themselves but their family and community and that it was vital for them to avoid doing anything that might embarrass them, including speaking out about community issues or bringing attention to anything that detracted from the image of perfection. They were expected to achieve excellence and to be the perfect daughter with the belief that if one does not speak about the issue, then the issue does not exist.

The history and system upon which the program is built upon perpetuates the gendered racialization of Asian American women and therefore sustains the model minority myth. The lack of acknowledgement of social identities and the dynamics
between and amongst these identities has led to the silencing of and privilege over certain groups within the community. The “othering” of certain groups of the community diminishes lived experiences and divides communities that should be working together. This has also severely limited participation in the program or limiting it to a certain type of Japanese American woman.

Another aspect that detracts from Asian American women from being fully accepted as leaders is the persistent perception of being the “foreigner” or the “other” in the predominantly white society, regardless of where they were born or how long their families have been in the United States. Tuan (1998) sums it up best, whiteness “is equated with being American; Asianness is not” (p. 139). Asian Americans are viewed as “unassimilable” into dominant culture and therefore often overlooked when it comes to leadership opportunities. Their credentials and experience are negated by their foreignness and are often required to be overly qualified to even warrant a consideration for a leadership position. It is this system that perpetuates the community’s continual drive for perfection and to live up to the stereotype of the “model minority.” The participants experienced this in the Queen Program when asked to conform to gender norms and the expectation to be polished and poised at all times. The perpetuation of the model minority myth also contributes to the Glass Bamboo ceiling. The model minority myth makes those that do not fit into the stereotypes feel like an outsider and increases the likeliness of mental health issues.

The model minority myth has also caused deep schisms between different communities of color. The program does not help women explore or understand this challenge and often encourages alignment with the model minority myth. The myth is a
result of the use of economic and immigration policies to create tensions between the Black and Asian communities and white supremacy and the racial hierarchy that fabricated scarcity and the zero-sum mindset that breeds resentment. The racial hierarchy in which the white Americans are placed at the top and Black Americans are placed at the bottom has created a Black and white paradigm in which Asian Americans are used as pawns. Claire Kim’s (1999) theory of racial triangulation, in which Asian Americans are positioned relative to Blacks and whites in a “field of racial positions” comprised of a “superior/inferior” axis or racial valorization and a “insider/foreigner” axis or the scale in which certain groups are considered unassimilable versus being considered acceptable by white America.

Japanese Americans' unique history and relationship with America during World War II coupled with their fear of being sent back to internment camps, forced many Japanese Americans to embrace the dominant framework of racial hierarchies and white supremacy which included internalizing racism against their own communities. This dominant framework narrows one’s options to either assimilate, be erased, or be excluded or incarcerated. The model minority stereotype is not meant to laud Asian Americans as much as it is meant to define Black Americans as deficient and reemphasize the American caste structure of race. By sustaining the myth that people of color, in this case, Asian Americans can overcome obstacles and succeed without acknowledging the role of skin color and racial hierarchy in the historic struggles of Black and Latino Americans, allows for those in power to continue to ignore the systemic issues and barriers in place.

As we’ve seen with the recent attacks against Asian Americans, the same tactics are being used to drive a wedge between Asian Americans and Black Americans. Black
Americans are being made scapegoats and main perpetrators of violence against Asian Americans and used to distract from the other forces at play in the situation. The model minority myth has successfully kept racism against Asian Americans out of the public consciousness and makes it easier for people to claim that the attacks are not racially motivated.

First and second-generation bias

Participants shared that the program did not provide much guidance or training when it came to dealing directly with discrimination including racism or sexism. When asked to share how racism or sexism showed up in the community or their workplaces, many of the women gave examples but often labeled them as rude or impolite rather than explicitly labeling them sexist or racist. This is consistent with second generation bias research findings (Grover, 2015; Sturm, 2001). Research has shown that second generation bias is difficult to trace and often goes unrecognized by men and women. These biases manifest themselves in the workplace structurally, relationally, and situationally. They are often neutral in tone, but the underlying system of values, customs, and beliefs are built to support and benefit men (Sturm, 2001) since men are mostly responsible for the construction and maintenance of the society’s structures. Often racism and sexism are so entrenched in our culture that it is hard to recognize them in action. Even when the women experienced racist or sexist incidents during the program, the incidents were rarely acknowledged and if they were acknowledged, the women were told that they must “grow thicker skin and brush it off.” This coping mechanism was helpful for some women as they felt that they were in control of how they reacted to the incident. It also made them feel as though they were empowered to be self-sufficient.
However, the conservation of the belief that women should manage their emotions and excuse harassment has led to the normalization of racist and sexist incidents in the community and the workplace. It has taken the onus off the institutions to make any effort toward improving the climate for women.

The model minority concept also enforces the myth of boot-strapping success, which can be internalized by Asian Americans. When internalized, Asian Americans tend to look inward as the reason that they did not receive the job or promotion and individualize the failure, rather than seeing it as a symptom of the larger system of discrimination. It also leads to harmful practices like imposter syndrome, not setting boundaries for their workload and safety, people-pleasing, and seeking the pay and positions they deserve (W.-C. Hwang, 2021; Trieu & Lee, 2018). There were many instances in the data that the participants would describe an incident, but preface or conclude that they weren’t treated like that because of race or sex, and they were probably right; it was not because of race OR sex, but an intersection of their identities.

**Recommendations**

*For the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program*

**Realign Queen Program with vision and mission**

The Queen Program has evolved over the course of many years in a series of small steps; however, these incremental changes have led parts of the program to be misaligned with the vision and mission to develop women into future community leaders. The program needs to evaluate the ways in which it is carrying out its mission and vision and if the program’s outcomes are reflective of the true meaning of their program.
Culturally sensitive support systems

The Queen Program stands at an important intersection for future and current Japanese American female leaders. It provides a bridge to connect Japanese American women that share similar goals and aspirations. The program should continue to provide opportunities for Japanese American women to connect and network, whether they’ve participated in the program or not. It would give these women a chance to develop a culturally sensitive support system as well as create meaningful connections especially for mentorship.

For rising or current Asian American women leaders

Continue to establish and nurture relationships

One of the most rewarding aspects of the study was hearing the relationships that women were able to establish through the Queen Program and continue to nurture to this day. The networks that they were able to build have helped them to create a sense of sisterhood and support. Though they may not have found the leadership development that they were looking for through the Queen Program, they were able to help find encouragement and moral support in their leadership and life journey. These connections and systems of support are what seems to help these women sustain their efforts as they grow their careers and continue to pursue their leadership ambitions.

Recognize and name the discrimination

Participants in study often minimized the importance of gender or race in interactions which is consistent with Britton’s (2016) research. Stereotypes are often used as explanations as to why women do not reach parity with men in leadership positions. However, second generation bias needs to be acknowledged and recognized so that they
can feel empowered to take action against the effects of second-generation bias.

**Future research**

*Sister programs*

While the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program, Nisei Week in Los Angeles, and the Cherry Blossom Festival in Hawai‘i all share similar components they have uniquely been shaped by their geographic location and their surrounding communities. Future research on the experience of participants in Sister Programs could provide additional insight to the diverse experiences of Asian American women leaders in different geographical locations across the U.S.

*Missing in history*

The absence of voices from Queen Program participants that were also a part of the LGBTQIA+ community was acutely felt. Though participants of the study expressed the need for outreach to the LGBTQIA+ community, it would be valuable to hear from those women to better understand the intersections of their identities and amplify their voices and experiences. Activist and author Helen Zia said that Asian Americans are “MIH- missing in history” and it is about time that their stories are told to encourage the future generations and shift the narrative.

In the same way that the voices of LGBTQIA+ Japanese American women are missing from history, so are the voices of those Japanese American women that are a part of other marginalized communities. The representation of diverse individuals and their histories need to be represented in Asian American research.

*Participatory action research*

This study was intended to lay the groundwork for additional participatory action
research. The findings from the current research indicate that it may be difficult, given the history of the program, its traditions, and the nostalgia that it evokes for the community, to build a curriculum that places the needs of Japanese American women and their leadership development at the forefront, not to mention grounding that praxis in critical feminist theory. Building a leadership development program for Japanese American women through participatory action research is a political process that seeks to improve social practices by disrupting the oppressive systems that value leadership rooted in white patriarchy, which means questioning institutional ideas, assumptions, and practices. This requires engaging in texts such as *Feminism is for Everybody* by bell hooks, *Living a Feminist Life* by Sara Ahmed, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* by adrienne maree brown, etc. in order to develop a critical consciousness and understanding our intersectional identities and their role in leadership.

The group would start small. The size of the group would require authentic participation to be truly collaborative and create community. The size of the group would contribute to building community by allowing participants to bring their whole selves to the group. Starting small would also refer to starting with minor changes and working towards deeper patterns of change as well as starting with small cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting to refine the curriculum of a leadership development program. Lastly, through the process of reflection and journaling the research would be a systematic learning process which is ever evolving and responsive to opportunities so the leadership development would be critically informed and committed to action for Japanese American female leaders.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: USF IRB APPROVAL CONFIRMATION

Attachments:
- Expedited Review Approved by Chair - IRB ID: 1531.pdf

To: Alison Nishiyama-Young
From: Richard Gregory Johnson III, IRB Chair
Subject: Protocol #1531
Date: 01/25/2021

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 research (IRB Protocol #1531) with the project title The Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program: A Critical Feminist Case Study of a Cultural Pageantry Program has been approved by the IRB Chair under the rules for expedited review on 01/25/2021.

Any modifications, adverse reactions or complications must be reported using a modification application to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS via email at IRBPHS@usfca.edu. Please include the Protocol number assigned to your application in your correspondence.

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

Sincerely,

Dr. Richard Gregory Johnson III
Professor & Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
University of San Francisco
irbphs@usfca.edu
IRBPHS Website
Dear Cherry Blossom Alumnae,

My name is Alison Nishiyama-Young, a doctoral student from the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of San Francisco and a former participant of the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program. I am reaching out to invite you to participate in my dissertation study. The purpose of this study is to examine how the Queen Program in the Bay Area prepares participants for leadership roles and shapes the social identity categories (i.e., race, gender, class, etc.) of Japanese American women who participate. I would like to offer a space for women who have participated in this program to share with one another our experiences of the program and our experiences in leadership and society afterwards.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask for an introductory interview for some background information regarding your NCCBQP experience and leadership roles. I’ll then work to find the best time for the initial community group meeting with five to six fellow participants to discuss social identities. The second community group meeting would be scheduled a few weeks later to explore leadership and leadership challenges. At your convenience, we would have a final one-on-one follow-up interview. The study is slated to take place between February 2021 and April 2021. Due to the ongoing pandemic, all meetings will be conducted and recorded via Zoom.

If you’d like to participate in the study or require additional information about the research, please feel free to contact me at aknishiyama@usfca.edu. I can also send you a copy of the consent form, which gives you more information. I greatly appreciate your help and look forward to hearing your story.

Best,
Alison Nishiyama-Young
Doctoral Candidate
Leadership Studies
School of Education
University of San Francisco
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study entitled “The Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program: A Critical Feminist Case Study of a Cultural Pageantry Program” conducted by Alison Nishiyama-Young, a Doctoral student in the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of San Francisco. The faculty supervisor for this study is Dr. Danfeng Koon, a professor in the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of San Francisco.

WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT:

The purpose of this study is to engage Japanese American women who have participated in the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program and explore their experiences in the program. This study is particularly geared towards how the program shapes the leadership and social identity categories (i.e. race, gender, class, etc.) of participants, and prepares or fails to prepare participants for leadership challenges.

WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:

During this study, you will first participate in an introductory interview with the researcher, followed by two focus groups with five other participants, and conclude with a final one on one interview with the researcher.

DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY:

Your participation in this study will involve two interview sessions that last one hour and two focus group sessions that last ninety minutes over a three month period with potential for follow up. The study will take place via Zoom.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:

The risks associated with this study are a loss of your time and the risks associated with regular activities. If you wish, you may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty.

BENEFITS:

The possible benefits to you of participating in this study are building community with those who have participated in the Northern California Cherry Blossom Queen Program. This study may add to the research on the field of leadership and multicultural issues and may benefit other people now or in the future.

PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY:

Any data you provide in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In any report published, no information will be included that will make it possible to identify you or any individual.
participant. Specifically, all information will be stored on a password-protected computer and any printouts will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Consent forms and any other identifiable data will be destroyed 3 years from the end of data collection.

COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:

There is no payment or other form of compensation for your participation in this study.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits. Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time.

OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:

Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact the principal investigator: Alison Nishiya-Young at (808) 729-7202 or aknishiyyama@usfca.edu or the faculty supervisor, Dr. Danfeng Soto-Vigil Koon at (415) 422-4346 or dkoon@usfca.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board at IRBPHS@usfca.edu.

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.

PARTICIPANT’S SIGNATURE

DATE
# APPENDIX D: INTRODUCTORY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Introductory Interview Protocol**  
**Format:** Zoom  
**Timeframe:** 1 hour  
**Recorded and transcribed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Warm Up</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - Tell me a little about yourself.  
  - Where did you grow up?  
  - What were the most formative events that contributed to your identity as a Japanese American?  
  - What were the most formative events that contributed to your views about being a woman? |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NCCBQP Experience</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - How did you come to participate in the NCCBQP?  
- Tell me a little about your experience in the NCCBQP.  
  - What were the most impactful activities?  
  - What aspects of the experience were consistent with what you imagined it would be? |
| Definition of Leadership | - What aspects of the program were a surprise to you? Why?  
- Tell me a bit about what you do.  
- What are your strengths as a leader?  
- What are your weaknesses as a leader?  
- What is your definition of a good leader? Why?  
- How has your definition of leadership evolved? What were the events or people that contributed to this evolution? |
**APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP #1 PROTOCOL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group #1 Protocol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Format: Zoom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeframe: 1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recorded and transcribed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Introduction
- Introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about you
- What are the 3 crucible events that have shaped you into the JA woman you are today?

### Leadership
- In your experience, what are characteristics of leadership that are valued in your workplace? in your community?
- How has the NCCBQP prepared you for leadership roles?
- How has NCCBQP not prepared you for leadership roles?

### Formation of Intersectional Identities
- In what ways, if at all, did the NCCBQP address being Japanese American? Being a Japanese American woman? Other social identities like race? What about gender, class, or sexual orientation?
- How do you feel the NCCBQP represents Japanese American women?
## APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP #2 PROTOCOL

**Focus Group #2 Protocol**  
*Format: Zoom*  
*Timeframe: 1 hour*  
*Recorded and transcribed*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>- Reintroduce yourself</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Leadership Development**                                                 | - How did your experience in the NCCBQP shape your ideas about leadership (shape your leadership style)?  
|                                                                            | - Where did you go to find support outside of NCCBQP? Why did you go there? |
| **Racism and Sexism**                                                      | - What challenges have you faced in your workplace and community?  
|                                                                            | - How do you feel the NCCBQP prepared you for those challenges?  
|                                                                            | - Have you been discriminated against in the workplace?  
|                                                                            | - How did NCCBQP prepare you or not prepare you for addressing it?  
|                                                                            | - How does racism show up if at all in your workplace? In your community?  
|                                                                            | - How has the program prepared you or not prepared you to address it?  
|                                                                            | - How does sexism show up if at all in your workplace? In your community?  
|                                                                            | - How has the program prepared you or not prepared you to address it?  |
## APPENDIX G: FINAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Final Interview Protocol  
Format: Zoom  
Timeframe: 1 hour  
Recorded and transcribed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Warm Up</th>
<th>- Check in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Document Collection              | - Do you have any documents or pictures that you’d like to share?  
|                                  | - What significance do these documents hold to you? |
| Closing                          | - What role does the NCCBQP play in the community?  
|                                  | - Is there anything else that you’d like to add? |