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Bridging the in Between: A Portrait of Asian American Student Affairs Professionals in Asian American Cultural Centers

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

BRIDGING THE IN BETWEEN: A PORTRAIT OF ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENT
AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS IN ASIAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTERS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

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CHICAGO, IL

AUGUST 2020

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When I made the decision to go back to school full-time for my doctoral degree, I did so in pursuit of dedicating time to grow myself as a scholar-practitioner, my own understanding of Asian American history and produce scholarship that would hopefully uplift my community in some shape or form. Most only bear witness to the commencement and completion of this journey, there are a handful of individuals that I have been blessed to have in my life because they have each made this gruelling process feel a little less solitary.

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scholars of color into my life and I am forever transformed by the opportunities afforded to learn with as well as from them. I am particularly thankful for Dr. Paige Gardner and Naseeb Bhangal who kept me rooted as I navigated going back into a full-time Student Affairs position while also pushing to complete my dissertation.

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I am incredibly humbled that not only am I the first in my family to hold an advanced degree, but I am now part of the 0.07% of Malaysians and the 1.38% of Americans who hold a doctorate. It is hard to fully wrap my head around that but for a public school, B-average, first-generation college student from Malaysia to be part of this small minority, I can say with confidence that God did that!

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

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ABSTRACT

Although the first Asian American Cultural Center (AACC) on a U.S. college campus came about as a result of student activism in the late 1960s and 33 other AACCs have since been established at higher education institutions across the country, very little has been documented in higher education scholarship about the Asian American Student Affairs Professionals (SAPros) who work within these unique institutional resources. And while concerted efforts have been made to diversify the student body demographic at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), the negative impact of campus racial dynamics on students of color have nevertheless persisted and extant literature on the impact of these racialized experiences on Asian Americans in higher education has been comparatively small. AACCs are increasingly expected to not only serve as safe and advocacy spaces for a growing Asian and Asian American student population on campus but to also engage the broader campus community around issues related to race, access, and equity. Thus, learning about the lived experiences of AACC SAPros both within and outside of the higher education institutional context is important to understanding the critical consciousness development of Asian Americans more broadly and its influence on how Asian American navigate their positionality as the racial middle within higher education.

This qualitative study utilized demographic surveys, photo project, semi-structure interviews, and participant observation to explore the lives of five AACC SAPros' who recently and currently held a full-time position at a higher education institution along the East coast. The purpose of the qualitative study was to understand AACC SAPros more wholly as people, what

has influenced their identity and critical consciousness development processes, what led them to and informs their work at the AACC, and how they navigate their positionality as Asian Americans within and outside of higher education. Data reveals that the people around them have a significant impact on the racial identity making meaning processes of AACC SAs. AACC SAs often find their racialized experiences overlooked by colleagues and thus turn to other Asian American SAs both within and outside of their institution for support. In addition, AACC SAs' lives influence their approach to the work and in turn things experienced through their role also influences their life's approach to create an infinite loop of mutual influence. Finally, data demonstrates that AACC SAs remain committed to uplifting the Asian American community past, present, and future beyond the formal responsibilities of their full-time position because they are driven by a deep love for the community.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As U.S. higher education institutions seek to diversify their student bodies, statements of commitment to diversity and inclusion have become increasingly visible on their websites, and in brochures and other marketing materials. How those commitments are kept and lived out, however, varies greatly from institution to institution. While colleges and universities are reportedly becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, student life and administration continue to reflect the nation's bigotry, repeatedly evidenced by the number of incidents that occurred in 2018 alone involving people of color being racially profiled on college campuses (Jaschik, 2018). Despite espoused efforts in favor of anti-racism, systems and structures that promote white dominance have been reinforced by higher education's employment of a diversity and inclusion rhetoric instead of transformative efforts that promote equity and justice (Patton, Ranero & Everett, 2011; Yosso & Lopez, 2010). This reinforcement of rhetoric has led to the rise of neoliberal multiculturalist policies which view diversity through the racial ideology of color-evasiveness and the "historical lens of whiteness" (Hernandez, 2016, p. 337). To date, U.S. higher education's response to issues of racial inequity has been to employ the rhetoric of diversity and inclusion as part of playing the politics of appeasement (Stewart, 2017). To quell voices of dissent and minimize negative news coverage, higher education institutions strategically make changes to give an appearance of valuing diversity and inclusion without any meaningful long-term commitments (Ahmed, 2012). As a result, most higher education

institutions stop at the improvement of compositional diversity within their student bodies, choosing to “celebrate” diversity in all its forms and only embracing aspects of racial equity that benefit white people while failing to address the deeply layered issue of institutional racism and evading truly transformative efforts to promote equity and justice (Ahmed, 2012; Cobham & Parker, 2007).

Thus, despite marked progress in access to higher education, research suggests that students of color are significantly less likely than their white peers to be satisfied with their campus racial climate (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Park, 2009; Rankin & Reason, 2005). This reality has yet to be meaningfully addressed as predominantly white institution (PWI) leaders continue to mostly respond reactively to appease protestors, trustees, and donors, ultimately leaving both institutions and students fundamentally unchanged (Stewart, 2017). Increasing access to higher education for historically marginalized student populations brings experiences, outlooks, and ideas that have potential to enrich the educational experiences of all students. However, when higher education institutions bring together historically isolated and disparate groups of students without creating intentional opportunities for learning around diversity to occur, the very problems that exposure to diversity were meant to solve are, in fact, perpetuated (Henry & Closson, 2010; Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan, & Landreman, 2002; Landreman, Rasmussen, King, & Jiang, 2007). Furthermore, there has been a persistent failure of U.S. higher education institutions to “connect the idea of diversity with the underlying core concept of social justice” (Kumagai & Lyson, 2009, p. 782). Too often, diversity-related efforts are implemented in reaction to a bias-incident that leads to demands for change from the campus community rather than from the institution’s proactive initiative. Subsequently, pursuits to

achieve diversity have resulted in checklist approaches, such as increasing access to higher education for minoritized student populations without bolstering student support services for those specific populations, haphazard incorporation of cultural competencies into curriculum content, and often treating diversity as a static outcome.

Cultural centers are a unique intervention within higher education institutions' response to calls for improving campus climate for racially minoritized populations. First established on college campuses in the 1960s as a resistance to the discrimination and isolation experienced by students of color at PWIs, cultural centers are an institutional office staffed and funded by the campus to meet the needs of students of color, which may include providing academic, social, cultural, and personal support (Hord, 2005; Patton, 2010). While cultural centers across the country range in size and scope, they remain as rare symbols of college student activism and institutionalized commitment to creating racially equitable learning environments. It was also during this period, largely in the wake of student strikes at San Francisco State University during the 1960s Civil Rights era, that the banner term *Asian American* was developed and under which Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino American college students mobilized to raise awareness around issues of racism and discrimination with the goal of transforming higher education (Espiritu, 1992; Park, 2008; Osajima, 1998a). Out of this political participation, Asian America emerged consisting of diverse peoples willingly and consciously self-identifying as Asian Americans to promote multiethnic alliances and action (Lee, 2015; Osajima, 2007). The first Asian American Cultural Center (AACC) was established in 1972 at Stanford University and continues to serve as Stanford's primary resource for Asian and Asian American community (Stanford Asian American Activities Center, n. d.). Yet, at present, AACCs comprise 34 out of the 154 race-

specific cultural centers located at four-year non-profit institutions (Shek, 2013). Although historically created to work with marginalized, racialized student populations (Bankole, 2005; Patton, 2010; Stennis-Williams, Terrell, & Haynes, 1998), today's AACCs extend beyond their historical missions to include a responsibility to serve their broader campus communities as educational resources (Shek, 2013).

While broadening their mission statements may have emerged in response to preserving the relevance of AACCs in a political environment where race-conscious programs and services have been accused of being discriminatory against dominant populations, how does this place an undue burden on Asian American Student Affairs Professionals (SAPros) who work in these spaces? In an era of color-evasive racism, the need for racial literacy and race consciousness across the board has never been greater (Annamma, Jackson & Morrison, 2017). While institutional racism is not often named as a crucial factor in the higher education experiences of Asian American students, research in the past two decades has begun to reveal the significant psychological and physical impacts of racism on Asian Americans on campus (DePouw; 2012; Johnston & Yeung, 2014; Lee, Wong, & Alvarez, 2009; Wong, 2013). Despite this emerging evidence and the increased enrollment of Asian American students in U.S. colleges and universities, relatively minimal attention has been paid to understanding how Asian Americans internalize and cope with race and racism, often rendering their racialized experiences invisible both to themselves and others (Alvarez, 2002; Pendakur & Pendakur, 2017). While we have seen a growth in the body of research on Asian Americans in higher education these last two decades, there is still comparatively less research published specifically on Asian American college students than other students of color (Museus, 2014). Within that, a paucity of published research on the experiences of Asian American SAPros still persists (Museus & Kiang, 2009).

Thus, documenting the experiences of Asian American SAPros in this study will fill a gap in the current body of literature. Furthermore, addressing this gap is important because AACC SAPros are positioned as mentors, advisors, and role models to students, and perhaps a documented exploration of their journeys will position higher education institutions to better support them in fulfilling their roles on campus in a more sustainable fashion. The current academic conversations around Asian American SAPros relate to their work with students and also focus on concerns around lack of representation in senior leadership positions within higher education, as will be revealed in chapter two. Although these are certainly necessary parts of the conversation, exploring Asian American SAPros' experiences beyond their impact on students has the potential to expand notions of racism and inclusion on campuses, as well as the relationship between higher education institutions and Asian Americans. Given that existing notions draw heavily from student populations, including AACC SAPros will broaden our understanding of how adults are impacted within the same institutional environment.

In the remainder of this chapter, I provide context around my study on the experiences of AACC SAPros in the form of a purpose statement. This is followed by my research questions and the significance of my study. From there, I provide background on this study's personal relevance to me. I then clarify the assumptions and delimitations of my study before defining terminology I use throughout my dissertation. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a preview of how the remaining chapters of my dissertation are organized.

Purpose Statement

As institutions of higher education often tout cultural centers as a symbol of their commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, it is important to consider who Asian American SAPros are as individuals, both within their unique work context in the AACC and beyond. This

study aims to describe the lived experiences of Asian American SAPros currently working in AACCs on college campuses in the United States to expand research on Asian American experiences, in general, and specifically in higher education, as well as shed light on their critical consciousness development processes. Differentiated from critical thinking by its focus on social change, critical consciousness implies an awareness of societal systems of advantage and disadvantage rooted in sociocultural identity differences (Allan & Iverson, 2004).

Given that AACCs, founded on a history of student activism, have contemporary mission statements that require the masking of serving any one particular racial group (Shek, 2013), Asian American SAPros must likely bridge the divergent expectations that upper-level administrators and Asian American students have of an AACC. Coupled with how Asian Americans have been racialized relative to and through interaction with Blacks and whites as the racial middle (Kim, 2015), I am curious about AACC SAPros' experiences as they each navigate bridging this "in-between" in their work and the broader U.S. society. By exploration of the individual in context, I hope to illuminate the complexities of their experiences both within and outside of higher education. To achieve this goal, I employed the qualitative research design of portraiture.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research question and sub-questions centered on the lived experiences of Asian American SAPros working within the AACC setting:

1. What are the lived experiences of university-based AACC SAPros?
2. What do AACC SAPros identify as key influences on their critical consciousness development?

3. Which strategies do AACC SAsPros employ that contribute to the cultivation of Asian American college students' critical consciousness, if any?

Significance of the Study

A fissure has formed among America's Asian population, today totaling more than 21 million (Lee, 2015; Ramakrishnan, Wong, Lee, & Lee, 2016). The 2010 Census statistics indicate that Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial group in the U.S., and by 2013 about half of all new immigrants were from Asia. Of both U.S. and foreign-born Asians aged 25 and older, 55% earned a bachelor's degree or higher by 2015 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, 2016). Fueled in large part by immigration, this growth has resulted in Asian Americans not only differing from one another by country of origin, but also in immigration and generational status, class position, religion, and gender. These demographic trends have profound implications for higher education and the greater society. Once stable identities and previously unified communities are now being reexamined in the wake of rapid demographic shifts, technological changes, and the emergence of new social relations. In a country that regularly attends to race matters in a manner that reinforces the Black-White dichotomy, the impact of living, learning, and working within such environments and systems makes the topic of Asian American experiences important to students, faculty, staff, and others within and outside of higher education for several reasons.

First, college students are identifying with the term Asian American in more varied ways than in prior years. This may encourage more individuals to identify with the pan-ethnic term while simultaneously diminishing its potential effectiveness as a "unifying and activating symbol" (Park, 2008, p. 557). Often due to a lack of critical consciousness, Asian Americans

have been and continue to be manipulated by white people in positions of power as a racial wedge against other people of color (Pimentel, 1995). In other instances, Asian Americans like affirmative action opponents for example, recognize the power of racial meanings and their fluidity and actively choose to weaponize their racial minority status to “attain whiteness and its associated privileges” for themselves (Poon & Segoshi, 2018, p. 261). Consequently, this has contributed not only to the disenfranchisement of other communities of color but also a fissure in America’s Asian population to their own detriment (Lee, 2015). Thus, investing in education that redefines self-definition and internal ideological understanding of themselves in relation to the world, confronts fundamental questions of power and domination in U.S. society, and raises critical consciousness for future generations of Asian Americans, becomes a necessary part of liberation (Omatsu, 2007). With AACCs often being the only institutional resource dedicated to Asian American identity development, it is vital to understand the AACC SAPros who are responsible for constructing and implementing co-curricular experiences and policies for Asian American students’ holistic development. This knowledge could help identify common attributes of Asian American SAPros who do or do not cultivate the critical consciousness of Asian American college students through their work at the AACC.

Second, researchers and recommendations of best practices for SAPros suggest that educators can be most effective in their work when they have first undergone their own development (Owens, 2010). Thus, it is my aim for this study to provide participants with a rare opportunity for introspection and reflection on both individual and collective levels. Creating an opportunity for participants to engage with a community of AACC SAPros to make sense of the work they do may simultaneously serve this professional community through informed support

and validation. Overall, I hope participating in my study will help AACC SAPros become better able to recognize attitudes and behaviors in students and use their own developmental stories to understand and guide students. Therefore, this study will also help illuminate various strategies that may be employed by AACC SAPros in an effort to cultivate the critical consciousness development of Asian American college students.

Third, as previously mentioned, despite the burgeoning numbers of Asian Americans attending higher education institutions throughout the U.S., there are still few studies exploring Asian American SAPro experiences. Most related research on Asian American SAPros are found in dissertations and focus on career trajectory/mobility. Rather than reinforce the assumption that Asian American SAPro leadership can only be achieved in upper-level administrator positions, this study aims to highlight the leadership AACC SAPros demonstrate as it pertains to advancing issues of diversity, equity and inclusion within higher education institutions. This study offers an intervention in the existing scholarship on Asian American SAPros by highlighting the lived experiences that shape and inform the praxis of AACC SAPros on college and university campuses across the country as well as their critical consciousness development. The concept of *praxis* is defined by Freire (1993) as reflection and action directed at structures to be transformed. By centering the experiences of AACC SAPros, this study will contribute to the dearth of research dedicated to Asian American SAPros' experiences, which could also inform those who supervise Asian American SAPros of how to better support these professionals in their work within the AACC setting.

Personal Relevance

In the Fall of 2006 I came to Oxford, Ohio from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia where I was exposed to popular media from both the United States and the United Kingdom. I thought I had

an inkling of what race and racism looked like in the U.S. as well as the role it would play in my experience as an Asian international undergraduate student. However, as a Malaysian-born and raised, ethnically Chinese, Southeast Asian woman, U.S. understandings of race and ethnicity were not part of my consciousness until I found myself fully immersed in them during my undergraduate years at Miami University. Thus, I did not understand where I would fit in the broader campus and U.S. society nor did I fully appreciate how race would impact my lived experiences. It was through my involvement with the Office of Residential Life as a Resident Assistant that I first began to grapple with issues of racism, privilege, and oppression.

What became increasingly evident over the years was the distinct difference in my experiences as a racially minoritized individual in the United States as compared to back in Malaysia; my ethnic Chinese identity impacts the way I move through U.S. society in a way that it did not when I was growing up in Malaysia. It was an impact that led me to experience bouts of confusion, self-doubt, and unsettledness that I had never encountered before. While some of it was likely related to the usual challenges that come with being thousands of miles away from my home and family, it was not until I received social justice education and participated in meaningful dialogue about social justice issues in various higher education spaces that I began developing the language and agency to adopt a critical systemic perspective of my experiences.

Working with Asian Americans in Higher Education

My experiences as a SAPro have shaped my personal understanding of and scholarly/professional investment in race as it pertains to issues of inclusion, equity, and justice. Consequently, how I relate to my Asian American identity has also shifted over time. One of the pivotal moments of my journey was when I supervised an Asian American undergraduate student for the first time as a graduate student. This student who was born and raised in Indiana

would often state that the only thing Asian about him was his appearance. Given my budding understanding of Asian American identity development theory at that time, I was not as surprised as I was intrigued by what had led this student to feel the need to voluntarily deny his Asian-ness and how SAPros like myself could facilitate experiences that would move the student towards embracing his Asian American identity. My legal status as an Asian international graduate student at that time, however, allowed me to more easily identify as a woman of color and less as an Asian American because I felt disenfranchised by the notion of citizenship tied to that identity. Every experience I have had with a border agent while re-entering the country through U.S. airports has always left me feeling dehumanized because I did not hold a U.S. passport. Additionally, as the sole Asian-identifying SAPro in the entire department I was only able to find true community with other people of color, specifically women. Nevertheless, I began to recognize that regardless of how I felt, the impact of how I visually presented to others had inextricably entangled my fate with that of Asian Americans, partially because of the general American public's perpetual foreigner stereotype and assumption that our experiences are homogenous. My recent immigrant status coupled with my relatively superficial understanding of American history, cultural and societal norms reinforced assumptions that Asian-identifying individuals do not belong to this country.

The realization that the Asian experience in the United States was both distinct and shared was further solidified by my experiences at the University of Connecticut (UConn) where I was the only Asian-identifying SAPro in the entire 68-member department during my first year and Asian and Asian American students from across campus often directly reached out to me for support. Many of these students found my racial identity relatable, familiar and valued the added perspective I offered in navigating UConn. It was evident that representation mattered to these

students' persistence through graduation, especially in a PWI where they rarely saw people who looked like them succeed in such environments. What I was unable to consciously acknowledge was how lonely it felt to carry that burden of representation on my own. It was not until I attended a speaker event where Claude Steele's (2010) work on the effects of stereotype threat was introduced that I was finally able to make the connection between the internal lightness I felt having two other Asian-identifying SAPros hired in my department in my second year and having a critical mass to help shoulder this invisible burden. UConn was also where I first became more intimately familiar with an AACC and its role in shaping the learning environment and lives of individuals within a given institution of higher education. The AACC at UConn ultimately became a space where I was able to develop a stronger sense of ownership over my racial identity as an Asian American through my position as an SAPro educating and advocating for issues related to the Asian American community in community.

My Asian American Experience

While race is a social construct (Omi & Winant, 2015), it continues to have very real implications for myself and other racially minoritized individuals. The complex racialization history of Asian Americans coupled with my personal re-racialization journey that began when I arrived in the United States over a decade ago, has occasionally caused me to question my own authenticity as a member of the Asian American community. The notion of Asian American as felt identity, which is more about consciousness rather than ethnic affiliation (Shankar & Srikanth, 1998), resonates strongly for me as my sense of agency as an Asian American has been heavily influenced in relation to others. Navigating between differing, and at times even conflicting, assumptions that the Asian American and non-Asian American communities have of me as a racialized person is challenging and inequitable. From having had other Asian American

SAPros view my lived experiences as “not Asian American enough” to feeling the need to hide my upbringing in Malaysia from non-Asian Americans for fear of furthering the perpetual foreigner stereotype, I am thankful for the lessons these moments of dissonance continue to teach me as I strive towards upholding racial justice in all aspects of my life.

Through personal and professional experiences as well as my scholarly pursuits, I have continued to ground myself in the political roots and historical purpose behind the term Asian American, which has increased the saliency of the Asian American identity for me and serves as a source of empowerment. Additionally, exposure to theories such as those detailed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970, 1993) has led me to be more cognizant of how power and privilege influence U.S. systems. Given the hyperfocus on racial identity in my current role as an AACC Director, I recognize that my lived experiences are brought into this space with me and they inherently influence my work just as I am affected by those I interact with through my work. Thus, as Asian American SAPros working within AACCs that are striving towards diversity, equity and inclusion within our institutions, I think it is necessary that we consider how our lived experiences shape us and the work that we do so that effective praxis could be replicated. As a lifelong student of higher education, I am continually striving for my practice as a SAPro to be informed by relevant research and vice versa. When I made the decision to pursue a doctoral degree, I wanted my research study to be one that not only furthered my understanding of racial dynamics I have experienced in my personal and professional life, but that also translates directly into positive impact for Asian American SAPros. I see myself continuing to work in the higher education setting advancing institutional efforts of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Thus, what I hoped to learn through my research directly relates to the communities and people to whom I feel deeply committed.

Assumptions

Based on the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit) I assumed the notion that racism is a reality in the lives of my participants and that, as Asian Americans, they are racialized in distinct ways. Additionally, I saw my research participants as cocreators of knowledge for this study and thus assumed that my participants are the foremost experts when speaking to their lived experiences. Finally, throughout the data collection process, I also assumed that the participants are sharing truthfully, not for the purpose of providing what I or other research participants want to hear.

Delimitations

This study was conducted during late summer and into fall of 2019 on the U.S. East Coast. The setting for interviews and community gatherings were chosen based on the participants' availability and preferences. The study included Asian American SAPros who currently work or recently worked in AACCs on college campuses along the East Coast and are interested in sharing how their lived experiences have been shaped by their racialization as Asian Americans. The main source of data is participants' portraits, which was crafted from interviews, photos, and group dialogue that was audio/video recorded.

Terminology

In order to provide a foundation for understanding the study, I provide the following terms and accompanying definitions in this section.

Asian American – individuals who trace their ancestry back to Asia and who also feel that they have lived enough of their lives in the United States to consider themselves “American”. While there are other, similar labels associated with the same group, such as Asian

and Pacific American, Asian Pacific Islander, Asian American Pacific Islander, Asian and Pacific Islander American, or Asian Pacific Islander Desi American, I choose to use the term Asian Americans because I do not want to engage in the tokenism of Pacific Islanders in any way.

Student Affairs Professional (SAPro) – staff working at U.S. colleges and universities within departments offering programs and initiatives that aspire to provide leadership, support, and service to students.

Cultural Center – an institutional office staffed and funded by the campus to meet the needs of students of color, which may include providing academic, social, cultural, and/or personal support (Hord, 2005; Patton, 2010). Although the center can target or serve additional student populations (women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender students, etc.), this study focuses on centers with a historical and contemporary emphasis on students of color, specifically Asian Americans.

Students of color – students who identify as African American, Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander, Latinx, and/or Multiracial.

Organization of the Chapters

The remainder of this dissertation is divided into four additional chapters, references, and appendixes. Chapter Two consists of a comprehensive literature review that informs the study and provides its conceptual framework. Chapter Three delineates the research design and methodology of the study. This includes an overview of the qualitative approach bolstering this study, the researcher's positionality within this work, and methods that were used to gather and analyze the data. In the fourth Chapter, I introduce the six AACC SAPros in my study through a

semi-fictional community dialogue during which their experiences both on and off campus are discussed. The fifth and final chapter discusses the implications of my study, draws conclusions about AACC SAsPros' experiences in higher education, and make recommendations for improving the effectiveness of AACC SAsPro positions within their respective higher education institutions. I conclude that chapter with some final thoughts and reflections.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will address relevant literature focused on experiences of Asian American student affairs professionals (SAPros) who work in Asian American Cultural Centers (AACCs) that supports the need for and significance of my dissertation study. To situate these contributions, my literature review is divided into three larger sections. First, I begin by examining the historical context of how AACCs came to exist, how their purpose has evolved, and what is known about SAPros working in AACCs. As I embarked on my literature review, however, it became abundantly clear that limited scholarly research exists about AACCs. Thus, I also include broader research on race-specific cultural centers and the role they have played in the ever-shifting demographic landscape of higher education. Secondly, to further contextualize Asian American SAPros, I will follow with an overview of the student affairs profession, and what existing research details about Asian Americans' experiences in the higher education setting. Third, I will examine how Asian American college students' critical consciousness development have been fostered and supported by various spaces within the college and university environment. This will help illuminate current knowledge about the role Asian American SAPros play in fostering the development of Asian American college students' critical consciousness. After discussing the literature, I explain Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit), which is the theoretical framework that guides my approach to this research study.

Asian American Cultural Centers (AACCs)

AACCs have a unique history and purpose within U.S. higher education institutions. Nationwide diversification of the collegiate student body demographics has an important relationship to the establishment of AACCs and race-specific cultural centers on U.S. college campuses. Although race-specific cultural centers have existed at institutions of higher education for more than forty years, only a handful of empirical investigations examining their form, function and role on college campuses have been conducted, many of which have been narrow in scope (Foote, 2005; Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002; Patton, 2006). The few doctoral dissertations on the topic have only featured studies of cultural centers at a single college campus (Ago, 2002; June, 1996; Rodriguez, 2016; Toya, 2011; Welch, 2009). The most recent survey of cultural resource centers found that, as of 2013 “there are 273 cultural resource centers in four-year non-profit institutions of higher education serving Students of Color” with 34 established as Asian American and Pacific Islander resource centers (Shek, 2013, p. 170). The literature related directly to the AACCs is proportionally a lesser percentage of scholarly research on cultural centers and consists mainly of commentary describing their history, necessity, and defending their relevance (Liu, Cuyjet & Lee, 2010). The research studies demonstrating the AACCC’s influence on Asian American college students are only found in doctoral dissertations and master’s theses (Kim, 2015; Martell, 2016; Shek, 2013). A broader focus is necessary to set critical context, though the need for it further demonstrates the need for research with specified focus on AACCs. Therefore, literature on all race-specific cultural centers are included in the following section concerning the historical context for the emergence of AACCs, and how their purpose, as well as SAsPros, have been shaped by it.

The Rise of AACCs

According to Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen and Allen (1998), campus climate is produced within larger institutional and environmental contexts such as government policies and socio-historical forces that propel policy change. Therefore, in order to contextualize the rise of AACCs, I provide a brief overview of higher education history for racialized non-white groups along issues of access and campus life in this section.

Higher education has upheld a long history of resistance to desegregation despite legal victories for integration (Hurtado et al., 1998; Thelin, 2004). Initially created to serve as intellectual and spiritual enclaves for economically privileged, white, young men, higher education institutions' legacy of exclusivity and exclusion shaped the dominant institutional climate and has continued to impact existing practices and policies even as new populations of students gained entrance to them (Hurtado, 1992; Stewart, 2011). Widespread access of higher education by marginalized populations did not develop until after World War II (Lee, 2010). The nation's progressive social movement during the twentieth century aided this by providing the philosophical backdrop to a collective and social legislative push toward increased access for more segments of the American public. Beginning in the 1960s, the United States government enacted the G.I. Bill, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972, to name a few (Thelin, 2004). Yet even while the admission of a more diverse student body began to reflect the nation's population, institutional norms and policies governing campus life continued to reflect the nation's bigotry and oppression of racially minoritized populations (Stewart, 2011). With the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Orangeburg

Massacre in 1968¹ as the backdrop, the unwillingness of higher education institutions to engage with Black students, even as their numbers and presence on campus increased, was the impetus for the students to challenge their institutions' status quos (Patton, 2010; Williamson, 1999). Black students organized and made demands for more Black representation among faculty and staff members, focused recruitment of Black students, development of more curricula that centered the knowledge, culture, and experiences of Africans and African Americans, and the creation of a center for Black students (Patton, 2005; Patton & Hannon, 2008). These demands challenged the fundamental tenets of universities' dominant culture as administrators at PWIs begrudgingly conceded to student demands. This typically occurred only after institutional leadership experienced media coverage that painted a negative picture of their institutions, making their primary goals appeasement of student demands and halting campus upheavals (Palmer & Shuford, 1996; Patton, 2010; Sutton, 1998). As a result of Black students' efforts, Black cultural centers became the first race-specific cultural centers to exist on a U.S. college campus with the establishment of the Paul Robeson Cultural Center at Rutgers University in 1967 (Patton, 2010). Black cultural centers not only served as a model for the subsequent establishment of other race-specific cultural centers but also inspired other racially minoritized student groups at PWIs to develop agency and seek ways to address racism at institutional levels. This led to higher education institutions across the country experiencing an era of pronounced student protests in the late 1960s and 1970s as students of color advocated for change in collegiate curricula, hiring, admissions, and student support services (Lee, 2010).

¹The Orangeburg Massacre occurred on February 8, 1968 during a civil rights protest at South Carolina State University in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Highway patrolmen opened fire on unarmed Black student protestors, leaving three young men dead and 28 wounded. Two months later, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who had led the civil rights movement was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

The history of cultural centers “is rooted in a struggle for students to hold institutions of higher education accountable” (Patton, 2010, p. xiv). It was student activism during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement and broad-based community organizing against racism in the United States that ultimately led to the emergence of cultural centers (Patton, 2005; 2010). In 1968, Yuji Ichioka and his partner, Emma Gee, formed the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) at UC Berkeley to bring together a multigenerational group of Asian Americans from different ethnic and class backgrounds as a political group (Lee, 2015). It was the first organization to use the term “Asian American” to denote Americans of Asian descent (Lee, 2015). Although the AAPA in Berkeley was short lived, it helped inspire the formation of similar organizations across the country. Together, these organizations “helped forge a new Asian American consciousness and inspired the creation of new institutions that addressed the distinct needs of Asian Americans and gave voice to the growing community” (p. 305). College campuses like San Francisco State University (SFSU), served as some of the first sites of activism for Asian American college students. The AAPA at SFSU joined with Chicano, Native American, and African American students in the Third World Liberation Front to call for a campus-wide strike, demanding curricula and programs that reflected their histories, needs and experiences as people of color (Lee, 2015). Such strikes led to the establishment of ethnic studies programs at SFSU as well as other U.S. higher education institutions and were closely tied to the creation of Black cultural centers and similar centers for other racial groups (Patton, 2005; Umemoto, 1989). The first AACC was established in 1972 at Stanford University as a result of student advocacy (Stanford Asian American Activities Center, n. d.).

While the oldest AACCC was established almost 50 years ago, there was and continues to be little consistency in how they are structured, positioned, and resourced from institution to institution, and even center to center. Research has also shown that broader socio-historical context, along with specific campus dynamics, influenced how higher education institutions shaped the formation of cultural centers and their mission statements (Shek, 2013). The following section examines how AACCCs' missions and purpose have evolved over time.

Fulfillment of AACCCs' Purpose

Due to a lack of research examining existing AACCCs on U.S. college campuses, scant information is known about how they historically functioned and their stated purpose(s). Thus, I also draw from research on other race-specific cultural centers in an attempt to paint a more complete picture of cultural centers' purposes. In this section I examine the varied purposes of cultural centers and how the context of higher education has shaped them according to documented, extant research.

Safe spaces. Cultural centers were historically formed to serve as safe spaces or places of solace for students of color, each as a place to retreat from the perceived hostility of an unwelcoming campus community (Shotton, Yellowfish, & Cintrón, 2010; Stewart, 2005; Turner, 1994; Young & Hannon, 2002). In some cases, cultural centers began as "Black houses (a designated facility for African American students to congregate)" and later evolved to serve a broader population of ethnically minoritized students (Shuford, 2011, p. 34). A cultural center is a place where racially minoritized students' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences are affirmed, where they are able to find community and a support system to help them navigate the isolation and messages of rejection many experience at PWIs (Jones et al., 2002; Liu et al., 2010;

Patton, 2010; Yosso & Lopez, 2010). When students of color encounter racism or other targeted acts of violence directed at members of their community, the cultural centers also “serve as a safe haven where students can gather to seek healing and restoration” (Shotton et al., 2010, p. 56).

Counterspaces. Cultural centers also serve as counterspaces for students of color, sites where “deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained” (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 70). This is achieved through cultural center initiatives that validate the cultural knowledge, histories, and experiences of racially minoritized communities, which are regularly dismissed elsewhere at colleges and universities – affirming the value of their existence on campus (Yosso & Lopez, 2010). Thus, these centers allow students of color to develop positive self-concepts and community, as well as the strength and support necessary to be successful in higher education (Shek, 2013). Given the history of student activism that led to the establishment of cultural centers on college campuses, these spaces continue to serve as sites for building a community of resistance and empowerment among racially marginalized students on campus (Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso & Lopez, 2010). Students engaging in this process develop a critical consciousness as they figure out ways to bridge and navigate the two worlds between their home communities and the university (Yosso & Lopez, 2010; Manzano, 2018). AACCs play an advocacy role for Asian Americans by challenging racist assumptions and inequity through creating interventions based on disaggregated data that highlight the varied needs within the Asian American community (Liu et al., 2010).

Educational storehouses. Cultural centers serve as storehouses of cultural knowledge for racially minoritized communities who are often marginalized within their respective higher

education institutions (Asante, 2005; Badejo, 2005; Liu et al., 2010; Shotton et al., 2010). Given the Eurocentric and white supremacist roots of PWIs, racially minoritized students often feel like they must leave behind or hide aspects of their lives that do not fit into the dominant culture. Cultural centers are one of the few dedicated spaces on a given college campus that have served as a repository for resources that promote the cultures of ethnic groups within each race, thus providing a main source of connection to the culture and values of students' home communities (Liu et al., 2010; Shotton et al., 2010). Through preserving and recounting the historical memory of the struggle it took to first establish each cultural center and the milestones achieved by each community served since its founding, students of color are strengthened to carry on the legacy of those who have gone before them and recognize value in the community cultural wealth they bring to their institution (Shotton et al., 2010; Yosso & Lopez, 2010).

Recruitment and retention tools. By providing students of color with cultural, social, psychological, and academic support to navigate the hostile climate at PWIs, cultural centers have long played a significant role in their retention and persistence (Foote, 2005; Jones et al., 2002; Lozano, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Shuford, 2011). Cultural centers serve as a symbol of the historical and current presence of racially marginalized student populations on campus, which could factor into the decision-making process of prospective students of color (Patton, 2006). For Native Americans who remain grossly underrepresented in U.S. higher education institutions, Native American cultural centers play a crucial role in their recruitment and retention (Shotton et al., 2010). Cultural centers also serve as an additional resource to enhance the integration into campus life for incoming students of color through facilitation of and simultaneous advocacy for culturally relevant student support services (Patton, 2010; Shotton et al., 2010). From university preview programs for prospective students, new student

orientation and mentoring programs to academic workshops, cultural heritage events and cultural graduation recognition ceremonies, cultural centers provide students of color a greater sense of belonging to their enrolled institution along with critical navigational skills to assist with their recruitment and retention (Jones et al., 2002; Patton, 2006; Toya, 2011; Welch, 2009).

Improving campus climate. Research has proven that in order to fully reap the benefits of a racially diverse student body, higher education institutions must intentionally engage in constructing culturally affirming environments and experiences that facilitate the cultivation of cross-racial engagement (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). The origins of cultural centers can be traced back to larger, national movements for inclusion of historically marginalized populations within higher education, and as such, these centers play an integral role in institutionalizing interventions that cultivate cross-racial interactions on campus (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Denson & Chang, 2009; Espenshade & Radford, 2009). Cultural centers serve as “the institutional educational corrective for the systemic racism” embedded in PWIs by supporting students of color holistically while also providing opportunities for the broader campus to engage in issues so often marginalized in the curricula (Shek, 2013, p. 38). Cultural centers are somewhere students can go to address racial tensions and resolve conflicts and misunderstandings that might occur among their peers, thus helping improve interracial relations across campus (Princes, 2005). Given the heterogeneity of the Asian American community, AACCs also facilitate, support and nurture intragroup interactions across ethnic groups through an intersectional approach that addresses internalized racism, bias, and discrimination that could be perpetuated among members of the community – factors that can form a potential barrier to coalition building with other racially minoritized groups on campus (Liu et al., 2010).

Educating the broader campus. AACCs often play a role in facilitating collaborations between Asian American SAPros and faculty to provide the intellectual, cognitive, and physical space devoted to identity and culture that is necessary for the psychosocial, personal development and self-exploration of Asian American students (Liu et al., 2010; Young 1991). This relationship likely stems from the history behind the establishment of ethnic studies programs that have often been precursors to, simultaneously developed with, or immediately created after the founding of cultural centers (Lee, 2015). These cultural center and ethnic studies programs are open to all students who are invested in seeking cultural knowledge regardless of their race and thus provide academic enrichment to the campus community, including alumni. Given that they are situated within institutions of higher education, the common educational purpose of cultural centers is clearly articulated in their mission statements and manifests itself in the form of cultural programming related to students' racial identity development (Shek, 2013). Yet, when resistance against cultural centers from institutional stakeholders does occur, it typically revolves around the notion that these spaces promote segregation and separatism from the larger campus body, so cultural centers have had to rearticulate their mission statements to clearly demonstrate that they include a target population beyond their historical mission of any one racial group or particular students of color population (Liu et al., 2010; Shek, 2013).

To remain sustainable in institutional environments that continue to center whiteness, cultural centers today have a three-pronged mission to solidify their presence as a campus-wide resource; providing direct services to targeted populations, multicultural programming and education for all students, and promoting systemic change to foster multicultural perspectives across campus (Shuford, 2011). Fulfilling the mission of AACCs and other race-specific cultural

centers can only be viable if staffed and resourced over a sustained period. The next section provides an overview of what existing research has revealed about individuals who have worked within a cultural center.

AACC Student Affairs Professionals

Within the limited empirical research on cultural centers, there is an additional dearth of research that impedes us from developing a better understanding of SAPros who hold a full-time position in these centers and their perspectives of their work. Therefore, even though AACCs have existed on college campuses since the 1970s (Liu et al., 2010) and play an integral part in institutional change within higher education, knowledge of AACC SAPros' experiences and their influence on an AACC's mission and purpose are still largely absent. Neither decision makers nor campus community members know very much about AACC SAPros or why they do what they do. Understanding the lived experiences of AACC SAPros will be revealing of universities' hidden ideologies as it pertains to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion beyond their willingness to benefit from the positive perceptions of having cultural centers on their campuses.

Considering cultural centers more broadly and how they emerged from a crisis-oriented history of grassroots protest and student-led activism, it is safe to assume that institutional support by way of resources was minimal in cultural centers' early days (Patton, 2010). Unfortunately, due to the context in which the first cultural centers were established, they were in many cases not only underfunded, understaffed and physically located on the margins of campus life but were also staffed by individuals with minimal student affairs or organizational development background (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Stennis-Williams et al., 1998). This has certainly contributed to a nationwide lack of uniformity among higher education

institutions' cultural centers' present structuring and operations, which also directly impact the SAPros' experience. Staffing levels of cultural centers can range from one-person units to multi-person units, and in some cases are primarily student-run (Jenkins, 2010; Patton, 2005; Sutton & McCluskey-Titus, 2010).

Research studies that have produced information about cultural center SAPros often did so as a byproduct of research that examines the functions of cultural centers and their impact on student and institutional outcomes (Ago, 2002; June, 1996; Patton, 2006; Turner, 1994; Welch, 2008). Research has found that cultural center SAPros are touted for exhibiting professionalism, genuine care, compassion, and welcoming personas (Jones et al., 2002; June, 1996; Patton, 2006; Turner, 1994). These professionals are also credited for creating a home-away-from-home atmosphere that assisted students in coping with a hostile campus climate and helped them gain a sense of purpose by bettering the world through their social justice advancing work (Jones et al., 2002; Patton, 2006; Turner, 1994). There have also been cases where a cultural center's SAPro is not as well-versed in the cultural heritage, knowledge base, or unique needs of students of color (Bankole, 2005; Sutton & McCluskey-Titus, 2010). Unfortunately, there appears to be paucity of data on AACC SAPro experiences within these varied cultural center settings. Therefore, the next section describes research exploring Asian American SAPro experiences in higher education more broadly.

Asian Americans in Higher Education

Despite changes to U.S. immigration policy that have not only influenced demographic shifts and the rapid growth of the Asian American population but also "drove the increases in and diversity of Asian American enrollments in higher education" (Johnston & Yeung, 2014, p.

145), numerous elements of an antiquated anti-Asian framing are still applied to Asian Americans today (Chou & Feagin, 2015). The limited research on Asian American demography, educational experiences, educational trajectories, and educational outcomes is also reflected in the lack of systematic analyses that focuses on Asian American college students' experiences with racism (Museus & Park, 2015; Teranishi & Nguyen, 2011). This dearth in research undoubtedly serves to mask challenges that this student population encounters in the higher education context and allows for what is known about Asian American college students to be heavily influenced by misinformed perceptions rather than by empirical evidence (Teranishi & Nguyen, 2011). Fragmented data across several studies reveals that racism does impact the Asian American student experience (Museus & Park, 2015). The racialization of Asian Americans according to both the perpetual foreigner and model minority myths continues to be the dominant narrative that shapes Asian American college student experiences (Lee, 2006; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007). Resultantly, Asian American students continue to experience marginalization at higher education institutions despite the presence of a large Asian American student population (Wong, 2013). A recent study revealed Asian American students still experienced racial harassment and isolation at a supposedly racially diverse higher education institution where they have a large numerical representation (Johnston & Yeung, 2014). This reveals that increases in compositional diversity alone fail to sufficiently challenge the predominance of ideologies associated with whiteness that are embedded within institutional norms.

The racial triangulation of Asian Americans in the U.S. is such that while they might be numerically present or even predominant in higher education institutions, they continue to remain politically, socially and culturally outside of the racial arena (Jo, 2004; Wong, 2013).

Rather than privileging the full complexities of human perspectives and experiences, Asian Americans are racialized in a way that makes their social acceptance dependent on perceived proximity to whiteness, their cultures as inherently un-American, and their concerns as politically immaterial except when Asian Americans can be portrayed as victims of race-conscious policies. This is a function of whiteness as property; the right of disposition includes the conferring of honorary whiteness to Asian Americans in certain situations, particularly to ensure that white needs, interests and concerns remain at the center of institutional initiatives (DePouw, 2012; Harris, 1993). This has allowed for the perpetuation of racist policy decisions to maintain the status quo and resist a tipping point that threatens to change the racial balance of the institution, highlighting the insidiousness of how Asian Americans are intentionally racialized to uphold a global system of racial hierarchies (Lee, 2006; Poon et al., 2016). Conducted across five predominantly white institutions Harper and Hurtado's (2007) study found that beyond race-specific and multicultural centers, Asian American students faced difficulty in identifying other spaces on campus where they felt shared cultural ownership. Marginalized from both racially dominant and minoritized communities, Asian Americans are often isolated and likely deprived of the full range of educational benefits their higher education experience should offer. What then do these experiences look like for Asian American SAPros working in these same environments? This is what my study will shed light on, the specific experiences, challenges, and opportunities for Asian American SAPros working within an AACC.

Experiences of Student Affairs Professionals

As higher education institutions struggle with the need to improve the campus climate for Asian American students, most have barely begun to acknowledge the need to improve the climate for Asian American SAPros. This is evident from the almost non-existent research on

Asian American SAPros and that even most of the limited research focuses primarily on Asian American college students' experiences with tangential references to the work of SAPros (Ching & Agbayani, 2012). A search using the words "Asian American" and "student affairs" from the top five education databases yielded only 65 results and the handful of articles that directly relate to Asian American SAPros' experiences were either anecdotal or prescriptive in nature. In this section I review research that further illuminates Asian American SAPros' experience and, given that faculty often have the opportunity to hold senior level administrator positions within the university, I include research regarding Asian American faculty where relevant.

Although Asian Americans have steadily increased in representation among students and faculty in higher education institutions in comparison to other racially minoritized groups, the same cannot be said of SAPros (Suh, 2005; Suzuki, 2002). Asian American SAPros are underrepresented at all levels of higher education administration and their absence within senior level administration is especially acute (Suh, 2005; Suzuki, 2002). Worse yet, the use of aggregated data further masks the underrepresentation of specific ethnic subgroups within Asian American categorization and how racism impacts them. In the fall of 1997, Asian Americans in executive, administrative, or managerial positions comprised approximately 2% of the total number of higher education institution employees (Employees in Colleges and Universities, 2000). A survey of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators' (NASPA) membership database, one of two major SAPro organizations in the country, revealed that of the 7,762 members studied, 4% of those who self-identified as Asian American and Pacific Islander "held only 17 senior administrative positions, which is only 2.5% of all senior-level administrative positions" (Wang & Teranishi, 2012, p. 21). According to The Chronicle of

Higher Education (2010), of the 113,232 women who held executive, administrative, and managerial positions in higher education in the 2007-2008 academic year, only 3.1% were Asian American. Despite Asian Americans' extraordinary investment in higher education that having led to development of a small but significant pool that could be tapped for presidencies, Asian Americans still comprise less than one percent of all presidents and chancellors running four-year public, private and two-year community colleges in the United States (American Council on Education, 2007; Lee, 2002; Lum, 2008; Yamagata-Noji & Gee, 2012). Although there are numerous drivers, racial discrimination toward Asian Americans that occurs in particularly subtle ways (Chan & Wang, 1991; Nakanishi, 1993; Suzuki, 2002) and sex discrimination experienced by Asian American women (Blackhurst, 2000; Lum, 2008) are the causes most heavily attributed for the prolonged underrepresentation of Asian American SAs in upper-level leadership positions within higher education.

Racial stereotypes like the model minority myth, which generally defines Asian Americans "as a monolithically hardworking racial group whose high achievement undercuts claims of systemic racism made by other racially minoritized populations" (Poon et al., 2016, p. 469), cause many to believe that because Asian Americans have significant numerical representation on U.S college campuses that they also have an elevated level of decision-making power within higher education (Suh, 2005). The tendency to neglect and overlook challenges Asian Americans might face as professionals working within the higher education setting and their lack of representation and influence is also rooted in societal internalization of the dominant model minority narrative about Asian Americans (Ching & Agbayani, 2012; Nakanishi, 1993; Suzuki, 2002). In a rare national study of SAs, Suh (2005) found that Asian Americans compared to other SAs of color, tended to have lower administrative titles and were clustered

in a limited number of administrative function areas, including minority affairs or cultural centers. Additionally, not only did they have less supervisory and budgetary responsibilities but often faced more hostile work factors and were the least satisfied and most stressed at work, which hindered their entry into and advancement within the student affairs profession (Suh, 2005). Compounding this, the racialization of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners has led to them often being seen as untrustworthy and passed over for higher level positions that would serve as pathways to presidencies (Saigo, 2008; Suzuki, 2002). Furthermore, due to racist socialization around leadership ideals, the image of what people envision when they think of a leader often does not align with the long-held stereotypes of Asian Americans (Lu, 2008; Lum, 2009; Yamagata-Noji & Gee, 2012). In higher education Asian Americans are often the workhorses and not the show horses – performing work behind the scenes without receiving much credit for doing so (F. Chong, personal communication, May 5, 2016 as cited in Morris, 2016).

Similarly, Asian American faculty representation follows a pattern of diminishing presence as one moves up the academic hierarchy but continues to receive insufficient policy or nascent programmatic attention (Nakanishi, 1993). Given that many presidents have previously served as faculty members, a lack of Asian American representation among faculty is bound to negatively impact the pipeline issue facing Asian American SAs (Wang & Teranishi, 2012). This reality of underrepresentation situates Asian Americans who do reach a top leadership position to have few, if any, role models and mentors, which leads to feelings of isolation (Lum, 2008). A lack of professional development/mentorship, coupled with limited opportunities for advancement, could likely lead to lower levels of job satisfaction and high levels of attrition, further perpetuating the issue of underrepresentation among Asian American SAs in higher

education. While Asian Americans have gained representation and some measures of success within higher education institutions, they are still ultimately excluded from equitably holding positions of power that can or do challenge systemic whiteness, which is consistent with the historical purposes of Asian Americans' racial triangulation in the United States (Matsuda, 1996; Poon et al., 2016).

As the long-term physical and psychological toll of dealing with these white-imposed characterizations of Asian American identity are often not immediately apparent (Chou & Feagin, 2015), it would be beneficial to have research that sheds light on how racialized experiences impact Asian American SAPros and the sustainability of their work within AACCs. As Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1999) explained, development is bidirectional – thus Asian American SAPros are impacted by experiences in higher education while being active participants in their environments. How do AACC SAPros navigate higher education institution environments that are often antithesis to the historical roots of AACCs? In the next section, I expound on the experiences of Asian American SAPros by seeing how their praxis actively shapes Asian American college students' critical consciousness.

Asian American Critical Consciousness Development and Higher Education

Recognizing that no amount of academic achievement can protect Asian American college students from racial hostility and discrimination, there should instead be an investment in education that empowers Asian Americans to redefine the dominant racial hierarchy and status continuum. Rather than conforming to the viewpoint of racial and ethnic difference as natural, individualized variance, Asian American students should be taught to actively resist neoliberal ideologies through critiquing the systems of structural inequality and oppression that continue to marginalize communities. Pockets of educators have begun to engage in anti-oppressive forms

of education that move away from the banking system, cultivates critical consciousness and works against multiple forms of oppression toward liberation (Kumashiro, 2004). The concept of critical consciousness essentially refers to a reflective awareness of the inequalities imbedded in society's social relationships (Freire, 1970). Development of a critical consciousness through critical reflection and critical action allows an individual to redefine racial and ethnic identity, promote new ways of thinking about communities we are a part of and those that are around us, as well as challenge prevailing notions of power and authority that shame and devalue historically marginalized populations (Osajima, 2007).

Osajima's (2007) study makes an explicit effort to solely understand the process by which Asian American college students develop their critical consciousness. Drawn from an interview sample of 30 Asian Americans, Osajima identified the conditions, influences, processes, and experiences that contributed to their critical consciousness development and presented four elements that work in combination. The first being information and conceptual tools to enhance cognitive understanding of how the individual lived experienced is shaped by greater systemic forces (Osajima, 2007). Second, is the importance of the affective aspects in motivating individuals toward pursuing the third element, which is action (Osajima, 2007). These three elements parallel the framework that was identified by Pitner and Sakamoto (2005) for understanding the process of developing critical consciousness. The fourth element identified by Osajima (2007) is the importance of breaking isolation, which reflects the social aspect of critical consciousness development. The subsequent sections provide detailed exploration of the tools employed in various higher education settings to encourage the critical consciousness development of Asian American college students.

In the Realm of Academia

Asian American Studies (AAS). The study of Asian American history is crucial for the construction of an Asian American critical consciousness and counterframe to the preexisting white, racist frame that upholds white supremacist ideology (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Manzano, 2018; Museus, 2014). Thus, AAS is one of the main sources of information and avenues for introducing Asian American college students to conceptual tools that enhance their cognitive understanding of the systemic nature of inequity. During the longest student strike in U.S. history, known as the Third World Liberation Front strikes which took place from November 1968 to March 1969 in San Francisco, Asian American student activists collaborated across racial groups to call for an education that was more relevant and accessible to their communities (Ryoo & Ho, 2013). It was a watershed period for Asian American activism that led to the establishment of the first School of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University and AAS as a field, which continues to be a key factor in the critical consciousness development of Asian American students (Umemoto, 1989). Pedagogically, Osajima (1998a) posits that AAS courses should still be guided by the principle of developing a critical consciousness “that enables students to situate themselves within a broader understanding of the Asian experience in a globally interconnected, racialized, and capitalist United States” and instill a commitment to fighting for collective liberation (p. 278).

To engage students with curricular content in a meaningful way and facilitate critical consciousness development, active learning is essential because it helps students to create meaningful connections between their own experiences and course content (Osajima, 1998a). Assignments that facilitate reflection on the complex nature of the Asian American experience, provide data for comparing and contrasting student experiences, and promote critical analysis of

readings can be used to reveal patterns and connections pertaining to issues of privilege and oppression (Osajima, 1998a). Research shows that when AAS course content resonated deeply with helping students understand their own lives as Asian Americans in the greater context of U.S. society, it increased their desire to learn more (Osajima, 2007).

In addition, Osajima (1998a) stated that creating a sense of solidarity and community within AAS courses and programs plays a critical role in engaging the affective aspect of facilitating students' critical consciousness development. Establishing this sensibility involves intentional effort to build connections between students, faculty, and the course material as well as developing safety and trust so students can confidently express themselves, ask questions, and convey concerns without fear of retribution (Osajima, 1998a; 2007). The communal aspect of the critical consciousness development process coupled with the collectivistic nature of ethnic identity development among Asian American college students, makes exposure to and dialogue about the lived experiences of discrimination with others who share the same racial background a powerful tool for breaking the sense of isolation many Asian American students experience (Freire, 1993; Osajima, 2007; Yeh & Huang, 1996). For Asian American students, colleges and universities are often their first opportunity to live in an environment with a different racial composition from their home lives and to interact with a sizable Asian American population (Takeda, 2001). Thus, structuring an AAS course in which students are regularly interacting with and learning from each other in a supportive, non-judgmental environment will increase their sense of belonging and strengthen ties to others in the course (Osajima, 1998a).

Congruent with what Freire (1993) calls *praxis*, the central goal of AAS is to instill in students a desire to transform newly gained knowledge into progressive activism for effecting social change in their communities (Osajima, 1998b). Thus, AAS is not approached solely from

an intellectual standpoint but is rather rooted in a vision for social justice and change. The incorporation of community-based projects, participation in related social justice causes, and – at minimum – devoting parts of the course to issues of political action to highlight the role of Asian Americans as agents of change are some strongly encouraged strategies (Osajima, 1998a; Ryoo & Ho, 2013). Research studies on how activism is successfully cultivated in the context of AAS courses are still scarce although there are instances where involvement in activism inspires students (Osajima, 2007). Going beyond the classroom and integrating students into their communities to work in concert to subvert the inequitable power structure remains one of AAS's greatest challenges (Osajima, 1998b).

Decolonization pedagogy. Halagao's (2010) research on Pinoy Teach, a multicultural teacher education program, highlighted decolonization pedagogy as another effective tool for developing the critical consciousness of Asian American college students. Decolonization is seen as a humanizing process that begins with reconnecting with one's own history and ethnic roots, both to understand the present, and birth the possibility of a new future. Thus, understanding the program's curricular concepts of perspective, revolution and imperialism, as well as how they relate to students lives preceded learning Filipino content; this stemmed from the faculty's intent to equip their students with critical thinking tools to challenge the construction of history rather than simply replacing the master narrative with another (Halagao, 2010). Acknowledging the communal nature of critical consciousness development, faculty created an intellectual and feeling-based curriculum with activities that promoted a collaborative spirit in the classroom, love of self, empathy and perspective-taking, while fostering emotional

exploration and dialogue that allowed students to name their world so they could begin to change it (Halagao, 2010).

In addition to the cognitive and affective, Pinoy Teach also engaged the behavioral aspect by incorporating a social action component whereby students in the teacher education course were assigned to instruct the organization's concepts, content, and pedagogy, learned in their first quarter, at public and private middle schools (Halagao, 2010). Pinoy Teach students overwhelmingly mentioned how the course content, Filipino American history, culture and activities helped them better understand themselves, which instilled feelings of empowerment and self-efficacy to actively work against oppression. Overall, the decolonizing curriculum of Pinoy Teach successfully created an academic and social space for formerly colonized people, specifically Filipino Americans, to gather, unite and fight systems of oppression (Halagao, 2010).

Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR and its many variants are quickly gaining prominence as viable research tools and methodological alternatives to address the history of power imbalance deeply embedded in mainstream research (Guishard, 2009). Suyemoto, Kim, Tanabe, Tawa, and Day (2009) demonstrated how employing the PAR approach to research of Asian American college students not only helped enhance the research outcomes, but simultaneously contributed to the critical consciousness development of the Asian American student researchers. Asian American graduate and undergraduate students were part of a multilevel research team that conducted a needs assessment of Asian American students at a public research university, which eventually led to another PAR project conducted as part of an AAS course (Suyemoto et al., 2009). Ultimately, student researchers developed stronger racial and ethnic identities as they "identified the research projects as acts of resistance to racial

inequality and oppression” since they were able to distribute the results through the university and give voice to the often invisible experiences of Asian American students (Suyemoto et al., 2009).

According to the student researchers, the key factors of the PAR projects that contributed to raising their critical consciousness were: (i) the relevancy of the project results to their own lived experiences as Asian Americans; (ii) the structural emphasis on reflexivity as an integral part of the research methodology; and (iii) the close sense of community and mentoring relationships established among the student researchers as well as with faculty (Suyemoto et al., 2009). Recognizing the effectiveness of communal learning for critical consciousness development, faculty ensured that student researchers were paired with mentors and/or met regularly with the research team during which they would review research methodology and both conduct and present literature review focused on Asian American college student issues and the field of AAS (Suyemoto et al., 2009). The relationships that formed were integral to student researchers’ sustained motivation while dialogue across racial groups provided them with insight into multiple perspectives (Suyemoto et al., 2009). However, these results have a limited generalizability since whites were the only non-Asian American student researchers that were part of the abovementioned PAR projects.

Beyond the Classroom

Asian American Cultural Centers (AACCs). Although cultural centers were created as “guest rooms that have been added to the house” (Turner, 1994, p. 362), these centers are also sites of student resistance (Patton, 2005; Toya, 2011; Welch, 2009). Thus, AACCs undoubtedly play a role in cultivating the critical consciousness development of Asian American students (Manzano, 2018). In fact, the physical location of AACCs relative to the rest of campus is a

telling symbol of the psychological and institutional commitment to the Asian American community on campus, or lack thereof. In addition to where it is placed, just having a physical space, staffing, and resources, is significant enough to serve as a catalyst for engaging Asian American students cognitively around their racialized identity and affectively around their sense of belonging at the institution (Liu et al., 2010). Not to mention, AACCs often operate in congruence with AAS programs which blurs the lines between the curricular and co-curricular for increased opportunities to engage the behavioral aspect of students' academic knowledge (Liu et al., 2010).

AACCs often serve as catalysts for the formation of ethnic-centered or pan-Asian American student organizations, political groups, or community-focus organizations (Liu et al., 2010). They also represent a constant source of support to facilitate increased intergroup and intragroup interactions among Asian American students and other populations that vary in terms of acculturation level (Liu et al., 2010). Similar to curricular spaces, the social connections established through involvement at AACCs help Asian American students feel more comfortable exploring questions about race, identity, and culture (Liu et al., 2010). Such involvements often provide Asian American students the opportunity to learn about real life issues that they can relate to and expose them to recognizing social oppression firsthand (Poon, 2013). This could organically lead to students engaging in larger questions about how racism operates to produce and reproduce inequalities and inequities, struggling with questions of belonging, and developing strategies of resistance (Poon, 2013). An AACC well-resourced enough to have assigned staff person(s) or strong collaborative relationships with faculty who are equipped to facilitate group dialogues, has an additional avenue to foster the critical consciousness development of Asian

American students by way of educational programs that promote communal learning and critical literacy (Freire, 1993; Liu et al., 2010).

Student activism. Engagement in transformative resistance is typically a desired outcome for those who possess critical consciousness and due to the iterative nature of critical consciousness development involvement in activism, it also serves to cultivate the critical consciousness development of Asian American college students (Osajima, 2007; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). An underpublicized fact is that Asian American students do engage in resistance that is motivated by a desire to create more just and equitable learning environments (Lee, 2015; Ryoo & Ho, 2013). Being involved in the process of organizing and protesting on campus provides Asian American students exposure to life-altering perspectives and peer-communicated information, which stirs the affective element and inspires them to deepen their knowledge around issues of oppression (Osajima, 2007).

In other cases, information from a course and student organization involvement sparked initial student interest in Asian American issues that eventually led to involvement in organizing protests on a statewide level and resulted in a deepened commitment to critical social change (Osajima, 2007). Responsibility as a result of recognizing one's privilege and difference has also motivated Asian American students to engage in activism (Ryoo & Ho, 2013). These students describe being transformed by activism because it made them feel connected to something larger than themselves and gave them a greater sense of purpose (Ryoo & Ho, 2013). Coupled with new information gained from AAS courses, some students felt activism truly allowed them to develop a new perspective and greater appreciation for their own history, take ownership of their Asian American identity and find their place on campus (Ryoo & Ho, 2013). Resoundingly, Asian American student activists voiced their deep-rooted commitment to social change for the

benefit of furthering their communities beyond their time on campus (Ryoo & Ho, 2013; Umemoto, 1989). Student activism will not only continue to be a contributing component of higher education but will also continue to evolve in the 21st century, as it has already over the last 15 years (Biddix, 2010; Coburn, 2015; Manzano, 2018).

Theater program. While not heavily researched within the higher education context, an ethnographic case study of a theater program within a Hmong arts organization revealed how culturally relevant practices employed by the staffers and teacher had a direct impact on the critical consciousness development of Hmong American youth (Ngo, 2017). A major focus of the youth was directed toward a theatre project that aimed to highlight aspects of their Hmong heritage and identity. Administered by two Hmong Americans and one Korean American, the shared racial and/or ethnic background between the program staff and the youth enabled them to offer a culturally responsive space, one that was characterized by supportive relationships because they brought a deep sense of awareness and relatability to the Hmong youth's experiences (Ngo, 2017). The program staff even role modeled for the Hmong youth by first sharing stories of their own experiences with racism (Ngo, 2017). The program staff then engaged the youth in activities that debunked the negative characterizations of their communities held by dominant culture (Ngo, 2017).

The Hmong youth were provided with writing prompts to encourage vulnerability and deep reflection on their individual experiences with marginalization on the basis of race, culture and identity, including: "Tell me a time when you were sad;" "Tell me a time you felt left out;" and "Tell me a time you were incredibly happy" (Ngo, 2017, p. 43). By utilizing storytelling as a tool to share their experiences that were then translated into a play, Hmong youth were able to gain distance and perspective on their lived experiences, critically analyze them, name the

relevant injustices, and imagine a more just outcome (Ngo, 2017). Breaking the “culture of silence” on these issues of oppression serves to restore the humanity of those who have been subjected to the painful experiences (Freire, 1993; Ngo, 2017). It helped Hmong youth remove internalized oppression and cultivate the capacity to respond to and critique inequities (Osajima, 2007). The development of the youth’s critical consciousness motivated them to make internal and external changes that uplifted and pushed back against the dominant culture’s devaluation of their community (Ngo, 2017).

Summary

This literature review has revealed that while we have witnessed a steady growth in research available on Asian American students and faculty in higher education, very little of it contributes to developing a better understanding of Asian American SAPros, especially AACC SAPros. What does it say about whose perspective is valued within higher education when existing research on Asian American SAPros are concentrated on the perspectives of senior-level SAPros like Presidents, Vice Presidents and Deans? According to Bastedo (2012), “work itself is an immensely important activity and crucial to the complete understanding of the organizational dimensions of educational practice” (p. 8). Thus, by understanding the lived experiences of AACC SAPros through my study we could derive a more accurate depiction of higher education institutions’ commitment to realizing inclusive mission statements and diversity action plans, which AACC SAPros directly contribute to.

Albeit limited, this literature review begins to illuminate the critical consciousness development process for Asian American college students. It also reveals AACCs as the only institutionalized cultivators of Asian American college students’ critical consciousness

development outside of the classroom setting. Recognizing the bi-directional relationship between people and their contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1999), it would be important to explore the experiences of Asian American SAPros and their own critical consciousness development, specifically those who work in an AACC. Furthermore, given that AACC SAPros are expected to contribute towards the development and success of students, faculty, and the broader institutional climate, it would be to the benefit of all parties involved to know what kind of support AACC SAPros need to fulfill expectations sustainably.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In order to explore AACC SAPros' experiences, I began by acknowledging "the centrality of race and racism in shaping the everyday life experiences of all people, but especially for people of color" (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015, p. 214). Thus, the proposed conceptual framework of Asian American critical consciousness development I am using for this research study is informed by the tenets of Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit), which has historical roots in Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Museus, 2014; Solórzano, 1997, 1998). Thus, I first provide an overview of CRT within this section to offer necessary context for how AsianCrit will guide my study.

CRT is an evolving methodological, conceptual, and theoretical construct that demonstrates how the U.S. legal system sustains the dominance of whites by placing race at the center of analysis (An, 2016). It was developed in the 1960s by a group of lawyers during the civil rights movement to address social justice and racial inequality within the legal realm (Kumasi, 2011). Generated in response to the unwillingness of the legal field to "meaningfully critique and respond to the role of race and racism in the legal system", CRT has since been adopted by scholars outside the legal field to analyze dominant systems of racial oppression in

other spheres (Museus & Iftikar, 2013, p. 19). CRT operates with a variety of tenets (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solórzano, 1998). Namely, the theory views race and racism as permanent aspects of daily life in the United States, challenges ahistorical, acontextual analysis of how the law operates, and values the experiential knowledge of the oppressed as a valuable tool to furthering its commitment to struggle for the elimination of racism and other forms of oppression (An, 2017). CRT also honors intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) by recognizing that “oppression and racism can be experienced within and across divergent intersectional planes, such as classism, sexism, ableism, and so on.” (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015, p. 207).

In response to concerns that race as a topic was “under-theorized as a topic of scholarly inquiry in education” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 8), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Solórzano (1998) pioneered the application of CRT to be employed for the study of K-12 and higher education, respectively. Many education scholars have since used CRT frameworks as a tool to challenge claims of race-neutrality, objectivity, color-evasiveness and analyze how racism is embedded in and shapes educational structures, content, and experiences of inequalities faced by students of color (Kumasi, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Liu, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Solórzano et al., 2000). Some have branched off to generate a critical race perspective that focuses on a specific racial or ethnic group.

AsianCrit, as a branch of CRT, expands the framework to one that centers the racial realities that are core to Asian American experiences (Chang, 1993; Museus & Iftikar, 2013). The AsianCrit perspective consists of seven interconnected tenets (Museus & Iftikar, 2013). Four tenets build upon prior CRT tenets to incorporate knowledge of Asian American racial

realities into CRT: (a) Asianization, (b) transnational context, (c) (re)constructive history, and (d) strategic (anti)essentialism (Museus, 2014). The remaining three tenets are combinations or reiterations of original CRT tenets, namely (e) intersectionality, (f) story, theory, and praxis, and (g) commitment to social justice (Museus, 2014). There is a tendency to use Eurocentric or Western frameworks of understanding development when studying Asian Americans, rather than using or creating more culturally sensitive approaches (Leong et al., 2007). Research informed by an AsianCrit framework is still in its nascent stage, with no current or published focus on SAPros (An, 2016; Chae, 2013; Han, 2014; Museus, 2014). Therefore, the use of AsianCrit for this study ensures that the distinct ways AACC SAPros experience race in the United States are honored and foregrounded.

AsianCrit provides a glimpse into Asian American lives in context, while expanding ways to consider race in higher education. Employing the AsianCrit tenets for my dissertation research study provides a lens to adequately bolster my understanding and analysis of the conditions and experiences negotiated by Asian American SAPros working in AACCs that have long been overlooked. The *(re)constructive history* and *strategic (anti)essentialism* tenets affirmed my decision to not just focus on Asian American SAPros broadly, but more specifically on Asian American SAPros who worked full-time position in an AACC. As seen from the literature review, research on AACC SAPros has been limited, despite AACCs being around for close to 50 years. Thus, incorporating a lens of (re)constructive history in the study on AACC SAPros provided a means of including their voices and contributions to the history of AACCs and towards constructing a collective Asian American historical narrative. The strategic (anti)essentialism lens allowed us to gain insight into how AACC SAPros are racialized when

actively engaged in shaping a collective Asian American identity and consciousness within a higher education setting.

When designing the various data collection methods, I also ensured there were numerous opportunities for research participants to share their distinct racialized experiences as Asian Americans. As I collected and analyzed data for my study, I prioritized the *story, theory, and praxis* tenet, which asserts that the voices and stories of Asian American SAPros can and should inform praxis. I drew from Freire's concept of praxis, which he describes as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970, p. 51). While this study is not explicitly action research, by choosing to conduct narrative research I hope to facilitate opportunities for Asian American SAPros to experience and share individual and collective critical reflections on their lived experiences to inspire social change through their AACC work. Additionally, I paid close attention to and named the various ways in which *transnational contexts* and *intersectionality* impact the lived experiences of AACC SAPros as I was analyzing the data collected.

This study is undergirded by the assumption that the lives and work of Asian American SAPros within AACCs are in alignment with the AsianCrit commitment to social justice. Therefore, the study aimed to contribute towards the construction of a collective Asian American historical narrative within the context of higher education, further illuminating the distinct ways Asian American SAPros have had to navigate race and racism in their lives. Critical consciousness development as the conceptual framework introduces the lens of how cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social forces play a significant role in Asian American identity development and may inform the desire to pursue an AACC SAPro role, which in turn further influences their critical consciousness development. The following chapter presents the research

questions as well as the research design and methods that were employed to explore the lived experiences of AACC SAsPros.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter explored the theories and research that relate to my central inquiry. In this chapter, I provide the rationale for my dissertation study exploring the lived experiences of Asian American SAs. Specifically, this study sought to better understand the lived experiences of Asian American SAs working in AACCs, their own critical consciousness development, and its influences on how they approach their work with Asian American college students, if any.

I begin by presenting a rationale for why this study utilized a qualitative approach. Next, I introduce my methodology choice of portraiture and convey its aptness for addressing the research questions of my study. I then describe the methods I employed for participant selection, data collection, and data analysis as they are connected to the development of a portrait. To conclude, I consider the limitations of portraiture methodology.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

I always knew that I would conduct a qualitative study due to its ability to examine how individuals construct meaning, make sense of their realities, and experience the world around them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Essential to qualitative research is an understanding of phenomena from the perspective of the participants and not just the researcher's (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This is imperative to me as a researcher because it lessens the privileging of researchers as the expert, guards against the researcher being in the position of omnipotence and

instead views their role “as witness giving testimony to the lives of others” (Lather, 2007 as cited in Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, p. 27). Therefore, a qualitative research approach employed with a CRT and AsianCrit lens enables me to produce research that gives voice to those historically silenced, foregrounds marginalized points of view and places the focus of inquiry on capturing narratives in their own words.

Qualitative researchers view context as central to understanding any person, group, experience, or phenomena and thus also assert that there are multiple, situated truths and perspectives (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). By centralizing the complexity and subjectivity of lived experiences and valuing these aspects of human being and meaning making (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), qualitative research rejects the assumption that finding an objective or immutable truth is a possible or necessary goal. Therefore, as a qualitative researcher, I can apply a Freirean approach of liberatory praxis which embraces the notion that people are subjects that know and act, not just ‘objects’ that are known and acted upon (Freire, 1970). In other words, I look to my participants as the best authorities on their own lived experiences to inform scholarship that provides a counterstory to the dominant narrative.

Additionally, in qualitative research the researcher is viewed as “the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” hence addressing biases or “subjectivities” are deemed important (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 16). This acknowledgement challenges the constructs of a mythological objectivity researchers are expected to maintain or claim to have in their interactions with research participants. Instead, researchers are encouraged to pay close attention to the relational aspects of research, like how personal relevance might shape the researcher’s collection and interpretation of data, which is more congruent with my orientation as a

researcher. This allows me to bring my full self while acknowledging the influence of my own identity and sociocultural history on the research process, which is especially necessary given my salient racial and gender identities will be shared by many of the research participants. Lastly, qualitative research as an inductive process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) is suitable for my topic of research given the dearth of scholarship on Asian American SAPros working in an AACC setting.

Why Portraiture?

Through my search for a qualitative approach that felt congruent with my critical epistemology, I was led to portraiture as a methodology per the recommendation of a mentor and found myself drawn to it for several major reasons. As a child, I would write short stories on my school exercise books, rip out the pages and bind them up to present as mini-novels for my father. Even from those simple, handwritten pages filled with stories from my imagination, my father fully believed in my potential to become a published author. While I never got to fulfil my childhood dream of becoming a fiction author, portraiture permits me, as the researcher, to focus on presenting narratives using accessible language and develop texts that will inform and encourage readers to think more critically about issues that impact their lives (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Dubbed as ““a people’s scholarship”—a scholarship in which scientific facts gathered in the field give voice to people’s experience”—by employing portraiture for my research I hope to produce work that finds relevance beyond the walls of higher education institutions into broader and more eclectic audiences, including the likes of my father (p. 10).

As I highlighted in Chapter Two, Asian American narratives have historically been subjected to invisibilization, marginalization, and manipulation, painting a picture of homogeneity and linearity that often fails to capture the full extent of their rich experiences. My

goal is to create a more nuanced understanding of Asian American experiences through their own words and my interpretations. My choice to focus specifically on AACC SAPros at higher education institutions was due to the little that is known about them as people. Even though AACC SAPros facilitate formal, dedicated spaces and programs on campuses across the country that further universities' diversity and inclusion commitments, most show disinterest in understanding their work and lived experiences. This is indicative of the persistent invisibilization of Asian Americans on U.S. college campuses as well as the inherent devaluing of SAPros who engage in race-based work. Researchers and recommendations of best practices for higher education professionals suggest educators can be most effective in their work if they have first undergone their own development so they can recognize attitudes and behaviors in students and can use their own developmental stories to understand and guide students (Owens, 2010). Given the bidirectional nature of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1999), by applying a portraiture methodology and related methods to answer my research questions I aimed to not only make AACC SAPros more visible but also provided them with an opportunity to examine their own development in a new way. Through constructing portraits from their stories, the research question and sub-questions that I answered in this study were:

1. What are the lived experiences of university-based AACC SAPros?
2. What do AACC SAPros identify as key influences on their critical consciousness development?
3. Which strategies do AACC SAPros employ that contribute to the cultivation of Asian American college students' critical consciousness, if any?

Portraiture as a qualitative research approach developed from a blend of ethnography, autoethnography, critical race theory, oral history, narrative inquiry and phenomenology

(Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). It seeks to blur the boundaries between aesthetic and empirical; combining science and art. Designed to center people and capture the richness, complexity and dimensionality of their experiences in social, historical, and cultural contexts from the perspectives of individuals negotiating those experiences, portraits are drawn through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject to create an image with words (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The portraiture process consists of five essential components: context, group voice, relationship, emergent themes and aesthetic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Born out of research in education, scholars have continued to apply portraiture methodologies and methods to research educators. Portraitists have focused on gender, race, and educational institutions (Ashby-Scott, 2005; Bailey, 2012; Hill, 2005; Lynn, 2006; Simmons, 2016).

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), portraiture necessitates presenting both the role of researcher as the main research instrument and the relationship between portraitist and subject as key to the authenticity of portraits rendered. Portraiture encourages the researcher to develop authentic relationships with participants that are filled with empathetic regard (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). This is highly congruent with my approach as a researcher and one of the major reasons why I chose this methodology as it will allow me to make deeper connections with AACC SAs who do meaningful work that is close to my heart, with the goal of painting a rich portrait of them for readers. For relationships to be authentic, as a researcher I must be able to demonstrate honesty, dependability, and trust, thus enabling both researcher and participant to engage in the process of co-creating knowledge. Given the central role of the portraitist and the visibility of the researcher in portraiture, no longer was I able to position myself as a researcher removed from the person or subject of research. Instead, I am challenged

to put into practice the vulnerability I required of my research participants through the self-examination of my own narrative, perspective and biases.

In portraiture, the narrative is valued as “an essential vehicle for meaning making in the life of the individual or group and in the work of the attendant researcher” (Davis, 2003, p. 199). The narrative is always embedded in a particular context hence portraits are framed by both the ecological and personal context (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Borrowing from ethnography, portraiture permits the researcher to provide a thick description of the context in order to produce portraits that are true to the realities of the participants’ social, cultural, historical, economic, and political realities. Additionally, as a portraitist, I am encouraged to insert myself and my experiences into the context alongside the participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). When I first learned about portraiture, I recall feeling concerned that such a methodology would not be viewed as academically rigorous enough due to my awareness of the existing bias against qualitative research and rarely ever seeing researchers acknowledge a personal connection to that of the participants in a positive light but often as a limitation of their study. Thus, I am learning from my initial reaction of cynicism to portraiture as a methodological approach, that I continue to develop my critical consciousness through challenging and destabilizing the racist and patriarchal standards of academia that has socialized me to view my own narrative as not “scholarly” enough to be made visible in my research study and that doing so would distort the work.

Given that I identify as an Asian American, cis-heterosexual woman and Sapro who currently works at an AACCC, I believe sharing my experiences in dialogue with the research participants further enriched it regardless of how unnatural it might have felt because I am

accustomed to not revealing much about myself as the researcher in relation to questions I ask participants. Portraiture asserts that “voice is the research instrument, echoing the *self* of the portraitist” in a premeditated, restrained, disciplined, and carefully controlled manner (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 85). To ensure my own narrative is not overpowering the portraits there are six ways the researcher is encouraged to use voice in portraiture to amplify, in this case, AACC Sapro experiences: as witness, as interpretation, as preoccupation, as autobiography, listening for voice, and voice in conversation (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Voice as witness emphasizes the researcher’s position as a discerning observer from a position on the boundary, “far enough away to depict patterns that actors in the setting might not be able to notice because of their involvement in the scene” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 88). As a result, participants should also have an opportunity to see themselves in relation to a broader frame. In addition to witnessing what is taking place from the researcher’s point of view, their voice is also used as interpretation so the reader can understand how the researcher is making sense of the data and uncovering the “why” as it relates to their observation. The utilization of both thin and thick forms of description by the portraitist is important to the texture and authenticity of the portrait as well as to allow the reader the opportunity to draw their own interpretation (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The third type of use is voice as preoccupation, which refers to the lens through which I as the researcher see and record reality. Since what I see is influenced by my background, I must constantly engage in self-reflection to keep my assumptions and biases in check to maintain the integrity of my research study. The fourth use of voice as autobiography acknowledges that I bring my own history to the research

and encourages me as the portraitist to draw from it as a resource for understanding and source of connection and identification with participants instead of as a hindrance.

The next two uses of voice are more focused on the participants. Listening for voice is asking the portraitist to pay close attention to the non-verbal communication of participants (e.g., texture, cadence, movements, gestures, silences), not just on what is verbalized, then “exploring its meaning and transporting its sound and message into the text through carefully selected quotations” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 99). Lastly, voice in conversation is about the voices of the researcher and participants as they express their views and co-construct meaning in dialogue with one another. The portraitist is purposeful in placing them self “in the middle of the action (in the field and text)” thus permitting the reader to witness the developing relationship between researcher and participants, which is at the center of portraiture (p. 103). By using voice in the abovementioned modalities, I hoped to learn from AACC SAPros about their experiences and convey it in a well-crafted portrait that inspires readers and illuminates greater understanding about aspects of an unknown world.

Finally, portraiture as a methodology that emphasizes the search for goodness, or that which works and why, is a refreshing approach to inquiry that pushes back against the more commonly seen pathologizing of marginalized communities in social science (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1986; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Participants are honoured as knowledge bearers, encouraged to express their strengths, competencies and insights (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Goodness is not meant to paint idealized images of individual experience or group culture but rather focuses on underscoring what is healthy and strong while also leaving room for expressions of flaws and weaknesses as part of the full range of qualities. In recognizing

goodness, inconsistencies in participants' narratives are embraced as part of the process not identified as indicative of a larger problem (Davis, 2003). Therefore, as the portraitist I was intentional about not imposing my own definition of "good" on the inquiry about Asian American SAs' experiences and what informs their work in the AACCs or assume that there was one explanation everyone agrees with but instead believed that there are myriad ways in which participants express what they know and I must try to identify and document it from their perspectives.

Carefully developed authentic relationship between researcher and participant is once again central to portraiture to reveal "the underside, the rough edges, the dimensions that often go unrecognized" even by the participants themselves (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983, p. 6). Relationship also guides the researcher in their determination of what information to include that is illuminating and not intrusive (Davis, 2003). This aligned with my goal as a researcher to resist deficit thinking, unlearn my socialization that marginalized communities are only worth studying because there are problems that need to be fixed, and validate the myriad of ways in which goodness can be expressed. Given that I was researching a population that is often treated as a monolith and a functional area within the field of student affairs that varies from institution to institution, portraiture allowed me to create portraits of Asian American SAs in AACCs that authentically represents their perfectly imperfect lives.

Portraitist/Researcher Positionality

Every individual brings with them different backgrounds and understandings that form the lens through which they see, hear, and make meaning in any setting (Davis, 2003). The pervasiveness of the voice of the portraitist/researcher required that I reflect and get clear on the

assumptions, biases and expectations that I brought into this work with me to ensure it never overshadowed the participants' voices but worked together. In order to maintain a balance, I had to remain open to information that both affirmed and disconfirmed my hypothesis throughout the research process. In my use of *voice as interpretation* I had to provide enough descriptive evidence in the text so the reader might be able to offer an alternative hypothesis that might differ from my own. As mentioned earlier, my positionality as the portraitist/researcher is *voice as preoccupation*. Thus, positioning myself included naming aspects of my identities in relation to the topic of this study. Higher education institutions have been an integral part of my identity exploration journey. Coming to the United States from Malaysia just over a decade ago, my re-racialization experiences in the context of predominantly white institutions as an undergraduate, graduate student and full-time Sapro, significantly shifted my understanding of how race is operationalized. As a third generation, Chinese Malaysian I grew up in a multiracial society with first-hand experiences of being racially minoritized and having certain privileges legally denied to me solely for that reason. While I have not experienced such blatant legalized racial discrimination in the United States, my racialization as an Asian woman heavily shaped how I moved through my undergraduate years and required active effort on my part to retain a sense of self as I swam upstream against a steady flow of bias.

Although I have now developed agency around my racial identity as an Asian American, being Asian in the United States was an identity thrust upon me that carries with it a weighty history of which I was unaware. For the first several years in the United States, I enthusiastically welcomed the question, "Where are you from?" Even though it was tiresome to repeatedly provide a geography lesson about Malaysia, I thought of it as my responsibility as someone privileged enough to access higher education in a different country. After a while, however, I

realized that international students from Europe were either not asked that question as frequently or their responses more favorably received than those of Asian students. I also learned that my Asian American friends continued to receive questions regarding their nationality even though many were born and/or raised in the United States. Along with the label 'international' that assumes everyone from outside of the United States has needs that can be met by one office on campus, the dominant perception of Asians further perpetuates the homogeneity with how my experiences are viewed and the perpetual foreignness of Asian Americans. I later developed a realization that there is a deeply rooted white supremacist assumption that America is of, by, and for white people; you cannot really be an American if you are not white, so where are you really from? Tell us so we know what box to put you in, because we refuse to expand our understanding of what it means to be American. While I was socialized to see myself as separate from the Asian American community solely based on my citizenship status, what I have now come to see is how intertwined our liberation from the oppression of racism is and that being Asian American is about a commitment to pan-Asian solidarity. The work of Asian American SAsPros and AACCs within higher education institutions has also allowed me to gain a more holistic understanding of the Asian American experience. It has led me to seek out and deeply value being part of the Asian American community, something I do not take for granted but instead feel compelled to contribute towards.

Voice as autobiography, as abovementioned, reflects the portraitist's own history, including familial, cultural, ideological and educational (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) as it relates to the research topic. As a cis-heterosexual, Asian American woman, non-US citizen, Christian, able-bodied, English speaker, born into a middle-upper class family, I experience oppression and privilege simultaneously. In addition to my 10 years of living in the United

States, I am also heavily influenced by my 19 years of being born and raised in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia which has socialized me to value certain lives, bodies, knowledge, and work more than others. For example, I was taught to work hard at having a good command of English rather than my native language so I could pursue my degree in countries like the United Kingdom, Australia or the United States. At a young age it was shown to me that white people were often given the benefit of the doubt, assumed to be more qualified and deserving of their success than others. Inversely I was cautioned to be suspicious of dark-skinned people, to assume they are dishonest, poor, uneducated and even dangerous. The effect of growing up on colonized land requires that I actively engage in unlearning anti-blackness and white supremacist ideology that has been normalized.

Often, the only Asian-identified person within my department and one of few across campus, I am a visible Asian student affairs educator and now made hyper visible by a formal title indicating I do identity-based work. I am deeply invested in expanding understandings of race and engaging Asian Americans to proactively pursue racial justice both on and off college campuses. My connection to this topic is personal and professional. Therefore, I must practice reflexivity throughout this research process. My educational privilege has afforded me access to critical frameworks and language to develop a social justice praxis that frames my approach as a scholar-practitioner. Together these have served as a catalyst for my critical consciousness development and has allowed me to develop efficacy around social justice advocacy within and beyond the realms of higher education. My epistemology—or way of knowing—has heavily influenced my methodological choices because I believe that knowledge is generated by centering the experiences and narratives of the marginalized. Portraiture provides an ideal

platform to understand AACC Sapro experiences, and the final portrait represents collectively built realities of the participants' and my experiences in higher education.

Methods

This section describes the population, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and validity procedures. My qualitative study was designed to provide thick and thin descriptive data thus I employed multiple data collection methods to paint a more holistic picture of the lived experiences of university-based AACC SAPros. Portraiture encourages engaging participants as active co-creators of knowledge in the production of narratives about their experiences hence the methods of interviewing, focus groups and participant-generated visuals are well-suited for this study.

Participant Selection

Study participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) identify as Asian American; (2) currently or recently experienced working in an AACC on a college/university campus full-time. To achieve this, I employed purposeful random sampling to recruit potential participants by tapping into my professional network and knowledge of AACCs that I had established over the course of my Sapro career. To create variation within the sample I staggered my outreach to AACC SAPros who differed in their gender identity, ethnicity, age, years in the role, institutional type and size along the East Coast. I directly communicated information about my study's call for participants through electronic mail (see Appendix A). Given that I am also based on the East Coast, the geographical proximity to participants' home institutions increased the possibility of having in-person interviews with participants to build rapport. However, due to an unexpected delay in my IRB-approval process the logistical challenges of aligning our schedules to identify common

availability once the academic year began proved insurmountable and we utilized Zoom video call platform for all real-time communications. For the purposes of this study, I limited the number of participants to five AACC SAPros at higher education institutions along the East Coast so that data collection and analysis could be completed in a reasonable amount of time. There was supposed to be a sixth participant, but they decided to withdraw for personal reasons.

Data Collection

Multiple forms of data were collected to paint a more holistic picture of AACC SAPros' lived experiences and their critical consciousness development journey. As introduced earlier, this study involved four phases of data collection: demographic surveys, photo project, semi-structure interviews and participant observation. Designed to provide my study with visual, written, and verbally communicated data that would help me paint a portrait of these AACC SAPros, each collection method is discussed below.

Consent form and demographic survey. Prior to data collection, each participant completed a consent form in compliance with Loyola University Chicago institutional review board standards. Upon agreeing to accept my invitation to participate, I provided each participant with a copy of the consent form (see Appendix B) via e-mail to allow them an opportunity to review the form and ask questions about the study before going any further. I kept the signed consent form in a password-protected shared folder that the participant could access at any point throughout the research study. Once the consent form was completed and submitted to me via email, I then asked my participants to complete a brief demographic survey (see Appendix C). The demographic survey provided some basic information about the participants such as their names, pseudonyms, gender identities, age, pronouns, ethnic and racial identifications, education, position on campus and length of time in higher education, and other

social identities that are salient to them. The survey also contained open ended questions so that AACC SAs could write about themselves in ways that they wanted and with the discourses and understandings they had access to. For this reason, I viewed the demographic sheet as an extension of the other pieces of data collected; hence open-ended questions were best to capture their own understandings and complexities (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Photo project. Participants were then presented with instructions and prompts (see Appendix D) to participate in a photo project to represent and reflect upon their experiences vis-á-vis self-generated images. Photo elicitation falls under the umbrella of visual methods research or arts-based research, more specifically participant-generated visual methods (PGVMs) and is more common in other fields but continues to be underutilized in higher education research (Kelly & Kortegast, 2017). Recognizing that people do not make meaning or express it only through words, the use of PGVMs provides me with an avenue to build data from the point of view of the participants and allow them to express parts of their lives that traditional, linear text might not capture (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Harper, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Within the context of this study, photographs can take me into parts of the participant's world I might not be able to go due to various temporal or spatial boundaries (Kelly & Kortegast, 2017). Photographs also provide "a means of remembering and studying detail that might be overlooked if a photographic image were not available for reflection" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011, p. 144).

Thus, I chose this method not only because it enriched my understanding of participants' meaning making but also because it created space for participants to engage in deeper reflection and disrupt the power dynamics in the researcher-participant relationship (Harper, 2002; Kelly & Kortegast, 2017). By providing my participants with the creative liberty to capture, select and

interpret photographs I positioned them as collaborators in this research, conveying their authority, wisdom and perspective.

Interview. Upon completion of the photo project, a semi-structured, individual interview was scheduled with each participant and they shared with me the important context behind each photograph they captured or chose, their thought process in selecting which photographs to include, and how it represented what they wanted to convey about themselves as it related to the prompts provided. The photographs served as prompts for additional verbal data from participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), providing me a thick description of their context congruent with the portraiture approach. Each semi-structured, individual interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and took place via the Zoom video call platform from a location conducive to each respective participant. Scholars have stated that technology-mediated interviews allow for increased access to a greater number of people across geographical and mobility barriers (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Seeing as all the interviews ended up being scheduled outside of regular work hours, the participants chose to take the call from the comforts of their own living spaces. In each of the interviews, I followed a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix E) that explored the central research questions, while allowing for clarifying questions. During these interviews, participants were asked to expound on what they had written in their demographic survey when it was relevant to the conversation.

Given the retrospective as well as introspective nature of this study, it only seemed appropriate that I utilized interviews to gather more specific data about unobservable behaviour, feelings and how participants interpreted the world around them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These interviews can render rich and valid information that encompasses the “hows of people’s

lives...as well as the traditional whats” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 646). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), semi-structured interviews are “flexibly worded” with a mixture of more and less structured questions thus permitting the researcher to respond to the participants’ “emerging worldview...and to new ideas on the topic” (pp. 110-111). Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. I also handwrote fieldnotes of the participants’ responses. Pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of each participant. All the interview recordings were transcribed by me with the assistance of a web-based AI transcription service.

Participant observation. Finally, I convened an online community gathering with participants who were interested. Although all five participants indicated interest, one ended up pulling out after being called to a work meeting that conflicted with the time and day our online community gathering had been scheduled for. Recognizing that it would be challenging to find another time and date that would work for everyone’s schedules during the Fall semester, I decided to still hold the online community dialogue with just four participants. I chose to facilitate this space utilizing Zoom video conference call technology to reflect the reality that most SAs have finite resources and increasingly rely on audio and video conferencing technology to supplement collaborative efforts across institutions. To ensure there was ample time for in-depth discussion and inclusion of all participants’ perspectives throughout the hour-long dialogue, I ensured the online gathering involved no more than six individuals as is suggested for focus groups (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Prior to the scheduled gathering, I reminded participants that the dialogue was going to be audio-recorded for my dissertation study. No

formal protocol was created. Instead, prompt statements based off themes from the first interview and questions participants had for one another were used to spur dialogue.

Assuming the role of participant-observer during the dialogue, as a member of the community I used my *voice in conversation* to insert my own experiences and expressed my views where relevant to co-construct meaning with participants. Concurrently, I also used my *voice as witness* by taking notes utilizing a participant-observer protocol (see Appendix F) to record what I saw happening overall in the context of the dialogue and exercise reflexivity. Proposed as a professional support network for AACC SAs who often operate in isolation on college campuses, it was my hope that this online community gathering would serve as an open dialogue space that allowed for more organic conversations to emerge. Consequently, my role as a researcher and primary research instrument was less prominent and disruptive to participants in the dialogue. Ideally, those who agreed to participate in this first dialogue saw the benefit of continuing to meet in this manner beyond the purpose of my dissertation data collection.

Risk, benefits, and confidentiality. Participation in this study was voluntary. Participants had the right to end their participation at any time without question or fault. There were minimal risks involved in participating in this study. Due to the self-reflective and personal nature of the study, participants may have experienced some discomfort in responding to some of the questions in the interviews or the dialogue prompted through the online community gathering. In addition, although pseudonyms were used, participation in the online community gathering limited participants' ability to maintain full anonymity. This risk was presented to each participant prior to their participation in the study.

Data Analysis

In portraiture, data analysis is known as *voice as interpretation* where I as the researcher attempt to make sense of the information gathered from the demographic survey, photo project, semi-structured interview, and participant observation in various ways throughout the research study to determine the final aesthetic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). It is also understood as an “iterative and generative reflective process” giving rise to emergent themes that shape and form the data collected (p. 185). This is congruent with Merriam and Tisdell’s (2016) statement that “the much-preferred way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection” (p. 197).

Thus, upon each participant’s completion of the demographic survey, photo project and semi-structured individual interview, I engaged in a precoding process of reading, scrutinizing, organizing and engaging in sense making of the survey, images, interview transcripts, my field notes, and made additional notes of anything that stood out and jotted down questions, first impressions, and so on (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To *listen for voice* as the portraitist, I immersed myself in the data by closely listening to each audio recording as I transcribed each one, reading participants’ interview transcripts not just for what they said but how it was said, reviewed my participant-observation notes, and reflected on participants’ word choice, cadence, gestures, verbal and non-verbal cues, including sighs and silences (Davis, 2003; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). By making note of things that struck me during and immediately following the interviews, developing ideas, evidence for emergent themes as well as journaling my reflections at every stage of the research process, ongoing coding served as a guide for my activity as a researcher along with the voices of the AACCC SAs (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

I read through each transcript multiple times and skimmed them many more. The first read through was to re-immense myself in the interview and their stories as well as to double-check the transcripts against the audio recording. After sharing the transcript draft with each respective participant for review, I printed the transcripts for the second read through. I read them in the order in which the interviews were conducted, highlighted quotations and made notes in the margins for ways in which their stories addressed my research questions. The next read through served a twofold purpose in that I transferred and organized the highlights and notes to a separate document by participant as well as gathered any additional information I may have missed. Knowing that ultimately I would weave the stories of all my participants to craft a portrait, the final read through was when I made note of aspects that were shared across and that stood apart from what other participants were sharing both during their individual interview and online community dialogue. Additionally, I reviewed the photos submitted by each participant and made note of any trends that in any way bolstered what they were verbalizing.

This immersion process assisted me in “tracing the patterns, for capturing and constructing the themes” that directly answer my research questions (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 214). The tension a portraitist must constantly negotiate herein lies with the need to systematize and organize the data while also attending to the experiences and perspectives that diverge from the emergent themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Although this could be perceived as messy and unnerving to some, I think it is more representative of reality and the diversity that exists within a racialized group often perceived as homogenous. As a portraitist I remained clear on my intellectual framework and cognizant of the research questions guiding the study, but remained open to the unexpected and fully ready to adapt to the people and context I am studying (Davis, 2003; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

In order for the findings from this study to be valued and validated, I had to ensure the integrity of my data collection and analysis. The next section reviews the exercises I employed to ensure the trustworthiness of this study.

Trustworthiness

“A trusting relationship between research participants and researcher allows for the co-constructing of a story that belong to and honors them both” (Davis, 2003, p. 210). Given the centrality of the relationship between researcher and participant in portraiture methodology, it was necessary that I committed to ethical procedures and guidelines to establish trust with my study’s participants. To these ends, there were several ways I ensured the trustworthiness of the findings for this study: designing a study with *methodological and data* triangulation; employing *member checks*; engaging in *reflexivity*; and presenting findings as *thick descriptions*.

First, data collection using a demographic survey, photo elicitation interview, and participant observation allowed for between-methods methodological and data triangulation by looking across data sources for ways the data challenged and supported emerging theories as part of the analytic process, this increases internal validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Second, I conducted member checks with participants in my study. As part of the member-checking process, each participant received a transcript of their individual interview as well as the online group dialogue to review for accuracy and were given ample opportunity to provide feedback, additional edits and/or comments throughout the study (Davis, 2003). After I created their portrait, I shared a first draft of it and afforded each participant the opportunity to verify my initial interpretations or provide clarity around my findings. This was necessary for participants to inform me of any erroneous information that I may have included and also functioned to keep my biases in check (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Due to my personal and professional proximity to my research topic, I constantly engaged in reflexivity to recognize my biases, dispositions and assumptions, and contain them to a degree (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). My unique position as the portraitist required a lot of self-work throughout this process. Portraiture necessitates that I embraced the notion of a “good” whole rather than an ideal (Davis, 2003, p. 200). Thus, I was constantly negotiating my own experiences along with those of my participants, so I could incorporate my voice alongside those who might voice ideas that diverge from my own. I had to repeatedly ask myself how the articulation of my voice is done in a way that gives shape to the portrait but does not distort, clarifies but does not mislead the reader.

To leave room for readers to engage with and draw their own interpretations from my research study, I incorporated thick descriptions in the presentation of my findings. I did so by including direct quotes from participants’ interviews and contextualizing their responses so that readers can determine the validity of my findings for themselves (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Finally, I also ensured that participants had a clear understanding of what was being asked of them, so they were able to participate fully throughout the study. Together, these strategies strengthened the trustworthiness of this study.

Limitations

Even though the portraiture methodology was well suited for my study given the reasons outlined in an earlier section, it is not without limitations. Studying the collective experiences of AACC SAs is an arduous task. There exists a diversity of experiences that can never be fully captured in the final portrait represented in my dissertation study. There is much that is unknown and untold. Nevertheless, it still adds missing voices to the dearth of AACC SA narratives in the literature.

Another limitation is the online community gathering as a data collection approach. While beneficial to gather data that would not otherwise be possible in a one-on-one setting, the full anonymity of the participant could no longer be maintained. Participants were, however, made aware of this limitation prior to consenting to the study and could exercise the option to not participate in that portion of the process.

Finally, my use of purposive sampling with AACC SAs on the East Coast also served as a limitation for my study. Since I am based on the East Coast and Chan's (2017) study shows that contextual influences of geographic location uniquely impact Asian American racial identity development, it is possible that my sample could be biased towards the experiences of Asian Americans in a specific region. However, "given the mobile nature of the higher education profession, which can encourage migration across states and regions for career opportunities", I am confident that I was still be able to draw a diverse sample of AACC SAs through my existing relationships and connections (Chan, 2017, p. 1015).

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined portraiture as the research design for my dissertation study exploring the experiences of AACC SAs. I also reviewed my positionality as an AACC SA, educator, scholar and researcher. I concluded with an exploration of the methods used to carry out the proposed study, providing descriptions of sampling, data collection, data analysis, methods to ensure trustworthiness, and the limitations of the study. Portraiture enabled me to conduct research in a manner that did not objectify my participants or create exploitative relationships with them. Instead, my hope was to engage in a research journey that is transformative for both participants and me.

In the next chapter, I present a semi-fictional community dialogue among AACC SAsPros discussing their lived experiences. Although this dialogue did not actually take place with all five of the AACC SAsPros in the way that it is presented, the dialogue presents the participants' voices verbatim as captured from the demographic survey, semi-structured interviews and online community dialogue. The data are woven together in a way that made it seem like these AACC SAsPros had an in-person conversation with one another because community was identified as having played an integral role in every one of their experiences, both in positive and negative ways. Moreover, one of the goals of portraiture is for research to be accessible to people outside of the academy, which aligns with my personal goal as well. By presenting the data as a semi-fictionalized story, I hope to make the knowledge generated through my research more accessible to individuals in and out of the academy. As a first-generation college student who will be the first in my family to attain a doctoral degree, it was important to me that my research is accessible to people who like my parents do not hold a college degree or often feel shut out of and made to feel less than by higher education practices. It is also my hope for people to be able to understand and connect on a more personal level with the lived experiences of AACC SAsPros rather than overtheorize it.

A total of five AACC SAsPros participated in the demographic survey, photo project and individual interviews. Of the five, four of them also participated in the online community dialogue. Additionally, I as a researcher and portraitist am also a participant as my voice and experiences were in dialogue with the other AACC SAsPros and woven throughout the next chapter as a narrator. The portrait of their experiences as AACC SAsPros is not an actual image but rather a descriptive portrayal of their experiences with words. I primarily used the participants' own words to construct the semi-fictional community dialogue. Throughout the

dialogue, there are two different textual differences to note: “Dialogue with quotation marks” are direct quotes from interview transcripts that have had filler words removed to improve readability. [Dialogue in brackets] are words I added to help a sentence flow more naturally. They are minimal. Dialogue in *italics* are to include my voice as the narrator and is used to provide added texture to the portrait by naming participants’ non-verbal communications.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Asian American Community Conversation

In this chapter I present the findings of my research study using a semi-fictional community dialogue to depict the online conversations that took place both in individual and group settings with five Asian American SAs who currently hold or recently held a full-time position in an AACCC. As a participant-observer, I was taking notes, engaging, and reflecting on every conversation, which allowed me to weave seemingly separate voices into a symphony of voices to form a full portrait. This community dialogue paints a rarely seen picture of AACCC SAs' personal and professional journeys, their racialized experiences, and how it influences the ways they show up both on and off their college campuses.

Introductions

On an early morning Fall weekday, six Asian American SAs from campuses along the East coast came together eager to find support and understanding in community with others who have similarly held full-time positions in an AACCC on a college campus. A rare occurrence for us during the academic year as every available moment of our schedules are often laden with events and meetings, both scheduled and unexpected, leaving little time for anything outside of the day-to-day necessities. With only 34 AACCCs in existence on college campuses across the United States, each of us understood what a special opportunity it was to have all our voices in dialogue with one another, even if it was just for a short amount of time. Each brought with

them images they had selected as part of the photo project connected to my research study and were encouraged to share with the group as they saw fit. I begin by asking everyone to introduce themselves and how they would describe their race and ethnicity.

Sally, who grew up on the East Coast describes herself as a second-generation Filipina American, cisgender, heterosexual female, kicks off our conversation by introducing herself, her pronouns, and providing a quick summary of her career progression. She then went on to say,

The racial box I check is Asian/Pacific Islander and my ethnicity is Filipina, which is my more salient identifier. My racial checkbox simply means I am one of the approximate 5.6% of Americans who are categorized within this group by definition of the [U.S.] Census Bureau. But my ethnicity tells a more specific story about my heritage and cultural background. The term Asian American is so diverse that I never use it as my descriptor because it just begs too many questions and let's just get to the core of it, you know. You want to know who I am. When you ask, "where are you from?" it's really about what is your ethnicity, you don't look like you belong here, so let's get to the crux of the matter. And that's why I always say I'm Filipina American. Although my appearance may tell one story, my lived experience tells another hence the use of the full descriptor Filipina American (no hyphen, please). But perhaps an even better identifier is an American of Filipina descent which acknowledges present reality while providing cultural, historical context.

Sally's voice, tinged with sarcasm, did not hide her exasperation with having had countless such interactions both in and outside of her role as Director of the AACC at Yankee University. Others including myself nodded and chuckled knowingly.

Similarly, Gloria who grew up on the East Coast describes herself as a second-generation Pilipina American, cis woman, and mother. She served as the Senior Assistant Director of the AACC at Neoliberal University until transitioning into a new position recently. Gloria expressed how race and ethnicity continues to be a complicated question for her.

My parents immigrated here in the 80s and that very much informs who I am. Racially, I identify both as Asian and Pacific Islander. As a Pilipina American, it has always been challenging for me to feel like I fit in a racial category, and not that I have to, and I think it is because of how others have viewed me. I am not East Asian, which is what most will consider Asian, nor am I Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Tongan etc. So others might not

think I can call myself Pacific Islander. But I deeply connect with the narratives and traditions of Pacific Islanders, particularly as I learn more about pre-colonial Philippine history. The confusion around my racial identity tells me that my exploration of self is a journey that may never have an end.

Next, Kiran who grew up in the Midwest describes herself as a second-generation, single, Indian American, cisgender woman, served as the Associate Director of the AACC at Mid-Atlantic University and made a recent transition into a new role. Like Gloria, Kiran has a fraught relationship with what her racial and ethnic identities mean to her.

I identify racially as Asian, ethnically as Indian American and South Asian American (depending on the context). I recognize my placement in the Asian diaspora, but I struggle to feel part of a broad pan-Asian community. Part of this is due to the eclectic and political nature of the identity, but also because the census has shifted its racial identity labels in my lifetime. So, now I usually mark Asian Indian so my identity as Asian feels confusing as we haven't really identified how the new terminology impacts our diaspora, if at all.

Miguel, a second-generation Asian American and Pilipino American who grew up on the East Coast, describes himself as an equity, and justice, student-centered educator, a queer person of color, the current Director of the AACC at New England University and a second-year doctoral student. Miguel shared how his relationship to his racial and ethnic identities have shifted over time.

I feel like I have always had a stronger connection to my identity as a Pilipino American than I did as an Asian American since I came into my racial identity consciousness much later in life. However, now working in spaces like the AACC at New England University I contextualize my racial and ethnic identities in relation to each other, they inform and influence each other in different ways. Pilipinos don't know how to self-identify; some don't see themselves as Asian American, some think of themselves as Pacific Islander without recognizing that there's specific history and trajectory and reasons why Pacific Islanders are in the grouping. So, for me that's something important to work through personally but then also with the students I work with. It is just interesting that we sit in this very hazy place of racial and ethnic identity.

Henry, who grew up on the East Coast describes himself as a first-generation Asian American adoptee, athlete, partner, student, and son, serves as the Assistant Director for the

AACC at Green University. He talks about how being a transracial adoptee and growing up in a predominantly white town significantly shaped the way he identifies racially and ethnically.

I would describe my race as Asian and ethnicity as Korean. As a transracial adoptee, I do not strongly identify with my ethnicity. So, I think ethnic pride comes from different customs, whether that's language, food, family history, and unfortunately, I just don't have kind of that context of my own. I do strongly identify with my racial identity. I have a lot of pride in being Asian and Asian American from recognizing the obstacles and discrimination that prior Asian and Asian Americans have overcome to make the future better for other Asian and Asian Americans. And from different social justice movements to the work that students have done at different campuses, that's been really a great leverage for myself. So, for me being Asian American is about being part of a movement and I'll be part of history.

Henry spoke with a clarity and matter-of-factness that reverberated among us.

I then went on to introduce myself to the group, my pronouns and my current position as Assistant Dean of Yale College and Director of the AACC at Yale University as well as how my understanding of race and ethnicity has evolved over the years.

Having grown up in Malaysia, the terms race and ethnicity were used interchangeably and so I identified as fourth-generation Chinese Malaysian. When I came to the United States as an international student in 2006, however, my regionality as a Southeast Asian became a lot more of a focus. Additionally, because of the emphasis on my citizenship status as an international college student living in the United States, I identified heavily with being Malaysian in my first few years and inversely felt uncomfortable identifying as an Asian American due to my association of those words with a biological and legal designation. Attending graduate school at a PWI with only one other Asian-identifying individual led me to develop my identities as a woman and person of color. It was only after I began working full-time at an institution that had an AACC and worked on various collaborations with Asian American SAPros that I then begin to develop my understanding of Asian American as a political identity. My development as a scholar-practitioner over the years has influenced me to claim my racial identity more confidently as an Asian American even though my citizenship status has not changed. I think it's safe to say that my re-racialization experiences in the United States is what led me to want to do diversity, equity and inclusion work, but also my own racialized experiences in Malaysia as an ethnically minoritized person informs a lot of the ways in which I understand how race is used to maintain power and oppression within the United States.

Accidental SAPro

While all of us currently work for higher education institutions along the East coast, our paths into the field of higher education and becoming AACC SAs likely has had a distinct influence on how we approach our work. Thus, I proceeded to ask the group to talk about their path into the career of Student Affairs.

Everyone smiles fondly as they recalled back on the moments that led them to this point.

Gloria proceeded to share first.

So I fell into this work by accident because as I shared, I went to college and there was also an Asian American center space and it was everything that I didn't know that I needed to really make sense of my life and my story and my community's story. And so, at the time, naturally, I thought it was just like something I needed for my soul. Little did I know it would become more than that and so it was truly an accident. I was a science major; I had no intention of following a career in education. But I guess I quickly learned after graduating how meaningful my experience was and how much I actually really loved working for and with my community, and I thought that this pathway would be a way that I could continue doing the work that I accidentally fell into. And no one persuaded me or dissuaded me. It was something that I processed, I remember with different people and I just remember them encouraging me. Not in like a you should do it but like in an if it's something that's important to you then why not? My parents included. So, I definitely think my experience at the Asian American [Cultural] Center in college planted the seed even when I didn't know the seed was planted. It was just a matter of time where I could actually be reflective and think like, ok, this actually brings me joy and meaning.

What was shared resonated with Henry, so he chimed in next.

So, I decided to go to Left Turn University because I remember exploring and looking for a campus that had a very vibrant Asian, Asian American community. I remember going down for Left Turn Day, which is like a Spring community event, and engaging with the Senior interns [at the AACC] and how welcoming and how much they wanted me to get involved with the center so I decided to go there. I didn't get really involved...my first semester of college I think was really, really challenging. I started pre-med my first year and I finished that first year and I hated it. So, I feel like that first semester was a little rough but then I remember seeing on the Facebook there was a Junior intern program that was coming up and I went and I applied and I got in. So that was probably the most important moment in my student affairs career, learning about program planning and team building. But that was a two-year experience because they want students to be able to get involved. I switched out of [pre-med] to pre-law, I took a few law classes and it

was ok but at the time I was in the School of Management and so I was like I'll just do that for a few years and then I can switch out after. But I did a corporate internship and I hated it more than anything. I think that was my Junior year maybe early Senior year. I was like I had no idea what I'm going to do until I actually talked to Cho. I spent a good amount of time at the cultural center but not as much as when I was an intern. So, we had a one-on-one and she was telling about how she recommended going into student affairs and how it could be a really good career and how I could create impact for students. So, I thought about that and I think that was probably the end of November, so application deadlines were like two, three weeks away so I really had to scramble to apply to [graduate] schools. My dad's been successful in his career, so I always felt that I had to go through a prestigious career, but he just encouraged me to pursue happiness. And so, I think in the back of my mind that has always been circulating, that student affairs might not be the most financially lucrative career but it's something that's definitely brought me a lot of happiness. I think if this career were to stop being happy for me, I would probably look for another opportunity.

Miguel who had been listening intently proceeded to share his own accidental discovery of the field.

It was just by chance what let me into student affairs. I think I've always had a passion for education. So, the Cliff Notes version of my trajectory from like college to now. I had virtually gone in my first year as an economics major with a pre-med concentration because that was success, right? It is to become a doctor and the things some of my cousins were telling me were like you can't just be a bio major anymore like you need to stand out on your resume. And I did like economics, I still do but not the way that I learned about it in college. And then I had my first semester at college I was really unhappy. I didn't think that being away from family would have impacted me as much as it did even though I knew family was something that was important. Even though I was like a little unhappy where I was, I was actually like "oh, I kind of like this freedom like being away from home." And I was like, OK I think I'll just declare a major in psychology. So, I was taking a lot of psych courses that were focused on identity and I think that's what got me into doing this identity work. In a similar program for the Bridge Program they had leaders that they called preceptors for that program and one person had actually dropped out to take a summer RD position. And they asked me to join. So, in a lot of it was just kind of by happenstance. There is no intentionality that's like, "I'm going to work this bridge program." And the person supervising the program, she was in her second year of the Higher Ed program and after talking, we would do one-on-ones throughout the summer and she was like, I think you know you've always had this passion for education and you do amazing work with these first-years even though you're not that much older. I think I was a rising Senior at the time. So, that's how I fell into higher ed and how I fell into really doing mostly student facing work was just based on the assistantships that I had. Looking back honestly, I don't think I would have hired me

looking at my résumé and looking at what I had written. My career in student affairs is like part of me taking chances on the field, and people taking chances on me.

The similarity of Miguel's sentiments to Sally's own prompted her to share next.

Well I tell my graduate students all the time, if I were to apply for my job right now, I would never even make the shortlist. I think my application would have been thrown out! My background is human resources and before coming to Yankee University, I never had higher ed experience. So, my experience was mostly corporate and non-profit work. And when we moved in 1986, I thought, "Hmmm well we are living right by the university. Maybe I'll go and see if there are any jobs over there." I ended up working, first part-time and then it became full-time, working at the Yankee Foundation. So, I was working there but the 1987 incident happened and the faculty and the staff on the university side had already start to organize and say, "Ok, what do we need to do to support the students?" And then somebody heard that I was working at the Foundation and asked if I would like to join this group of faculty members and staff who were putting this proposal together. And so, I joined them very late in the game and helped put together those proposals. Then unbeknownst to me, minding my own business, I get a call from the Provost Office and the Associate Provost, asking me if I was interested in applying for the position because the university had just approved of a search for a Director at the [Asian American] Cultural Center. Then I said, "why me?" and he said, "because you got nominated." Uhhhhh...you know what, let me think about that. And I was pretty much freaked out by that because my whole professional career up to that point was I was the person hired to always come in and put out the fires. So, I was always the crisis manager, that is what I love to do the most. And I thought to myself, I'm not solving a crisis here. I'm building a program and I'm not quite sure I know how to do that. And so for me, it was really about, ok...hey I'm working with this group of 18 to 21 year olds predominantly, you know, I really had to understand their student development. And it was my involvement first with some folks from ACPA (American College Personnel Association) but mostly with calling colleagues around the country in other AACCs that helped me figure this out.

Kiran jumped in next with a summary of her journey into the field of higher education.

I got recruited into the field. When I was an undergrad student, I did the NASPA (National Association for Student Personnel Administrators) Undergrad Fellows Program. And it came...I did it at a time when I thought that I was going to go to law school and then I was like, "oh wait, I don't really want to go to law school." I didn't really, I was an English major in undergrad. So, I just and my undergrad honestly it was a huge institution and I didn't really get a lot of career development there or mentorship in that way. So, the only options that I really saw if I wasn't going to do law was to become a professor. That was literally the only other thing that I thought I could do. And I had a good mentor who connected me with other folks around the university and I realized through like doing informational interviews with my faculty was that I actually

didn't want to go down the faculty route either. My mentor for the NASPA Undergrad Fellows Program had me like apply to grad schools as a part of my process. I truly had no idea what I was doing. I had no clue what I was signing up for. What I did know how to do was fill out an application and write an essay right? And I just needed an option and so I really don't think I understood what I was doing when I was applying to grad school to do higher ed and I don't think I understood what it was even while I was there to be honest with you. I don't think I understood what studying higher ed meant or anything like that. But because of like you know grace, I got into a really wonderful program, had a fine experience, like it was a good experience. I grew up a lot in a lot of ways, I didn't grow up in many other ways. But what it did was give me like financial security right? It was a free master's degree that came with job experience and I was like at the end of the day I'll figure something else out later. But I think at each step of the process I've been lucky enough to find a job that works and fits for me. I've known that I always wanted to because I was a student activist, because I'd been involved with my Asian American Cultural Center, I always knew that that was work that I wanted to return to probably because it was just what I knew.

Journey to Self

Intrigued by what everyone had shared, I asked if they could each identify sources that played a significant role in shaping their salient identities. Many in the group shared that growing up they either did not identify with the term Asian American or were not aware of it until they got to college.

Gloria was the first to share her thoughts.

So I'm going to say...family and just my own like pursuit of education have really shaped my identity, and I say that because like in the one picture where...it's actually the book that you got me, [Joliana], the *Pinay Power* book. It's been like a Bible of sorts. I didn't really learn a lot about my racial and ethnic identity outside of like what my family has taught me or what I've experienced with family and other Pilipinos. And so, having to pursue this like non-mainstream education by myself has been a really challenging journey. And I use this book as a reference because I feel like it brings together so much of my life so reading this has really informed the way I see myself and others. But also it's very reminiscent of my experience in college when I myself participated in an Asian American Cultural Center and being introduced there also again in the pursuit of knowledge and education and experiences to help me kind of understand who I am in all of this. Because, you know, I had some level of grounding in my identity in the sense that I'm like, yes, I'm really proud of who I am, and I never once wanted to assimilate and be aligned with whiteness, which I'm really thankful for. At the same time, I just didn't have...there was something missing like, I felt like I was, like, fragmented right? And in a lot of ways I still feel fragmented. And maybe that's because I'm also like doing a lot of

this exploration in my doctoral program and in my research, too. [Family] have certainly contributed to how I've made meaning of my racial and ethnic identities and truly how I've been able to grow up feeling proud of who I am and not necessarily ashamed of feeling different [be]cause I definitely was different growing up mainly around white people. And so, I think about how resilient I needed to be as a little kid too to be able to feel grounded in my racial and ethnic identity and I really owe that to my parents. So, I think it's this interesting circle of like my parents have provided for me, and now I'm providing for this little person who is also, you know, now a third generation Asian Pacific Islander American. And what will her identity development be like? And my God, I think about it all the time! So, yeah, they've been such a profound influence because they've just been so resilient in this sometimes horrible place.

Sally concurred as it relates to being Filipina American.

Total credit goes to my parents, particularly my mother. And when I was growing up, you know, I don't think I really ever heard the term Asian American until I went to college and we know that that's more of a political term than anything. Even though I wasn't born there, there is this spiritual attachment that I have to the Philippines. I do think that unfortunately, if there is something major or something critical or awful that's coming out of the Philippines that also I always take that to heart.

Sally went on to talk about how education has had a positive impact on her. Specifically, Asian American research books that she references to either inform her "research in providing services to students or in developing the class" she teaches on mentoring and leadership. It brings her excitement to see more books published on our community and new scholars out there doing the work to expand beyond East Asian narratives. She then recounted a significant experience at an Asian American Studies conference where she presented her research as a graduate student alongside her advisor at the time.

I wanted to do a presentation on generational differences in the Filipino family and my graduate advisor at the time was one of the best ethnographers I had ever met. She also had spent a lot of time in the Philippines so there was that other personal connection that I had with her. So, when that conference was coming, I had asked her if she would present at the conference and she was really excited about that. And I said, "this is what I would like us to do is I would like to present on the generational differences that I see within my family. And if you could talk more theoretically about that, and maybe the cultural differences that you've seen [from] working with the Filipino families in the Philippines." And she said, "OK, that's great." Well, my advisor was one of those

freethinkers and she said, "I want you to do a performance ethnography." Now, we had learned in that class like a year back she had taught, which was a big ethnography class or research class qualitative research class in which performance ethnography was just coming into the field and how it was being used, but how it was also being criticized. But she thought performance ethnography is the bomb. She said, "I want you to do a performance ethnography instead of just talking about generational differences with her family." I said, "I don't know how to do that." She said, "Yes, you do. Just look at the research." And she said, "You have your field notes," because I had done an oral history with my mom. She said, "You've got the field notes, you can do this." And I found myself using all my oral history notes and just writing this performance ethnography about my mother and myself, and so that conference really was...It was cathartic for me. We did it. A week before she said, "Ok, let me look at your performance ethnography" and I said, "Ok, but what's your paper about?" She goes, "My paper isn't happening. I'm going to play your mother now!" So that's what we did. But that particular photograph with the poster of the conference, really, I think for me celebrated who I was and for everybody in the audience. I didn't expect this to happen. When I looked up because I was so nervous, I didn't know how people were reacting to this, especially the academics in the room thinking what the hell is she doing. People were crying. I thought, oh. And people came up to me to say what a unique way to do the research.

Everyone listened with amusement and appreciation of the transformative impact passionate faculty can have. Henry smiled as he began recounting the various communities that have played a significant role in the meaning making of his race and racial identity.

When I was growing up there were five other [transracial] adoptees but there were no Asian or Asian American families. And so, my Asian and Asian American identity wasn't salient at the time. Being adopted I really started I feel like at a base of zero. I really didn't have any identity that was kind of seemed second hand, like I already knew it. So, I really relied on others to kind of share their identity and that helped me shape my own. I really just focused on my American identity, my upper SES (socioeconomic status) class identity and I never really thought about my Asian American one. The early exposure I did have to other Asian and Asian American individuals was at Yale. And so that was through Yale's Korean American Students of Yale Adopted Friends program. So, my parents started taking my brother and I there early on and it was for their Adopted Friends picnic. So, I remember going there from like age six probably until midway through high school. And back then I formed really two good relationships with two Yale students. And so I think it was a year or two later after I stopped doing to Adopted Friends one of them messaged me to attend a high school Asian American leadership conference in the Spring semester and so I attended that, I want to say my senior year of high school, and that was my first opportunity to really learn about Asian and Asian American issues. And while I don't remember all the sessions there, one of the ones were where we really dived in to talk about the model minority myth. Specifically, I related to

Elizabeth Shin who was a student at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), who unfortunately struggled with mental health issues, and it really sparked my interest in getting involved and learning more about my identity. Also, NYCAASC (New York City Asian American Student Conference) at NYU was a really great conference I think because it had more workshops. It was more for college students but they also had high school tracks and so we dived into talking about issues that we might face in our first semester, first year at college, kind of talk about the racial binary to Black and white and you know where Asian American students kind of fall into that and how we can build solidarity with other students of color. And so, I really, really got interested. And so, I think that was my foundation, work that was done by students because both of those conferences and events were student ran. [At Left Turn University I was] on the ECAASU (East Coast Asian American Student Union) national board and I think that's just a really important moment for me because I was kind of stuck in a Left Turn bubble for a bit and this allowed me exposure to other campuses because I want to say we had like 20-25 campuses and just to hear about the issues that were both similar and different to the ones I was facing as an Asian American student around organizing things like Asian American Studies, more resources. ECAASU was really a springboard into getting more involved in trying to figure out what I want to go in at the time. I wasn't looking to go into student affairs. I was just trying to explore my identity as an Asian American. ECAASU led me to APAICS (Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies) because I thought I wanted to go work at Congress at the time. I was a congressional intern and it was a really interesting experience. I was able to do a lot of coalition building, I was able to work with other communities of color around common issues and have a lot of dialogue on issues that we were facing as an APIDA (Asian Pacific Islander Desi American) community and then also that they were facing. I think it challenged me to think more critically and I think it's easy to see a lot of the positives but there are a lot of challenges; talking about anti-blackness in our community and how we combat that. So being more critical and being vulnerable enough to call out our own community, I think made me a lot more comfortable with that. [Lastly], Cho [had] a really significant role for being a mentor not just when they're at the university or college but that continues on for an endless amount of time. She's always been there to give advice and kind of how to navigate the next steps.

Miguel proceeded to share next about sources of influence that have shaped his identities both personally and professionally.

I didn't have any real awareness of my Asian American identity until college cause I think I knew I was a Filipino American just because of how I grew up and it was important aspects of you know various communities, like the Filipino church community that I had in New York and just like my own family background I think that was just something that was always centered. I don't think we even really thought of ourselves as Asian American as a family. So, it wasn't until college and I was involved in a variety of ethnic specific organizations like I was involved with the Southeast Asian student association and the Filipino club and a variety of other organizations as well. But really

with this picture of this protest, we were students trying to get a scholarship named for someone important in our community. So prior...I mean some background. The University had three scholarships for students who made significant contributions to this specific population. So, one for the Black population and it was named the Martin Luther King Junior scholarship and the second one was the Oscar Romero scholarship for the Latinx community and the third one was just called the Asian American scholarship. So for us as students we read that as the institution not recognizing any Asian American that had specific contributions and you know they had a laundry list of like things that we needed to fulfill to find the name. So, we presented a list [of names] and I remember there was a huge fight for us. And that was during my first year at college and [it had] me thinking about the influence that student activism and protest had in my development as a student leader. But really there I think with this protest it was also the idea of mentorship because it was a lot of the seniors in that graduating class who took us first year students under their wing to be like, there needs to be like this sustainability and continuity with the movement because it didn't end up happening in that year with that protest. It actually took another full academic year before anything happened. So I feel like it was great that there was that kind of mentorship and sponsorship between the community and I think that really helped frame my understanding around like planting the seeds about Asian American identity awareness and even what did activism look like. The APIKC (Asian Pacific Islander Knowledge Community) [is] really integral to my understanding of my identity as a professional in this field as someone who identifies as Asian American and I met some other folks in the community as well to really see that we existed in this field. Because my graduate program...there were folks who identified as Asian but they came to the program with the intention of like going back to their native country and it was more focused on international higher education and their understanding of race and their identity as Asian Americans, if they even identified as Asian American, was different. So, to be in a space where that was centered was very refreshing. It's meant a lot to be part of this space and I think also to see folks who have been in this field for a very long time and talk about what things they have experienced, whether it's racism or misogyny or the intersection of both. And to see where we are now is that critical mass but then also knowing that like we also have a lot of work to do. So, I think this space consistently challenges my ideas of what does it mean to do this work in this field but then also what does it mean to do this work for ourselves. I think being part of NASPA and the APIKC and other similar things like APINCORE (Asian Pacific Islander National Conference on Race and Ethnicity) and ACPA (American College Personnel Association), these spaces provide the necessary things for us to feel seen in a field that doesn't always let us do that.

Kiran who had been attentively listening proceeded to share after she was certain nobody else had anything to add.

I would actually attribute a lot of that racialization process for myself as to when I was an undergraduate student. My undergraduate campus had an Asian American Cultural Center and I took classes in the Asian American Studies program and that was really

when I started to think a lot about my racial and ethnic identities, start to understand my own sort of placement in the pan-Asian American movement and develop a context and history of like activism in the US. So, in undergrad I was a student activist and I think a lot of my politicization was in the classroom and Asian American studies courses, outside in student organizations, and under the guidance of mentors is where I think that that process really started. In grad school, I would say that it's more I think I develop more of an identity as a person of color rather than an Asian American identity. I think it came honestly out of like survival and like regional politics. So, I went to grad school in a different region than where I went to undergrad. The place where I went for undergrad had a huge, huge Asian American community with diverse ethnic groups, lots and lots of different student organization options. And so, it was easy to find like very specific community, but it was also in an area where there really was a lot of segregation based on race. I really didn't interact, honestly, with other POC (people of color) students as an undergraduate student unless I had one mentor that paired me to work with another student leader on a project like in the context of a fellowship I did. But that wasn't like an organic pairing, right? So, in undergrad I think the racial politics of the area that I was in was very segregated. And then the place where I left for grad school was like extremely white. So I was lucky enough to have a grad school cohort that was very diverse across many different social identities and I think it really was just a numbers game of where that identity becomes salient and where I found those points of connection with folks that I honestly would not have considered as like people I could connect with prior to that experience. So, I think it just came out of the reality of like where I was at and my need to have community to survive in a different place. I think I identified extremely saliently as an Asian American person prior to then. And I would say that I think my identity shifted to a POC identity when I was in grad school and I think after that it kind of stayed like equal; I think they sort of balanced each other out where I was holding both at the same time in equal measurement. A lot of folks that like I consider my family in higher ed which for me really is actually more like a South Asian or Desi community. I have been involved in Asian American spaces within student affairs, but I still don't feel really connected to them. I think on paper I know that I identify right and like I'm here for pan Asian community building and connections and advocacy. But at the end of the day I think that for me like what feels like family is still a South Asian sort of community. From like conferences I've been to or just trips that I've made where I've met up with those folks in the field or like life celebrations that I've been able to attend of those moments and that to me is also where I've really solidified that particular identity as well [as] being like a South Asian person working in higher ed and student affairs. Being involved with [an] off-campus grassroots leftist collective that I founded with a few friends here has also really forced me to think again about my own positionality about being South Asian in activist spaces, about doing intersectional work. [It] has also really forced me to reconsider the work that I do, to think critically about what it means to serve Asian American communities, and to really stand up for what I believe in. So, I think that that group has also played a really foundational role in my own racial development.

Caught in the Binary

Given the racialized experiences of Asians in the United States, I threw out a question to the group asking what feelings were often associated with their experiences as an Asian American SAPro on their respective campuses.

Kiran jumped in and candidly says, “I’m ready for the semester to be done! Yea, I think things are going ok though. It’s just everyone’s burnt out. I’m kind of feeling that way.”

Sally responded in agreement.

You know, I hear you, Kiran. I’m so done. There’s a lot going on at my institution; racial incidences, a new President, lack of a CDO (Chief Diversity Officer), the national tenor hasn’t helped. We just had a march for solidarity yesterday, which came at the heels of a march that just happened just last month because of an incident of the use of the N-word being screamed at from a parking lot. And then clearly in view was an apartment full of Black students and so that whole issue and I think the positioning of being at a predominantly white institution makes issues of race very binary and I’m tired of that. Where the racial discrimination against Indigenous, Latinx, Asian international, Asian Americans students are not recognized or talked about. And so, this march for solidarity really to me was about the Black community and the climate crisis, right?” I’m tired, I’m tired. And then following that march we had a two-hour townhall meeting that was called by the President’s office on a discussion on race, which was great. About two hundred maybe two hundred and fifty people came, filled a ballroom and we had intentional conversations at our roundtables. But I was sharing with folks right before you joined the call [Kiran], that of the nine case studies that we used there was nothing about the Asian and Asian American community. We talked about every other community and again, I just felt invisible, erased, there I was the model minority. So, I’m tired, I’m tired. And I also shared that I’m just going to work at Nordstrom as a personal shopper.

The group shared a laugh at Sally’s satirical closing comment.

Miguel jumped in next.

I think something that I’m struggling with and have struggled with even at my previous institution, is us actively being included in communities of color. I think there is this again through model minority and in not understanding who or what impacts our communities. Like at my previous institution there’s a bunch of centers and faculty doing something on DACA and there is no one representing the Asian American voice [even though] we are a huge part of this population. Or even thinking about immigration, it’s

viewed only as a Latinx issue and I'm like we're the fastest growing population in the United States, mostly are immigrants to this country. So, I think even though we have carved out or space for us have been carved out, we're still left out of a lot of conversations either because they don't think of Asian Americans as experiencing those types of things or sometimes they just don't know. And I think it's my job to tell other people that you need to do better at your job; at like including our population in your interventions and programming. I think just a broadening of like how we need to be supported should definitely be a conversation. And I think even with like this position that I'm at now trying to advocate for more staff, they're like, well you don't need more staff because you don't have trouble getting your students into the door, which is like a very backwards way of thinking of why we don't need support. They're like trying to get the numbers percentage wise of the other racial identities higher. I think part of it is like well it's not like...the mindset is that we're competing for the same slices of the pie without really changing the narrative. But no, we just need more pie, right? I think institutions do a good job of pitting marginalized communities against themselves. So, I think we need to change that to like...obviously not alone but we need to shift that narrative because it does everyone an injustice.

Kiran responded affirmingly.

I mean I think that while there are like AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) folks on campus, the campus is still pretty Black and white when it comes to the understanding of race. I'm not sure that I get seen as Asian in my department unless it's convenient for me to be Asian in that moment, right? We're just not often seen as having a race. People forget that South Asian people are part of the Asian diaspora, so we don't get read that way. And they know we're not Black, they know we're not white, they know we're not Latinx but we're conveniently people of color when like they need the data, right? I mean...just racial politics.

Many of us nodded our heads knowingly with pursed lips at what Kiran shared.

Miguel then went on to say,

I mean, similarly [like Kiran and Sally], I'm tired for different reasons. I transitioned to this role in August and just having to learn a new institution, you know, no student populations are going to be similar across institutions. But just the issues with the Asian American community [at University of New England] now are completely different from the issues that I saw at my previous institution and a lot of that is informed by my context. The previous Director was in the role for thirty three years and it's a lot of learning the former Director's, you know, reasoning and context behind building the programs and trying to be intentional of not erasing that legacy but really being thoughtful behind maybe this worked in you know 1984, but in 2019 the students are different. Who's on our campuses is different and just you know, in addition to that, when the Director retired in July, the University kind of forced retired, one of the only

Asian American Studies faculty who had been there for over twenty-five years. And currently there is no one teaching an Asian American Studies course on campus and the students feel that. And in many ways to what Sally was saying this, you know, making invisible the needs of our community. So, for different reasons, it's tiring.

Henry decided to share next.

I love the work that I get to do every day even though we're tasked with a wide number of tasks that for a staff of two people can be overwhelming. Green [University] can be extremely challenging and there are points when the students really struggled to find their sense of belonging to the university; they find belonging amongst each other's peers, in their clubs and student orgs but not to the University. I think our students don't see that many Asian/Asian American students affairs professionals on the staff side. They see a good number on the faculty side. And so, I think we always talk about self-care, talk about not pushing ourselves too much. But I think there's a responsibility to model that for our students because they see you as one of the only Asian/Asian American staff professionals and if we're not modelling the things that we're talking about we lose a lot of credibility. [For me] I think that when I first started [at Green University], probably for the first three or four months I didn't meet too many other staff members that were really Asian/Asian American so it was kind of hard to find that sense of belonging. But my supervisor at the time really encouraged me to schedule more meetings with peers and so there were some hall directors, academic counselors, folks in admissions, and we started to form a group that grabs lunch regularly, grabs coffee, pumps out more collaborations. So, I think at that point I started to feel more of a sense of belonging to the University.

Gloria smiled understandingly and proceeded to weigh in.

I think a lot about where we are in New England. Being a visibly brown, young presenting woman, I think a lot about representation. And then I also think about because of that representation and the intersectionality of my identities, how can I accomplish the work that I want to do or serve the students that I serve in a way that is authentic to who I am while also navigating the treacherous waters of Neoliberal University. But at the same time, being in this predominantly, extremely, predominantly white place, it's a weird juggling act because I can go my whole day not leaving the [Asian American Cultural] Center because everything that I do is in the [Asian American Cultural] Center, whether it's meetings or programs. And then there are some days I'm at 20 different meetings across campus and sometimes I have to embody a different part of me when I'm not at the [Asian American Cultural] Center and it's hard because I really value so much showing up authentically in all the spaces that I'm in. As a young brown woman, can I show up authentically and am I safe enough to do so. And looking at my experience that I had this past Spring and Summer, it became very clear to me that while no space can guarantee my safety there are definitely spaces that are not safe period, full stop. Where being my authentic self will get me into trouble or I'll have a target on my back or I'll be

known as the angry, brown API woman who thinks she knows everything. All these perceptions of me that I learned people had because they felt threatened by, I don't know what. I do feel like to an extent I have to operate differently to literally survive, you know?

Kiran concurred and went on to say,

I was really empowered and supported in bringing my activist work to the campus [in my previous role as an AACC Sapro]. I took students to protest with me and the school paid for their tokens for the train or whatever and saw it as a learning opportunity. I don't feel like I ever had to hide that part of the work that I did. There's been a lot of student activism on our campus lately. And my previous role still hasn't been filled, which I'm assuming when it gets filled there might be less messiness with still being an institutional resource to students. Although I'd like to be but that's another whole thing of like what it means to keep doing this work, even though I'm not actually working at the AACC anymore. But I think that it has been a really interesting and honestly a little bit of a scary time to be an administrator that is trying to be supportive of student activism and honestly just wanting to do the right thing. But we are seeing some pushback or honestly like impacts on people's jobs and things like that for supporting students who are speaking up about honestly really harmful events that are happening on campuses. And it's making me think a lot about my role as an administrator, my work had I been at a cultural center at the time that it happened. Sort of the tricky spot that that would be where you want to support the students, your institution is saying you can't protest with them but in your heart, you might feel like it's the right thing to do. The administration has really come down and said administrators shouldn't be involved and should be promoting free speech on campus or upholding open expression guidelines. And so, I think there is...we're definitely seeing some tensions amongst like supervisory lines or positional places as well as generational gaps and in how to navigate this conversation.

Based on what everyone had shared, Sally proceeded to provide an astute observation.

Basically, we're all working with Gen Z and we are all in administrative positions, and so we teeter on that very fine line of do we get viewed as administrators or do we get viewed as student advocates, right? And then we have to kind of play that role depending on the situation.

Henry nodded in agreement and spoke about a recent experience he had where this dynamic played out.

There was an article posted about Green [University]'s incoming class and how it's the largest population of students of color. Then there was a Twitter post from a student of color, current student that said, Asian and Asian American students aren't students of color and that these statistics are inflated because of that. And so I think it would have

been...because of the relationship that really formed with them, with our students, it would have been easy for them to march down to the Dean of Students Office or to do something more drastic but because of that relationship that we've had to earn that trust they came to us first and we talked about the issue as a group and then talked about kind of the steps forward. At the end of the meeting they said we understand, they understand our position, that we have to report up to our supervisors and to our Dean of Students and they were completely fine with it. So they actually shared their article, all their notes that they were going to share with the newspaper and they trusted us that we...while they understood that we had a duty to share they were ok with that because they knew that we could be trusted. And so really building that rapport, that trust and also being transparent that there are certain things because we're an agent of the university that we're going to pass that information up and they're fully understanding of that and ok with it.

There was a contemplative pause as everyone took in everything Henry had just shared.

"It's almost as though they cultivate it as a means of placating the students; just let them react, tire themselves out and then move on," Miguel says as he reflects on his current institution's approach to student activism. Whereas at his prior institution "any hint of it or sniff of it and they are like, shut that down immediately. They try to weasel down through various meetings to get them to stop doing larger movements."

What Miguel shared triggers a visceral response from Gloria. She recalled her own experiences with balancing her prior institution's expectations of her role along with that of students' needs.

If [Neoliberal University's upper-level administrators'] get any hint of any students being upset about something, their goal is to shut it down. When I had to do weekly reports when I was in the interim [AACC] Director role, there was a section in the weekly report that asked me to respond to any inklings of student activism. So you had to...I mean I never like said anything because I'm on the student side, which is ultimately why I was pushed out [but you had to] write if you know of something that's bubbling up, you should tell us. And it was never like you should tell us because we're concerned, and we should have an open, honest, vulnerable dialogue. It was more like we need to know because, you know, do the police need to be involved, do we need to have general counsel involved and all this stuff. Versus saying, you know, if they don't feel like they have some level of belongingness or feeling valued on campus let's have that conversation. It was definitely punitive and reactive.

Everyone's non-verbal communications suggested consensus with Gloria's statement.

Sally went on to say,

It's a hot mess in [residential life at Yankee University] and the cultural center Directors were set up a couple of weeks ago with residential life. But luckily the students understood that we were not the enemy because the students were going to walk out for that in-service. So, they were going to walk out of there, they're protesting but they realize that the cultural center Directors are their advocates and out of respect for us they did not. But they were all dressed in Black and wore signs about how their poorly treated in residential life and that they too have mental health issues that are being ignored. And they actually want to form their own union. It's a total hot mess! So, in some circles, we have totally respect for the students and then in other circles we're looked at with a little bit of scepticism by other administrators. So, we're in this funny position and luckily the five of us stick together and what we like to do is simply go to places where the five of us walk in together. It's so fascinating to watch how people react to that. But again, it's where do you find the support and who really has your back. But yeah, it's a mess. Let's go back to what I said at eight o' five, I'm tired.

Many in the group exchanged knowing looks with one another. We sat briefly in silence, reflecting on all that had been said thus far and appreciative of the candor everyone spoke with.

Scars Unseen

Understanding first-hand the joys and pains of doing this intimately personal work but rarely being in a space where those experiences could be freely spoken to, once the group got comfortable our conversation naturally shifted to the generally unknown institutional harms we have experienced as AACC SAPros.

Gloria stated in a very matter of fact manner,

I really left Neoliberal [University] because it was just too toxic. Even though upper level administration likes to brag about the institution being diverse and valuing experiential learning and being a global university and all this stuff, in reality that's just the perception they want to have. And I think that also goes with the race-based centers where, you know, it's nice to have us for aesthetic purposes. But when it really comes down to it, I feel like it had to be the Neoliberal way or the highway. And I chose the highway because I chose to center the students. And because of that, I was just gaslit on multiple levels to the point where I think their manipulation and all that was intentional.

But I'm like, well, it must happen everywhere. I know I'm not the only one that's surviving this. Because to them, protecting the university was their priority. I felt like everything was [on] lockdown; if there was a decision made, we just found out about the end result. It made it seem like along the way our voice mattered but the decision was already made. Having a dialogue was just the façade to make it look like they actually cared. I felt like my mental wellness was going to be compromised if I didn't remove myself from the situation. So, I'm at a healthier space now. But there is a longing there because I loved working in an Asian American [Cultural] Center. To be in that space, having been a student of one, I thought was always such an incredible experience because I would have never imagined that I would have ended up working at an Asian American [Cultural] Center. But for the time I was there [it] brought me so much joy. It was like a dream job. I loved, loved, loved working there because every day I felt like I woke up ready to do the hard work. And I never intended to leave you know, because I love the space so much and it sucks that the institution, and by the institution I mean senior level administrative, have their own ideas of what they thought was important, which is completely misaligned with myself and my colleagues and the students that I work with. That experience unfortunately ended on such a shitty note.

The lingering heartbreak Gloria sustained from her experience as an AACC Sapro at Neoliberal University was evident in her voice.

Kiran jumped in to affirm Gloria's experience then shares her own.

I appreciate, Gloria, the language that you used around being gaslit. And not because I appreciate that experience, but because I think I can relate a lot to that. I think I left my position because I was one, just really tired; I could feel it in my spirit that it was time for a new way to flex my brain and my time. I also was ready to make more money. But I also think I like I needed to seek the support of a therapist while I was in the role, and it was to process on multiple different levels what was an abusive environment. And so, I really had to spend a lot of time healing from that experience and framing my experience in like [the] understanding of what abuse looks like, an abusive environment or exploitation of labor and things like that. It's helped me, but it's made me increasingly frustrated because this was my dream job when I took it at the cultural center. I had spent my short career up until that point dreaming about a role like this right? It's why I got into higher ed. I had spent my time in grad school, my first couple of jobs out of grad school trying to get into this role and I loved it and I value it and I love the students and it really messed me up in a lot of ways, too. At the end of the day there were days that I'd cry in the office with my other co-worker; we were pitted against each other, we were made to feel stupid and less than and just feeling a lot of patriarchy in the office and not really having the empowerment or the voice to be able to address it within the institution. I think that there was a lot of manipulation in that way around creating silence, which I think is what happens to a lot of Asian American people broadly. I think it also happens to the folks that work in [cultural] centers in general. I got my cat to have a therapy

animal; I needed something to help me deal with my stress. Then that picture of me on the beach, that was a trip I took over Christmas and around that time I was really debating about quitting my job and not having a backup, which happened to me a few times within my role there. So that wasn't about the type of work anymore, it's really about management and about when your identity is tied to the work that you're doing and it shows up in conflict with the bureaucracy and the structure of feeling unsupported or feeling hidden. I learned a lot and grew a lot, too. But I think that I'm still in a place of trying to name and talk about, within all these frustrating conversations about the bounds of professionalism or whatever, what this experience was like as someone who carries these identities, is doing this work and who is paid for it, although not fairly paid for it to do it at the institution. And as someone that might go back into this work too, I am still trying to figure out my future career path stuff, but I think this language around abuse is really sticking out to me and the ways that institutions or even honestly like within the office settings, I've been impacted by it. And I think it's happening on so many levels and it results in, for me, it resulted in a lot of silence or just like immobility in figuring out how to navigate it. To the point where I was like, I've got to leave. Like it's not going to get better. And the only way to fix this is to leave it. Yeah, so I don't know if that echoes with other folks, too. But from when I think about my experience, that grounding language around abuse is very salient.

Sally proceeded to talk about her most recent experience working in a toxic environment within her own department.

I had a supervisor who was finally let go two years ago. But the two years that she spent overseeing the cultural centers, it was abuse beyond abuse. I would shake kind of in fear every time I open my email in the morning because usually there was something there that was belittling; she was screaming in the email or the worse was when I would get an email that would say, we need to have a conversation. And it got to the point where I would call another colleague and ask them to be in my office for a phone call so that I had witnesses about what she was saying to me and we would do that, and she was an equal opportunity abuser, so we would do that for one another. It was the first time in over 20 years that I was evaluated as not being a good leader, in needs of improvement, coming off of years of outstanding evaluations and basically being told, because our students actually went to the board of trustees to complain about it, that I should have known what they were doing and I should have shut it down. And I said, you know what? That's the beauty of student activism. And I said I had no inkling. And so, I was vilified, it was horrible. So, I know what it's like to be in a toxic environment, but you know, I think it's going to be [about] where do we find our allies? Where do we find our support? Especially for you Kiran, who wants to stay in the institution, right? Because to move around takes a lot of energy. And what we have to do is we have to do the self-care, which culturally we don't really do very well. And as female identified people, we don't do very well either. So, you know, this work is hard, it's long, it's exhausting. Where do we find our supports, whether we're in a toxic environment or not?

“Yeah, that’s a great question! I think as someone who’s fairly new to my institution, I’m just trying to also figure that out, right? If I talk to this person, can I truly trust them?” I say in response to what Sally shared.

Miguel concurred and went on to say,

Just in reflecting and just being in my new role like what you said Joliana, it’s even now I don’t know who to trust on campus. Part of it is, should that make sense [being only] four months in? But part of me is just like thinking back to the brighter and sunnier times at [my previous institution] where I knew day one, my supervisor had my back. And thinking now and the people who always showed up were always the people from the LGBT center. And I wonder if it’s because [there’s] this understanding and shared history of like trauma and, you know, not having that support, like that’s what I currently have now. It’s almost as like horizontal support. Not that I don’t have that from my supervisor now. She’s just in a new role, like they created this new role for her without any support so she’s trying to prevent us all from drowning while she’s trying to paddle boat that has a hole in it, you know? So it’s one of those things where collectively our team of six feels some level of guilt asking her for support knowing that as for her as a Black woman, like one of the only people of color in senior leadership that the hypervisibility also means so much in terms of what gets thrown on her plate. So, I think it’s this also cultural thing of not wanting to burden other people when we also have things to go through. And you know that idea that like not all skin folk are kin folk. I’m thinking back [to] this one instance where we were at a town hall meeting for Asian American students at [my former institution], which was being recorded and had consent from the Associate Dean who supervised all the [cultural] centers that it was going to be recorded. And during this live Facebook streamed event he microaggressed me in front of my students and I didn’t know how to process that. So then when I went home, I took to Instagram and I was just venting some thoughts, like, what does it mean when someone who has been in this role, another person of color, microaggresses you in front of your own students? And then just the levels of surveillance because the next day I get a call from another colleague who is an Asian American woman and [she] was just like, you need to be careful because people see what you’re posting out there and this is going to hurt you professionally. And instead of offering the support of like, I’m sorry that this happened to you, she was like, you better watch out because people are talking. So, it’s just this idea that you can’t...I feel that I can’t trust people who are supposed to support me in doing this work. I think that’s something that like across the board I’ve heard from folks in roles like this, not even in Asian Americans [Cultural] Centers just in other [cultural] centers as well. So, it’s just like, are we just window dressing? Like we have these [cultural] centers but we’re not going to do anything to support the people in those [cultural] centers? When I’m not in the [cultural] center there’s no one there and I think that [photo of an empty chair in my office] represents that if I’m not in certain spaces or places then the voice and someone thinking about Asian American students is absent and

know thing that I'm only one person and at any given time there are x number of meetings happening. The one thing I found about being a Director is that you get a lot of random ass requests. It's just like, come to this meeting and it's just like why do you need me there? But then thinking about like, well if I'm not there is someone going to be thinking about our population? So, it's like doing this random juggle of trying to figure out what to do and advocate for myself. Other Directors who've been there longer know what that feels like and actively within my first month have always been checking and making sure that the work does not feel so solitary. I can't be at all places at one time to advocate for all the students that I need to advocate for. So, it sucks that I have to prioritize and rank all the issues that are going on knowing that there are many at any one given time.\

"That really sucks," Kiran says in reaction to Miguel's experiences. She then went on to say,

So, I think it it's also making me think about just the sort of development for folks in these roles, right? A part of my own unpacking has been, you know, I get frustrated and then I'm like, this is part of institutional racism, right? That folks are not...they get promoted without learning how to supervise people or how to run things and then when they're in the positions, they're set up to fail. And then it creates sort of like a waterfall effect of that. Or people were existing under the like...we might be like doing quote unquote rad work within a [cultural] center but it's still existing within the context of a white supremacist culture and institution that then causes our own colleagues or folks that we think we can trust to actually just act just like police within the institution or within our profession. So, maybe that was a well-intentioned feedback to give, but it actually was really harmful. And it wasn't really rooted in what we're trying to say we're teaching students. And I just don't know if that reflexive process is like actually happening when people get into these jobs to think that way. And I think, yeah, I felt like I was often asked to be like an institutionalized police person in a lot of ways or asked to surveil on my students as well. I could totally relate to like what a few folks were talking about, right? In terms of like participating in surveillance culture and that's gross. All in the name of student support, which is really messed up.

Sally chimed in next.

I spend a lot of time at the [Asian American Cultural] Center. The reason I spent a lot of time [at the AACC] was number one, as a woman of color I felt that I was being...a different microscope was being used for me and I was building a program. It really became my first love at the detriment probably to my family life and to my own personal health. At a PWI (predominantly white institution), we sometimes suffer from the model minority myth and even when we think that we're being vocal we are not being heard. I feel like I have a calling to do this work here [at Yankee University]. So, I think it makes me feel that there is a real purpose here but there are also a lot of challenges. Everybody

that I have reported to over all these years, nobody really understood the work that we do. That it really went beyond students, because we also service faculty and staff, alumni, community, we're down in Hartford at the legislature so I'm lobbying legislators, right? I do think over time that I have sometimes used quiet power to get my point across and other times I'm screaming on the top of my lungs, right? I remember one time when I went to see the Provost, who I reported to at the time, and I just walked into his office and I said, "Stop making me your token Asian American!" Yeah, that took a lot of bravery, probably stupidity on my part. But I said, "There are close to 400 Asian Americans or Asian folks on this campus, you need to start tapping into them. I can help you figure out where they are and who they are, but I can't consistently be the person that you're choosing so that you can check the box." He listened and he understood, and we worked together in identifying folks that whenever there was a committee assignment that there was intent and intentionality of who he would put on those committees.

The group reacted in disbelief because we recognized an outcome like what Sally had described are few and far between.

Gloria then proceeded to share her thoughts.

It's just interesting navigating a multiplicity of identities being at Neoliberal University where being in the Asian American [Cultural] Center versus not. Because again, like upper level, senior level administration, they like the aesthetics of diversity and whatever buzzwords they like to talk about now but don't actually allocate the funding and the resources and the personnel and the space and the opportunities to actually really commit to saying, this matters to us. So yeah, I think more and more I've been quite conscious of this like multiple, how am I showing up in different spaces? And you know, even in a phone interview or whatever this past summer, I think there's like some trauma there where I don't want to be my real self because I'm afraid of how they'll react to me, you know? And it's not good, it's really not good. But I think about it a lot. I was able to cope with all the BS by relying on [colleagues who I was closest to] to process if things happened or if I had questions or if I needed confirmation that I'm not making things up. Especially the last few months I was there, I would process with some colleagues. I'm like this gaslighting is unreal, I need you to be able to help me and confirm for me that my reality is actually reality and not something that they're just making up to oppress me. We will check in on each other and I'll spend time with them because I trust them and they trust me and they know me for who I really am; someone who cares and have truly put in my heart and soul into the space and the students that we serve. It's because we all recognize that BS and to some level, it looks different for everyone, we all have to negotiate that. It's so unfortunate that there are so many of us that can look at each other and be like, "Yo! Wasn't that some shit?" and then feel like we're so disempowered that we can't really say anything because now you're gonna end up like Gloria. They're going to push you out just like they pushed out Gloria, and like that's horrible! So being on the other side I think it was not as sparkly as I had seen it as an undergrad. Because as a staff

member, well, now I'm negotiating all the bullshit and dealing with fucking white people, people of color who are white on the inside, and I'm like well, this is the stuff as an undergrad I didn't have to deal with. But I remember talking to [my former supervisor] once where she's like, there's levels of BS that we have to navigate in order to continue doing the great work. How do we negotiate that in a way that I didn't have to as a student? So, you know, the rose colored glasses aren't as rosy anymore. Whereas initially I came in with so much vigor and energy and passion and I still do, but the way I see it and myself is so different. But does it mean that I love the spaces any less? No. As I am becoming more critical, I understand that it is necessary to be critical in order to continue doing this work for myself and the community that I love. It just looks and feels differently because of the bullshit. I'm really thankful that at least Neoliberal University brought some incredible people into my life. They sustained me. And, you know, it's horrible to say that I needed people to sustain me too. Their friendships are important and the way we worked together was amazing but I'm like, why do I have to feel like I need this type of connection in order to survive? It shouldn't have to be like that.

The group takes a collective sigh at the weightiness of Gloria's rhetorical question.

Multidirectional Influence

Recognizing how closely linked our professional roles are to our social identities in a unique way, I asked the group to reflect on how their racial identities might have been influenced by their roles as AACC SAs over time and vice versa.

Sally began to share.

I had totally rejected who I was and it wasn't until I was in college that I'm like...I mean I rejected my religion at that point, I rejected my identity and I had a real cultural identity crisis, Joliana. It was orientation my freshman year, that's when I started my identity journey. Really focusing on it, understanding why I rejected, or I was ashamed of being who I was and not being able to verbalize that to my parents because I didn't know that that was what I was going through, right? And so I think over the years, but particularly doing this job, has really cemented my identity and made me really look about all of the different markers in my life that made me question who I was, reject who I was, and then finally accept who I am. This job has just been this, "Yay! I finally I feel grounded in who I am." And it was this job that did it.

Henry shared similar sentiments.

So much transformational work has been done and my personal identity that has translated into my professional work as a staff member that works at an Asian American Cultural Center has been really interesting. Just the work that I do and how that growth

that I saw in my personal development has translated into my work. [For example], Rona was really, really supportive in our identity and was always advocating for students. And so, I remember times of vulnerability that she shared with us that I carry on with the work that I get to do with students now. I think [my racial identity] is still evolving. I think it will always be. I think early on I only thought of my Asian American identity by itself, I didn't look at the intersections with different identities that I hold whether that's being heterosexual or being upper SES (socioeconomic status) etc. I think having those conversation with students and staff and faculty has continued to challenge my own views on my own identity but also [provides] opportunities to learn from others. I think for me, the theory and the research that we utilize and kind of the way that we guide our assessments and achieve our practices in our center have been really important. But I think the experiences that our students currently have is the thing that's been my biggest teaching lesson.

Gloria smiled and nodded in agreement before saying,

I don't think others necessarily get to sit x amount of hours a day, reading through scholarship and history and participating in this never ending amount of time around self-reflection and I guess exploration and feeling the way I've been able to for the past however many years now. Not even just in this doctoral program but like being in the Asian American space I got to be around other API (Asian Pacific Islander) people all day, every day and I got to have these conversations, and I have to recognize that not everybody gets to have that and I don't think people outside of the Asian American [Cultural] Center can necessarily name that about the space. So yeah, I would say having to do my own goddamn work like it's just so hard. But it has helped me find a little bit more clarity and having access to those materials, but also having access to spaces like [an AACC] space in college and also an [AACC] space that I committed five years to has really helped me to put together the pieces of my sometimes fragmented identity and I constantly think about yeah, how these spaces have been so meaningful for me. I really don't think I would have ended up working at an Asian American [Cultural] Center had I not had the space at [my undergraduate institution]. I'm really grateful and lucky to be surrounded by such incredible colleagues who could challenge me. I recognize that it was also labor on their parts but they've really helped me to develop and grow and really look inward and focus on the things that I lack knowledge around; how do I push myself to not always rely on the labor of others, but to make myself uncomfortable and challenge my own biases and things like that. And so, yeah, it's been a lot of interaction with colleagues but also I think other more formal professional development experiences, whether they were conferences or scholarship that I've read for classes or written for classes have also helped me to further create this very complicated lens that I operate with at all times of day. On the flipside of that lived experience and stuff, I've encountered a lot of not so nice people; people who are selfish, only interested in their own personal gain, incompetent, openly and blatantly oppressive, or say things with the façade of trying to be helpful. So there's this like wealth of amazing knowledge and

people who I'm so grateful for and then the other side of that has also helped pull this lens are like these horrible, not-all-skin-folk-are-kin-folk people and white people.

Miguel talked about how his experiences as an AACC SAPro has helped shape him.

[The Asian American Cultural Center] is really where I learned a lot about my own identity as well. It's like through the students I know I learned as much from them as I hope to impart on them and I think part of that is really rooted in my philosophy of non-hierarchical knowledge; that knowledge is shared and it's co-constructed. And I think a lot of this space and a lot of the things that the students have wanted to see from this space allowed me to grow in ways that maybe I didn't necessarily expect to. Eric was like technically my first supervisor in student affairs. So, to have another Asian American male supervise me and look out for me in ways that my other supervisor in my other graduate assistantship did not, it was fascinating to see that. I think it was really these people who helped shape that space and then I'm part of that space too so in many ways it helped shape me. I often allowed myself to be a little selfish with the work in terms of creating a space because I needed it, in terms of knowing that there might be also students who would need it as well. I think I had the agency to do things at the AACC that I didn't where I went to undergrad, which is like a Catholic school; we didn't have the agency to create spaces for queer people. I think because of that it allowed us to grow in ways that we wanted to. I just have such a deeper understanding of all my identities from doing this work. I think it's even impacted the way that I bring it into how I even talk to my family and how we think about raising our family in a more just and equitable way. And I think a lot of that educator language has showed up in my relationships with my family in particular, because it's allowed me to be a little bit more patient and know that we are all still developing throughout and that things are different for our parents because a) they don't have necessarily the understanding of American higher education and b) even their understanding of their racialization as Asian people have changed. So, I think being in student affairs, being specifically Asian American in this work, has changed the ways that I really interact with folks. Because of the work I do I joke, and I call myself professional Asian American because what I do is like my identity, I just can't leave it in the office, you know? It's a constant engagement with it. For better or worse. But I think it allows me to grow in ways that maybe some people don't necessarily grow, and it allows me to see the connection between things. I think it definitely impacted the ways that I see myself in my own identities and even to see the spaces that I do need to grow more in. I think there is always work to be done.

Sally concurred with Miguel and went on to say,

I think it's messy and it has to be messy. You can't turn it off. You're never turned off and I think that's also the beauty or the mess of it. This is where it becomes very difficult, when it starts to affect your personal relationships with some of your family members, right? Because they just don't seem woke, right? Or they'll say something that is so offensive that you just look at them like, what is wrong with you? Why are we

related? And I mean, I've gotten into some knockdown, drag out fights with some family members and they just don't understand what my passion is all about. And then I have to check myself by saying, okay, Sally take a step back. In the middle of a wedding is not the time for you to educate them. But then I'm having this internal struggle with myself saying, but this is the only time I'm going to see them, so I better show them. It just gets really intense and sometimes my daughters are like, mom, step it down, step down, it really is ok.

The group chuckled at the scene Sally depicted.

Kiran candidly shared her reflection next.

I think my professional experiences have mostly just highlighted how uncomfortable I still feel within broader Asian diaspora spaces. Like I feel great when I'm in South Asian spaces. I feel great when it's like South Asian and Southeast Asian folks together. I don't always feel great when it's a broader AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) space because it tends to center East Asian narratives and I feel like I'm made into an afterthought. So, I think professionally I still feel some of the same discomfort that I felt as an undergrad student. For me being Asian American it's very...I mean it's complicated for everyone. Politically I align with the identity, politically I identify with the movement [but] I'm still not sure that I am always comfortable in pan-Asian spaces because as a South Asian person I'm often not read as an Asian American person and I think with my work at an Asian American Cultural Center, it was still a continuous point of I think pain in a lot of ways as well as pride. Where I feel like I was just constantly having conversations with other South Asian students about not feeling like they had a place in that center even when there were staff members who reflected that same identity. And they felt comfortable coming to that space and talking to me about it, but they still were feeling disconnected from the broader diaspora and I think I carried a lot of the same feelings about that. [So] how I identify as Asian American is...it's like a gradient to me. I show up, I'm there but I think there's also a lot of stuff around our diaspora when it comes to what is considered an Asian American fight that feels really frustrating to me at times. I think it is still an extremely East Asian centric diaspora and curriculum. I think the work that I did at the [cultural] center, we were able to try decentering East Asian-ness. A lot of the stuff that I would talk to students about it's like, I want to build the same level of entitlement to this kind of space to folks that have traditionally been marginalized in Pan-Asian spaces. But at the end of the day we can't change what's happening in classrooms or in textbooks or at national Asian American organizations, right? So while none of our programming actually represented anything East Asian, it still felt like East Asian stuff took up a lot of space, which made it continuously frustrating to try to do the work within the diaspora or like within an Asian American diaspora community.

There was a brief pause as everyone grappled with everything Kiran shared.

Sally relates in and went on to say,

I think some of the challenges that may not be apparent in the photographs really influence the way I do my work. How I'm a very different person from when I started this job to where I am now and the things that I take that are important to me and how I refocus my personal approach and how I'm taking care of myself, professional and personal, as I do this work. I do think with age comes wisdom. And finally, after twenty-six years, I finally realized that I don't have to work 60 hours a week and I think that was a function also of not having enough staff. But I do think we have all learned and I've certainly learned it takes me twenty-six years to figure this out, that you don't have to spend all your time there. Now I'm starting to learn that and so the clock becomes a very important thing for me to look up and say, ok, you're approaching eight hours. Is there something so critical that you have to stay or can this wait until the morning? So that becomes very important for me as well.

Sally's thoughts sparked another for Kiran.

Prior to working within multicultural affairs, I basically worked only in res life and student activities, which are very white spaces. And I think I was taught a very particular set of rules around professionalism and something that has stuck out to me that I unlearned within my work at the cultural center that I'm trying to keep with me in my new role is particularly around the importance of family. What I really loved about my work at the cultural center was that my co-workers understood that family came first, which I don't think is a common experience in other areas of higher ed and student affairs. I have worked somewhere where you can have both [family and work], and have really supportive co-workers who understand and that for me felt like a really racialized experience; that we are all Asian and we do understand that this is important and critical. I don't think I would have had that necessarily in my more mainstream higher ed roles prior to this.

Values (In)congruence

As AACC SAs doing culture shifting work within environments that are not always in alignment with our efforts, I was curious about everyone's reflection on the ways in which their core values have informed the work.

Henry began speaking first.

Some of the work I've done has been part of a shorter history but I think it's just kind of moving that needle forward so that for future Asian and Asian Americans they're in a better place for social justice movements, political movements than we are today. I don't think anything's ever perfect. So, I think in our context with the students that we work

with that are Asian and Asian Americans, they never really want to talk about the negatives of anything. Whether that's events, a current issue on campus, they always try to spin it positively. But I think it's really important to be critical again of our past history and where we are and where we're going. So, I challenge them to think more critically and not to think that the negative is the most important thing. But if they want to grow as people, as a movement then we have to be really, really critical of our past and the errors that we've made so that we don't recreate those moving forward. So, making sure that we're not just looking away when [mistakes] happen but making sure that we're holding each other accountable. [Also], there's a lot of important work but how do we make sure that our students are having fun and enjoying the experience. We want them to be able to find who they are; being authentic with themselves and not looking at comparing themselves to their peers from an academic and career perspective but also from personal identity.

What Henry shared resonates with Gloria, which prompted her to speak next.

Authenticity, joy and meaning. I always think about that when I'm prompted to talk about core values because there are a lot of things in this world trying to either mold me into something I'm not, trying to steal my joy, or trying to trick me into thinking this meaning making process is something else, you know? So, I always try to return to what does it mean for me to show up as true as I possibly can, because I know that's fluid, it shifts every day. I try to be who I am and unapologetic about it. I try to encourage others to, particularly students, to do the same so that they feel like they too can live joyfully, they too can live meaningfully, and do the things that matter to them most, and be in spaces where they feel valued and heard, and spend time with the people in their life that make them feel valued and heard. Because at the end of the day, it's like to me, that's what matters the most. But it's easier said than done. It's hard to show up as your truest self in a lot of spaces because of all the things I've already shared.

Sally chimed in next.

One of our core values is community building and how we do that with intentional conversation, by intentional collaboration, and then also trying to bridge when students feel like, they're so different than me that I think I should avoid them. But the other thing is about our sense of belonging, not only with the space but when you're outside the space. Do you feel that you belong to the greater university? I do think that sometimes my younger naivete and idealism kind of led me into thinking like, ok I'm just going to do it. But I've done this [work] because I believe in our community and I feel like I've had a lot of great mentors along the way. I don't take any of this like I did it myself. I did it in community and I've been very fortunate that I had that. I hope that I'm intentional in making sure that people understand that the [cultural] center is not me. I'm just part of a cog in the wheel that has helped build it, but that it is really about students. And it really goes back to the eight students who were the victims of the 1987 racial incident. I know that I'm being looked at from a very different microscope than

everybody else and I can't afford to screw this up, right? And so, the other ideal that I go by is that I usually am just asking for forgiveness instead of permission without doing anything that is illegal or unethical. But I just felt that I really needed to prove something, personally and professionally. And if I didn't, who would be the loser? I would be the loser certainly, but the students would be the loser. The people I didn't want to disappoint the most were those eight victims because it was on their back that we were building something, and I didn't want that to be for nothing.

Miguel along with everyone else smiled and nodded in agreement with Sally.

Miguel then went on to say,

I think part of it too comes with this role and transition, just a fear of letting folks down knowing that I've learned so much from the people around me to be able to exercise my own level of agency to make the space how I feel that it should be. But also, being able to take myself out of this equation. I want to make sure that the space is always about centering the community and not necessarily centering one person, so I think that's where that fear comes from. I think knowing my own values and being able to translate that in a way that feels authentic with the students around me. There is a mural in the [cultural] center I work at now that students fought for to be able to put their own character in the space and they wanted to show a history of the [Asian American] community. I think living my core values looks at thinking about how we're consistently telling our stories and that's what they're doing. Now it's a constant reminder of where we have been and where we need to go. The power of a narrative can go a long way. I think especially in this space where I'm at now where it was started because of a fraternity racist incident. I don't think that's a common narrative that a lot of current students know. I think I'm still learning about our [Filipino American] history and who has impacted us and who has contributed things. Isang bagsak, which is the idea that like, if one person were to make a movement it might not be felt but [when] we all do a collective movement that's what gets felt. I think that's very poetic because I think in many ways me doing this work alone might not be felt but knowing that there are others of us doing this work and advocating for who we want to advocate for, I think that means something and that there will be a wave of movement. I think about the ways that I want to make sure that as I'm climbing, I'm lifting other people and other narratives and other things as an Asian American Sapro. I guess that does feel like solitary work but at the same time I feel empowered by the idea of community and what that means. The people I met doing this work have become part of my community of care, my community of support and family and friends to me. I was fortunate enough to work in a space and place where it was more than just like a colleague relationship. It was like we care about each other in ways that was very important. At the Asian American [Cultural] Center I try to be most of who I am. I say most just because I know there are some boundaries I have. My students I work with I add them on my Instagram because the way I portray and live my life is not anything that's different from how when I interact with them. I think I live a very congruent persona and I'm open about challenges and failures on my social media. I

think that's part of it too, is to not only see and celebrate the moments where we're succeeding but it's to really look and live through the moments where we need support and that might have been challenging. To have a brown person as a Director of an Asian American [Cultural] Center and shift from traditional East Asian narratives, I think that's something I wanted to show; the diversity and intentionality behind seeing who are our students leaders in the space and who gets access to the space. So, I think I'm challenging the community to grow in a variety of ways. But then overall just how do I center that with things that also matter the most to me. It should be a [cultural] center and work that's approached with love but then also I think should be fun too, [as Henry had mentioned earlier]. I think we should celebrate the things that are worth celebrating, like our existence is worth celebrating in a space that is a historically white institution.

Kiran then jumped in next and says,

I think when it came to living out core values I was really proud of [programs where] we were able to bring together seemingly disparate sorts of events and programs and build an integrated experience. So, for me I like collaboration, I like when things integrate, [and] when people get to have new experiences. There's a lot of intentionality behind how we make it feel warm and familial in terms of living out core values in a lot of ways. Just building genuine community and being able to connect with different folks all over. I do also want to share that these [Asian American Cultural Center] events I feel really great about, I'm really proud of them, they were wonderful and a point of frustration that I have about them is that me and the other staff member in my office were the people who planned everything. These events that are marketed as family events that really rely on the labor of women to put everything together but that was to be framed as a community program and where honestly, its men doing most of the talking. And so, I think that for me was also a point of thinking about what our cultural values are and what are we recreating when we say that this is a family thing and whose labor are we relying on. I think that is a critical part of experience when we talk about cultural centers, right? It's like in a lot of ways there was integration and yet there was still like stuff under the surface that felt like it wasn't necessarily an authentic representation and ideal of culture.

Gloria resonated with what Kiran said and went on to share her related sentiments.

[I hear you, Kiran]. I want to bring about really positive and radical social change within my spheres of influence but sometimes I feel so jaded. Sometimes I just feel so like damn, why am I working so hard to do all these things and be present and be an activist and educator and all this stuff? It's like the stupid people who are senior level administrators don't care or don't want to do anything positive, they don't want to challenge anything. They're just greedy and selfish so why am I investing all this time? Then I think about will I stay in higher education? The answer to that is I don't know. A year ago, I think I would've been like yes, I'm going to stay in higher education. But the difference a year makes. Now I'm kind of like is it worth it? Is it worth sacrificing my mental wellness to be in these spaces where I could care so much yet still be so belittled?

I think at the end of the day, bottom line, whether it's higher ed, if I'm faculty, a practitioner or whatever, that it's still meaningful for me.

Words of Advice

As our time together began to draw to a close, I posed the following question to the group, "Knowing what you know now, what would your advice be to younger versions of yourselves who are entering this work as AACC SAPros?"

"Run!," Gloria said jokingly. She then went on to say,

I would tell her that it's going to be hard, however, you always have to find the people who love you to remind you of what's important and who you are and to remember to keep the faith. That imposter syndrome is real because there are a lot of forces in this world, forces meaning people and other things, that are going to challenge you to be complacent or they're going to silence you or gaslight you so you have to find your people. More than anything I believe it because you can do a million presentations and build up your CV and get a doctorate and all this stuff but at the end of the day, if you don't have your community and you don't have your village, it's just going to be hard. Harder than it already is hard. Because the people who really care are going to be the ones who are going to love you unconditionally but also be real. It's going to suck sometimes but you and all of your ancestors can do this.

Henry smiled appreciatively of Gloria's sentiments and shared his thoughts next.

I thought I had to be perfect. So, I would tell myself to be more vulnerable and understand that a ton of mistakes are going to be made that you can control and can't control. But that you're going to grow a lot both personally and professionally and that the relationships are something that will carry on forever. To be honest I don't remember all the programs and things I did when I was in graduate school, but I remember the relationships formed. It's almost as important as the work.

Sally was next to speak.

To be patient. I was just recently telling a graduate student who was interviewing me for a class and asked, "is the [Asian American Cultural] Center where you want it to be after all these years?" I said in retrospect, my initial vision of the [cultural] center did not get realized until 10 years later. I was really frustrated because I just felt like something's not working here. I realized that you had to build a community that felt like it was a community. You're working at an institution of higher education where things don't go as quickly as you want them to. And then you've got to deal with institutional racism,

blatant racism, you know? And now with implicit bias and microaggressions and all of that informs and influences your work. So, I do think it's about patience. It only took me twenty-six years to be patient with myself. If I can leave you with any lesson here, is that just be patient. And that this is messy. This is messy, personally and professionally.

Miguel proceeded to share his advice.

A lot of messages I got when I was younger in the field was to not pigeonhole yourself and like don't be the Asian American person doing Asian American work. But I realized now I would tell myself, that's a privilege to be in this situation where I am. There are, I don't know the exact number like forty-six maybe Asian American standalone [cultural] centers and to have one of forty-six positions across 4000 colleges and universities, that makes us like basically unicorns, right? Like I think it's a privilege to do this work and to want to be able to dedicate if I could get it if I could just have my whole career just be this I would not see it as a deficit. Where others had concerns that I was staying in similar work. They're like, well I think it's going to be hard for you to get other jobs too since your resume is just Asian American [cultural] centers. And I'm like, that's not a deficit on me. That's a deficit on that institution that they're not able to see past that. And I got a lot of that interviewing for when I was trying to transition between my last position and this one. Well, how do you support like other students? I'm like, Asian American students are students. So, I think I would tell myself my younger self to not listen to that. Yes, I think I definitely carried that a lot throughout my first job search where I was like I didn't want to be in an Asian American [cultural] center actually. My first job search, I heavily looked at student activities work and my position at UNE was the only position in equity and justice for that because I was like, you can't be just a person of color doing person of color work. But then I realized that it's just BS and that's a lot of like internalized racism and you know white supremacy, which [are] things I did not want to admit back then. But I would tell myself no, you can do this work and you'll be fine.

Kiran resonated with what Miguel shared. She went on to say,

I would tell myself to not get so sucked into mainstream higher ed stuff, listen to my gut, to not be afraid to seek different types of mentorship, and to speak up when something doesn't feel good. That listen to my gut thing is something I think about a lot. I wonder what it would have been like where I know I had weird feelings when I did my on-campus for this AACC job and I wonder what would have happened if I listened to them a little bit more. I don't regret anything but I think that just like trust myself, listen to myself, do what I know in my heart to be the right things but to get consultation along the way and to not lose myself within the world of higher ed and student affairs. Just to keep perspective that there's a whole other world out there, there's other people, there's family and friends, and it's so easy to just get sucked into this world.

“Thank you for naming that, Kiran” I say in response. “In a position that can be so all consuming and easily justified as being for a greater cause when we are overworked, that perspective is so important to maintain.” To that end, I went on to talk about how having a spouse who is not in the field of higher education has helped me maintain a more balanced perspective.

Continuing in this Work

In our remaining moments together, everyone was invited to share any final thoughts or reflections.

Henry commented.

It’s hard to look at it, the work that we do and the impact from a legacy standpoint because we’re just doing it now, so we just don’t know the impact that I’ll have in the long term. But it’s really being able to continue on that foundation that was originally built of the first few people and then doing our part to add on. So, I try to reflect as much as I can because I know our work is really, really important. It’s building on what the [cultural] center offers but I know that in the future, in ten years the [cultural] center is going to be in a much better place than we are today. Just doing our part to contribute to that.

Kiran chimed in next.

It took me a long time to get the pictures [for the photo project] back to you and I realized that part of that might have been around some avoidance around things. I just left my position within this calendar year and there was a lot to process about the experience that I hadn’t. So, the experience of reflecting on it, thinking through pictures, looking at it was I think cathartic in some ways. I was very aware that the pictures I picked were different than what I would have picked had I done this project when I was still in the job and I think that was a moment for me I needed to really think about. I loved my time working in the center and there were a lot of negative moments in that time as well. I feel like most of the pictures I picked were happy, positive ones and I don’t know if they are actually an accurate representation of my time working there. I mean generally I look back on my time working there as positive but there are definitely points of pain and frustration that I’ve brought with me as well and that was surprising. But I think that that’s all part of my own journey and growth process.

What Kiran shared prompted Miguel to go next.

What keeps me in this work now is knowing that there are so many students that need to have their experiences centered. I think part of [it too is that] I'm continually learning and being challenged by the experiences I have that I still feel like there is that benefit because I was at a point earlier this year where I was going to rage quit my job without any job prospects afterwards. I think part of it is also being able to recognize your own value and your own worth and what's worth your time to make you want to stay. I'm coming from just [having] gone to a conference and seeing the amount of mediocre people who get to be in this work, and awarded for it. And I have been thinking about what is really going to keep me in this work, even though I am deeply committed to students, equity and justice. I think about something that like Joliana had said in a conversation that we were having, it's like if you weren't in this role, do these guiding principles still matter to you? And I think it would. And I think part of that, too, is like thinking about, you know, my friend and former supervisor, like just up and left the job. And I know she's still committed to all these things. And knowing that, I think even though I'm in month four, like not thinking of leaving but also at the same time one of the questions I always get, even though it's meant as a joke, they're like, "Oh, are you going to stay in your role for 33 years too, like the previous Director?" And I don't know what they mean by that, because if you knew her, she was deeply committed to this space and deeply committed to the work. But at the same time, like knowing the harm that higher education does to black and brown bodies, I was just like, how can this be like a forever role when we know that these places were never built for us? And I always think about that in my role as a practitioner and then in my role as a doctoral student and thinking about, we were never meant to be here. So, do we, like, persist and resist or do we just tap out? So, I think that's one of the things that I'm always consistently thinking about.

Upon hearing this, Sally immediately jumped in to say,

So as tired as I am, Miguel, I'm going to give you a piece of advice. Because I am one of those people who stayed for a long time, and for me it is about keeping your eye on the prize. And yeah, these spaces are not meant for us to be here and I think that's what spurs me on to do this work. Ok, they don't want me here but guess what? They're going to have to live with me. And that is what I try to empower my students with, who just finished doing their cultural identity projects last night in class and it was really teary. We always end up crying together collectively over somebody's project. And when we finished, a student said, this is really poignant, he said there is so much trauma in this room. And I said, let's process that, right? And it turned out to be a discussion about why our community has to speak out, and why they have to be present and do this hard work. You have to find your mentors, you have to find your support and we have to be willing to show up every day and pushback and that takes a lot of energy. And everybody finds their level of self-appreciation and purpose very differently. But yeah, I just want to thank all of you for the work that you're doing in whatever capacity that you're doing it, because I think it just reminds the institution that we're here and we're not going to blow away even if they want to blow us away. And so, you know, I'm here if you ever want to chat.

We all exchanged affirming non-verbals in response to Sally's sentiments.

Gloria then went on to say,

I just want to thank all of you for being in this space together this morning and I also want to thank future Dr. Yee for taking on this type of project, because I remember in the earlier conversations, we did talk about how no one really captures our stories as staff and educators who live and breathe this work. So, I'm so appreciative of you and this space. Because I think on the outside sometimes folks will look at what we do as like really glamorous and there aren't that many [cultural] centers like this in the U.S. so like, woah, it's so cool that we get to be in this space. And even as an undergrad, right like, you know, I loved my experience at Yankee University and hence why I entered this work. But being from like student and then onto the other side it's like, what is happening? You know as we were talking just a few moments ago it's a hot mess everywhere. So, I'm just thankful to all of you and like the people that I know that I can truly trust versus like having to teeter around conversations with people that I wish I could trust. Sometimes it's just so hard to keep fighting the good fight when it's so exhausting and painful and traumatizing. But I also am reminded and also am hopeful and optimistic because of people like all of you. So, you know, I'm thankful that our field has us, even though, as Miguel was saying, there's a lot of really mediocre and or below average white people who get to be in decision making roles. And so, I'm hopeful that like we're just going to push them all out at some point and so it could be us so that we could really transform the field. So, yeah, I'm just really thankful to all of you.

On that note, I wrapped the dialogue up by conveying my deep sense of gratitude to everyone for their time, support and trust. While we could have easily stayed in conversation for much longer, the demands of our day tugged at us, but we walked away heartened by the opportunity to hold space with one another.

Summary

The preceding semi-fictional community dialogue among AACC SAs featured them in a conversation with others at institutions located along the East Coast. Given that many felt their racialized experiences were often made invisible and their pain silenced, the AACC SAs were eager to connect with others who could relate in on a deeper level. The trust that was given resulted in a space for open and honest reflection about their joys, hopes, disappointments, hurts, uncertainties as well as shared commitment to equity, justice, and the Asian American

community. The final chapter of my dissertation presents conclusions, implications and recommendations based on my findings. The final chapter is a culmination of my interpretations and the AACCC SAPros' experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this final chapter, I present a summary of the study, key findings and how they are germane to the conceptual framework for this study, Asian American critical consciousness development. I then draw practical implications and recommendations for further research based on the AACCC SAsPros' experiences. I conclude with my final thoughts and reflections on the research study.

Summary of the Study

Overview of the Problem

Institutionalized efforts to increasing access to higher education for historically marginalized student populations brings experiences, outlooks, and ideas that have potential to enrich the educational experiences of all students. However, scholars point out that the “managerial focus on diversity works to individuate differences and conceal the continuation of systemic inequalities” within higher education institutions (Ahmed, 2012, p. 53). This is evident from the racism and negative racialized experiences Asian American college students continue to experience even while their enrollment numbers and presence on campus has increased. Cultural centers have emerged as a unique intervention to matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within higher education.

Specifically, AACCCs have a unique history, purpose, and role in advocating for racially minoritized students on U.S. college and university campuses since they were first established

close to 50 years ago, yet little is known about the Asian American SAPros who held full-time positions in these spaces. Although U.S. higher education institutions are more than willing to tout their commitment to DEI by pointing to the existence of Race-specific, Multicultural or Intercultural Centers on their campus, research shows that they are often under resourced, underfunded and understaffed (Shek, 2016). Further inquiry into the lived experiences of AACC SAPros is needed to better understand the racialized experiences of Asian Americans who actively engage in DEI efforts within higher education. These insights prove valuable in creating a more nuanced understanding of AACC SAPros who are often positioned as mentors, advisors, and role models to students. It could also better position higher education institutions to better support AACC SAPros in fulfilling their roles on campus in a more sustainable fashion.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The invisible and often silenced voices of AACC SAPros can and should inform higher education institutions' approach to DEI efforts. Further inquiry into the lived experiences of AACC SAPros is needed to better understand who they are as people, both within their unique work context within the AACC and beyond. How Asian American SAPros are racialized in distinct ways within higher education, and what it reveals about the critical consciousness development process of Asian Americans, is crucial to the advancement of racial justice within higher education and beyond given our positionality within the U.S. racial hierarchy.

This study aimed to describe the lived experiences of Asian American SAPros currently working in AACCs on college campuses in the United States to expand research on Asian American experiences, in general, and specifically in higher education, as well as shed light on Asian American critical consciousness development processes. The following research questions guided me throughout the process:

1. What are the lived experiences of university-based AACC SAPros?
2. What do AACC SAPros identify as key influences on their critical consciousness development?
3. Which strategies do AACC SAPros employ that contribute to the cultivation of Asian American college students' critical consciousness, if any?

Framework and Analysis

In creating this portrait of AACC SAPros' in response to research question one, it was vital for me to use their own words to introduce them and describe their lived experiences because their voices should be central to the portrayal of their own lives. Their words and experiences are critical in developing a rich understanding of their distinctive experiences. Too often identities and experiences of Asian Americans are lumped into a monolithic group. Thus, I included many, and such lengthy quotations because I wanted to honor the AACC SAPros' ways of naming and making meaning of the complexities and nuances of their lived experiences. Aside from the initial round of introductions, I deliberately kept my voice out of the semi-fictional community dialogue because as the researcher my voice is already evident in the construction and framing of the AACC SAPros' portrait itself.

In my intentional search for goodness, as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) suggested, I also chose to highlight who AACC SAPros' are through their lived experiences rather than a deficit perspective of the ways in which they are not a fulfilment of problematic stereotypes. In doing so, I came to see that while AACC SAPros did not speak directly to the third research question, it did not mean that they were not cultivating the critical consciousness of Asian American college students' but rather their responses to the first and second research

questions revealed the little known barriers and opportunities to do so within higher education. Additionally, using words spoken by the AACC SAPros' in an informal and trusted conversational setting to convey their lived experiences not only makes it more accessible to a broader audience beyond higher education but also created opportunities for readers to draw their own interpretations that incorporates their unique perspective. As a portraitist, I worked to construct something that closely resembled how the AACC SAPros' described their experiences. I want them and you as readers to be able to see the AACC SAPros' and how they chose to show themselves to me in their rich complexities.

Major Findings

Relational understandings of self. Although the AACC SAPro participants were raised in different parts of the U.S. and had distinct life journeys to where they are currently, what was consistently evident is the key role people around them played in shaping how they understood themselves, both personally and professionally. Whether seeking, building, thriving in, or struggling with, relationships within community was a critical element in developing a stronger sense of self.

As AACC SAPros, we only began to develop an awareness and understanding of the Asian American identity upon exposure to communities within a higher education setting. Prior to that, our ethnic identities were either salient or not depending on who was part of our family and the community's they chose to be a part of. Often it was attending college as an undergraduate student or in Henry's case it was as a high school student attending an Asian American student conference organized by college students. It was in these community settings that Asian American issues were explored in a more directed manner, be it through Asian

American or ethnic studies coursework, involvement in an Asian American organization or the AACC.

Whether AACC SAs' grew up familiar and deeply immersed in their ethnic identities or not, it was the encounters, exchanges, and relationships formed with other Asian Americans outside of their family that drove their Asian American identity development journey at every stage of life. Henry, Gloria and Kiran, for example, directly attributed the community and experiences gained from their involvement at an AACC as an undergraduate student as a key source of their critical consciousness development. Sally, Miguel and Kiran talked about community organizing and mentorship among Asian Americans within these spaces also playing a key role in their personal development as students as well as AACC SAs. This reflects Osajima's (2007) research, which identified the social aspect to breaking isolation and spurring Asian American critical consciousness development.

Furthermore, Kiran's articulation of her identity development as a person of color first coming out of the need to survive a regional environment unlike the one she grew up in extends Osajima's (2007) research to highlight the critical role communal experiences of racial marginalization with other POCs play in furthering Asian American critical consciousness development. The predominantly white environment where Kiran was one of the only Asian Americans in her graduate program led her to seek other POCs for support and community, which resulted in her POC identity becoming more salient. This mirrored my own experience as a graduate student too. It also reinforces Chan's (2017) research that geographical factors "encompass social and cultural contexts that uniquely construct race and racial identity" (p. 1015).

A new factor that had not been highlighted in prior research is the role negative experiences within a community play in an AACC SAs' understanding of self and their critical consciousness development. For Gloria, Kiran, and Sally, the harmful experiences that occurred with other Asian American and colleagues of color at their institution helped them develop a more complex understanding of their racialized identities albeit at the cost of their wellbeing. Nevertheless, there is no question that the communities we establish over the course of our lives as AACC SAs provide opportunities for growth at the various intersections of our identities like gender, sexuality, class, ability and so forth that further develops our critical consciousness as Asian Americans.

Enduring growth. AACC SAs are often perceived as experts on Asian American identity, culture and DEI matters more broadly due to the significant amount of time and energy invested in building knowledge around these subject matters. It was an assumption I too held when designing the third research question for this study, thinking that AACC SAs developed a critical consciousness as a result of prior lived experiences that had all four elements highlighted in Osajima's (2007) research, which led them to seeing their profession as the ideal avenue and consequently influenced current praxis. What this AACC SA portrait revealed, however, is that the process as I had envisioned was only half of the full picture. Expanding Brofenbrenner's (1977, 1999) theory of development as bi-directional, the process is not one that occurs in a unidirectional manner but rather one with an infinite feedback loop, which I attempt to depict in Figure 1.



Figure 1. AACC SAPro

Based on what study participants shared, it became evident that while their lived experiences prior to assuming the AACC SAPro position played a key role in informing who they are and their praxis, the knowledge gained through scholarly pursuits and resultant strategies employed to effect positive social change continued to influence their understanding of themselves and their critical consciousness development. This in turn adds to each individual AACC SAPros' existing meaning making lens to form a more complex one that then manifests in their personal and professional lives that result in new experiences that further hones who they are.

All the participants revealed various ways in which their lived experiences as an AACC SAPro have had significant personal impact in both positive and negative ways. Because of how closely tied our work is to our personal identities, it is impossible to have a clear delineation between the personal and professional, which makes it messy as Sally put it. It permanently alters the AACC SAPros' lives in ways that lasts beyond our time in the position, as many of the values that drive our work are embodied in our personal lives too.

We are who we got. While AACCs and race-specific cultural centers have existed at each of our respective higher education institutions for at least a decade, a widely held sentiment among the AACC SAPros was about how the racialized experiences of Asian Americans on campus are continually glossed over or erased altogether. While we would like more of our

focus as AACC SAs to be on building up a strong pan-Asian community and institutional support for all marginalized communities within higher education, the enduring perception of Asian Americans as the model minority, separate from other communities of color, continues to plague our efforts and keeps us in the position of always having to justify what we are not rather than being able to show who we are in a multifaceted way. Not to mention, the tendency to conflate numerical overrepresentation of Asian Americans in higher education with the end of discrimination not only masks the complexities of race and the racialized experiences of Asian Americans but also pits us against other POC communities (Lee, 2008). Both these logics combined have resulted in problematic policies and resource distribution that serve to maintain institutional whiteness and a hegemonic concept of racial equity.

As Asian Americans who actively engage in racial justice and equity work within higher education institutions, the recurring dynamic of not only seeing our students' racialized experiences downplayed or dismissed, but also our own, creates a sense of isolation and fatigue that wears us down as AACC SAs over the years. Feelings of tiredness, jadedness, bitterness, and sadness vocalized during our community dialogue are consistent with indicators of social justice fatigue, which is defined as the physical, mental and/or emotional toll often experienced by agents of an institution of higher education who are advocating for social change (Furr, 2018). To preserve their mental and emotional wellness, Kiran and Gloria made the difficult decision to leave their AACC SA positions after working within an abusive institutional environment for an extended period of time without anyone in power willing to advocate for them. Sally, on the other hand, has experienced adverse effects on her physical health and family life as a result of the countless hours she dedicated to building up the AACC to where it is today yet did not receive additional institutional support or recognition until decades later.

Rarely do people in positions outside of the cultural center setting fully grasp the breadth and depth of the work as well as day-to-day challenges faced on various fronts by AACC SAs. At higher education institutions that have employed the “lip service” model of diversity (Ahmed, 2012), where institutionalized diversity efforts are valued on a superficial level, AACC SAs have even found themselves silenced, surveilled, vilified, and gaslit by white and SAs of color who were hired to supervise and supposedly support them in their roles. Rather than give AACC SAs the agency to achieve outcomes that further equity and justice within higher education, institutional surveillance and engagement in the politics of appeasement result in only superficial diversity work being possible. Thus, the community dialogue revealed how we often relied on AACC SAs at other higher education institutions and/or SAs who also advocate for equity and social justice within our own institution for allyship and survival. For those who were newer to their AACC SA role or institution, energy is expended on sussing out which of our colleagues could be trusted to have our backs as we often found ourselves having to walk a fine line as institutional agents when students’ needs and demands were not in agreement with institutional priorities and interests. Community spaces, like our AACC SA community dialogue, facilitated through virtual and physical channels have been critical to AACC SAs feeling fully seen, affirmed, and re-inspired to keep doing the hard work.

Labor of love. Something that might be confounding to many who come to learn about these AACC SAs’ lived experiences within their institutions is what compelled them to choose such a challenging position in the first place. It was easy for me to perceive from constructing the AACC SA portrait a palpable sense of how deeply they loved and valued the work they got to do with Asian American students and the community more broadly. Not solely because of the fulfillment that it brought each of them but a reverence each held for the

interconnected nature of our community's existence and a strong sense of responsibility towards past, present, and future generations of Asian Americans that motivated them as AACC SAPros. Understanding first-hand the power of representation, the AACC SAPros were often willing to go above and beyond to support the community, resulting in hours invested and sacrifices made that often go unseen and unappreciated, especially by those who hold institutional power.

From my analysis of the photos the AACC SAPros' submitted as part of the study, the one thing that stood out was the deliberate decision each person made independently to exclude images that represented the most challenging, hurtful, and dark moments of their experience within their role. While they spoke about it during the interview it was the joy, meaning and personal growth experienced that the AACC SAPros wanted to center. Driven by love, authenticity, community, solidarity, advocacy and meaning, the AACC SAPros' manifest these values in the work by building a genuine intersectional coalition in community and thinking of ways to mobilize it for advancing a greater social good. Teaching and learning Asian American history as well as celebrating the Asian American community by bringing visibility to our rich stories and perspectives to challenge the master narrative are other ways in which this values-driven work has been done. The gratitude received from individuals who have shared what a positive impact the AACC SAPros left, undoubtedly fuels them to keep pushing forward.

Conclusions

Practical Implications

As depicted in the AACC SAPro portrait, toxic work environments coupled with failure and negligence by those who hold institutional power to meaningfully address abusive treatment of individuals in these positions are pervasive features that Asian Americans employed into these AACC positions face, especially at PWIs. If higher education institutions are committed to

ensuring their AACC and cultural center spaces more broadly are effective resources for students, staff, faculty, and alumni, they must be willing to proactively recognize and effectively resolve issues when they are brought to light. The willingness to be honest when mistakes are made and to hold individuals responsible for perpetuating hostile climates accountable rather than prioritizing optics is critical in making this work sustainable and not losing talented AACC SAsPros.

In that same vein, just as many PWIs are committed to diversifying the student body they must be similarly committed to providing additional resources and support to their AACC SAsPros so they can realistically keep up with the growing demands that come with an increased presence of Asian American students on campus without compromising their own wellbeing. Given the distinct racialized experiences of AACC SAsPros, those hired to supervise them should receive ongoing training and development to know how to effectively represent and advocate for Asian American issues to others within the senior administration. Recognizing the isolation Asian American SAsPros often face when engaging in race-based work within higher education institutions, it is important that consistent access to Asian American community spaces that allow for critical racial identity conversations through formal and informal channels are prioritized. Lastly, given the little that is known about AACC SAsPros and the work they do, it will be important to keep in mind the skills and qualities needed for the work they do when looking to hire someone rather than assuming someone is suited for the role solely because of how they racially identify.

Future Research

I recommend that future research prioritizes studying the lived experience of AACC SAsPros and their critical consciousness development further. Given that this study focused on a

small group of AACC SAPros working at higher education institutions along the East Coast, expanding the scope of this study to include a broader swath of experiences from across the U.S. would offer insights into how regional and institutional environments might factor into the lived experiences and critical consciousness development of Asian Americans doing race-based work. Conducting a similar study with Asian American SAPros working in multicultural and intercultural centers would also be worth exploring.

Taken together, all this information could prove incredibly instructive in determining how Asian Americans can be better supported and effectively engaged to advance DEI efforts that move beyond the Black-white racial binary frame. Their life stories can further inform understandings of Asian Americans and their racialized experiences within higher education while also serving as a source of inspiration of aspiring and current Asian American SAPros.

Final Thoughts and Reflections

My motivation for conducting this research and presenting the data as a community dialogue among AACC SAPros was to bring together and hold space with others who belong to this small, unique network of AACCs. I have feelings of deep respect and admiration for AACC SAPros because of the positive impact their work has had on me as well as the communities around them hence I wanted to show the field of higher education what made AACC SAPros a vital yet often under-appreciated partner in DEI efforts. Additionally, working in an AACC myself, I relished the opportunity to bring our voices together in hopes of finding the emotional support and connection I have been lacking at my current institution.

To my surprise and relief, all my AACC SAPro participants felt appreciative for the opportunity to reflect on and process their experiences with others in a similar position who could relate in a genuine way. A luxury we are rarely afforded given the frantic pace during the

academic year. In a space free from the context of institutional politics with people who had our trust, each spoke unreservedly to the doubts, hurts, and challenges they have carried but rarely ever show to others for fear of negative repercussions. Engaging in conversation together, weaving together our stories and experiences was powerful because it validated a reality, my reality, their reality, our reality.

As I scanned through all the data collected and decided on what should get included in the final portrait, I noticed how acutely aware I was of having to negotiate the tension between honoring the AACC SAPros' lived experiences and the very present surveillance culture we are subjected to as institutional agents. Over the course of this process I have felt anger, inspiration, fear, and love for the AACC SAPros and all the experiences they have entrusted me with. While readers will still not be able to fully grasp every intricate detail of these AACC SAPros' lives, I hope this portrait gives you a glimpse into their multi-layered, complex, interconnected, and simply beautiful struggle to live meaningfully and authentically.

APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT EMAIL COMMUNICATION

E-mail Subject: *Seeking Study Participants: Asian American Cultural Center SAPros*

Dear [insert first name],

I hope this email finds you well. I am a doctoral student in Loyola University Chicago's Higher Education program and I am facilitating a study on the experiences of Asian American student affairs professionals, more specifically those who have worked or currently working within the cultural center setting.

My hope is to find Asian American SAPros in an Asian American Cultural Center who are interested in sharing their experiences, how it might have led them to and shows up in their work.

Participants will first be provided with instructions to complete a participant-generated photo project, which will then be followed up by an individual interview where we will talk about the meaning behind each image captured. Following the interview, participants will be invited to join an online community dialogue.

Please contact me at jyee@luc.edu if you have questions and/or would like more information about the study. If you are interested in being a participant in this study, please complete this demographic survey here [insert URL] by [date]. I will reach out to folks who complete the survey by [date] to provide instructions about next steps. Thank you for considering and I look forward to connecting with you soon.

Sincerely,

Joliana Yee

Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education Program at Loyola University Chicago
Director, Asian American Cultural Center at Yale University

APPENDIX B
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Bridging the In Between: A Portrait of Asian American Student Affairs Professionals in Asian American Cultural Centers

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Joliana Yee, (a doctoral student in Loyola University Chicago's Higher Education Program) for a dissertation. Joliana is working under the supervision of Dra. Aurora Chang in the School of Education's Higher Education Program at Loyola University of Chicago.

You have volunteered to participate in this study because you identify as an Asian American student affairs professional who has recently worked or is currently working in an Asian American cultural center on a college campus. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to better understand the lived experiences of Asian American student affairs professionals and how it might shape their approach to work in the Asian American cultural center. Additionally, this study will allow participants the opportunity to reflect on their personal experiences and approach to their work in the Asian American cultural center.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in:

- Demographic Survey: I will ask you to complete a demographic survey either in-person or electronically via email depending on what is most convenient.
- Photo Project: You will be asked to complete a participant-generated photo project over the span of 14 days according to instructions that will be provided to you upon receiving your consent to participate.
- Interview: I will conduct an individual interview with you that will last approximately 60-90 minutes to discuss the meaning behind the photos from your photo project, your lived experiences and how it might have influence on your work as an Asian American student affairs professional in the Asian American cultural center. Depending on what is most convenient for you, the interview will either take place in-person or video call and will be audio recorded.
- Discussion Group: You will be invited to consider participating in a virtual hangout with other Asian American student affairs professionals who work in an Asian American cultural center that will last approximately 60 minutes.

Risks/Benefits:

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

Participants will benefit from having an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences as well as potentially connect with other Asian American student affairs professionals who can relate. The results of this study could also help others better understand the Asian American student affairs professionals who work in Asian American cultural centers, which could inform future practice.

Confidentiality:

- Your name, institutional affiliation and any other identifying information will be withheld from all information collected throughout this research study. However, you will pick a pseudonym that will be used in place of your real name to maintain privacy and confidentiality.
- If you choose images to submit as part of your photo project that include you, then I will not be able to keep your identity confidential. Similarly, should you choose to participate in the discussion group, your identity will no longer be confidential to the other participants.
- All data and recordings associated with this research will be stored on a password-protected shared folder accessible only by the researcher (Joliana Yee), her faculty advisor (Dra. Aurora Chang) and a transcriber. All these materials will be destroyed at the conclusion of this research study.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate or not will have no effect on our existing personal or professional relationship.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Joliana Yee at jyee@luc.edu or the faculty sponsor, Dra. Aurora Chang at achang2@luc.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given copy of this form to keep for your records.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX C
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Name:

Pseudonym:

Pronoun(s) (if any):

Age:

Sex assigned at birth:

Gender:

Highest level of education (degree and major):

Most recent higher education institution affiliation:

Institution pseudonym:

How would/do you describe your race and ethnicity? What does that mean to you?

How would/do you describe yourself? What aspects of your identity are most salient for you at this point in your life?

How long have you worked in higher education? How long have you been in your current or most recent full-time position?

What is your current or most recent full-time position on a college campus? What are/were your primary responsibilities?

APPENDIX D
PHOTO PROJECT PROTOCOL

Please use the following guidelines and questions to guide you in completing your photo project. Answer the following questions by taking photos and/or selecting from previously captured images over the course of two weeks that illustrate your reflections to the following questions:

- What sources (people, experiences, spaces) have played a significant role in the meaning making of your race/racial identity as an Asian American?
- How does being an Asian American student affairs professional on your campus make you feel?
- What does living out your core values through your work at the Asian American Cultural Center look like for you?

The photos you capture can be set on or off campus. You are encouraged to be as creative and abstract as you would like in your photography to capture emotions, ideas, and observations of your experiences, from the everyday ordinary occurrences to the exciting, satisfying, frustrating, and anything in between.

Upload 10 to 15 photos of your choice to a shared folder and share it with me. We will then schedule a time for an individual interview during which we will discuss your experience of participating in this photo project, the meaning of each photo you chose for this project and other questions related to your experiences as an Asian American student affairs professional.

Your identity will be kept anonymous in order to maintain respect for your privacy unless you make the choice to include photos that makes you identifiable. Similarly, if you choose to include photos that make other people identifiable, it is your responsibility to seek their consent. The photos you submit for this project will not be used beyond the dissertation that this project is intended for.

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for making time to speak with me today. As we discussed, this interview is part of my dissertation study at Loyola University Chicago. My faculty advisor, Dra. Aurora Chang, can be reached at achang2@luc.edu. The interview will be used for the purpose of informing my work as a doctoral student in the School of Education's Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago. It will last between 60 to 90 minutes. Your participation in this interview today is completely voluntary, and you can stop the interview at any time. You can also let me know if there are any questions you would rather not answer. During the interview, we will talk about your photo project and your experiences as an Asian American student affairs professional working in an Asian American Cultural Center.

This conversation is strictly confidential and care will be taken to exclude all names and identifying characteristics from the data. To facilitate my note-taking, I would like your permission to audio-record our conversation so that I can more accurately reflect your thoughts and experiences shared during our conversation today. We are going to begin the interview. The interview should last about 60-90 minutes. Do you have questions before we begin?

Introduction

1. What was it like for you to participate in this photo project?
2. Did you notice anything new that you had not before participating in this project?

Asian American Identity

3. Tell me about the meaning behind each photo you selected in response to the first question posed as part of the photo project.
4. What feelings do these people, experiences and/or spaces evoke in you?
5. Are there other sources of influence you were unable to represent in your photos that you would like to talk about?

Student Affairs Professional

6. Tell me about the meaning behind each photo you selected in response to the second question posed as part of the photo project.
7. What led you to pursue a career in student affairs?

8. How have your professional experiences thus far influenced how you understand your race/racial identity, if at all?

Asian American Cultural Center

9. Tell me about the meaning behind each photo you selected in response to the third question posed as part of the photo project.
10. What elements do you see as crucial to effectively engaging Asian American college students in alignment with the AACCC's mission through your work?
11. In what ways does your understanding of your own race/racial identity inform your praxis as an AACCC student affairs professional?
12. Describe the campus where you work and how your role at the AACCC positions you within this institutional context.

Conclusion

13. If you could talk to a younger you as they are starting off in an AACCC SAPro role, what would you tell them?
14. Is there anything else that you would like to share about yourself or your experiences that you have not shared with me yet?

Thank you very much for sharing your experiences with me. I will email a copy of your interview transcript so you may review it. If you notice any discrepancies in the transcript from what you recall sharing during your interview, please make note of them and send it back to me by [discuss specific date about two weeks after it is received].

Additionally, if you are interested in participating in an online community dialogue with other AACCC SAsPros, please let me know.

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

As a participant in this study, you are invited to participate in an hour-long online community dialogue during which I will conduct participant-observation. The conversation will focus on power, privilege, as well as our various positionalities within and outside of higher education. This conversation will seek to explore some of the following questions:

- How does whiteness, class privilege, and other forms of dominance impact our community?
- What sustains you and keeps you motivated to move your work at the AACCC forward?
- What does progress look like for you as an Asian American student affairs professional working in an AACCC?

Date:

Description of my feelings:

Questions

- What are the main issues or themes that stood out from the online community dialogue?
- Summarize the information gathered from this conversation that connects to the research questions.
- Was there anything that struck me as salient, interesting, illuminating or important from this conversation?

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VITA

Since 2018, Dr. Yee has served as an Assistant Dean for Yale College and Director of the Asian American Cultural Center at Yale University. While she was a full-time doctoral student, Dr. Yee held the Associate Editor and Editor in Chief positions for the Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs housed at Loyola University Chicago. Prior to pursuing her doctorate, Dr. Yee was a Residence Hall Director at the University of Connecticut. During that time, she was selected to receive the Division of Student Affairs Outstanding New Staff of the Year award in 2012. A member of NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education since 2010, Dr. Yee currently serves as the Asian Pacific Islander Knowledge Community National Co-Chair.

Dr. Yee's research focuses on issues of diversity, equity, and justice in higher education. In 2013, Dr. Yee was awarded a research grant from the UMass Boston's Asian American Student Success Program to conduct the first-ever assessment of the University of Connecticut's Asian American Cultural Center 18-year old Asiantation Mentoring Program. Her current research interests are on Asian Americans' racialized experiences, their critical consciousness development and social justice activism within the higher education context.

Dr. Yee earned a Ph.D. in higher education at Loyola University Chicago. She earned an M.S.Ed. in higher education and student affairs at Indiana University and a B.A. in political science and economics at Miami University.