

**EXPLORING LEADERSHIP SELF-EFFICACY IN FIRST- AND SECOND-  
GENERATION EAST ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN**

by

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## **Abstract**

The underrepresentation of East Asian American women in senior leadership roles persists despite high educational attainment and professional experiences, yet limited research has examined how these leaders develop and sustain leadership self-efficacy within culturally and generationally complex organizational contexts. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership roles describe their leadership self-efficacy and how cultural and generational influences shape its development over time. The theoretical framework was grounded in social cognitive theory, with a focus on leadership self-efficacy as a contextually constructed belief system. The study examined how participants perceived their leadership confidence, how that confidence evolved with experience, and how cultural and generational factors influenced the meaning of leadership. A general qualitative inquiry design was used, with purposive and snowball sampling to recruit 9 East Asian women in senior leadership roles. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using iterative coding, categorical analysis, and thematic synthesis. Findings indicated that leadership self-efficacy developed gradually through responsibility, persistence, and experiential learning rather than through early validation, and was sustained internally despite limited external recognition. Participants described leadership confidence as grounded in relational influence, ethical responsibility, and cultural integration rather than visibility or self-promotion, extending leadership self-efficacy theory by demonstrating that efficacy was maintained independently of perceived legitimacy. Conclusions highlighted the need for leadership development approaches that recognize culturally grounded expressions of leadership confidence and support identity-aligned leadership pathways. The implications for

social change include increased awareness of how culturally responsive leadership development, organizational practices, and evaluation systems can better support East Asian American women leaders, promote equity in leadership advancement, and foster more inclusive and sustainable leadership environments.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, whose unwavering support made both the beginning and completion of this work possible.

First, I dedicate this work to my mother. Her journey as an immigrant, arriving in this country with little more than determination and a belief in education, instilled in me perseverance and an indomitable spirit. Her example shaped my commitment to learning and resilience, which continues to guide me. I also dedicate this work to my daughter, who inspires everything I do and reminds me daily that this work matters. To my husband, whose steady presence, late-night encouragement, and belief in me carried me through the most demanding moments in this process. To my three sisters, whose insight, perspective, and honest feedback strengthened both this work and my confidence in it. And to my stepchildren, whose support and understanding helped me throughout this journey.

This work is also dedicated to the women who came before me, particularly Asian American women whose courage and persistence created opportunities that did not previously exist. As a second-generation Korean American woman, I stand on foundations built through their efforts. This dedication is offered in gratitude for their perseverance and in service to those who will follow.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership self-efficacy (LSE) (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986; Hannah et al., 2008), confidence in one's capacity to lead effectively, is influential in advancing marginalized groups' professional careers. Among these groups, East Asian American women face notable barriers to entering and thriving in top leadership positions (Sy et al., 2010; Rosette, 2016). Cultural stereotypes (Akutagawa, 2013; Kim & Kim, 2023; Zhou & Lee, 2017) such as the "model minority" myth (Pettersen, 1966; Wu, 2015) and generational nuances (Rumbaut, 2004; Sakamoto & Hsu, 2020) can significantly affect their opportunities, leadership identities, and self-efficacy beliefs. This study aimed to explore how first- and second-generation (First and Second Generation, n.d.; Trevelyan et al., 2016) East Asian American women in senior leadership roles described their LSE. It explored how cultural heritage and generational experience intersected to shape their journeys. This research used a general qualitative inquiry (GQI) approach, which is especially appropriate for collecting and analyzing participants' opinions, attitudes, and reflections (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Percy et al., 2015). By capturing these women's perspectives in depth, this study addressed to bridge gaps in academic literature and organizational practice, informing leaders of leadership development strategies. This chapter provides the background and need for the study, articulates the problem and purpose, explains the study's significance, presents the research question, and offers an overview of the qualitative research design, assumptions, and limitations.

## **Background of the Study**

The underrepresentation of East Asian American women (Council of National Psychological Associations for the Advancement of Ethnic Minority Interests [CNPAAEMI], 2016) in senior leadership roles is a persistent issue within corporate and organizational contexts in the United States (Gündemir et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2022). Although leadership has been extensively studied, the experiences of East Asian American women remain relatively underexplored (Lawson et al., 2022; Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017). Although Asian Americans are among the most rapidly growing ethnic groups in the nation (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021), the obstacles they face remain underexamined (Lewis & Han, 2024; Zhu, 2024). The “bamboo ceiling” (Hyun, 2005; Lu, 2022, 2024a, 2024b) metaphor underscores both the structural and cultural barriers that impede their rise to executive ranks, a dynamic further compounded by the model minority stereotype (Kiang et al., 2017; Padgett et al., 2020; Sy et al., 2017; Wu, 2015). This stereotype portrays Asian Americans as studious and technically proficient, lacking the perceived assertiveness and charisma often associated with effective leadership (Mouton et al., 2020). This study is grounded in LSE theory (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986), which emphasizes individuals’ beliefs in their capacity to perform leadership behaviors effectively. This theoretical framework provides a foundation for examining how cultural and generational influences shape leadership confidence and experiences among East Asian American women and is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Additionally, generational differences can influence how East Asian American women perceive leadership norms and expectations (Rumbaut, 2004). First-generation women often navigate linguistic and cultural adaptations, while second-generation women may find

themselves balancing familial and cultural values with Western organizational norms (Tu & Okazaki, 2021). LSE, the confidence in leading, delegating, and decision-making, becomes crucial in overcoming these interconnected barriers (Block et al., 2011; Burris et al., 2013). However, the current literature tends to group all Asian Americans together without adequately distinguishing between East Asian ethnicities or exploring differences among first- and second-generation immigrants (Block et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2021; Kodama & Dugan, 2019).

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that first- and second-generation East Asian American women remain underrepresented (Lu, 2024a, 2024b) in senior leadership roles, and existing literature offers limited insight into how they develop and experience leadership self-efficacy. Despite growing awareness of the barriers Asian American professionals face, current literature and leadership development initiatives often neglect the nuances of Asian American women's experiences, particularly across generational lines (Block et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2021). Existing studies categorized Asian Americans as a single demographic or focused exclusively on broad structural issues, such as the "bamboo ceiling" (Chen et al., 2013; Hyun, 2005; Lu, 2022, 2024a, 2024b), without sufficiently examining how specific cultural identities and general backgrounds shape LSE (Akutagawa, 2013; Burris et al., 2013). Consequently, scholarly work that disaggregates data by ethnicity, gender, and immigrant generation is scarce. This leaves a significant gap in understanding how first- and second-generation East Asian American women come to perceive, develop, and exercise leadership capabilities (Adewale et al., 2019; Dwyer, 2019; McCormick et al., 2002).

Furthermore, organizational strategies often fail to provide targeted approaches that recognize the interplay of cultural heritage, generational identity, and workplace expectations (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021; Gündemir et al., 2018). Studies generally do not account for how first-generation women navigate linguistic adaptation and cultural transitions differently from second-generation women, who may grapple with reconciling Western leadership norms with familial and cultural pressures (Tu & Okazaki, 2021). Focusing on the subjective reflections and attitudes of first- and second-generation East Asian American women leaders offers the depth of insight needed to inform more culturally responsive and generationally accommodating leadership development programs.

These gaps reveal a persistent disconnect between documented structural barriers and a nuanced understanding of how first- and second-generation East Asian American women develop and experience LSE. Existing research points to structural biases, including the “bamboo ceiling” and cultural stereotypes that thwart advancement (Hyun, 2005; Kim et al., 2022; Lu, 2022, 2024a, 2024b; Zhou & Lee, 2017). Yet few studies provide an in-depth look at how these women interpret their leadership abilities and navigate generational or cultural influences in the workplace (Burris et al., 2013; Gündemir et al., 2018; Sakamoto & Hsu, 2020; Tu & Okazaki, 2021).

Organizations often deploy leadership development initiatives that do not address the unique needs (Gündemir et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2021) of East Asian American women, further widening the gap in leadership opportunities and representation. Leaders, human resource professionals, and researchers lack a nuanced understanding of how these women perceive their

leadership potential and how cultural heritage and generational experiences might share that perception.

Addressing this gap is essential for advancing leadership research and informing organizational practice. While prior studies have documented structural and cultural barriers such as the bamboo ceiling, less is known about how East Asian American women themselves understand and develop LSE within these contexts. A qualitative approach is particularly well-suited to this inquiry, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, interpretations, and meaning-making processes. By centering participants' voices, this study contributes nuanced insight into leadership development that is often overlooked in quantitatively driven research. While existing research has documented structural and cultural barriers such as the bamboo ceiling, it offers limited insight into how first- and second-generation East Asian American women themselves experience and develop LSE within organizational contexts.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the study was to explore how first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership roles describe their LSE and how cultural and generational influences shape those experiences. To address the need for nuanced, culturally informed leadership development, this study examined the views, attitudes, and experiences that shape LSE among East Asian American women in senior roles. It explored and documented lived experiences related to LSE and examined the role of generational influences in shaping leadership confidence among this population. Through this focus, the study sought to deepen understanding of LSE within culturally and generationally diverse organizational contexts.

## **Research Question**

The research question (RQ) that guided this study was: How do first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership roles describe their LSE, and what influences do cultural and generational factors have on their leadership experiences?

This research question directly addresses the identified gap in the literature by exploring how first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership roles experience and conceptualize LSE.

## **Study Rationale**

This study was needed to address the identified gaps in the literature, which is essential for advancing leadership research and informing organizational practice. While prior studies have documented structural and cultural barriers such as the bamboo ceiling, less is known about how East Asian American women themselves understand and develop LSE within these contexts. A qualitative approach is particularly well-suited to this inquiry, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, interpretations, and meaning-making processes. By centering participants' voices, this study contributes nuanced insight into leadership development that is often overlooked in quantitatively driven research.

## **Significance of the Study**

This research has implications for multiple audiences, including organizational leaders, policymakers, scholars, and East Asian American women in leadership roles. Understanding how cultural and generational influences shape LSE provided valuable insights for both academic and professional settings. While previous research has examined the barriers to leadership for Asian Americans broadly, there remains a gap in understanding how first- and second-generation East

Asian American women experience and develop leadership confidence within the complexities of cultural expectations, workplace norms, and systemic biases (Block et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2021). Addressing this gap is essential to improving leadership development strategies and ensuring that organizations can fully leverage this group's talent and leadership potential.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extended LSE theory by examining how cultural identity and generational experiences shape leadership confidence among East Asian American women. By situating LSE within culturally and relationally informed contexts, the study challenges assumptions embedded in predominantly Western, individualistic models of leadership development. These insights contribute to a more inclusive understanding of LSE across diverse populations.

For organizational leaders and policymakers, the findings of this study informed the development of policies and leadership training programs that acknowledge the specific challenges faced by East Asian American women in senior roles. Existing leadership frameworks often fail to consider the cultural nuances that shape self-perceptions of leadership, particularly for women who have been socialized in East Asian cultures that emphasize humility, collectivism, and deference to authority, qualities that may not align with dominant Western leadership models (Sakamoto & Hsu, 2020; Shen et al., 2014). As a result, many East Asian American women may find themselves overlooked for leadership roles, not due to a lack of competence but because their leadership style does not fit conventional expectations (Hyun, 2005; Lu, 2022).

From a scholarly perspective, this research contributed to the growing body of knowledge on LSE by focusing on the experiences of an underrepresented (Lu, 2024a, 2024b) and often

overlooked group. Although LSE theory (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986) has been widely explored in the context of traditional leadership development, research has yet to fully account for the ways in which cultural background and generational identity influence self-efficacy beliefs among minority leaders (Bobbio & Manganelli, 2014; Ruggs et al., 2023). Additionally, existing research on Asian American leadership tends to generalize across ethnic groups despite substantial variations among East, South, and Southeast Asian cultures (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021; United States Census Bureau, n.d.). By examining the LSE of first- and second-generation East Asian Americans, this study filled a critical gap in the literature and enhanced theoretical understanding of how individuals from underrepresented groups cultivated leadership confidence in the face of cultural and structural barriers.

For East Asian American women in leadership, this research provided an opportunity to document and amplify their voices, offering a platform to share their lived experiences, strategies, and resilience in navigating leadership roles (Chin, 2013; Kim & Choi, 2019; Kim et al., 2022; Lewis et al., 2018). Historically, research on Asian American leadership experiences has focused more on external barriers, such as discrimination and lack of mentorship, rather than on the internal psychological factors, such as self-efficacy, that influence leadership development (Kim et al., 2021; Kodama & Dugan, 2019). By centering the narratives and perspectives of these women, this study can offer practical insights for current and aspiring leaders seeking to overcome imposter syndrome, assert their leadership abilities, and develop confidence in professional settings (Gündemir et al., 2019). Additionally, the findings may provide valuable guidance for mentorship and sponsorship programs. Thus, helping emerging leaders identify

effective strategies for navigating workplace challenges and leveraging cultural strengths in leadership roles (Reynolds et al., 2018).

By bridging the gap between research and practice, the study informed scholarly discussions and the organizational and personal strategies that support the next generation of Asian American women leaders. Understanding the complex ways in which culture, gender, and generation intersect in shaping leadership identity and confidence is imperative for fostering more inclusive and effective leadership development models that recognize and support the diverse ways in which leaders emerge and thrive.

### **Identified Gap**

Although existing research has documented structural and cultural barriers that limit the advancement of Asian Americans into senior leadership roles, including the bamboo ceiling and leadership stereotypes, fewer studies have examined how East Asian American women themselves understand and develop LSE within these contexts. Much of the current literature aggregates Asian Americans into a single category or focuses on external barriers to advancement, offering limited insight into the internal meaning-making processes through which leadership confidence is formed and sustained. There is a lack of qualitative research that disaggregates by generation and explores how first- and second-generation East Asian American women interpret their leadership abilities as they navigate cultural expectations, gendered norms, and organizational environments. This gap limits understanding of how LSE developed in this population and constrains scholars' and practitioners' ability to design culturally and generationally responsive leadership development approaches.

## Overview of the Methodology

This study used a qualitative methodological approach to explore how first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership roles describe their LSE and the influences shaping those experiences. A general qualitative inquiry (GQI) approach captured participants' subjective reflections (Grant & Osanloo, 2014; Kostere & Kostere, 2022; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Percy et al., 2015) and meaning-making related to LSE within cultural and generational contexts (Lawson et al., 2022). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and were analyzed thematically to identify patterns across participants' experiences. The methodological approach and analytic procedures are described in detail later in this chapter.

### Definitions of Terms

***Asian American.*** Refers to people with origins from the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent who live in the United States of America (Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017).

***Bamboo ceiling.*** The invisible barrier that hinders Asian Americans from rising to senior leadership roles due to stereotypes or biases (Hyun, 2005; Lu, 2022; 2024a, 2024b).

***East Asia.*** China, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, and Taiwan (Wu, 2015).

***First-generation.*** Foreign-born individuals who immigrated to the United States and were raised with cultural influences from their countries of origin (Tu & Okazaki, 2021).

***Leadership self-efficacy.*** Refers to an individual's belief in their ability to lead effectively (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986).

***Model minority.*** A stereotype portraying Asian Americans as highly intelligent, hardworking, and submissive, which may implicitly conflict with perceptions of leadership potential (Hyun, 2005; Kiang et al., 2017; Lu, 2022; Pettersen, 1966; Wu, 2015).

***Second-generation.*** United States-born individuals with at least one foreign-born parent navigating between American and Asian cultural identities (Tu & Okazaki, 2021).

***Senior leader.*** An individual in a high-ranking organizational position responsible for driving strategy, making critical decisions, and overseeing key business functions, including C-suite executives, President, Vice-President, and directors (Lawson et al., 2022).

### **Methodological Approach**

The GQI approach was used to explore the perspectives, attitudes, and interpretations (Carter, 2016; Patton, 2015) of first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership roles. GQI was selected as the methodological approach because it is well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena where participants' perspectives and meaning-making are central to the inquiry (Patton, 2015; Percy et al., 2015). Unlike more prescriptive qualitative methodologies, GQI allowed methodological flexibility while maintaining analytic rigor, making it appropriate for examining LSE as it is experienced and interpreted within specific cultural and generational contexts. This approach supported the study's aim to capture nuanced leadership narratives without constraining participants' experiences within a single theoretical or methodological tradition. Rather than focusing on measurement and statistical analysis, as is typical in quantitative methodologies, GQI enables a deep exploration of participants' subjective experiences. This captures the nuances of LSE as shaped by cultural identity, generational status, and professional environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given the

limited research specifically addressing how East Asian American women leaders perceive their leadership abilities, a qualitative approach provides the necessary depth to understand how they conceptualize, enact, and sustain their LSE. This methodology is well-suited to addressing the research question: *How do first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership roles describe their leadership self-efficacy, and what influences do cultural and generational factors have on their leadership experiences?*

To achieve rich and meaningful insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine first- and second-generation East Asian American women who hold senior leadership roles in various industries. This sample size (Mason, 2010) aligned with qualitative research best practices and allowed for a diverse yet manageable dataset. The sample supported thematic structuration while still capturing the breadth of experiences across different organizational contexts (Mason, 2010; Percy et al., 2015). Interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom to enable access to a geographically diverse participant pool while maintaining flexibility and convenience for high-level executives (deVilliers et al., 2022). Each interview was recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically. This ensured that emergent patterns and perspectives were rigorously examined and contextualized within the broader literature on LSE, cultural identity, and generational dynamics (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A purposive sampling strategy was implemented to select participants who met the inclusion criteria (Patton, 2015; Percy et al., 2015). This approach focused on individuals with first-hand experience in navigating leadership roles and allowed the study to capture insights from those who have entered and sustained careers in executive leadership (Patton, 2015). By

targeting participants with direct professional experience, this sampling method increased the likelihood of gathering meaningful and relevant perspectives on LSE.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method for exploring LSE's complex and multidimensional nature. This approach offered the flexibility to explore themes in depth, allowing participants to expand on their experiences, clarify key insights, and highlight unique leaders' challenges that may not emerge in a rigidly structured interview format (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview protocol included open-ended questions focused on leadership identity, perceptions of self-efficacy, cultural influences, generational differences, and professional obstacles encountered throughout their careers.

A thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify patterns and recurring themes within participants' responses. This process involved becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, identifying thematic patterns, and interpreting findings. A reflective researcher journal was maintained throughout the study to enhance credibility and trustworthiness to track biases, assumptions, and emerging insights (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Patton, 2015). Additionally, member-checking procedures were implemented to allow participants to review preliminary findings and provide feedback. This ensured their experiences were accurately represented. This iterative validation process strengthened the rigor and reliability of the study. The study's findings are grounded in participants' lived experiences rather than researcher interpretations alone.

### **Assumptions**

There were several key assumptions made for this study. First, participants are assumed to respond truthfully and in good faith to offer a candid reflection on their LSE. Given the

sensitive nature of leadership identity and workplace challenges, participants may have felt pressure to present themselves in a particular way. However, assurances of confidentiality and the semi-structured interview format encouraged openness. Secondly, this study assumed that language proficiency would not hinder the ability of the participants to express their thoughts on LSE. While many first-generation participants may have learned English as a second language, they are assumed to have sufficient fluency to articulate their leadership experiences. In cases where language presents a challenge, additional accommodations such as clarifying questions and extended response time were offered to ensure participants can fully engage with the interview process (CNPAAEMI, 2016; National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPH], 1979). Lastly, the assumption is that GQI is an appropriate methodological approach for capturing the complexity and richness of LSE among East Asian American women. Given the lack of existing research on this specific population, a qualitative approach emphasizing participant narratives, reflections, and interpretations is deemed most suitable for addressing the research question.

### **Limitations**

One of the primary limitations of this study was the transferability of its findings to broader populations. Because the sample is limited to East Asian American women in senior leadership roles, the findings may not be generalizable to other Asian subgroups or professionals in different organizational contexts. To mitigate this limitation, thick descriptions and detailed participant narratives enhanced the applicability of findings by providing rich insights into LSE across cultural and generational backgrounds (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Another potential limitation was sample bias. Since participation in the study was voluntary, individuals

who chose to participate may already possess high levels of self-efficacy, or many have experienced particularly salient leadership challenges. This could lead to an overrepresentation of certain viewpoints. To mitigate this limitation, efforts were made to recruit a diverse sample from multiple industries and seek varied perspectives on leadership development.

### **Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

This chapter introduced the study, including the background, problem statement, purpose, research questions, significance, and conceptual framework. It also included an overview of the methodology, key definitions, assumptions, and limitations. Chapter 2 examines existing research on LSE, barriers to leadership advancement for East Asian American professionals, and generational influences on leadership identity. Key theoretical frameworks are discussed, and gaps in the literature are identified to establish the need for the study. Chapter 3 outlines the GQI framework to detail the study's sampling strategies, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the participants' interviews, organized by key thematic patterns. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the broader implications of the research for leadership theory and practice, acknowledges study limitations, and offers recommendations for future research and leadership development initiatives.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The persistent underrepresentation of East Asian American women in senior leadership roles has drawn attention to the complex interplay of cultural, generational, and structural influences on leadership development. While Asian Americans are often perceived as academically and professionally successful, this perception, commonly known as the “model minority” stereotype (Kiang et al., 2017; Kim & Kim, 2023; Lewis & Han, 2024; Ma & Shi, 2025; Mouton et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2019; Padgett et al., 2020; Pettersen, 1966; Walton & Truong, 2023; Wu, 2014; Zhou & Bankston, 2020), can obscure the nuanced challenges faced by East Asian women in ascending to executive positions (Kim et al., 2021). These challenges are compounded by the “bamboo ceiling” (Hyun, 2005; Lu, 2022, 2024a, 2024b;), a metaphor for systemic and cultural barriers that hinder advancement despite high qualifications and performance (Chin, 2013; Marvin et al., 2014; Nguyen et al., 2019). LSE (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986), the belief in one’s capacity to lead effectively, is a key factor in overcoming such barriers, yet little is known about how this construct is shaped by cultural expectations and generational status (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986; Ruggs et al., 2023).

This study explored how first- and second-generation (Immigrant Initiative at Harvard [IIH], n.d.) East Asian American women in senior leadership roles described their LSE and the factors that influenced its development. While research has begun to explore Asian American leadership broadly, existing studies often treat Asian Americans as a monolithic group and fail to differentiate by gender, ethnicity, or generational background (Lu, 2024a, 2024b). A critical review of the current literature was needed to understand the unique intersections of race, gender,

immigration history, and leadership identity. This chapter outlines the criteria used in the literature search, introduces the theoretical framework guiding this study, and presents an organized review and synthesis of the relevant research on leadership self-efficacy (LSE), cultural influences, generational identity, structural barriers, and leadership development for East Asian American women.

### **Methods of Searching**

The Capella University library offered access to a wide range of academic databases to support the literature review process. To identify relevant literature for this study, targeted and exploratory search terms were used across databases such as EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, ProQuest, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SAGE Journals Online, and Summon. The search terms were selected to align closely with the core constructs of the study, including LSE, Asian American identity, cultural values, and gendered experiences in the leadership context. Primary keywords included *leadership self-efficacy*, independently and with identity-specific terms such as *Asian American* and *Asian American women*. Additional searches used phrases such as *women in leadership*, *East Asian*, *cultural values*, and *Confucianism leadership* to capture culturally grounded understandings of leadership development. Then, terms like *cultural dissonance*, *bicultural identity*, *first-generation immigrant*, and *second-generation immigrant* were used to explore identity-based and sociocultural dynamics. Structural barriers and stereotype-related challenges were examined through searches incorporating terms like *model minority*, *bamboo ceiling*, and *stereotype threat*. Finally, search terms included *mentorship*, *leadership networks*, *peer mentoring*, and *executive women* to investigate developmental support and resilience. Boolean operators and combinations of terms were used to refine the search results, and filters

such as publication date (within the last seven years), peer-review status, and population characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity) were applied to ensure the relevance and currency of the sources. This iterative approach allowed continuous refinement as themes and gaps emerged during the review process. Searches continued until conceptual saturation was reached, at which point additional sources did not introduce substantively new themes relevant to LSE, cultural identity, or generational influences. Sources were included if they were peer-reviewed and focused on LSE, leadership development, or leadership experiences relevant to Asian American populations, gender, or cultural identity; sources not centered on leadership or organizational contexts were excluded, with seminal works retained when conceptually foundational.

Beyond traditional academic databases, supplemental sources were reviewed to contextualize the lived experiences of East Asian American women in leadership roles. These included government and policy reports, reputable organizational surveys, and demographic research. For example, data from the Pew Research Center (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021) and the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (n.d.) highlighted trends in representation and workplace barriers for Asian Americans. These sources provided critical background on broader systemic and cultural dynamics, particularly those relevant to generational differences, minority stress, and leadership development pathways in American organizational contexts.

### **Theoretical Framework for the Current Study**

This study was grounded in Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1986) social cognitive theory (SCT), with a particular emphasis on the construct of self-efficacy, as well as its domain-specific application to leadership, known as leadership self-efficacy (LSE). These frameworks provided

the conceptual lens through which the leadership experiences of first- and second-generation East Asian American women were examined. The intersection of social culture identity and leadership development is further informed by scholarship on race, gender, and generational dynamics. Together, these theories establish a foundation for exploring how cultural values, systemic expectations, and internal beliefs shape LSE within this underrepresented population.

### **Self-Efficacy Theory**

Bandura (1977, 1982, 1986) defined self-efficacy as one's belief in one's ability to influence events that affect one's life. According to SCT, self-efficacy develops through four primary sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological or emotional states. These sources interact dynamically with individual behavior, personal cognition, and environmental contexts. The strength and interpretation of these sources can be moderated by sociocultural experience, systemic inequities, and the visibility of role models in one's environment. For marginalized or underrepresented (Lu, 2024a, 2024b) individuals, self-efficacy beliefs are particularly susceptible to contextual and cultural factors reinforcing one's perceived capacity to succeed (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986). In this study, self-efficacy is the foundational psychological construct underlying how East Asian American women interpret and navigate leadership.

Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986) provided a foundation for examining how LSE develops through lived experience, social feedback, and self-reflection. In the context of this study, this framework supports exploration of how East Asian American women interpret their leadership capabilities over time, particularly as they navigate culturally shaped expectations, role models, and organizational environments.

## **Leadership Self-Efficacy Theory**

LSE is a construct derived from Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1986) theory and refers specifically to an individual's belief in their ability to lead others effectively (McCormick et al., 2002; Dwyer, 2019). LSE is an essential predictor of leader emergence, resilience, motivation, and performance. It influences whether individuals pursue leadership roles and how persistently and effectively they navigate leadership challenges. Women have been shown to experience lower LSE in contexts that reinforce gendered leadership stereotypes (Duchek et al., 2022; Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018; Lee et al., 2022). Hannah et al. (2008) extended the LSE construct by emphasizing that leadership efficacy should be understood across multiple levels—individual, team, and collective—highlighting that a leader's belief in their capacity is often shaped by their perceptions of the resources, systems, and people available to support their efforts. Bobbio and Manganelli (2014) contributed a multidimensional scale, the *leadership self-efficacy scale*, for measuring LSE. This study's LSE framework allowed a deeper exploration of how East Asian American women evaluated their readiness and confidence to lead, particularly with sociocultural barriers such as the bamboo ceiling (Hyun, 2005; Lu, 2022, 2024a, 2024b;) and implicit bias (Burriss et al., 2013).

## **Intersection of Race, Gender, and Generational Identity**

While self-efficacy theory explains how personal beliefs are shaped, it does not fully account for how they intersect with racial, cultural, or generational identity. Therefore, this study also draws on frameworks that examine the identity-based experiences of underrepresented leaders. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) provides a critical lens for understanding how multiple social identities, such as race, gender, and immigrant generational status,

compound to shape leadership experiences. This framework reviewed how East Asian American women's leadership self-perceptions are not formed in isolation but are dynamically influenced by internalized cultural values and external perceptions within organizational settings.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) informs this study by offering a lens for understanding how leadership self-perception is shaped by group membership and social positioning. For East Asian American women in leadership roles, this framework helps explain how gender, race, and professional identity intersect to influence confidence, belonging, and perceived legitimacy as leaders.

Ruggs et al. (2023) emphasize that LSE among women of color is uniquely shaped by racialized and gendered socialization, workplace stereotyping, and perceived leadership fit. They argue that women of color encounter distinct development pathways due to compounded societal messages that question their racial belonging and leadership credibility. By adopting a lifespan approach, the authors demonstrate that these messages are internalized early in life and reinforced through systemic barriers in educational, professional, and social environments, ultimately influencing LSE trajectories into adulthood.

The model minority myth (Mouton et al., 2020; Pettersen, 1966), which frames Asian Americans as industrious yet passive, often undermines perceptions of leadership potential. Although frequently misconstrued as a positive stereotype, the model minority myth obscures the heterogeneity within Asian American communities and masks the challenges they face, including exclusion from leadership pipelines. This stereotype contributes to the "bamboo ceiling" (Hyun, 2005; Lu, 2022, 2024a, 2024b) effect, where East Asian Americans are overrepresented in technical roles but underrepresented in executive positions, despite strong academic and

professional credentials (Lewis & Han, 2024; Lu, 2022; Zhu, 2024). For East Asian women, cultural values such as humility, collectivism, and deference to authority may conflict with dominant leadership norms emphasizing assertiveness and visibility (Shen et al., 2014; Tinkler et al., 2019). These value tensions often place East Asian women in a double bind, pressured to perform leadership in ways that contradict cultural upbringing and organizational expectations. As a result, many experience a form of cultural dissonance that affects their leadership identity development and contributes to underestimation by peers and superiors.

Cultural and bicultural identity frameworks are particularly relevant for examining differences between first- and second-generation East Asian American women, as these perspectives illuminate how individuals negotiate cultural norms, intergenerational expectations, and dominant leadership prototypes. These frameworks support the study's focus on how cultural heritage and generational context shape LSE beliefs and leadership meaning-making.

### **Integrated Framework for this Study**

Integrating Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1986) self-efficacy theory with the LSE construct and identity-based perspectives offers a comprehensive lens for analyzing how East Asian American women understand and construct their leadership confidence. Social cognitive theory explains the formation of efficacy beliefs through experience, feedback, and self-reflection, while leader self-efficacy situates those beliefs within leader roles and leader behavior. Identity-based frameworks further illuminate how race, gender, and generational positioning shape the interpretation of leadership experiences within organizational contexts. Together, these conceptually compatible frameworks emphasize the integrated understanding of LSE as both a

psychological belief and a culturally embedded process within a population that has been overlooked and oversimplified in leadership research.

### **Review of the Literature**

LSE is defined as an individual's perceived capability to perform cognitive and behavioral functions necessary to regulate group processes toward achieving desired outcomes (Dwyer, 2019; McCormick et al., 2002). LSE is considered a critical factor in leadership effectiveness. Rooted in Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1986) social cognitive theory, LSE reflects one's belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks associated with leadership roles. These beliefs influence goal-setting behaviors, persistence in the face of adversity, emotional resilience, and decision-making strategies (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986). Consistent with Bandura's self-efficacy framework described earlier in this chapter, LSE is shaped through mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological or emotional states. Vicarious experience, gained by observing others' successful performances, is a critical learning moment that shapes self-efficacy beliefs, particularly in contexts where personal experiences are limited. Verbal persuasions, including encouragement and positive feedback from respected peers and mentors (Le, 2020), further solidify efficacy beliefs. Lastly, physiological states such as anxiety or stress can significantly impact perceived self-efficacy by either impairing or enhancing confidence depending on how individuals interpret their emotional and physiological responses (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986).

Building on Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1986) foundational framework, Adewale et al. (2019) examined the role of LSE in promoting change-oriented behaviors and organizational citizenship within higher education contexts. Their findings indicate that leaders with higher self-

efficacy are more likely to proactively engage in organizational change and demonstrate adaptive strategies. The study further identifies experience as a moderating factor, showing that robust self-efficacy beliefs amplify the effectiveness of more seasoned leaders. These findings clarify the interaction between leadership experience and self-efficacy in shaping leadership behavior.

Bergman et al. (2021) extended research on LSE by differentiating assertiveness-related efficacy from self-control efficacy. Their findings demonstrated that confidence in assertiveness and in making immediate, effective decisions strongly predicted transformational leadership behaviors, such as inspiring and motivating followers. In contrast, self-control efficacy and confidence in maintaining emotional or cognitive composure were less predictive of leadership performance. These results highlight how specific dimensions of LSE may differentially influence leadership effectiveness in high-stakes environments.

Dwyer's (2019) comprehensive literature review clarified the central role of LSE in leadership effectiveness. This synthesis demonstrated consistent positive relationships across diverse performance metrics, indicating that LSE influences individual leader performance and collective team efficacy. Dwyer also discussed critical methodological implications, suggesting that interventions such as mentoring, executive coaching, and cognitive modeling may effectively enhance LSE, in turn, leadership capability and organizational outcomes.

Ruggs et al. (2023) demonstrated how an intersectional analysis of race and gender enhances understanding of LSE. Their work shows that racialized and gendered experiences uniquely shape women's LSE and contribute to distinct developmental trajectories across racial groups. Structural barriers and pervasive stereotypes further constrain the LSE of women of color, underscoring the need for targeted mentorship and structuring leadership opportunities.

This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding the experiences of East Asian American women, whose cultural identity intersects with leadership experiences and self-perceptions.

Bobbio and Manganelli's (2014) multidimensional scale for assessing LSE provides a validated and comprehensive tool for examining leadership capabilities. The scale addresses key leadership dimensions, including initiation, guiding change, effective decision-making, interpersonal management, and group motivation. This approach facilitated precise identification of leadership strengths and areas for development and supports the design of targeted leadership interventions. For Asian American leaders, such nuanced assessment is particularly important, as leadership styles that emphasize harmony, indirect influence, and collective success may be undervalued in traditional leadership evaluations. A multidimensional framework allows for more inclusive and culturally responsive approaches to identifying and developing leadership potential in underrepresented groups.

McCormick et al. (2002) empirically demonstrated a direct correlation between LSE and leadership behavior, showing that higher LSE is associated with increased willingness to assume leadership roles. Their findings also revealed gender disparities, with women reporting lower LSE and fewer leadership experiences than men. These results highlight the influence of societal gender stereotypes on leaders' self-perceptions and developmental opportunities, pointing to the need for targeted interventions to improve leadership diversity and efficacy.

Across these studies, LSE is consistently linked to leader emergence, persistence, and effectiveness, while the mechanisms shaping LSE vary by context and identity. The reviewed literature positions LSE as a central component of effective leadership. Prior research

emphasizes mastery experiences, assertiveness, mentorship, intersectionality, and structured assessments as key dimensions influencing LSE. At the same time, these studies reveal persistent gaps, particularly regarding the differential impact of context, culture, and identity. Further research is needed to examine these dimensions using culturally nuanced and intersectional approaches. Strengthening LSE through targeted interventions, structured opportunities, and organizational support systems is especially important for historically marginalized groups and may contribute to more diverse, resilient, and effective leadership.

### **Asian American Women in Leadership**

Asian American women continue to be underrepresented in senior leadership roles despite high educational attainment (Cao & Zhang, 2024; Lu, 2024a, 2024b; Sakamoto & Hsu, 2020) and professional performance. This pattern challenges the assumption that merit and effort naturally lead to advancement in leadership. Research suggests that the persistent leadership gap is shaped by intersecting racial and gendered expectations, structural barriers, and internalized narratives shaped by both dominant and cultural norms (Kim et al., 2021; Rosette et al., 2016). This section of the literature review examines how Asian American women navigate leadership identity formation, stereotypes, and systemic exclusion, as well as the sources of resilience and support to advance within their organizations.

One explanation for the underrepresentation of Asian American women in leadership is the agentic mismatch (Rosette & Tost, 2010), which refers to the perceived incongruence between stereotypical leader traits and the attributes ascribed to Asian American women. Western leadership ideals often emphasize agentic characteristics such as assertiveness, dominance, and charisma (Koburtay et al., 2019), which conflict with stereotypes portraying

Asian Americans as quiet, compliant, and hardworking (Gündemir et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2022). Kim et al. (2021) found that Asian Canadians reported lower motivation to lead and lower LSE than White Canadians, partly due to internalized beliefs about leadership suitability. These patterns reflect broader dynamics affecting Asian American professionals in the United States.

Research by Rosette et al. (2016) further illuminated the racialized and gendered experiences of Asian American women by distinguishing between agentic deficiency and agentic penalty as separate but distinct biases (Rosette & Tost, 2010). They argue that Asian American women are often perceived as lacking the dominance associated with leadership, even when they demonstrate technical competence. Tinker et al. (2019) found that although Asian American women may experience less backlash for assertiveness than White women, they are still perceived as less fit for leadership, reflecting a form of intersectional invisibility (Mondala-Duncan, 2024).

Gündemir et al. (2018) illustrated how racialized leadership schemas through opportunity structures, noting that Asian American leaders are more likely to be promoted during periods of organizational underperformance and positioned as safe or stabilizing figures rather than visionary changemakers. Liang et al. (2018) similarly show that Asian American women in educational leadership encounter institutional barriers, including cultural expectations, racialized assumptions about authority, and limited access to leadership role models. Together, these findings demonstrate how structural gatekeeping mechanisms restrict Asian American women's access to leadership pathways. Even in organizations that emphasize diversity, reliance on a narrow business case for women's leadership may be insufficient to address these systemic barriers.

Hoobler et al. (2016) caution that linking inclusion to firm performance failed to address systemic inequities or support sustained leadership development. They argue that performance-based justifications for diversity initiatives often overlook the lived experiences of marginalized leaders and do little to change underlying organizational norms. Instead, the authors emphasized the need for organizations to invest in inclusive cultures and identity-affirming leadership models that support long-term development and belonging.

Cultural and generational factors further complicated the leadership landscape for Asian American women. Hong (2025) found that East Asian American clergy women often experience double marginalization rooted in both Confucian (Viengkham et al., 2018) values that emphasize deference and Christian institutional norms that historically excluded women from leadership. Participants described internal struggles around authority and visibility, yet many reframed their leadership through a culturally grounded lens of service, spiritual strength, and authenticity.

Shelton and Wu (2023) examined how Asian American women in corporate settings manage executive presence. Participants shared that the dominant leadership norms, such as self-promotion and assertive communication, often conflicted with their upbringing and preferred leadership styles. Many described using impression management techniques to translate their leadership while maintaining cultural authenticity. However, these adaptations were associated with emotional and cognitive burdens, raising concerns about authenticity and long-term sustainability.

The *Gendered Racial Microaggression Scale*, developed by Keum et al. (2018), provides empirical evidence of how racial and gendered slights reinforce exclusion in professional settings. These subtle, often unconscious communications convey messages that Asian American

women are invisible (Mondala-Duncan, 2024), exotic, or subordinate, and may undercut self-efficacy and confidence. Such experiences may undermine LSE by eroding confidence, increasing vigilance, and reinforcing perceptions of diminished leadership legitimacy.

Kim and Choi (2019) provided insights into how internal traits support leadership-related self-concept. Their study found that curiosity and ethnic identity are key predictors of “career decision self-efficacy among Asian American college students” (p. 35). Ethnic identity was shown to mediate the relationship between curiosity and career decision-making. Individuals actively exploring and embracing their cultural background may be better equipped to navigate career and leadership decision-making. These findings suggest that individuals who actively explore and integrate their cultural background may be better equipped to navigate leadership and career decisions.

Morey et al. (2020) contributed a public health perspective by examining how experiences of discrimination and stress vary by nativity and length of time spent in the United States. Their findings indicate that cumulative stressors and acculturative challenges differ from first- and second-generation individuals, with implications for well-being and identity development. These dynamics are relevant for leadership development, as chronic stress, exposure to discrimination, and access to ethnic affirmation may shape confidence, resilience, and LSE over time.

Meister et al. (2017) introduced the concept of internal identity asymmetry, describing how women leaders feel misrecognized at work due to dissonance between their internal identity and others’ perceptions. Although the study did not focus on race, the findings have clear relevance for Asian American women who navigate gendered leadership expectations alongside

cultural identity conflicts. Such internal misalignment may contribute to psychological strain and constrain risk-taking within leadership roles.

Leadership development also hinged on access to networks, mentors, and inclusive organizational cultures. Prior research indicated that mentoring relationships provided critical opportunities for feedback, modeling, and sponsorship, all of which contribute to leadership learning and advancement. For Asian American women, limited access to informal networks and senior mentors may constrain opportunities to build confidence, visibility, and LSE within an organizational context.

Mavin et al. (2014) highlighted the often-overlooked dynamic in leadership: intra-gender micro-violence, or subtle negative behaviors between women, particularly toward those who diverge from normative gender roles. Their study showed that some senior women engage in distancing behaviors to align with dominant organizational norms. These dynamics can unintentionally reinforce exclusion for women of color and further limit access to supportive leadership relationships.

Derks et al. (2016) expanded on this phenomenon by describing the “queen bee” response, in which senior women distance themselves from junior women as a strategy for maintaining status within male-dominated organizational environments. The authors argue that this behavior is not rooted in individual deficiency but in structural conditions that reward assimilation into dominant norms. Such dynamics may reduce access to mentorship and peer support for women navigating leadership pathways, particularly those from marginalized racial or cultural backgrounds. Collectively, these studies suggested that access to mentorship and

supportive networks plays a central role in shaping LSE by influencing opportunities for master experiences, social validation, and leadership identity development.

Im et al. (2024) offered a counterbalance by exploring the leadership characteristics of successful Asian American nursing leaders. They found that relational intelligence, contextual adaptability, and cultural humility are key leadership strengths, often overlooked in dominant leadership paradigms but highly effective in team-based, values-driven environments. Their work called for a more expansive view of leadership that recognized these strengths as strategic assets rather than cultural anomalies. Leung and Turner (2018) echoed these findings in their study of transformative leadership among Asian American women, emphasizing community-centered, culturally grounded leadership as both a resistance strategy and a model for collective empowerment.

Similarly, Rosette and Tost (2010) suggested that women leaders may be perceived as both agentic and communal under certain conditions, particularly when leadership success is attributed internally and grants them an advantage in leadership evaluations. This finding resonated with Asian American women leaders who often lead through inclusive, collective, and culturally responsive styles that challenge traditional Western prototypes. Finally, Duchek et al. (2022) emphasized resilience as a core leadership competency developed over time. While not specific to race, this research supports the idea that adaptive capacity, self-reflection, and reframing are critical tools for navigating identity-based barriers. These insights aligned with the lived experience of Asian American women leaders who demonstrate high levels of persistence and emotional agility in the face of chronic exclusion and misrecognition.

The literature on Asian American women in leadership emphasized the salience of race, gender, culture, and identity in shaping leadership development, self-efficacy, and visibility. While pervasive stereotypes and structural inequalities limit access to leadership roles, emerging studies also highlighted the strengths and adaptive strategies Asian American women use to redefine leadership on their own terms. By integrating insights from intersectionality, cultural identity theory, and resilience research, this body of work provided a foundation for understanding and supporting the leadership experience of first- and second-generation Asian American women in an organizational context.

### **Cultural Influence on Leadership**

Understanding the LSE of East Asian American women required critically examining the cultural forces that shaped leadership identity, behavior, and confidence. Cultural constructs such as Confucian values, collectivism, gender roles, and intergenerational transmission of expectations profoundly affect how leadership is defined, pursued, and internalized among this population. The following section synthesizes empirical studies exploring the intersection of East Asian cultural values and leadership-related constructs by highlighting culturally specific frameworks that enable and constrain LSE.

Confucianism remains a deeply embedded philosophical system within East Asian societies, shaping social and organizational behavior. Viengkham et al. (2018) conducted a cross-national study that disaggregated Confucian values into three dimensions: relational, pedagogical, and transformative. Then, they demonstrated how these values differentially predicted workforce performance across China, Taiwan, and South Korea. The pedagogical aspect (e.g., self-cultivation through education and discipline) was vital, as it consistently ranked

highest across cultures and significantly predicted motivation for success and accuracy at work. The study challenged monolithic interpretations of Confucianism, thereby illustrating the East Asian individual's navigation of a fluid interplay of tradition and modernity. For East Asian American women, this dynamic cultural heritage may serve as a source of internalized leadership discipline and a pressure to conform to hierarchical expectations that suppress assertive leadership styles.

Similarly, Chou (2024) explored how East Asian ethical leadership pursues idealized, often unattainable, role models rooted in cultural and spiritual ideals (e.g., Confucius, Buddha). While fostering moral clarity and long-term vision, these aspirational standards may also reinforce humility to the point of self-suppression, which can negatively impact the expression of LSE. In this light, leadership is not merely a role, but a moral and philosophical pursuit tied to cultural archetypes. Cultural expectations of humility and perfectionism have direct implications for leadership self-assessment. Cho et al. (2023), in a meta-analysis of East Asian self-ratings of job performance, found a persistent modesty bias whereby East Asian individuals underrate their performance relative to peer or objective assessments. This underestimation, grounded in collectivist norms and avoidance of self-aggrandizement, may obscure actual competence and suppress the development of leadership confidence. Extending this theme, Suh and Flores (2022) identified how socially prescribed perfectionism, shaped by cultural and familial expectations, influences Asian Americans' career experiences. Participants reported internalized fears of failure, leading to overachievement, anxiety, and reluctance to take risks. For East Asian American women, the dual expectations to uphold cultural ideals and succeed in leadership

contexts may lead to cognitive dissonance. This is bolstering competence while undermining perceived efficacy.

A significant body of research emphasized the identity tensions experienced by East Asian Americans as they navigate bicultural spaces. Using narrative inquiry, Lee et al. (2022) explored the experiences of bicultural Asian American women negotiating gender roles across cultural contexts. Their findings revealed conflicting expectations: assertiveness and independence valued in Western leadership versus obedience and relational harmony expected in East Asian cultures. These competing norms generate uncertainty in leadership behavior and hinder the development of a coherent leadership identity. Polenova (2018) examined bicultural women's struggles with belonging and cultural identity, emphasizing the epistemological toll of constantly shifting between cultural scripts. In this negotiation, second-generation women may experience greater freedom to integrate dominant Western leadership ideals but also create cultural dissonance. Huynh et al. (2024) further illuminate the generational context by examining intergenerational trauma among second-generation Southeast Asian Americans. The study found that personal traits and inherited narratives of sacrifice, survival, and silence shaped resilience. This legacy may shape how leadership efficacy is internalized, leading to the understanding that stepping into leadership is both a privilege and a burden.

Cultural values, perceived discrimination, and identity factors significantly shape career decision-making and leadership trajectories among Asian Americans. Kantamneni et al. (2018) demonstrated how collectivism orientations, familial expectations, and systemic barriers influence Asian American career development, often resulting in constrained occupational choices and internalized imitations. Kim and Choe (2019) added that curiosity and a strong

ethnic identity were positively related to career decision-making self-efficacy, suggesting that cultural engagement can be a source of strength in navigating complex career landscapes. Lewis et al. (2018) reinforced the protective role of ethnic identity, finding that it, alongside the meaning of life, predicted career decision-making self-efficacy in Asian American students. These findings collectively emphasize that cultural identity, when positively integrated, can foster career and leadership confidence, especially in environments where Asian Americans are underrepresented or stereotyped.

Beyond individual psychology, structural and social perceptions also shape leadership pathways. Kodama and Dugan (2020) introduced the concept of collective racial esteem. This shows that group-level pride among Asian Americans predicts resilience and leads to self-efficacy. This is a decisive contribution to internalized racism or marginalization, particularly for women whose identities struggle with racial and gendered boundaries. In contrast, Lu (2024) addressed the bamboo ceiling through a creativity stereotype lens, arguing that East Asian Americans are perceived as competent but uncertain, a bias that disqualifies them from traditional roles in innovation-driven environments. This stereotype, grounded in Western conceptions of ideal leadership, systematically excludes East Asian individuals from advancement and contributes to self-doubt in leadership capability. Finally, Tu and Okazaki (2021) called for a redefinition of “career success” through an Asian American lens, encompassing communal impact, familial fidelity, and cultural congruence rather than solely individual status. Their findings support a broader conceptualization of leadership's success for Asian American women, one that aligns with cultural values and fosters authentic self-efficacy.

In summary, cultural frameworks such as Confucianism, collectivism, intergenerational values, and bicultural identity negotiation profoundly shape how East Asian American women conceptualize and enact leadership. These cultural influences offer assets, like discipline, resilience, moral purpose, and constraints, including modesty bias, perfectionistic pressure, and internalized culture conflict. The reviewed literature demonstrates that LSE among East Asian American women cannot be understood apart from the cultural scripts they inherit, negotiate, and sometimes resist. As such, culturally grounded factors must be integrated into any comprehensive understanding of their leadership development. This nuanced understanding laid the groundwork for investigating how first- and second-generation East Asian American women internalize, express, and challenge dominant leadership paradigms in pursuit of self-efficacy and professional advancement.

### **Generational Identity in Leadership**

Generational context plays a significant role in shaping leadership identity, career pathways, and the development of LSE. The literature revealed that two distinct, yet interrelated constructs of “generation” emerged. The first is based on immigration generational status, such as first-generation immigrants and their second-generation United States-born children, and the second refers to age-based generational cohorts, such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z (Chillakuri, 2020). Each offers insight into how cultural, socioeconomic, and developmental factors influence leadership emergence and efficacy, particularly among Asian American women navigating complex cultural and institutional landscapes.

A significant body of scholarship has examined how immigration generational status informs socioeconomic outcomes and occupational attainment (Cao & Zhang, 2024; Sakamoto & Hsu, 2020). Thus, providing a critical foundation for understanding leadership development among first- and second-generation Asian Americans. Contrary to deficit-based models, Sakamoto and Hsu (2020) argued that second-generation Asian Americans do not face systemic occupational disadvantage. They often outperform their white peers in terms of occupational status when educational attainment (Cao & Zhang, 2024; Sakamoto & Hsu, 2020) and field of study are controlled. Their analysis presented the importance of cultural and familial capital in shaping high-status career pathways that may lead to leadership roles. Further challenging prevailing assumptions about “hyper-selectivity.” Sakamoto and Wang (2021) critiqued the argument that second-generation success stems primarily from the class advantage of their immigrant parents. Instead, they contended that cultural factors, such as parental educational expectations, interdependent family structures, and collective orientations to achieve, are more salient across all socioeconomic strata. These cultural influences served as resources and constraints in developing LSE among second-generation individuals. For women, internalized family obligations and cultural definitions of success may simultaneously propel and inhibit leadership aspirations.

Trevelyan et al. (2016) and the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (n.d.) provided empirical grounding for the unique position of second-generation Americans, demonstrating that they tend to have higher educational attainment (Cao & Zhang, 2024; Sakamoto & Hsu, 2020) and income levels than both the first and third generations. This pattern of intergenerational mobility, coupled with cultural continuity, placed second-generation

Asian American women at a critical intersection: they benefit from upward mobility while navigating lingering cultural expectations around gender, obedience, and familial duty that can shape their leadership development. Huang (2021) adds a qualitative perspective by exploring how second-generation Asian American professionals negotiate identity, workplace belonging, and career growth in their early professional years. Her findings revealed that these individuals often confront misalignments between their bicultural identities and dominant workplace norms. Such misalignments can influence the development of LSE, particularly when second-generation professionals must mask cultural identities or feel excluded from informal networks critical to advancement. Complementing this, Ahn et al. (2021) used a socioecological and intersectional lens to explore the gendered racial socialization of second-generation Asian American women. They find that family, peer, and media messages reinforced both affirming and oppressive norms regarding gender, race, and achievement. These formative messages have lasting effects on how women view themselves in leadership roles, shaping their body image, self-esteem, and career confidence. This form of socializing often entails reconciling the pressure to conform to dominant cultural norms while maintaining family obligations and cultural expectations, complicating leadership identity formation.

Parallel to immigration-based generational status, age-based generational cohort theory has been widely applied in leadership research to explain differences in workplace expectations, communication styles, and organizational engagement. Chillakuri (2020) explored the onboarding expectations of Generation Z, identifying key themes such as the need for structured guidance, career development, and relational feedback. While not specific to Asian Americans, this study provided insight into how younger generations expect different leadership and

development experiences. This factor is especially relevant for second-generation Asian American women entering the workforce with bicultural experiences.

Lowe et al. (2020) synthesized research on leadership access across multigenerational workforces and found that perceived differences between generational cohorts are often exaggerated. Many workplace challenges attributed to generational differences are instead better explained by life stages, tenure, and role clarity. Nevertheless, they cautioned against ignoring generational diversity altogether, emphasizing the need for inclusive leadership practice that considers individual developmental experiences alongside group-level patterns. Mehra and Nickerson (2018) offered further nuance by examining communication preferences among generational cohorts in Indian workplaces. They found dissatisfaction with workplace communication is less about technological fluency and more about the organizational communication climate and the degree of mutual generational understanding. This suggests that leadership efficacy across generations is not merely about digital adaptability but also relational and cultural competency. These skills may be powerful among bicultural leaders, such as second-generation Asian American women.

The literature pointed to the necessity of understanding generation as a multidimensional construct. For Asian American women in leadership, immigration and generational status shape identity development, cultural expectations, and educational opportunities. In contrast, age-based generational cohorts inform their workplace values, leadership styles, and expectations for organizational support. Studies like those by Cai (2023), which explore how Asian American women integrate culturally responsive leadership in school settings, demonstrate how these women strategically embody leadership identities that reconcile cultural rootedness and systemic

navigation. These findings aligned with the broader notion that LSE is not merely a function of individual traits or achievements, but a dynamic process shaped by intergenerational narrative, cultural capital, socialization processes, and contextual opportunities. For first- and second-generation East Asian American women, this means negotiating complex terrains of race, gender, and generation as they cultivate and express their leadership identities.

### **Structural Barriers and Stereotypes**

Despite high levels of educational and professional success (Cao & Zhang, 2024; Sakamoto & Hsu, 2020), Asian Americans remain significantly underrepresented in leadership roles across sectors (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021; Lewis & Han, 2024). This paradox, high achievement with low advancement (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021), is often explained through the intersection of racialized stereotypes, institutional exclusion, and cultural dissonance between dominant leadership norms and the behaviors typically associated with Asian American individuals. For East Asian American women, these barriers are further magnified by intersecting racial and gender biases. The following literature review synthesizes current research on the structural and perceptual factors contributing to this leadership gap, emphasizing how stereotypes and systemic exclusion operate to suppress LSE and advancement (Rosette & Tost, 2010; Rosette et al., 2016; Ruggs et al., 2023).

### ***The Model Minority Myth and Its Consequences***

The “model minority” (Pettersen, 1966) stereotype, which portrays Asian Americans as intelligent, hardworking, and academically successful, has long been invoked to explain their perceived socioeconomic success (Shen & Liao, 2022). However, this myth has damaging consequences for leadership inclusion. Walton and Truong (2023) comprehensively reviewed

“the social, educational, and health impacts of the model minority myth” (p. 1), finding that the stereotype contributes to cultural invalidation and psychological distress while reinforcing invisibility in equity initiatives. Zhou and Bankston (2020) argued that this stereotype positions Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners, whose visible success does not translate into authentic belonging or access to power. Historically, the stereotype has evolved from the “Yellow Peril” to the model minority, but the underlying narrative of foreignness persists (Nguyen et al., 2019). This contradictory framing, admired for competence, yet distrusted and excluded, perpetuates structural exclusion from leadership roles. Mouton et al. (2020) emphasized that while Asian Americans may be seen as ideal workers, they are often not perceived as leadership material due to implicit biases about their social and communicative competencies. This sentiment is echoed in the Canadian context by Padgett et al. (2020), who describe the “too Asian” stereotype in academic and professional settings, where Asians are viewed as excessively competent and therefore socially undesirable or unapproachable. Yip et al. (2021) added that Asian Americans are often invisible in leadership discourses. This means they are celebrated as high performers but rarely recognized as organizational influences or decision-makers.

In support of these observations, Mondala-Duncan (2024) presented a comprehensive analysis of the international barriers that Asian American women face in corporate advancement. Through the development of the Workplace Racial Invisibility Model, the study illustrated how Asian American women experienced invisibility at multiple stages through cultural stereotypes, exclusion from diversity conversations, and systemic underrepresentation in leadership pipelines (Rosette & Tost, 2010; Rosette et al., 2016; Ruggs et al., 2023). The research added nuance to

the understanding of microaggressions, internalized cultural norms, and gendered racial socialization that uniquely constrain career progression among East Asian American women.

Zhou and Lee (2017) critically examined the roots of the Asian American achievement paradox. They argued that educational success is less a result of inherent cultural values and more a product of structural hyper selectivity in the United States immigration policy. Their research identified how highly educated immigrants foster a “success frame” and ethnic capital that promote academic achievement but do not necessarily translate into leadership roles. Stereotypes that support academic performance, such as being hardworking, disciplined, and quiet, become liabilities in professional contexts where leadership is associated with assertiveness and charisma. This paradox reinforced the bamboo ceiling, particularly for East Asian American professionals, and added critical nuance to understanding why perceived merit does not yield equal advancement in leadership.

### ***Racialized Leadership Stereotypes and Cultural Mismatch***

The leadership gap is further reinforced by the incongruity between racialized expectations of Asian Americans and Western leadership prototypes. Bu and Borgida (2021) extended the stereotype content model to propose a four-dimensional framework for Asian American stereotypes. This consisted of competence, warmth, submissiveness, and self-centeredness. Their findings showed that perceptions of low warmth and high subservience disqualify Asian Americans from being seen as prototypical leaders, despite acknowledged competence. This framework intersected with the findings of Lewis and Han (2024), who showed that East Asians, unlike South Asians, are significantly underrepresented in leadership roles within the federal workforce. Even with equivalent qualifications, East Asians faced

barriers rooted in stereotypes around passivity and conflict avoidance. Zhu (2024) confirmed this trend in national labor data and found that East and Southeast Asian men are markedly underrepresented in executive roles, while South Asians are not (Lu, 2022 Lu, 2024a, 2024b). This suggests that Western bias favors culturally assertive leadership styles. The compounded effects of racial and gender bias are especially acute for East Asian American women. Wong and McCullough (2021) introduced the intersectional prototypicality model and argued that Asian American women are perceived as least fitting of leadership roles because they are both racially and gender-wise non-prototypical. Their exclusion is not merely additive but intersectional, thereby making them particularly vulnerable to invisibility in leadership pipelines.

### ***Disaggregation and Intersectionality within “Asian American” Identity***

Many of the barriers to leadership are obscured by the use of “Asian American” as a catch-all category. Lu (2024) critiqued this practice and urged disaggregated research approaches to acknowledge the distinct cultural norms, histories, and challenges faced by East, South, and Southeast Asians. Cao and Zhang (2024) furthered this argument by differentiating between foreign-born and United States-born East Asians. They find that foreign-born individuals faced greater barriers to leadership due to perceived deficits in assertiveness and acculturation, while United States-born East Asians did not experience the same disadvantage. Zhu (2024) highlighted intra-Asian variation by showing that the bamboo ceiling primarily affects East and Southeast Asians. South Asians, whose cultural expression may better align with dominant leadership expectations in the United States, do not show comparable underrepresentation (Lu, 2022). These findings demonstrate that ethnicity and generational status are critical to understanding structural exclusion from leadership. Wong and McCullough (2021) focused on

Asian American women adds another critical intersection. Their model emphasized that leadership exclusion must be understood through the simultaneous lens of race, gender, and culture, as Asian American women often face distinct challenges not encountered by Asian men or White women.

### ***Structural Barriers, the Bamboo Ceiling, and Workplace Discrimination***

Beyond perception-based stereotypes, structural forces play a defining role in limiting leadership opportunities for Asian Americans. Yu (2020) presented qualitative narratives of Asian Americans who describe being consistently passed over for promotions, denied constructive feedback, and excluded from mentorship relationships. These patterns revealed that leadership gaps are not about individual deficits, but rather systemic exclusion. Lu (2022) used a social network framework to explain these disparities, emphasizing how East Asians are less likely to be embedded in leadership-producing networks due to ethnic homophily and limited informal connections. Leong et al. (2023) supported this view by critiquing the field's failure to adapt culturally appropriate frameworks and understanding Asian American identity, behavior, and ambition in leadership contexts. Litam and Chan (2020) offered practitioner strategies to counteract these structural disadvantages in counselor education settings. They recommended culturally grounded mentorship models and intentional efforts to support Asian Americans in navigating institutional politics and self-advocacy.

### ***Psychological and Developmental Factors Affecting Leadership Self-Efficacy***

Structural exclusion on stereotype threat (Pennington et al., 2016; Picho & Brown, 2011; Roberson & Kulik, 2007; Schmader, 2010) can also lead to internalized psychological barriers that diminish LSE. Hwang (2021) argued that internalized racism, including manifesting as self-

silencing, perfectionism, or overidentifying with dominant norms, impaired Asian Americans' ability to lead authentically. These intrapersonal barriers often mirror the external messages they received from organizations and society. Conversely, research shows that culturally affirming developmental experiences can enhance leadership outcomes. Ma and Shi (2025) found that Asian employees participating in leadership development programs emphasizing self-affirmation and cultural identity show improved task performance and helping behavior. Litam and Chan (2020) advocated for leadership strategies that validate Asian American values, rather than forcing assimilation into Western norms. These developmental approaches offered a path forward by acknowledging and counteracting internal and external barriers to LSE.

A consistent narrative emerged from the literature; structural and stereotype-based barriers collectively restricted the leadership opportunities of Asian Americans, especially East Asian American women. While often misperceived as universally successful, this population encounters compounded exclusions based on race, gender, cultural mismatch, and internalized bias. By disaggregating Asian American experiences and addressing both psychological and organizational factors, scholars and practitioners can better understand and mitigate the bamboo ceiling. Interventions that are culturally grounded, intersectional, and structurally embedded are necessary to dismantle the myths and mechanisms that continue to marginalize Asian Americans from leading the trajectories.

### **Mentorship, Support, and Resilience**

Despite growing participation in the labor market, women remain significantly underrepresented in senior leadership roles across sectors. This underrepresentation is particularly acute for racially and ethnically minoritized women, including East Asian American

women, who must navigate the compound effects of gendered, racialized, and cultural expectations in organizational support and resilience-building in fostering women's leadership development and self-efficacy. This section reviews recent literature that has informed understanding of these factors in cultivating leadership pathways for women, with implications for culturally marginalized groups.

### ***The Role of Coaching and Peer Development***

Leadership coaching has emerged as a powerful intervention for building women's LSE and resilience. Hopkins et al. (2021) examined a leadership development program that included facilitated peer coaching and found significant individual and collective behavioral changes among women in human services. Participants reported improved self-awareness, interpersonal connectedness, and organizational engagement, particularly when coaching environments supported identity expression and relational leadership models. Similarly, McCarron and Yamanaka (2022) demonstrated the efficacy of a yearlong strengths-based coaching program, where women reported increased ability to identify and apply their strengths, enhanced interpersonal leadership awareness, and the benefits of psychologically safe, peer-centered learning communities. Such findings emphasized that coaching interventions that integrate individual and communal dimensions of leadership can be especially effective for women lacking access to traditional leadership pipelines.

Dzingwa and Terblanche (2024) further linked coaching to developing resilience and work-life balance among women leaders. Their findings showed that coaching empowered women to reframe challenges and reinforced adaptive coping strategies, enhancing their agency in managing systemic constraints. These insights are particularly salient for East Asian American

women, who may internalize cultural norms around deference and self-sacrifice. Coaching models that validated personal narratives and fostered reframing could play a critical role in overcoming internalized barriers and building sustainable self-efficacy.

### ***Mentoring, Organizational Support, and Career Outcomes***

Mentorship remains a foundational pillar of women's career advancement, especially when organizational contexts fail to offer adequate institutional scaffolding. Chauhan et al. (2020) emphasized the moderating role of mentoring in women's career success and found that mentoring and perceived organizational support buffered the negative impacts of family responsibilities (Polenova et al., 2017). Both mentoring and perceived organizational support positively influenced LSE and aspirations, supporting Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1986) assertion that self-efficacy is socially shaped through modeling and encouragement. For East Asian American women, who may be perceived as competent but not agentic (Rosette & Tost, 2010) or leadership-ready, mentorship that affirmed leadership identity is critical in countering stereotype threats (Roberson & Kulik, 2007) and activating career progression.

Kossek and Buzzanell (2018) also argued that POS and mentoring are essential for addressing institutionalized gender inequality but must be embedded within a broader agenda for systemic change. They advocated for evidence-based strategies beyond individual interventions to reshape organizational cultures. This aligned with Loumpourdi's (2023) use of the capabilities approach, which critiqued conventional elite development programs for focusing narrowly on individualized achievement while neglecting the structural constraints and internalized biases that shape women's trajectories. Together, these studies suggested that while mentoring and

support are vital, their efficacy is constrained unless they are nested within organizational reforms that recognize intersexuality and challenge dominant leadership schemas.

### ***Leadership Development Programs and Structural Change***

While leadership development programs are widely adopted, their effectiveness remains mixed, particularly when they center individual transformation over structural critique. Perriton (2022) provided a conceptual analysis of the persistent use of gender reflexivity in leadership development programs. She warned that such programs risk individualizing systemic problems by focusing on self-awareness, self-regulation, and confidence-building without targeting organizational transformation. Then Perriton argued that gender reflexivity, when untethered from collective or structural action, reinforces the burden of change on women rather than institutions.

In contrast, Stephenson et al. (2024) proposed a comprehensive multi-level framework for evaluating women's leadership programs that included micro (individual), meso (organizational), and macro (structural) dimensions. Their co-designed evaluation framework explicitly critiques the "fix the women" paradigm and emphasized the need to integrate interventions that link personal growth to organizational accountability and policy change. Notably, the framework called for intersectional metrics to help recognize the unique barriers faced by all women of color that generic programming often overlooks. For East Asian American women leaders, whose experiences may be obscured by the model minority stereotype, such an intersectional approach is indispensable for accurate evaluation and practical design of development programs.

Martínez-Martínez et al. (2021) further supported a shift toward systemic approaches through their analysis of an authentic leadership development program. The program enhanced participants' self-efficacy, relational authenticity, and social capital. These factors are interdependent with organizational recognition and inclusion. Similarly, Martín-Peña et al. (2023) used a multicriteria decision model to identify critical career development factors, including resilience, network access, and cultural fit. Each of these variables is often unequally distributed for minoritized women. Chasserio and Bacha (2024) also examined women-only training programs. They emphasized that while such programs can foster personal and professional growth, their transformative potential is limited unless supported by broader organizational accountability. This echoed the concern that isolated leadership development programs, when not paired with equity-focused institutional change, may unwittingly reinforce existing power dynamics.

Colby and Salinas (2021) offered a comprehensive case study of intentionally designed leadership development programming tailored to women in higher education. Their framework is grounded in the "Three E" model of education, exposure, and experience. Incorporating mentorship, coaching, and identity-affirming community spaces supported individual growth and institutional culture change. These features aligned with the needs of East Asian American women, for whom leadership development may require navigating bicultural experience and original cultural underrepresentation. The study also stresses how LSE can be cultivated through intentional program design and institutional commitment.

### ***The Strategic Role of Leadership and Sponsorship***

Longenecker and Insch (2018) focused on the strategic role senior leaders play in enabling or obstructing leadership development for women. They argued that senior leaders must provide mentoring and development opportunities, model inclusive behaviors, and hold systems accountable for equitable talent progression. Their findings highlighted the necessity of formalized sponsorship and accountability mechanisms at the top levels of organizations, components often absent for women of color, who remain under-mentored and over-scrutinized in elite settings. Khushk et al. (2023) offered a complementary perspective through a systematic review on the role of female leadership in driving corporate innovation. They found that female-led firms demonstrated higher levels of adaptive innovation, thereby reinforcing the argument for diverse leadership not only as an equity imperative but also as a business advantage. Yet the review also pointed to the limited institutional pathways available to women leaders, suggesting that leadership development initiatives must be coupled with structural enablers to foster innovation and inclusion.

These studies illustrated a critical shift in the scholarship on women's leadership development: from individual capacity-building toward systemic and intersectional transformation. Mentorship, coaching, and peer networks are vital tools for fostering LSE, but their impact is curtailed without inclusive organizational cultures and policy-level interventions. The literature revealed that while programs can support internal resilience and self-efficacy, the persistence of cultural stereotypes, limited access to networks, and unexamined systemic barriers remain formidable obstacles, especially for racially and culturally minoritized women. For East Asian American women in senior leadership, these insights featured the importance of leadership

development that is both culturally attuned and structurally supported. Programs must consider not only gender but also the racialized and generational dimensions of identity that shape leadership access and experience. LSE emerged from within and from environments that recognize, support, and elevate diverse expressions of leadership.

### **Synthesis of the Literature**

The collective body of literature offered a complex and nuanced portrait of the intersectional experiences of East Asian American women in senior leadership roles, particularly at LSE. Across the literature, three interrelated patterns emerge that explain how leaders' self-efficacy is shaped for East Asian American women in senior leadership roles. Scholars have applied this framework to examine leaders' confidence levels in organizational contexts (Hannah et al., 2008; McCormick et al., 2002). LSE, as defined by Bobbio and Manganelli (2014), included dimensions such as decision-making, team motivation, and strategic decision-making, each essential to leadership functioning. For East Asian American women, however, these competencies are not merely professional skills; they are deeply interwoven with cultural expectations, racialized experiences, and gendered perceptions, often yielding a more fraught and layered leadership journey.

A central theme that emerged across the literature is the tension between collectivist cultures, such as humility, harmony, and deference to authority, and Western leadership ideals that reward assertiveness, visibility, and individualism (Shen et al., 2014; Sy et al., 2010). East Asian American women often straddle these dual value systems, having to navigate both internal cultural conditioning and external expectations within predominantly White organizational environments. This navigation required technical competence and a high level of identity

negotiation, which is rarely addressed in mainstream leadership development programs (Akutagawa, 2013).

A second pattern across the literature highlighted how racialized and gendered stereotypes undermine leadership legitimacy and weaken LSE for East Asian American women. Moreover, the stereotype of the “model minority” (Pettersen, 1966), which casts Asian Americans as industrious and intelligent but lacking in interpersonal charisma, undermines perceptions of leadership potential. This stereotype contributed to the persistence of the “bamboo ceiling.” Hyun (2005) coined a term to describe the systemic barriers that hinder Asian Americans’ advancement into executive leadership roles. These stereotypes not only shaped how others perceived East Asian American women but also how these women perceived themselves and create a psychological environment that dampens their self-efficacy (Kim et al., 2021).

A third pattern emphasized how resilience, collective racial esteem, and intergenerational meaning-making shape LSE development across the lifespan. Several studies, such as those by Kodama and Dugan (2020) and Tu and Okazaki (2021), extended our understanding of how resilience, cultural identity, and racialized experiences interact with LSE. Kodama and Dugan (2020) found that collective racial esteem and resilience significantly predicted LSE among Asian Americans. Tu and Okazaki (2021) emphasized the importance of intergenerational cultural transmission and its effects on self-perception and agency. These findings reinforced the need to move beyond universalist approaches to leadership development and adopt frameworks that account for cultural and generational nuances.

While the literature is rich in identifying barriers and proposing theoretical models, it is markedly thin in offering practical interventions that address the challenges faced by first- and

second-generation East Asian American women. Most leadership programs relied on dominant leadership paradigms that implicitly reward assimilation rather than authenticity. This synthesis indicated a clear imperative for further research and practice that validated diverse leadership identities and equips first- and second-generation East Asian American women with culturally congruent tools for success.

### **Critique of the Previous Research Methods**

Although the existing body of research provided valuable insight into LSE and Asian American identity, it is often constrained by methodological limitations that narrow its scope and diminish its relevance to the nuanced intersection of race, gender, and generational status. A critical evaluation of these studies revealed patterns of sampling homogeneity, overreliance on quantitative survey instruments, and underrepresentation of East Asian American women in executive roles.

Many studies relied heavily on quantitative methodologies, including large-scale surveys and experimental designs (e.g., Burriss et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2021; Ruggs et al., 2023). While these methods offer statistical robustness and generalizability, they often lack the narrative depth to understand complex constructs such as bicultural identity, cultural dissonance, and stereotype threat (Roberson & Kulik, 2007). These approaches frequently fail to account for how LSE is developed and experienced over time and within varying organizational contexts. For example, standardized LSE scales may be misaligned with cultural expressions of leadership in East Asian populations, where humility, collectivism, and indirect influence may be more valued than assertiveness and charisma.

A prevalent limitation across much of the literature is the treatment of Asian Americans as a monolithic category. Studies such as those by Zhoe and Lee (2017) and Lu (2024) critiqued this aggregation and emphasized the vast heterogeneity among Asian ethnic groups. This homogenization obscured differences in language, immigration history, cultural values, and socioeconomic background. Very few studies distinguish between first- and second-generation immigrants. An omission that neglects how acculturation, bicultural tension, and intergenerational expectations shape leadership identity and efficacy.

Research specifically focused on East Asian American women in executive leadership remains sparse. While some qualitative studies (e.g., Hong, 2025; Leung & Turner, 2018) begin to address this population, most research is centered on early-career professionals or college students. This sampling bias limits applicability to high-stakes leadership contexts, where the pressures of visibility, stereotype threat, and organizational power structures are more pronounced. As a result, findings from these studies may not translate effectively to the professional realities of women navigating upper-tier leadership.

These limitations supported the qualitative approach detailed in Chapter 3.

### **Research Opportunities**

Despite growing interest in inclusion, significant research gaps persist concerning the leadership development of East Asian American women, particularly regarding generational differences and culturally grounded understanding of leadership. Most empirical studies tend to aggregate Asian American experiences into a monolithic category, overlooking the diversity within Asian ethnic groups and the impact of generational immigration status (Budiman & Ruiz,

2021; Gündemir et al., 2019). This presented an opportunity to explore disaggregated experiences that better reflect the demographic reality of the East Asian American community.

### **Contradictions in the Literature**

One of the most prominent contradictions in the literature involved the paradoxical framing of Asian Americans as both high-achieving and unsuitable for leadership. On the one hand, they are praised for their technical skills, reliability, and academic excellence, attributes associated with high job performance (Burriss et al., 2013). On the other hand, the same individuals are often perceived as lacking the social assertiveness, emotional expressiveness, and strategic vision typically associated with leadership roles (Kim et al., 2021; Lu, 2022). This dichotomy created a paradox wherein East Asian American women are deemed capable but not promotable, a tension that directly undermines their LSE.

### **Identified Knowledge Gaps**

The current literature, while informative, leaves several critical knowledge gaps that limit our understanding of how leaders' self-efficacy is shaped among East Asian American women in senior leadership. One significant gap is the lack of research that disaggregates data by gender, Asian region, and generational immigration status. Most leadership studies involving Asian Americans do not differentiate between first-generation immigrants and second-generation United States-born individuals, thereby obscuring meaningful variations in leadership development pathways (Block et al., 2011; Sakamoto & Hsu, 2020).

For instance, first-generation immigrants often faced linguistic and cultural barriers that shaped their self-efficacy differently from their second-generation counterparts, who may experience a hybridized identity that balances American individualism with inherited collectivist

norms (Tu & Okazaki, 2021). However, most studies on leadership efficacy failed to consider how these different socializations affect leadership confidence, identity formation, or perceived fit within executive cultures. This oversight limited the applicability of existing leadership theories and interventions to Asian American populations. Furthermore, while there is a growing body of work on mentorship and sponsorship as mechanisms to support minority leaders (Ruggs et al., 2023), there remains a lack of culturally specific mentorship models that address the unique needs of East Asian American women. Existing mentorship literature does not account for how cultural values may inhibit self-advocacy or how racialized experiences in predominantly White institutions may impact the quality of mentoring relationships. Developing culturally attuned mentoring frameworks is a promising research opportunity that could lead to more equitable leadership pipelines.

Another underexplored area is the intersectionality of race, gender, and cultural identity. While there is growing scholarship on women of color in leadership, few studies offered an in-depth analysis of how East Asian cultural values specifically shape leadership identity and efficacy. The literature tends to apply generalized models of minority leadership that do not account for the distinctive cultural scripts internalized by East Asian American women, such as filial piety, collectivism, and face-saving behavior (Kim & Choi, 2019; Shen et al., 2014). These internalized values can support or hinder leadership confidence, depending on how they are interpreted and valued within workplace contexts.

While many leadership studies emphasized traditional East Asian values such as humility and deference as barriers to advancement, others argue that this framing obscures class dynamics. For instance, Model (2020) critiqued the assumption that Asian American achievement is solely

a product of cultural values. Instead, she argued that what is often read as “ethnic culture” may be better understood as “class culture,” a strategic deployment of cultural capital tied to educational privilege and socioeconomic status. This distinction has significant implications for leadership discourse, especially when applied to Asian American women whose experiences are shaped by racialized expectations and economic stratification.

Additionally, much of the current leadership research neglected to examine how organizational cultures, systemic bias, and stereotype threats influenced leadership self-perceptions. There is limited empirical evidence (Block et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2021) exploring how workplace climates that marginalize and tokenize Asian American women affect their long-term confidence and ambition to pursue leadership roles. The absence of such inquiry prevents a holistic understanding of the barriers and enablers that shape LSE.

Finally, there is a need for research that explores effective interventions. While descriptive studies identify the problem, few offer evidence-based strategies for enhancing LSE among East Asian American women. What types of coaching, mentoring, organizational policies, or community-based supports are most effective? How can these be culturally tailored to reflect the lived realities of this group? These unanswered questions point to a pressing need for research that moves from diagnosis to solution. Intervention-focused studies could examine, for instance, whether culturally specific mentorship pairings, values-based leadership training, or affinity-based executive coaching produce measurable improvements in leadership confidence and advancement outcomes. Additionally, longitudinal studies could assess the sustainability of long-term impact of such interventions across different organizational sectors. Without a

systematic exploration of what works, leadership development efforts may continue to overlook or inadequately serve this growing yet underrepresented population.

Additionally, leadership development programs rarely integrate components that explicitly acknowledge and address racial bias, stereotype threat (Roberson & Kulik, 2007), or identity negotiation. Programs that are not tailored to culturally specific experiences may inadvertently reinforce dominant cultural norms, further alienate East Asian American women, and weaken their LSE. There is a pressing need for qualitative research that captures these women's voices and examines how they navigate leadership within the constraints and opportunities of their dual cultural identities. Finally, future research should examine how organizational structures, performance evaluation metrics, and promotion practices either reinforce or mitigate the bamboo ceiling. Investigating the organizational contexts that have successfully fostered inclusive leadership environments for East Asian American women may reveal scalable practices that promote equity at higher levels of leadership.

Despite growing scholarship on Asian American leadership and LSE, existing research remains limited in its ability to capture how leadership confidence is subjectively experienced and developed among East Asian American women across generational contexts. Much of the literature relies on quantitative designs that aggregate Asian Americans into a single category or emphasize structural outcomes, offering limited insight into meaning-making processes through which LSE is formed. Additionally, few studies differentiated between first- and second-generation experiences, despite evidence that cultural socialization, immigration history, and intergenerational expectations shape leadership identity in distinct ways. These gaps point to the need for a qualitative approach that centers participants' voices and explores LSE as a lived,

culturally embedded experience. Accordingly, this study employed a GQI design to examine how first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership roles understand, develop, and sustain LSE within complex organizational and cultural contexts.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed and synthesized interdisciplinary literature examining LSE, cultural identity, generational influences, and structural barriers affecting East Asian American women in senior leadership roles. Drawing on social cognitive theory and intersectional and cultural identity frameworks, the literature indicated that leadership confidence among this population is shaped by dynamic interactions among cultural values, racialized and gendered stereotypes, generational socialization, and organizational contexts. The review highlighted persistent underrepresentation despite high competence, the influence of the model minority myth and bamboo ceiling, and the role of cultural dissonance, resilience, mentorship, and identity negotiation in leadership development. Methodological limitations in prior research were identified, including overreliance on quantitative methods, aggregation of Asian American experiences, and insufficient attention to senior-level leadership and generational differences. Collectively, these findings underscore a clear need for qualitative, culturally grounded inquiry that centers on lived experience. This synthesis laid the foundation for Chapter 3, which details the research methodology used to address these gaps and examine how first- and second-generation East Asian American women describe the development of their LSEs.

### CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology used to investigate how first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership positions perceive and articulate their leadership self-efficacy (LSE), with particular focus on the influence of culture and generational factors. While Chapter 1 articulated the problem and its rationale, Chapter 2 conducted a review of pertinent literature. The methodology is based on the general qualitative inquiry (GQI) approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which underscores participant meaning-making and provides a versatile, non-prescriptive framework for data collection and analysis. This chapter expounds on the research questions and design, sampling and population, participant selection, data collection procedures, measurement instruments, validity, reliability, data analysis, ethical considerations, and strategies to ensure credibility and trustworthiness. It is noteworthy that all components of the study received approval from Capella University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and conform to the ethical principles delineated in the Belmont Report (NCPP, 1979) and the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (American Psychological Association [APA], 2017).

The methodological approach for this study was informed by documented gaps in the literature regarding the leadership experiences of first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership roles, a population that remains underrepresented despite high educational (Cao & Zhang, 2024; Lu, 2024a, 2024b; Sakamoto & Hsu, 2020) and workforce participation (CNPAAEMT, 2016; Hyun, 2005). Prior research has identified structural and cultural barriers affecting advancement, yet limited qualitative scholarship has

examined how cultural identity, generational status, and internalized norms shape perceptions of LSE within leadership experiences (Kim et al., 2021; Ruggs et al., 2023). Grounded in Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1986) conceptualization of self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their capacity to perform leadership-related behaviors, this study employed a general qualitative inquire approach to explore participants' perspectives and meaning-making processes. This methodological design aligns with the study's research question and supports an in-depth examination of LSE as a socially and culturally embedded phenomenon.

### **Research Questions and Design**

The primary research question is: "How do first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership roles describe their LSE, and what influences do cultural and generational factors have on their leadership experiences?" This question aligned with a broader body of research exploring identity, socialization, and resilience among women and racial minorities in leadership (Chin, 2010, 2013; Kim et al., 2021; Tu & Okazaki, 2021). By focusing on participants' lived experiences, the study was designed to explore how cultural and generational factors interact with self-beliefs and leadership behavior. The study incorporated narrative responses to examine participants' challenges and strategies for navigating leadership roles within complex organizational and cultural contexts.

This qualitative study utilized a GQI approach, which is appropriate for exploratory research focused on examining how individuals perceive and interpret a special phenomenon without the epistemological constraints associated with more rigid qualitative methodologies such as phenomenology or grounded theory (Patton, 2015). GQI is characterized by its emphasis on flexibility, responsiveness to context, and its basis in participants' voices (Percy et al., 2015).

This approach is commonly used when the research objective involves examining detailed descriptions of personal experiences and the meanings participants ascribe to them. In this study, the phenomenon of interest is LSE, as experienced by East Asian American women leaders within their cultural identities and generational contexts. The GQI approach was selected because it aligns with the study's aim of examining participants' descriptions of LSE and the influence of cultural and generational factors in relation to the central research question.

The research methodology involved collecting participants' reflections on their leadership experiences through semi-structured interviews, which are appropriate for gathering narrative data. Such interviews supported guided exploration while providing participants with the opportunity to elaborate freely. This approach is appropriate for examining aspects related to identity, internalized biases, and social context. The design incorporated elements of culturally responsive methodology and emphasized cultural humility, reflexivity, and contextual awareness when engaging with marginalized populations (Tu & Okazaki, 2021; Zhang & Okazawa, 2022). Additionally, the study employed strategies including member checking, memo writing, and iterative coding to ensure credibility, confirmability, and transparency throughout the research process.

Zoom was used as the platform for conducting interviews to support geographic diversity, minimize participant burden, and ensure secure and private participation. In accordance with IRB-approved protocols, interviews were audio-recorded—rather than video—recorded to safeguard privacy and were automatically transcribed for subsequent review and manual correction. Participants were granted the opportunity to preview questions and review their transcripts during the member checking process. The research methodology incorporated

member checking, maintained an audit trail, and utilized reflexivity through a researcher's journal to enhance credibility and transparency. Data analysis was performed manually through a structured process that included coding, categorization, and theme development. Transcripts were thoroughly reviewed multiple times to identify final codes, which were then grouped into categories and synthesized into broader themes; memos and analytical notes were used to document and interpret analytical decisions, thereby supporting analytical rigor. The GQI framework and the study's qualitative design were aligned with the research question and supported examination of how cultural values, generational identity, and gendered experiences relate to LSE among East Asian American women in senior leadership positions.

### **Sampling**

Sampling constitutes a fundamental component of qualitative research as it impacts the depth and pertinence of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). In studies conducted within a GQI framework, sampling is generally purposive, intended to select participants capable of providing detailed and experience-rich accounts pertinent to the research question. The subsequent subsections delineate the target population, the ratio of sample size, and the procedures employed to identify, recruit, and select participants who satisfy the study criteria. While purposive and snowball sampling methods are well-suited for identifying participants with direct, relevant leadership experience, these approaches may limit representativeness and constrain the transferability of findings beyond similar populations and contexts.

## **Population and Sample**

The target population for this study comprised of first- and second-generation East Asian American women who have held or currently hold senior leadership positions, designated as Director-level or higher, within public or private sector organizations across the United States. Participants self-identified as individuals of East Asian descent, including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Taiwanese, as well as residents from Hong Kong or Macau. The definition of generational status aligned with standard immigration research conventions, in which first-generation refers to individuals born outside the United States who have immigrated to the country, and second-generation refers to those born in the United States to at least one foreign-born parent (Choi & Tung, 2022).

The rationale for selecting this population was its demographic significance and its underrepresentation in the leadership literature. While East Asian American women constitute a growing segment of the professional workforce, they remain among the most underrepresented in senior executive positions (CNPAAEMI, 2016; Hyun, 2005). Furthermore, prior research has shown that the intersection of racialized gender expectations uniquely shapes their leadership trajectories, cultural values such as filial piety and collectivism, and stereotypes associated with passivity or technical proficiency (Chin, 2010 & 2013; Kim et al., 2022; Ruggs et al., 2023). This sample was constructed through purposive sampling to ensure participants had direct experience relevant to the research question. Participants were included if they met all the following criteria: (a) self-identified as East Asian American women, (b) are either first- or second-generation immigrants as defined above, (c) have held a senior leadership role for at least one year, and (d) are fluent in English. Individuals working for companies outside the United

States or under probation were excluded to maintain a focused sample. While generalizability was not the aim, the sample was designed to reflect meaningful diversity across industry, age, ethnicity, and geographical region. The unit of analysis for this study is the individual participant's narrative account of her leadership experiences and perceptions of LSE.

### **Sample Size Rationale**

The anticipated sample size was twelve participants, which conforms to the literature on qualitative research recommendations for comprehensive studies, including semi-structured interviews within a GQI framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guest et al., 2006). This range was considered adequate to attain data saturation, defined as the point at which no new themes or insights emerge from additional interviews. The sample size was also suitable, given the specificity of the inclusion criteria and the study's exploratory nature. In instances where saturation was not achieved with the initial participants, the IRB-approved protocol permitted further recruitment via the same purposive and snowball sampling methods. This approach ensured the study remained methodologically rigorous and feasible within the confines of the approved research timeline. This sample size aligns with qualitative research findings indicating that thematic saturation is typically achieved within 10 to 15 in-depth interviews (Guest et al., 2006) when participants share clearly defined characteristics and experience relevant to the phenomenon under study.

Although twelve participants were initially planned, data collection concluded with nine participants once analytic saturation was reached. During the interview and concurrent analysis process, analytic saturation was reached, as interviews increasingly reflected recurring patterns and no substantially new insights related to LSE, cultural influences, or generational experiences

emerged. An analytic review during data collection indicated that the data were sufficient to address the research question and that additional interviews were unlikely to yield new dimensions in the findings. Accordingly, recruitment was concluded once analytic saturation was achieved. A total of nine participants ultimately met the inclusion criteria and completed the interview process, constituting the final sample for this study.

### **Procedures**

With the target population and sample size established, the subsequent phase in the research process involved implementing a series of structured and ethically sound procedures to identify, recruit, and engage participants in the study. The following sections detail the practical steps undertaken to conduct the study by Capella University's IRB guidelines and established best practices in qualitative research. These procedures encompassed selecting and onboarding participants, data collection through semi-structured interviews, utilization of researcher-developed instruments grounded in theoretical frameworks and prior scholarly literature, and the analytic strategies used to interpret participant narratives. Each phase was meticulously designed to maintain methodological rigor, cultural sensitivity, and ethical transparency within the context of a GQI study.

In summary, the study followed a structured sequence of procedures beginning with IRB approval and participant recruitment, followed by eligibility screening and informed consent, data collection through structured interviews, transcription and member checking, and concluding with iterative data analysis and secure data storage. Each phase of the process was implemented in alignment with the approved research protocol and ethical standards for qualitative inquiry.

## **Participant Selection**

Participants were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling methods. The researcher disseminated an IRB-approved flyer and a concise study announcement via personal and professional social media channels, including LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram, and coordinated the flyer distribution through Radiance HQ. This organization supports Asian American professionals. Interested individuals were directed to complete a brief online screening survey hosted on SurveyMonkey, designed to verify eligibility based on demographic characteristics, generational identity, leadership roles, and language proficiency. Eligible participants received an email invitation to participate and were provided with a secure Docusign link to complete the informed consent process. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point. Upon receipt of consent, participants were scheduled for a one-on-one interview via Zoom.

Participants were encouraged, though not required, to disseminate the study flyer among their professional networks to individuals who may meet the eligibility criteria. Consistent with ethical research standards, no participant was asked to furnish the researcher with contact details of others, and individuals referred through snowball sampling were advised to contact the researcher directly if interested. Participants whose first language was not English were allowed to review interview questions beforehand. This strategy was consistent with the study's commitment to cultural responsiveness and equitable access.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection followed a structured, sequential process that included participant recruitment and eligibility screening, informed consent, semi-structured interview

administration, transcription and verification, member checking, and option follow-up interviews. The steps outlined below describe how interview-based data were collected and managed in accordance with the approved research protocol.

To ensure a rigorous and ethically sound research process, the study adhered to a clearly defined sequence of steps beginning with participant outreach and culminating in interview-based data collection and member validation. Following the approval by Capella University's IRB, the recruitment process started by disseminating a digital flyer through personal social media channels (LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram) and directly via Radiance HQ, a professional network that granted distribution permission. Interested individuals were requested to complete a brief eligibility screening survey hosted on SurveyMonkey. The secure, anonymous screener evaluated compliance with inclusion criteria: female, East Asian ethnicity, generational status (first or second), senior leadership experience, and employment within the United States. The exclusion criteria ensured that participants were not on probationary status and had no prior relationship with the researcher. Those who met the screening requirements were subsequently sent a secure, IRB-approved Informed Consent Form via DocuSign, a secure document signing platform. Participants were then invited to schedule an online Zoom interview following the digital signature of the consent form. This systematic process maintained adherence to ethical research standards, safeguarded participants' autonomy, and facilitated a consistent profile of participants aligned with the study's objectives (CNPAAEMI, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Once consent was confirmed, interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom using an audio-only recording to protect participants' visual privacy. Zoom's integrated audio recording

and auto-transcription features supported convenience and data integrity (de Villiers et al., 2022). Each session began with brief rapport-building and review of the participant's rights, including their ability to skip questions or withdraw at any point without consequence (APA, 2017; NCPP, 1979).

Following each interview, the researcher reviewed the transcript for accuracy by comparing it to the audio recording and correcting errors as needed. To enhance trustworthiness, transcripts were then sent to participants for member checking, a process in which participants could confirm the accuracy of their responses and offer clarifications or additions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Percy et al., 2015). This step supported credibility and confirmability while reinforcing a collaborative research relationship. A voluntary follow-up interview of up to 30 minutes was offered, scheduled two to three weeks later, providing participants an opportunity to elaborate or reflect further based on transcript review or additional insights. This two-stage process deepened the qualitative richness of the dataset while aligning with ethical norms and best practices for culturally responsive qualitative inquiry (Zhang & Okazawa, 2022). All research data, recordings, transcripts, and signed consent forms were stored on encrypted, password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher. No personal identifiers were included in the analytical dataset; instead, participants were assigned alphanumeric pseudonyms. Physical documents were stored in a locked cabinet. Following IRB protocols, all data are retained securely for seven years, after which it will be permanently destroyed using National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) guidelines for media sanitation (NCPP, 1979). These procedures ensured that each participant's contribution was

treated with dignity, confidentiality, and care while upholding the rigor and reproducibility expected of qualitative research.

### **Instruments**

The primary instrument for data collection in this study was a semi-structured interview protocol developed by the researcher and reviewed as part of the IRB application. The interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and followed a semi-structured protocol grounded in LSE theory (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986), cultural identity literature (Kime et al., 2021; Tu & Okazaki, 2021), and prior validated qualitative approaches (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This protocol was designed to elicit narrative-rich responses related to LSE, cultural identity, generational experiences, and perceived barriers to support encountered throughout participants' leadership trajectories. Questions were intentionally open-ended and framed to allow participants to interpret and respond based on their experiences and identity constructions. The interview protocol was guided by the constructs of Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1986) self-efficacy theory, as well as research on Asian American leadership identity, bicultural competence, and stereotype threat (Kim et al., 2021; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Roberson & Kulik, 2007; Tu & Okazaki, 2021).

The development of the interview guide was informed by best practices in qualitative research design, including alignment between research questions, theoretical constructs, and method of inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The protocol was structured to explore multiple dimensions of LSE, such as confidence in decision-making, navigating culturally mixed expectations, perceptions of authority, and strategies for resilience or authenticity. Specific questions addressed early leadership socialization, mentorship and sponsorship, cultural or

generational tensions, and how participants perceived themselves as leaders over time. Probing questions were built to allow for clarification or elaboration during the interview process.

All interviews were conducted by the researcher, who served as the sole data collector and analyst. As such, the researcher functioned as the primary instrument of interpretation and a source of potential bias. To address this, the study incorporated reflexive practices throughout the research process, including maintaining a detailed researcher journal to track assumptions, emotional reactions, and decision-making rationales (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Before initiating data collection, the researcher assessed positionality and potential bias as a fellow East Asian American woman with professional experience in leadership and coaching roles. While this insider perspective offered insight and empathy, it also required vigilance to avoid overidentification or interpretive projection (Tu & Okazaki, 2021). This was mitigated through continuous memo writing, adherence to the original interview guide, and use of participant validation via transcript review and follow-up opportunities.

Participants were informed that interviews would be audio-recorded and automatically transcribed using Zoom's secure platform. The researcher manually reviewed and edited the transcripts for accuracy. Member checking, conducted through transcript review and optional follow-up interviews, served as an additional check on the validity and credibility of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). No externally developed or standardized instruments were used; the researcher created all data collection tools and approved them by the IRB, including the interview guide, screening survey, informed consent form, and communication scripts.

## **Validity**

Validity in this qualitative study was supported through alignment between the research question, theoretical framework, and interview protocol. Interview questions were explicitly grounded in Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1986) LSE theory and informed by prior research on Asian American leadership identity, cultural socialization, and generational experience. The semi-structured format allowed participants to respond in ways that reflected their lived experiences while maintaining conceptual consistency across interviews. Validity was further strengthened through member checking, whereby participants reviewed interview transcripts to confirm accuracy and meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## **Reliability**

Reliability was addressed through the consistent application of the interview protocol across all participants and the use of systematic procedures for data collection and analysis. All interviews were conducted by the same researcher using the same semi-structured guide, audio-recorded, and transcribed following a standardized process. Transcript review, reflexive journaling, and documentation of analytic decisions contributed to consistency and transparency in interpretation, supporting dependability within qualitative inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis adhered to a rigorous, iterative process rooted in qualitative thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This methodology was aligned with the GQI framework and supported a flexible yet systematic process for identifying patterns, themes, and categories within participant narratives. Thematic analysis was chosen for its compatibility with exploratory research questions and its focus on examining participants' lived experiences, social

identities, and contextual meanings. Considering the culturally nuanced and identity-centered nature of this study, the analysis was deliberately conducted in layered stages to support a systemic examination of participants' narratives related to LSE and bicultural navigation.

Interviews were transcribed utilizing Zoom's automated transcription tool and subsequently reviewed by the researcher to ensure accuracy and clarity. Each transcript was de-identified to safeguard participant confidentiality and stored in a secure, password-protected folder. Coding was performed manually using Microsoft Word and Excel. The coding commenced with a meticulous reading of each transcript, followed by the development of initial codes grounded in the data. These codes encapsulated meaningful phrases, metaphors, and expressions pertinent to participants' leadership identity, cultural tension, generational framing, perceived efficacy, and external perceptions. The preliminary code list was then systematically organized into broader categories through axial coding, with particular attention to recurring themes across interviews, as well as contradictions and unique cases.

The researcher consistently documented a reflexive journal throughout the analytical process to record coding decisions, analytical memos, and inquiries that emerged during interpretation. This journal functioned as a transparency instrument and a means to identify potential researcher bias or over-identification, particularly considering the shared identity between researchers and participants. As themes developed, the researcher revisited earlier transcripts to verify consistency and evaluate the robustness of theme definitions, ensuring their grounding in multiple data sources rather than individual anecdotes (Percy et al., 2015).

To enhance credibility, member checking was employed through transcript verification and optional follow-up conversations. Participants were invited to review their transcripts and

clarify or expand upon their responses. In several cases, participants provided additional clarification during follow-up conversations, which were incorporated into the final analytic process. Once the themes were finalized, representative quotes were selected to illustrate key findings and preserve participants' voices. These themes were examined in relation to Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1986) LSE theory and existing literature on East Asian American leadership identity to inform analytic framing.

This multi-phase, interpretive approach was designed to maintain close alignment between the data and analytic process while adhering to established qualitative methodological standards. The analytical process supported the identification of patterns related to cultural norms, generational experiences, and identity negotiation regarding LSE among East Asian American women in senior leadership roles. Throughout the analytic process, codes, categories, and themes were examined in direct relation to the central research question to ensure that analytic decisions remained focused on how participants described LSE and the influence of cultural and generational factors on their leadership experiences.

Data analysis followed an iterative and concurrent process consistent with GQI. Interview transcripts were reviewed multiple times to support familiarization with the data. Initial coding focused on identifying descriptive and process-oriented meaning units grounded in participants' language and experiences. Subsequent phases of analysis examined relationships among codes through axial and pattern-based techniques to develop broader analytic categories. These categories were then synthesized into higher-order themes through ongoing analytic memoing, reflexive journaling, and repeated review of transcripts, allowing for integration and refinement as analysis progressed. The final analytic phase emphasized integrative synthesis rather than

additional coding. This section describes the procedures used to analyze the data; interpretation of findings is presented in Chapter 4.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study strictly adhered to the ethical principles outlined by the Belmont Report (NCP, 1979) and the American Psychological Association's *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (APA, 2017). Prior to data collection, the research protocol received formal approval from Capella University's IRB. This approval confirmed that the study design complied with all institutional and federal guidelines concerning informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and risk minimization. The rights, autonomy, and dignity of participants were prioritized at each stage of the research process, particularly considering the identity-specific and potentially sensitive nature of the topics discussed.

Informed consent was obtained through a secure Docusign process, allowing participants to review study details, risks, and rights before agreeing to participate. The consent form includes statements on voluntary participation, the right to withdraw without penalty, the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, data protection measures, and the intended use of the findings. Participants were informed that interviews would be audio-recorded via Zoom, but no video would be captured. They were also notified that data would be de-identified and that their real names or employer affiliations would never appear in the dissertation or any subsequent dissemination of results.

Confidentiality was safeguarded through a multi-layer approach. All digital materials, including consent forms, audio files, transcripts, and analytic notes, were stored on encrypted, password-protected devices and within a secure storage system accessible only to the researcher.

Participants were assigned pseudonyms and numeric identifiers to remove all personally identifiable information from transcripts. A master file linking real names to pseudonyms was stored separately and securely. Hard copy materials were locked in a cabinet in the researcher's private office. In compliance with IRB policy and data management standards, all data will be retained for seven years following study completion and then permanently destroyed using the NIST-recommended method of media sanitization (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2014).

No compensation was provided to participants, and there were no foreseeable risks beyond minimal emotional discomfort from recalling challenging leadership experiences. Participants were reminded that they could skip any questions or pause the interview at any time. The researcher, sharing aspects of cultural and gender identity with participants, engaged in ongoing reflexivity to mitigate potential over-identification or bias, as recommended in culturally responsive research practice (Tu & Okazaki, 2021). Although the study posed minimal risk to participants, discussing leadership challenges or experiences related to bias and marginalization may have elicited temporary emotional discomfort; this risk was mitigated by voluntary participation, the option to skip questions, the ability to pause or discontinue interviews, and the availability of follow-up support resources if needed.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research pertains to the rigor and transparency with which a study is designed and executed, ensuring that its findings are credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). The research used multiple strategies throughout its process to satisfy these criteria and uphold

methodological integrity. These strategies were deliberately integrated into data collection, analysis, and reporting procedures, in accordance with the GQI framework and the study's emphasis on cultural responsiveness.

### ***Credibility***

Credibility was established through several key methods. First, data triangulation was achieved by soliciting insights from various East Asian American women across different generations, industries, and leadership pathways. Second, member checking was used as a core verification strategy. Participants received their interview transcripts and were invited to review, clarify, and expand upon their responses. Several participants offered follow-up insights that were incorporated into the thematic findings. Third, the researcher engaged in prolonged engagement with the data through iterative coding and memo writing to ensure deep familiarity with participant narratives and thematic development. Finally, reflexive journaling supported researcher accountability and insight into potential interpretative biases, particularly given the shared identity between researcher and participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tu & Okazaki, 2021).

### ***Transferability***

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings can be meaningfully applied to similar contexts. Although generalizability is not an objective of GQI, transferability was augmented by providing comprehensive descriptions of participant demographics, cultural positioning, and leadership environments. By detailing the context in which participants experienced and developed LSE—including their generational identity, cultural influences, and systemic barriers—the study enables readers to assess the relevance of the findings to other

groups or organizational settings. The incorporation of detailed quotations and case-level descriptions further supports an understanding of contextual nuances.

### ***Dependability***

Dependability was addressed through clear documentation of research procedures, including an audit trail of analytic decisions, coding logic, and study materials. The researcher kept detailed records of interview schedules, participant communication, transcript edits, and theme evolution to ensure that others could trace the analytic process. Capella University's IRB reviewed and approved the study's procedures, and it was designed to be replicable by future researchers using a similar population and questionnaire framework.

### ***Confirmability***

Confirmability was supported through multiple safeguards against researcher bias. The reflexive journal served as a record of positionality, evolving interpretations, and decision-making rationale. Themes were derived inductively from participants' language rather than imposed by preexisting theory, and direct quotations were used to ground findings in participants' voices. The study achieved transparency in constructing meaning by integrating participant feedback through member checking and document coding consistency. These trustworthiness strategies ensured that the findings reflected the lived experiences of East Asian American women leaders, rather than the researcher's projections or assumptions. Together, these measures reinforced the study's methodological integrity and ethical commitment to faithfully representing participants' voices and experiences. The resulting findings are contextually rich and a trustworthy contribution to the growing literature on intersectional leadership identity and culturally informed LSE.

## Summary

Chapter 3 delineates the methodological framework for investigating the LSE of first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership positions. Anchored in the GQI approach, the study used purposive and snowball sampling to recruit participants who met explicitly defined inclusion criteria. Semi-structured interviews functioned as the primary data collection modality, with protocols meticulously developed and approved by Capella University's IRB. Procedures pertaining to recruitment, informed consent, data collection, and storage were designed to uphold ethical rigor and cultural sensitivity. Thematic analysis was adopted to interpret the data, supplemented by reflexive journaling, member validation, and a systematic coding methodology. The trustworthiness of the study was preserved through strategies that addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confidentiality.

The subsequent chapter, Chapter 4, presents the research findings. Based on participants' narratives, it introduces the central themes identified in the data analysis and exemplifies these themes with representative quotations. These themes reflect the lived experiences of East Asian American women as they negotiate cultural expectations, generational dynamics, and professional leadership contexts. Consequently, they inform the perceptions of LSE held by these individuals. Chapter 4 presents the findings derived from these analytic procedures, organized around the theme that emerged from participants' narratives and supported by representative quotations.

## **CHAPTER 4. RESULTS**

The earlier chapters established the context and significance of this study and described the methodological approach used to explore the leadership experiences of first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior roles. This chapter presents the study's results. It begins with a description of the individual participants, followed by an overview of the analytic procedures applied to the data. The remainder of the chapter reports the themes and patterns identified across interviews, supported by representative participant quotes. Participants often used the term confidence when describing their leadership experience. Results were organized around patterns and themes that emerged from qualitative analysis of participant interviews, consistent with the GQI approach described in Chapter 3.

### **Description of the Sample**

Although twelve participants were anticipated, recruitment concluded with nine participants due to saturation. Nine individuals participated in this study. All participants were East Asian American women who were community-dwelling adults residing in the United States. The sample represented a range of leadership backgrounds, with participants holding senior-level or executive roles across industries such as technology, healthcare, finance, government, and non-profit organizations. Participants were between 35 and 54 years old and had accumulated between three and fifteen years of experience in leadership positions.

A purposive sampling strategy (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015) was used to recruit women who self-identified as first- or second-generation East Asian Americans and currently held senior leadership roles. Five participants identified as first-generation, and four identified as second-

generation, allowing for representation across generational perspectives within the East Asian American community. All participants held advanced degrees, including master’s and doctoral-level education, consistent with the educational attainment (Cao & Zhang, 2024; Sakamoto & Hsu, 2020) commonly observed among East Asian American women in professional leadership roles.

Participants were recruited through professional networks, social media outreach, and snowball sampling, consistent with the IRB-approved recruitment process. Each participant completed the eligibility screening, provided informed consent, and participated in a recorded Zoom interview in accordance with the study protocol. All participant protections were implemented in accordance with the IRB-approved protocol described in Chapter 3, and no adverse events occurred during data collection. Table 1 contains the participants' demographic information on age, generation, race, and years in leadership. Brief participant profiles are provided in the Appendix to support contextual understanding of the sample.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Information*

Participant	Age	Generation	Race	Years in Leadership
P1	35-39	Second	Korean	5-9
P2	45-49	First	Chinese	10-14
P3	40-44	Second	Korean	10-14
P4	35-39	First	Japanese	1-4
P5	45-47	First	Korean	5-9
P6	35-39	First	Chinese	1-4
P7	45-49	Second	Chinese	5-9
P8	40-44	First	Korean	5-9
P9	50-54	Second	Chinese	10-14

## Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis

The data analysis followed the GQI approach described in Chapter 3. Interview transcripts were reviewed and analyzed to identify recurring patterns across participants' accounts. Patterns were organized into themes based on recurrence across interviews. Table 2 presented the distribution of analytic patterns identified during earlier phases of analysis. Numerical values indicate the frequency with which each pattern appeared across participant interviews, with the cumulative totals across the dataset. These frequency counts are provided to demonstrate recurrence across participants and to support transparency in the analytic process. The counts do not indicate magnitude, prevalence, or statistical significance.

**Table 2**  
*Distribution of Analytic Patterns Across Participants*

Analytic Patterns	Number of Participant Responses and Totals									
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	Total
How I Experience Leadership	34	38	46	33	17	11	19	19	18	235
Feeling responsible for outcomes	2	5	13	3	1	2	1	1	1	29
Figuring it out as I go	4	3	4	5	5	3	1	1		26
Learning by doing	2	9	9	5	4	4	2	1	1	37
Being calm and steady	1	3	5	6				1		16
Leading without needing the spotlight	2		3	5	1		2	3		16
Confidence growing over time	6	1	1		4	1	5	1	1	20
How I see myself as a leader	17	17	11	9	2	1	8	11	15	91
Visibility, Voice, and Legitimacy	29	18	42	18	34	5	11	16	5	178
Being mistaken for something else	3	2	8	2	7		1	1	1	25
Being overlooked	4	9	9	3	18	3	4	5	2	57
Needing to prove myself	8	1	4	3	4			4	2	26
Earning credibility	8	3	8	3	3	2	4	3		34
Not wanting to take up space	2	1	5	5	2		1	1		17
Visibility discomfort	4	2	8	2			1	2		19

Analytic Patterns	Number of Participant Responses and Totals									
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	Total
Living Between Worlds	44	17	25	20	16	10	9	14	10	165
Bridging expectations	8	6	6	7	1	1	5	3	2	39
Living in between	17	7	10	4	3	1	1	7	4	54
Adjusting how I show up	9	4	6	5	6	2	3	2	2	39
Code-switching	3				3	3				9
Translating between cultures	7		3	4	3	3		2	2	24
Culture, Family, and Upbringing	9	19	23	21	13	15	30	14	10	154
Cultural values shaping leadership	3	11	8	7	4	6	18	6	4	67
Avoiding conflict	2		3	1		1	4	1	1	13
Respecting hierarchy			4	2		1	2			9
Not being taught to self-promote		1		4	2		1	1	1	10
Being raised to be humble	1	1	4	6	2	1	2	5	2	24
Family expectations	3	6	4	1	5	6	3	1	2	31
Moments of Shift or Realization	38	7	26	15	11	4	20	14	18	153
Becoming more confident	7	1	1	5	2	2	5	2	2	27
Seeing myself differently	11	3	9	2	2		9	3	8	47
Something clicked	7	3	6	3	3		1	6	5	34
Claiming leadership identity	9		6	4	3	2	2	3	2	31
Realizing I could lead	4		4	1	1		3		1	14
Doubt, Pressure, and Inner Work	20	14	42	8	14	14	15	7	4	138
Working harder than others	1		5	1	1	5		2		15
Pressure to perform	2	2	9	1	3		1	3	3	24
Carrying a lot internally	6	8	21	4	8	2	7	1	1	58
Imposter feelings	1		1			2	4			8
Feeling like I am not enough	5	1	2	1		2		1		12
Self-doubt	5	3	4	1	2	3	3			21

Analytic Patterns	Number of Participant Responses and Totals									
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	Total
Persistence and Adaptation	11	9	59	11	4	8	4	12	6	124
Doing what needs to be done	1	4	9	4	1	4	1	2		26
Learning resilience	1	1	16	2			1	3	1	25
Figuring out how to survive	7		2		1		1	2	1	14
Adapting to change	1	2	8	3		2	1	3	1	21
Staying the course		1	8	1	2			2	2	16
Pushing through	1	1	16	1		2			1	22
Making It Safe for Others	15	11	16	18	6	3	18	24	5	116
Taking on emotional labor		1					5	1		7
Holding people through uncertainty	1		1	3			1	5		11
Protecting the team	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	5		11
Listening first	2	3	2	4			2	2	1	16
Creating space for others	8	4	10	7	5	2	7	7	4	54
Making others feel safe	4	2	2	3			2	4		17
Gendered Roles and Responsibility	4	2	14	2	7		7	3	0	39
Being taken advantage of	2		2		3					7
Managing emotions for others			4				5			9
Daughter expectations			1		1					2
Putting others first	1	1	4	1			1	2		10
Being the responsible one				1	1			1		8
Caretaker expectations	1	1	3		2		1			8

### Presentation of Data and Analyses

This section presents the study's findings from interviews with nine East Asian American women in senior leadership roles. The results were organized into three themes that reflect recurring patterns identified across participant interviews. Each theme was presented with

associated patterns and representative participant quotations. Quotations were included to support the reporting of patterns and to demonstrate how participants described their experiences, with participant identifier used to maintain confidentiality (e.g., P1, P2).

Table 2 provided an overview of the distribution of analytical patterns identified during early phases of analysis. The numerical values indicate the frequencies with which each pattern appeared across participant interviews and the cumulative totals across the dataset. These patterns informed the higher-order themes presented below. Consistent with GQI, results were presented as themes and patterns identified across participants rather than as individual case summaries.

### **Theme 1 – Relational Leadership Practices**

Participants described leadership practices that emphasized steadiness, emotional containment, attentiveness to others, and care for team functioning. Across interviews, participants consistently referenced relational behaviors, such as listening, remaining calm under pressure, and supporting others, as central to how they enacted leadership in senior roles.

#### ***Pattern 1.1 – Leadership Practice Characterized by Relational Steadiness***

Participants described these behaviors as part of their everyday leadership practices, particularly in situations involving uncertainty or heightened emotional demands.

- “I create space for people to take risks. It allows my team members to bring me their fear and imagination, and I try to hold that gently but firmly. It builds trust.” (P1)
- “I’m super attuned to people that are feeling out of place. I think other people might just be like, oh, that person is shy, or that person has hang-ups. I think I very intuitively understand when there are people who feel just mismatched in the workplace.” (P7)

- “I tend to lead with lots of empathy and kindness and understanding. And as a result of that, I am able to be fairly influential in that way...I feel like that is my current leadership abilities.” (P2)

Several participants described moments of uncertainty in which they focused on stabilizing others emotionally and operationally as part of their leadership role.

- “My greatest strength is being calm. When my team becomes anxious, I do not join the panic. I focus on the small actions that move us forward. One of my colleagues once told me you never raise your voice, but somehow, we all slow down when you speak.” (P4)
- “One engineer told me his father was sick in another country, and he was working nights to sort of help with medical arrangements. And he didn’t want to tell anyone because we’re all dealing with things. And after that, I reassigned tasks and adjusted the workload quietly. Some deadlines had to slip, but the humans didn’t. Well, that’s quiet leadership.” (P8)
- “I flew down, listened to what their problems were, and adjusted the work. Once people felt safe, they opened up about what was wrong, and we were able to fix the problem. So yes, I’m confident in my leadership, not because I feel like I’m perfect, but because I’m human first, and I’m a leader second.” (P9)

***Pattern 1.2 – Experiences of Being Overlooked or Questioned in Senior Leadership Context***

Participants described repeated experiences of being overworked, unheard, or questioned within senior leadership environments.

- “It’s like it is always a place to underestimate my capability, or underestimate or question my own leadership. I think that’s where you get, sometimes the stereotypes, she’s just a performer. And I think I’ve sat in that for a really long time.” (P5)
  - “The trend is, if you have non-Asian PM, they are good at talking, and Asian PMs, they’re more likely to withdraw. Like, okay, quiet, yeah, that’s a perception that’s actually a stereotype. So maybe that’s related to bad boosting, because now you’ve got to stay on more technical, you’re not going to be in the leadership or supervisor roles.” (P6)
- Participants described experiences of self-doubt after repeated instances of being

overlooked, questioned, or excluded in the senior leadership environment.

- “I never viewed myself as a leader. I was sort of hand-picked by some of my advocates within my career over the years to become a leader. It was deeply uncomfortable, and I dealt a lot with imposter syndrome.” (P7)
- “The bamboo ceiling wasn’t a single crash. It was more like invisible resistance. I was passed over for promotion because I supposedly lacked executive presence, and that really did sting. It was code for not fitting their image of leadership.” (P9)

### ***Pattern 1.3 – Responsibility for Emotional Labor and Team Cohesion***

Participants described taking on responsibility for emotional labor, problem-solving, and team cohesion in their leadership roles. Several participants reported doing so while lacking corresponding authority or formal recognition. Participants also described the demands associated with these responsibilities as increasing over time.

- “It’s because you’re not allowed to have opinions. You’re not allowed to be assertive; you’re not allowed to come into a meeting and say that you have a perspective as well.

And it's been interesting to try to build a woman in leadership solution and to meet the very barrier that we're trying to talk about in women in leadership." (P3)

- "It is exhausting, and it takes too much energy to have to navigate that stuff...a lot of like, sussing out, what will happen if I say this? And what will these people do, and what their response will be. The higher up the leadership chain that I am, and therefore the more responsibilities I sometimes have, I don't have time to get stuck in that space." (P3)
- "One of the most beneficial aspects is the sense of collective responsibility I grew up with in Korean culture. That mindset makes me more thoughtful and cautious in my decision-making. But there are challenges inside that strength. So, when you focus on the group, it's easy to forget your boundaries. I take on too much. I try to protect others." (P8)

Taken together, the patterns within this theme describe recurring relational leadership practices across senior leadership contexts.

## **Theme 2 – Leadership Self-Efficacy Development Over Time**

Participants described changes in LSE over time in relation to their ongoing leadership experiences.

### ***Pattern 2.1 – Leadership Self-Efficacy Accrued Through Experience***

Participants described LSE in relation to their experiences navigating responsibility, challenge, and complexity over time.

- "My weakness is that I do not promote myself. I prefer that results speak for me, but in a US-based organization, that sometimes makes me less visible. I would describe my leadership as quiet, deliberate, and grounded in respect." (P4)

- “If I don’t understand something, I have the initiative to learn. I will go just one little extra step, I just Google, now we have ChatGPT, instead of just waiting and not doing it.” (P6)
- “It largely comes down to self-awareness and constantly not getting comfortable like that. This is the leadership way. And actually it’s even more interesting, as much as AI is now kind of coming into the picture around so many management efficiencies that we can gain from management and day-to-day practices and the tactics it is constant, and it’s actually all has recently really made me think about, how do I continue to build that soft skill of leadership?” (P5)

Participants described LSE in relation to continued engagement across multiple leadership situations rather than in connection with a single event or achievement.

- “My leadership style is a blend of mentors I’ve observed over time. Seeing the consequences of different leadership approaches shaped how I lead today.” (P2)
- “I guess another way I would describe myself as a leader is at least at the beginning. I mean, I’ve been doing this for five years now, and I’m much more confident of a leader now, but certainly in the earlier stages, I was a very reluctant leader. I never pursued leadership as a career or as a goal. I never viewed myself as a leader, and I think that was probably cultural, like a cultural stereotype of Asians as being like good little workers that stay within the lines, follow the instructions and stay within the box and are really smart, and stick to the books. I was definitely the stereotype.” (P7)

### ***Pattern 2.2 – Continuing to Lead with Limited Feedback or Recognition***

Participants described continuing to lead in situations where feedback, recognition, or advancement cues were limited or unclear.

- “Being able to recognize where there is a need, where there is a gap, and just working to fill it quietly over and over. And so, I said yes, a lot to a lot of things, which has its own dark side. But I think because I was so willing to say yes and because I was so willing to just be like, I’ll figure it out, I found myself in these positions of influence, of being able to help make decisions and choices simply because I said yes and was willing to help when maybe no one else raised their hand.” (P3)
- “When I became a senior director, I noticed decisions were made informally and after meetings and in hallways. I wasn’t in those spaces. I was not invited because I don’t think I belong. That’s when I felt the bamboo ceiling most clearly.” (P8)

### ***Pattern 2.3 – The Emotional Cost of Persistence***

Participants described fatigue, self-doubt, and emotional strain in relation to their ongoing leadership responsibilities.

- “It’s the paradox of tradition and disruption. You’re always translating, constantly proving you belong to one group or another. Sometimes you feel like the groups are pulling you apart. I believe people don’t question your skills. They question your context. The hardest part is legitimacy, feeling like you have to justify your presence before you even start. And then there is visibility fatigue, always being the bridge in the room. For me, it’s navigating the bridge of multiple identity expectations.” (P1)

- “You just feel, well, if I do the work somebody will recognize it, somebody will see it, and I will get the recognition for it. And we all know that’s not necessarily true. And there are so many different sorts of navigational skills, oftentimes maybe soft skills, that are needed to then be recognized, potentially for work done or work not done. And so, I think that’s where you’re taught to be, your family values instilled in you over time.”

(P2)

- “Sometimes I’m seeking consensus when clarity is what’s needed, and I still fight the cultural pressure to be perfect. That voice saying you should have done better, you can be heavy on a day-to-day basis.” (P9)

Taken together, the patterns within this theme describe how participants discussed LSE over time in relation to their leadership experiences.

### **Theme 3 – Changes in How Participants Described Leadership Self-Efficacy**

Participants described changes over time in how they discussed their leadership experiences. Across interviews, participants referenced differences in how they spoke about self-efficacy, authority, and their leadership roles at different points in their careers.

#### ***Pattern 3.1 – Changes Described After Extended Leadership Experience***

Participants described changes in how they approached leadership after extended periods of leadership experience. These descriptions were often found later in their careers rather than at the point of initial entry into leadership roles.

- “I embody leadership differently across contexts. I can shift between being a servant leader, an influencer, rather than someone who makes difficult or hard calls, and when the situation calls for it, I can be very, very tough.” (P3)

### ***Pattern 3.2 – Changes in How Participants Defined Leadership***

Participants described changes in how they defined leadership over time. In their accounts, participants referenced shifts in how they described leadership in relation to their own values and experiences.

- “I think that’s just probably the upbringing of an Asian culture where you’re seeing sort of being more introverted, meek, whatever the stereotypes of it may be, but I would say that because in many places where I’m potentially the only person of my background, that I have learned, the different kinds of behaviors in which you need to speak up and influence and I think about that often. Do you become someone that you’re not in order to be more effective, or do you hone who you are, and as a result, people have to adapt to how you are in your leadership style?” (P2)
- “Leadership for me is not about power, but presence, the kind that makes people feel calm enough to do their best work... Quiet people can lead. We just lead differently. Maybe we don’t stand in the light, but we help others shine in it.” (P4)
- “I thought leadership meant being outspoken, charismatic, and always in control. But I learned that leadership isn’t about volume. It’s about presence. Quiet leadership can be powerful because it listens and endures.” (P8)

### ***Pattern 3.3 – Changes in How Self-Efficacy Was Referenced Over Time***

Participants described changes in how they referenced self-efficacy in their leadership roles over time. In their accounts, self-efficacy was described in relation to personal experience rather than external feedback.

- “From within, feeling in between, not Asian enough, not American enough. I used to think I had to earn belonging through excellence. Now I know I don’t. I don’t need to earn it. I already belong. I already have credentials. I’ve already proven my experiences and expertise in the things that I do.” (P9)
- “I used to think leadership was about keeping everyone comfortable, but I learned that conflict does not mean failure. I lead more transparently now and no longer shrink myself to fix expectations” (P1)

Taken together, the patterns within this theme describe changes in how participants described LSE and authority over time.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the results of a GQI focused on how first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership roles described LSE. Analysis of nine semi-structured interviews yielded three themes. Theme 1 described relational leadership practices, including steadiness, emotional containment, and care for others, alongside reported experiences of being overlooked or questioned in a senior leadership environment. Theme 2 described LSE over time in relation to accumulated leadership experiences, continued engagement, and reported emotional demands associated with leadership responsibilities. Theme 3 described changes in how participants discussed LSE and authority over time. Chapter 5 discusses these findings in relation to the theoretical framework, previous literature, and implications for practice and future research.

## **CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Chapter 5 presents an interpretation of the findings generated through this GQI into leadership self-efficacy (LSE) among first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership roles. Whereas Chapter 4 reported the results of the data analysis through themes, patterns, and participant quotations, this chapter focuses on what those findings mean in relation to the study's purpose, theoretical framework, and existing research. The chapter examines how participants described the development of LSE over time and how cultural values, generational identity, and organizational context shaped their leadership experiences.

This chapter begins with a summary of the key findings identified across the three themes presented in Chapter 4. The findings were then examined in relation to LSE theory and prior research on leadership, culture, gender, and intersectionality. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications for leadership development, organizational practice, and professional support, followed by a discussion of study limitations and recommendations for future research.

### **Summary of Findings**

Building on the themes presented in Chapter 4, this chapter summarizes the findings of the study. Participants described LSE as developing through accumulated leadership experience, cultural navigation, and identity integration rather than through early validation or discrete leadership milestones. Across the dataset, leadership confidence was described as emerging through steadiness, preparation, ethical responsibility, and relational awareness, reflecting how participants enacted leadership in a complex organizational context.

A second cross-cutting pattern evident in the findings was the persistent tension between participants' internal sense of leadership confidence and their external recognition as legitimate leaders. Participants described navigating environments in which their competence and contributions were frequently questioned, overlooked, or conditionally acknowledged, requiring ongoing translation of leadership capability into forms recognized within dominant organizational norms.

Cultural and generational influences were deeply embedded in participants' understanding and enactment of leadership. Participants described leadership meaning-making processes shaped by East Asian cultural values such as humility, relational responsibility, and discipline, alongside generational experiences that influenced how these values were negotiated within United States-based organizational contexts. First-generation leaders often emphasized cultural integrity through strategic adaptation, whereas second-generation leaders described sustained bicultural translation work. Across both groups, LSE was strengthened by integrating cultural values with professional identity rather than suppressing or replacing those values.

Participants' experiences also reflected layered patterns of invisibility, stereotype-based expectations, and conditional inclusion that shaped how leadership could be enacted without penalty. Rather than internalizing deficit-based narratives, participants described LSE through self-authored definitions of leadership grounded in values, relational influence, and long-term impact. Collectively, these findings synthesize the three themes identified in Chapter 4: (a) relational leadership practices, (b) LSE development over time, and (c) changes in how participants described LSE.

## **Findings in Context of the Theoretical Framework**

This interpretive discussion aligned with the three themes reported in Chapter 4: Theme 1 (Relational Leadership Practices), Theme 2 (LSE Development Over Time), and Theme 3 (Changes in How Participants Described Leadership Self-Efficacy). This section interprets the study's findings through the theoretical lens that guided the inquiry, with particular attention to LSE as conceptualized within social cognitive theory. Drawing on Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1986) framework, this analysis examined how participants' leadership confidence developed over time and how efficacy beliefs were shaped by experience, context, and self-authorship rather than solely by external validation.

### ***Leadership Self-Efficacy as an Evolving and Contextually Constructed Process***

The findings of this study indicated that LSE, as experienced by first- and second-generation Asian American women in senior leadership roles, is best understood as an evolving, contextually constructed process rather than a stable or inherent trait. These findings suggested that LSE for East Asian American women is internally anchored and contextually sustained, enabling leaders to maintain confidence even in environments where their leadership legitimacy is questioned or minimized. Participants consistently described leadership confidence as developing gradually through accumulated experience, persistence, and reflective sensemaking, rather than through early affirmation, formal leadership development, or external validation. This pattern aligns with Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1986) assertion that mastery experiences are the most influential source of self-efficacy, while also extending LSE theory by illustrating how these mastery experiences often occur under conditions of ambiguity, constraint, or misrecognition for racially and culturally minoritized leaders. Unlike dominant leadership narratives that equate

confidence with assertiveness or visibility, participants articulated leadership efficacy through steadiness, preparedness, ethical responsibility, and the ability to navigate complex interpersonal and organizational dynamics. These findings resonate with Dwyer's (2019) synthesis of LSE research, which emphasizes experiential learning and resiliency, yet they complicate existing models by demonstrating that high LSE can coexist with limited external affirmation. In this way, LSE functioned less as a precursor to leadership legitimacy and more as an internally sustained psychological resource for participants in the study, enabling them to remain effective despite structural and cultural barriers. The findings suggested that traditional measures of leadership confidence may underestimate the effectiveness of leaders whose confidence is internally rather than publicly anchored.

### ***Internal Confidence and External Legitimacy Under Conditions of Constraint***

A central theoretical insight emerging from the findings is the persistent tension between participants' internal leadership confidence and their external leadership legitimacy within organizational contexts. This tension did not appear to diminish participants' confidence; rather, it shaped how LSE was enacted in organizational contexts. Many participants expressed strong confidence in their decision-making, judgment, and leadership capability while simultaneously describing experiences of being overlooked, underestimated, or required to continually reestablish credibility. This pattern reflects what Meister et al. (2017) describe as internal identity asymmetry, in which leaders experience dissonance between their internal leadership identity and how they are perceived by others. For East Asian American women, this asymmetry was compounded by racialized and gendered leadership stereotypes that framed them as competent yet insufficiently leader-like, a dynamic well documented in the bamboo ceiling and

agentic mismatch literature (Hyun, 2005; Kim et al., 2021; Rosette & Tost, 2010). Importantly, participants did not interpret these experiences as evidence of personal inadequacy; rather, they framed them as contextual constraints that required strategic adaptation. This finding supports Ruggs et al.'s (2023) argument that LSE in women of color often develops in environments that actively question leadership fit, necessitating a form of confidence that is durable, self-authored, and less dependent on affirmation. From a theoretical perspective, the findings extend LSE theory by demonstrating that efficacy beliefs can be sustained independently of recognition or legitimacy, challenging the assumption that confidence and validation develop in tandem. These patterns highlight a distinction between LSE and leadership legitimacy, highlighting how confidence can be sustained independently of recognition and how underrepresented leaders may develop resilience and self-authorship in response to structural constraints.

### **Findings in Context of the Previous Literature**

This section positions the study's findings within the broader scholarly literature reviewed in Chapter 2, examining how participants' experiences aligned with, extended, and complicated existing research on culture, gender, intersectionality, and leadership. These findings positioned culture and generation not as peripheral factors, but as central mechanisms through which leadership confidence is constructed and sustained. Rather than treating cultural and identity factors as peripheral influences, the findings positioned them as central to the construction and enactment of LSE over time.

### ***Cultural and Generational Influences on Leadership Meaning-Making***

The findings demonstrated that LSE for East Asian American women is deeply shaped by culturally and generationally grounded meaning-making processes. Participants' leadership

narratives reflected values such as humility, relational awareness, discipline, and responsibility, which align with East Asian cultural frameworks, including Confucianism and collectivism (Shen et al., 2014; Viengkham et al., 2018). Rather than viewing these values as obstacles to leadership effectiveness, participants described them as foundational to their understanding of ethical and sustainable leadership, particularly in managing people, navigating complexity, and maintaining long-term accountability. Participants acknowledged that these leadership expressions often conflicted with dominant United States leadership norms that privilege assertiveness, self-promotion, and visibility, and that generational status influenced how this tension was navigated. First-generation leaders often described adapting leadership behaviors strategically while preserving cultural integrity, whereas second-generation leaders emphasized the ongoing negotiation of bicultural expectations and the cognitive labor required to translate leadership across cultural contexts. These findings align with Tu and Okazaki's (2021) call for culturally grounded redefinitions of success and extend that framework into LSE by illustrating how confidence is constructed through integration rather than assimilation. Taken together, these findings suggested that culture and generational status function jointly, rather than independently, in shaping how LSE is interpreted, enacted, and sustained over time.

### ***Intersectional Identity and the Construction of Leadership Legitimacy***

The findings illustrated that LSE for East Asian American women in senior leadership roles is shaped by the interaction of race, gender, culture, and generational identity. An intersectional reading of the findings revealed that LSE for East Asian American women is shaped by the interaction of race, gender, and generational identity rather than by any single identity dimension. Participants' accounts reflected layered experiences of invisibility,

conditional inclusion, and stereotype-based expectations that mirror patterns identified in intersectional leadership scholarship (Rosette et al., 2016; Wong & McCullough, 2021). These dynamics influenced not whether participants perceived themselves as capable leaders, but how freely and visibly they could enact leadership without incurring relational or reputational penalties. Consistent with the literature on the model minority myth and the bamboo ceiling (Lu, 2022, 2024a, 2024b; Mouton et al., 2020; Walton & Truong, 2023), participants described being perceived as reliable and competent while being excluded from assumptions of strategic authority or visionary leadership. Over time, many participants described developing LSE through self-authorship, redefining leadership in ways that aligned with their values rather than dominant expectations. This process aligns with Kodama and Dugan's (2020) findings on collective racial esteem and resilience, suggesting that leadership confidence is strengthened when leaders position themselves within broader cultural and intergenerational narratives rather than internalizing deficit-based frames.

### ***Reframing Leadership Self-Efficacy Beyond Dominant Leadership Norms***

The findings invited a reframing of LSE beyond dominant Western-centric leadership norms. Traditional leadership models frequently equate confidence with visibility, assertiveness, and individual dominance, and assumptions that fail to capture the forms of leadership efficacy demonstrated by participants in this study. The women in this study exhibited high LSE expressed through relational influence, ethical clarity, emotional regulation, and long-term paradigms. These findings align with scholarly calls to expand leadership theory to recognize culturally grounded leadership expression as legitimate and effective (Im et al., 2024; Leung & Turner, 2018). By situating LSE within cultural, generational, and intersectional contexts, this

study contributes to a more inclusive understanding of how leadership confidence is developed and sustained for underrepresented leaders. Rather than positioning East Asian American women as needing to adapt to existing leadership norms, the findings suggested that leadership theory itself must broaden to better reflect the diversity of effective leadership practices.

The study contributed to the leadership literature by extending understandings of LSE through the lived experience of first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership roles. While prior research has examined LSE using quantitative measures or early-career samples, this study offers qualitative insight into how LSE is experienced, sustained, and reshaped over time at senior levels of leadership. By centering cultural norms, generational context, and identity negotiation, the findings illuminate how LSE functions as an internally anchored and relationally negotiated construct. These insights deepen existing theoretical perspectives and address a gap in leadership research concerning the experiences of East Asian American women in positions of organizational authority.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First, the qualitative design and purposive sampling strategy limit the transferability of the findings beyond similar populations and contexts. The study focused on a small sample of nine first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership roles, and the findings reflect the experiences and perspectives of this specific group rather than representing all East Asian American women or leaders more broadly. As with qualitative inquiry, the goal of this study was depth of understanding rather than generalization.

Second, all participants in this study held senior-level leadership positions and had achieved professional success. As a result, the findings may not capture the experiences of East Asian American women earlier in their careers, or those who exited leadership pipelines. LSE with individuals who have not yet attained senior roles or who have encountered barriers to advancement may differ in different ways. Future research that includes a broader range of career stages could provide additional insight into how LSE influences leadership trajectories over time.

Third, the study relied on self-reported data collected through interviews, which reflect participants' perceptions and interpretations of their experiences. While self-report is appropriate for exploring meaning-making and identity, participants' accounts may be influenced by retrospective sensemaking or social desirability. To mitigate this limitation, the study employed rigorous analytic procedures, reflective practices, and systematic coding to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' narratives. Nonetheless, the findings should be understood as representing participants' subjective experiences rather than an objective assessment of leadership behavior or effectiveness.

### **Implications for Policy or Practice**

The findings of this study have several important implications for policy and practice related to leadership development, organizational systems, and professional support structures for East Asian American women in senior leadership roles. These implications were most applicable to organizations seeking to support culturally diverse leadership in knowledge-based or professional leadership contexts similar to those represented in this study. Collectively, the findings suggested that prevailing leadership development models and organizational policies

often fail to recognize culturally grounded expressions of LSE, thereby reinforcing narrow definitions of leadership confidence and effectiveness. Addressing these gaps within organizations like those represented in this study may require a shift away from deficit-oriented approaches that focus on helping underrepresented leaders adapt to dominant norms and toward systems-level changes that expand how leadership competence, confidence, and legitimacy are defined and supported. This synthesis highlights the need to reconsider dominant assumptions about leadership confidence and effectiveness, considering this study's findings.

### **Implications for Leadership Development**

Leadership development programs in many professional and knowledge-intensive organizations frequently emphasized visibility, assertiveness, and individual self-promotion as core indicators of leadership readiness and confidence. However, the findings of this study suggest that such approaches may overlook or undervalue the LSE demonstrated by East Asian American women, whose confidence is often expressed through preparation, relational influence, ethical responsibility, and steady decision-making rather than overt displays of authority. Leadership development initiatives in similar organizational contexts may benefit from redesigns that incorporate culturally responsive frameworks that recognize multiple pathways to effective leadership. Programs that explicitly address LSE as an evolving process shaped by experience, reflection, and identity integration may be particularly beneficial for leaders whose confidence has been internally cultivated rather than externally affirmed.

In addition, leadership development efforts should include structured opportunities for reflection and narrative reframing, allowing leaders to articulate and legitimize their own leadership styles. Coaching-based development models that emphasize values alignment,

meaning-making, and long-term leadership impact may be especially well-suited for East Asian American women navigating culturally incongruent leadership expectations. By validating diverse expressions of leadership confidence and effectiveness, leadership development programs can move beyond assimilation-based models and instead foster authentic, sustainable leadership growth.

### **Implications for Organizational Policies and Talent Systems**

Organizational policies and talent management systems played a critical role in shaping how LSE is recognized, reinforced, and rewarded. The findings indicated that participants often possessed strong internal leadership confidence while operating within systems that value visibility, self-advocacy, and dominant leadership prototypes. Performance evaluation criteria, promotion processes, and leadership potential assessments that rely heavily on these markers may inadvertently disadvantage leaders whose contributions are relational, long-term, or less publicly visible. Organizations like those represented in this study may benefit from examining how leadership effectiveness is defined and measured, ensuring that evaluation frameworks capture a broader range of leadership behaviors and outcomes.

Talent systems should also prioritize sponsorship and advocacy, particularly for leaders who may not naturally engage in self-promotion. Formal sponsorship structures that encourage senior leaders to actively recognize, validate, and advance culturally diverse leadership talent can help mitigate the gap between LSE and leadership legitimacy identified in this study. Additionally, organizations may benefit from considering how psychological safety and inclusion policies shape leaders' willingness to exercise voice and visibility. Creating

environments where diverse leadership styles are not only accepted but also valued may be essential to sustaining confidence among underrepresented leaders.

### **Implications for Coaching, Mentoring, and Professional Support**

The findings further highlight the importance of culturally attuned coaching and mentoring relationships in supporting LSE for East Asian American women. Generic mentoring models that focus primarily on skill acquisition or career navigation may be insufficient for leaders navigating intersectional identity dynamics and cultural dissonance. Instead, coaching and mentoring approaches should explicitly address issues of identity integration, legitimacy, and self-authorship, thus providing leaders with space to reflect on how cultural values shape their leadership practice.

Professional support structures, including affinity-based leadership networks and peer mentoring communities, may also serve as a critical resource for reinforcing leadership confidence and reducing isolation. Such spaces allow leaders to share experiences, normalize challenges, and collectively redefine leadership success outside of dominant organizational narratives. For East Asian American women in senior leadership roles, access to culturally responsive coaching and mentoring can support not only individual development but also broader efforts to challenge restrictive leadership norms within organizations.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of this study highlight several opportunities for future research that could deepen understanding of LSE among East Asian American women and extend the current study's contributions. Given the exploratory and qualitative nature of this inquiry, additional research is needed to further examine how LSE is developed, sustained, and expressed across

varied contexts, career stages, and organizational environments. Future studies could build on the insights generated here by employing diverse methodological approaches and expanding the population and settings under investigation.

Methodologically, future research could incorporate longitudinal designs to examine how LSE evolves over time, particularly during critical leadership transitions such as promotions into senior roles, organizational restructuring, or periods of heightened responsibility. Longitudinal approaches would allow researchers to explore how efficacy beliefs are reinforced, challenged, or reshaped across career stages and changing organizational contexts. In addition, mixed-methods studies that integrate qualitative interviews with validated LSE measures could offer complementary perspectives, combining depth of lived experience and broader pattern identification. Such approaches may help clarify how internally anchored leadership confidence interacts with external indicators of leadership legitimacy.

Future research could also extend this work by examining LSE as experienced by East Asian American women across different professional and organizational contexts. Comparative studies exploring variations by industry, organization size, or sector (e.g., private, public, nonprofit) may illuminate how contextual factors shape leadership confidence and legitimacy. Additionally, research that examines differences within East Asian American subgroups or compares first- and second-generation leaders more explicitly could provide greater nuance regarding the role of cultural heritage and generational identity in leadership development. Expanding the focus to include earlier-career leaders or individuals who have exited leadership pipelines may further clarify how LSE influences persistence and advancement.

In addition, future research could benefit from more explicit intersectional analyses that examine how LSE is shaped by the interactions of race, gender, culture, and other identity dimensions, such as immigration history, socioeconomic background, or organizational status. Comparative studies that include other racialized women leaders or men from similar cultural backgrounds could help distinguish which aspects of LSE are culturally specific and which reflect broader systemic dynamics. Such research would contribute to more inclusive leadership theories and support the development of organizational practices that recognize diverse pathways to effective leadership.

Finally, future research may extend beyond individual-level and identity-based analyses to examine how multilevel organizational systems interact with cultural and psychosocial variables to influence LSE development. Cultural heritage, hierarchical expectations, racialized gender norms, and structural opportunity access likely operate in dynamic and interdependent ways rather than as isolated influences (Stephenson et al., 2024). Quantitative, multivariate research designs may help clarify how these intersecting contributors collectively shape executive representation and leaders' confidence among women of color. Such work would further connect micro-level efficacy beliefs with macro-level organizational conditions that sustain or disrupt leadership disparities.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored how first- and second-generation East Asian American women in senior leadership roles experience and describe LSE and how cultural and generational influences shape their leadership meaning-making. Through in-depth qualitative analysis, the findings illuminated LSE as an evolving, internally sustained process developed through

experience, cultural navigation, and identity integration rather than through early validation or conformity to dominant leadership norms. Participants demonstrated strong leadership confidence expressed through steadiness, relational influence, ethical responsibility, and long-term perspective, even while navigating environments that questioned their leadership legitimacy.

By positioning these findings within LSE theory and existing literature on culture, gender, and intersectionality, this study extended understanding of how leadership confidence is constructed under conditions of constraint. The findings challenged deficit-oriented narratives that framed East Asian American women as lacking leadership confidence and instead highlight the adaptive, resilient, and self-authored nature of their LSE. In doing so, the study contributed to more inclusive leadership scholarship that recognizes culturally grounded expressions of leadership as legitimate and effective.

Ultimately, this research underscored the importance of expanding how LSE is conceptualized, evaluated, and supported within organizations and scholarly frameworks. Recognizing diverse pathways to leadership confidence is essential not only for advancing equity in leadership development but also for fostering organizational cultures that value a broader range of leadership strengths. By centering the voices and experiences of East Asian American women in senior leadership, this study offered insights that can inform theory, practice, and future research aimed at creating more inclusive and effective leadership systems. This study contributed to leadership scholarship by reframing LSE as an internally sustained, culturally grounded construct rather than a function of external validation.

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**APPENDIX**  
**PARTICIPANT PROFILES**

***Participant 1 (P1)***

P1 was a second-generation Korean American woman who worked in the arts sector, with approximately seven years of leadership experience.

***Participant 2 (P2)***

P2 identified as a first-generation Chinese American woman who worked in the healthcare sector, held an executive leadership role within a large organization, and reported over ten years of leadership experience.

***Participant 3 (P3)***

P3 was a second-generation Korean American woman who worked in the technology sector and held a senior leadership role within a mid-sized organization with over ten years of leadership experience.

***Participant 4 (P4)***

P4 identified as a first-generation Japanese American woman employed in the technology sector and held a senior leadership role within a mid-sized organization with several years of leadership experience.

***Participant 5 (P5)***

P5 was a first-generation Korean American woman who worked in a people-focused organizational function and served in an executive leadership role within a small organization with multiple years of leadership experience.

***Participant 6 (P6)***

P6 identified as a first-generation Chinese American woman employed in a public-sector-related organization and held a senior leadership role within a small organization with several years of leadership experience.

***Participant 7 (P7)***

P7 was a second-generation Chinese American woman who worked in the technology sector and held a senior leadership role within a very large organization with several years of leadership experience.

***Participant 8 (P8)***

P8 identified as a first-generation Korean American woman employed in the technology sector and held a senior leadership role within a large organization with several years of leadership experience.

***Participant 9 (P9)***

P9 was a second-generation Chinese American woman who worked in the healthcare sector and served in a senior executive-level role within a large organization with approximately ten years of leadership experience.

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