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## Experiences of Five Women Presidents in Higher Education: A Narrative Study

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EXPERIENCES OF FIVE WOMEN PRESIDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION:  
A NARRATIVE STUDY

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the strong women that influenced my life: Ashlyn and Madison, my daughters; Rosemary Caturano, my mother; Marie Leary and Dora Caturano, my grandmothers; and my sisters, Anne-Marie, Cathy, Patty, Kristi, and Ginger. Finally, to my mentor, sponsor, friend, confidant, and biggest cheerleader, Dr. Helen Doerpinghaus. I would not be the person I am today without the impact of each of these women. I am forever grateful.

This is also dedicated to the trailblazers in higher education, women college presidents, and those who aspire to be presidents. Please be a partner in feeding the pipeline of future women leaders.

When you get where you're going,  
Don't forget turn back around  
And help the next one in line  
Always stay humble and kind.

- Tim McGraw

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Extensive research has demonstrated that leaders aspiring to become women college presidents encounter many barriers, including gender-based leadership barriers. In higher education, women hold more degrees than men; however, women account for only 30 percent of all college and university presidencies. As the total number of women earning doctoral degrees and hired into faculty positions within the academy increases, the overall gap of the genders begins to narrow (Flaherty, 2016), and women are hired into lower status instructor positions compared to their male counterparts who are in tenured or tenure track position.

Even in presidential positions, women leaders face challenges within institutional structures, practices, and mindsets that require transformative change. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of five women presidents in higher education who navigated gendered institutions to achieve their presidency roles. The five presidents were from different institution-types, located in distinct regions of the United States, representing diverse races and ages.

Indeed, as more women enter the academy, more knowledge must be gathered. This study aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences and strategies the women presidents implemented as they navigated gendered higher education institutions. The reader also learned the self-efficacy strategies the women college presidents applied to assist them in their rise through the ranks to become president. Specifically, the attributes, professional advancement goals and activities,

opportunities, and behaviors that had implications for their career to progress to the position of president within the higher education academy. Finally, the study provided an understanding of the challenges these women presidents had to overcome to achieve their positions.

The conceptual theories used to frame this study are Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory and the feminist theory of patriarchy. Paramount to this narrative inquiry is the juxtaposition of the individual woman president's journey as she navigated the inherent bias, illustrated by self-efficacy theory, within a gendered organization, which was demonstrated through the theory of patriarchy. This study links theory, research, and practice of women college presidents and suggests future leadership development strategies. These strategies include exposing aspiring women leaders to leadership opportunities, supporting the women as they ascend through the leadership pipeline, and fostering the leadership skills needed to oversee a higher education institution.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The lack of women leaders in higher education is significant, persistent, and pervasive (Bilen-Green & Jacobson, 2008; Diehl, 2014; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Hannum, Muhly, Shockley-Zalabak & White, 2015; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016). Women consist of half of today's workforce but are meagerly represented in the president's position within the higher education sector. In 1986, the American Council on Education performed a study on the typical campus administrator. They found the average college president was a white man in his late 50's, held a doctorate in education, and served as president for approximately six years (Cook, 2018). Thirty-five years later, not much has changed except the average age has increased by ten years. In 2018, women earned approximately 53.5% of the Ph.D.'s in the United States (NCES 324.20); however, they make up only 30% of the academy's presidents (Johnson, 2017).

College presidents are the chief executive officers of higher education institutions and are considered the most powerful and influential individuals within the academic community (Rile, 2001). They are a unique group of leaders in the American higher education sector (Soares, Gagliardi, Wilkinson, & Lind, 2018) due to the depth and breadth for which they are responsible. College presidents are expected to provide intellectual leadership to the academic community concurrently, possess administrative and financial acumen, fundraising ability, political deftness, exemplify institutional

values, and shape the academy's policies (Ross & Green 2000; Selingo, Chheng & Clark, 2017). They must be resilient innovators that can make long-term strategic decisions, take risks associated with potential policy shifts and thrive on “turning challenges or moments of campus crisis into opportunities and sustain progress” (Soares et al., 2018, p.1).

The current higher education environment is turbulent. There always seems to be some type of crisis, whether it be a funding crisis, restructuring crisis, student retention crisis, health crisis, diversity and inclusion crisis, or leadership crisis (Ivancheva & Syndicus, 2019; Kretovics & Eckert, 2020). Indeed, higher education is constantly evolving to meet the current emergencies and adapt to the changing world around it (Kretovics & Eckert, 2020). These changes require a leader who can be risk-averse, manages a crisis, identifies opportunities, and carries out the institution's mission (Birnbaum, 1992; Ivancheva & Syndicus, 2019; Kretovics & Eckert, 2020; Lynch, 2014).

College presidents understand that they must have humility and a high degree of emotional intelligence to develop and implement the right solutions (Cowen, 2018). They are facing some broad forces that are reshaping the institutions across the nation. These include demographic changes, defunding of the higher education institutions by the federal and state government, erosion of public support, and an increased number of competitors of for-profit and nonprofit institutions (Hannum et al., 2015; Kippenhan, 2004; Tandberg & Laderman, 2018; Lennon, 2013; Maloney & Kim, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2017; Snyder & Dillow, 2012; Soares, Gagliardi & Nellum, 2017; Touchton, Musil & Campbell, 2008). Increasingly, over the next few years, college leaders will be challenged to solve the complex social, health, cultural, pedagogical, and financial issues within higher education (Johnson, 2017). The college president must

have a strong, balanced leadership that promotes and demonstrates equity and diversity because all perspectives are needed to solve these very complex issues (Johnson, 2017).

It is essential to have diversity in leadership for the multiplicity of viewpoints for decision-making. Women leaders tend to be more democratic, transformational, and collaborative rather than leading in a hierarchical style (Billing & Alvesson, 2000; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Lowe, 2011; Rosener, 1990). This type of representative leadership style, compared to hierarchical, according to Fagenson (1993), also leads to more satisfied faculty and staff compared to men's traditional leadership style. Moreover, it is important to have diversity in leadership for serving those that are traditionally marginalized. A study performed by Bilen-Green & Jacobson (2008) found that when women are presidents within an institution, regardless of the type of institution, more women are full professors and tenured faculty than institutions led by men. Further, when both president and chief academic officers are women, there are more dean positions held by women faculty by an increase of five percentage points (Bilen-Green & Jacobson, 2008). This statistic is important because, traditionally, future presidents are selected from within these leadership ranks in academia (Johnson, 2017). Women in leadership positions are also more likely to ensure equity in pay and benefits for all (Bilen-Green & Jacobson, 2008). This diversity in the academic hierarchy also makes a tremendous impact on the women student's experience, in particular as it relates to mentorship, advisement, and career advice (Finkelstein & LaCelle-Peterson, 1992).

Women leaders tend to be more communal, more communicative, and help those individuals that may be marginalized (Billing & Alvesson, 2000; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Lowe, 2011; Rosener, 1990). They typically engage

in building relationships, keeping the group's best interest in mind, and are supportive (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). The job requires social skills because they must work with and report to such a large stakeholder group (Ross & Green, 2000). The president's stakeholders consist of faculty, staff, students, parents of students, governing board, politicians, public figures, the community, donors, and the alumni, to name just a few (Cowen, 2018; Fisher, 1984; Ross & Green, 2000). The president represents the institution and its values to the external community, while the internal constituents look to them to lead, direct, and control the institution (Nason, 1980; Wiseman, 1991). Due to the diverse set of stakeholders, the communicative and communal attributes usually ascribed to women in leadership are extremely important for the overall experience in relationship building as well as supporting those that are traditionally marginalized individuals (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016).

Many qualified women leaders possess the abilities and leadership skills to be president within higher education institutions. However, at the societal level, cultural barriers on the perceptions of women as leaders (Lucas & Baxter, 2012; Schein, 2001) and gender stereotyping (Pittinsky, Bacon & Welle, 2007; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007) may hinder women from moving forward in the academy (Diehl, 2014). Traditionally, leadership has been equated to masculinity (Billing & Alvesson, 2000). Men outnumber women in positions with high incomes, authority, and power, as well as high status (Billing & Alvesson, 2000). Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) report that universities often champion a more collegial culture representing values and perspectives such as competition, domination, and hierarchy. These values are typically attributed to men compared to the traditionally female-oriented values such as collaboration and equality

(Billing & Alvesson, 2000; Bystydzienski, Thomas, Howe & Desai, 2017). In general, the workplace expects the men employees to provide strategic planning and lead the department while viewing the women as the employee that gets the job done (Ridgeway, 2013). It is important to note that these gendered social identities are frequently projected on to the employees even if they have the same educational background or work experience (Ridgeway, 2013).

Social scientists have studied gender inequity and biases for years. They have found that it shapes every aspect of a woman's life: family, personal and professional interactions, work, salary, authority, promotion, responsibilities, as well as others (Lorber, 2001; Lutter, 2015; Ridgeway, 2009, 2014; Weichselbaumer & Winter-Ebmer, 2005). Succinctly, gender is a social status, and men are valued higher and considered more competent than women (Brinton, 2013). A report by the AAUW (2020) found that women in higher education still make approximately 80% of the salary that men earn in similar positions. On average, men faculty earn \$96,369 and women faculty earn \$79,995 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

The gendered social status, in which men are held in higher regard than women (Brinton, 2013), is also manifested in the higher education institutions' policies and procedures. Even within departments that have a high representation of women, implicit biases can still result in significant inequality (Fuchs, von Stebut, & Allmendinger, 2001; Vazquez-Cupeiro & Elston 2006). Gender-neutral policies have been implemented in many institutions worldwide but have been found to primarily benefit men (Park, 2007; Vazquez-Cupeiro & Elston 2006). As an example, Vazquez-Cupeiro and Elston (2006) found that in an effort to make the leadership positions more gender-equitable, some

institutions decided to change the faculty recruitment policy into these roles. However, they found that men were still chosen for leadership positions due to the internal departmental networks. In many cases, women faculty simply do not have the access or the ability to utilize the social networks within their department or college (Petersen, Saporta, & Seidel, 2000). To make the academy more gender-equitable, a change in the academic culture with a commitment to inclusion and recognition of diverse contributions to ensure equity within the academy is needed (Bystydzienski et al., 2017). However, cultural change requires the academy leaders to realize there is a problem and “have the motivation and skill to change the cultural process” (Schein, 1991, p. 323).

This study will illuminate the voices of women presidents who navigated their gendered organization successfully and provide lessons learned from their lived experiences. This knowledge is important now more than ever because there will be significant vacancies caused by retirements within the academy's presidential positions over the next few years. Indeed, according to the American Council on Education (2020), 58% of the current presidents are age 61+, and over 54% plan to leave their current president position within the next five years. Through these narratives, the next generation of women leaders will understand how these women presidents leveraged opportunities and overcame the barriers that exist to obtain the presidency position. This is also an opportunity for the gendered organization to recognize and change the antiquated policies and procedures so the institution can attract and retain qualified women leaders into the presidency positions.

## **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experiences of women presidents in higher education who navigated gendered institutions to achieve their presidency roles. As more women enter the academy, more knowledge must be gathered to understand if specific professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors had implications for a woman's career to progress to the president's position. Previous research (Bilen-Green & Jacobson, 2008; Hannum et al., 2014; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016) focused on the shortage of women in senior administrative positions in higher education but did not adequately address women's experiences as they navigate gendered barriers within the academy. Institutions must understand the experiences of women who navigated those barriers to attract and retain more women leaders in the near future.

## **Research Question**

Within this study, I address the following central question: What are the experiences of the women presidents as they navigated gendered higher education institutions? My sub-questions are as follows:

1. What are strategies that women presidents implemented to assist them in their rise through the ranks to become president?
2. What specific attributes, professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors had implications for their career to progress to the position of president within the higher education academy?
3. What challenges did women presidents have to overcome to achieve their positions?



### **Significance of Study**

A gendered institution refers to the fact that gender is present in the processes, practices, and distribution of power within an organization (Acker, 1992). In higher education, men generally inhabit the role of professors or leaders with high salaries, while women are in positions that have lower pay and do not offer advancement into administration (Billing & Alvesson, 2000). The U.S. Department of Education (2015) reported that women have higher education attainment levels than men; however, the American Council on Education (2017) found that the higher attainment levels are not reflected in the number of women holding high faculty ranks, salary, or positions within administration such as department chair or dean. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), in 2017-2018, men faculty members held a higher percentage of tenured positions (54% of males had tenure compared with 41% of females) within every type of institution; however, they did not hold the highest number of faculty positions at every rank. In other words, there were more women faculty in the tenure-track and tenured positions, but more men held the highest-paid tenured positions. This is indicative of a gendered organization in which men hold the top leadership position with a higher salary, and women are in positions of lower status.

Gendered norms may determine who gets hired, promoted, or rewarded based on the traditional division of labor (Acker, 2007). These gendered norms are entrenched in the organization and repeated consistently through interpersonal interactions formalized and regulated by the institutional practices and policies (Chen & Chen, 2012; Mastracci & Bowman, 2015; Stivers, 2000). It is a consequence of gender as a socially constructed phenomenon in which the antiquated gendered roles, men are the breadwinner, and a

women's place is in the home, are maintained (Denhardt & Perkins, 1976; Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). Knowledge of gendered bias is demonstrated through the action and inaction at all levels of the organization and based on reflection, interaction, and professional observations (Prasad, 2018), such as the intentional or unintentional gendered practices currently implemented in the academy. Although more women are entering higher education, parity has failed to bring about gender equity (Guy & Fenley, 2014; Hsieh & Winslow, 2006).

As women presidents make their way through the gendered organizations, they have continuous experiences and interactions both in their surrounding world and within themselves (Moen, 2006). This research study utilizes the conceptual frameworks of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory and the feminist theory of patriarchy. Paramount to this narrative inquiry is the juxtaposition of the individual woman president's journey as she navigates the inherent bias, illustrated by self-efficacy theory, within a gendered organization, which is demonstrated through the theory of patriarchy. This research will illuminate the stories of how these women college presidents leveraged specific professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors to progress to the position of the president while overcoming the inherent bias within gendered organizations that could be manifested in women's oppression or marginalization.

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

The research study will consist of layering two theoretical frameworks: Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, with an emphasis on self-efficacy theory, and feminist theory, concentrating on patriarchy. I chose to create a conceptual framework due to the concurrence of two elements within this research question. The first element is

the individual woman president's journey and how she leveraged specific professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors to progress to the position of president. The self-efficacy theory can address this element. The second element is the inherent bias within the organizations, which could be manifested in women's oppression through a gendered organization. This element will be addressed by the theory of patriarchy.

### **Self-Efficacy**

The core belief in this theory is that through motivation, accomplishments, and emotional well-being (Bandura, 1997, 2006), a person can influence the events that affect their lives. In the simplest of terms, a person can accomplish anything if they believe in themselves (Maddux 2002). Self-efficacy is what a person believes they can do through their abilities and skill to change a challenging situation. This belief in oneself is developed over time through positive experiences (Maddux, 2002). This positive reinforcement influences the tasks the employee chooses to learn and the goals that they set for themselves (Lunenburg, 2011).

There are four principle sources of self-efficacy, which include past performance accomplishments, learning from others, social or verbal persuasion, and emotional cues (Bandura, 1977; Lunenburg, 2011). The first, past performance accomplishments, are the most important source, according to Bandura. If an employee succeeded at a task, they are more confident to take on similar tasks in the future. Learning from others, or vicarious experiences, is more effective when the employee believes they exhibit similar characteristics to the colleague of which they are modeling. The employee takes on the old maxim 'if they can do it, so can I.'

The source of persuasion can be either social or verbal. This is essentially the manager persuading the employee that they will be successful at the task. Lunenburg (2011) points out that the best way to help the employee succeed is through the self-fulfilling prophecy known as the Pygmalion effect. If the employee believes they can do something, they will be successful. Finally, the emotional cues are the physical and physiological symptoms one feels when they are trying to accomplish something that is difficult. These symptoms include fast heartbeat, nausea, and sweaty palms. This can significantly impact the employee's performance depending on how they react or succumb to the symptoms. Self-efficacy affects the employee's belief in themselves, their confidence, performance, and the tasks they are willing to learn (Lunenburg, 2011). Through self-efficacy, women leaders can ensure they pursue specific professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors that can significantly impact their career progression to the position of president.

### **Patriarchy**

The framework that most closely aligns with the lack of gender parity within higher education as an organization is the feminist theory, specifically patriarchy. Patriarchy is a social system that is characterized by subordination, oppression, power, dominance, hierarchy, and competition (Prasad, 2018; Sultana, 2010; Walby, 1990). As a basis for the gendered division of labor, organizations have mechanisms established for female oppression and the reproduction of patriarchal structures (Prasad, 2018).

A patriarchal society tries to develop some type of coherent principle that can explain the basis of subordination, which triggers the particular oppressive experiences women encounter (Beechey, 1979). Patriarchal society gives complete priority to men

and results in women's subordination (Sultana, 2010). Women's subordination is illustrated by the inferior position of women, vis-a-vis male domination, and the lack of access to resources or decision making (Sultana, 2010).

Through economic, social, and cultural establishments, it is the oppression of women by men utilizing domination (Rowland & Klein, 1996). This domination is manifested on a daily basis when men are celebrated and valued and women are undervalued and maligned (Firestone, 1979). Feminists assert that in order to understand the full scale of women's oppression in the workplace, it is paramount to understand the multiplicity of the division of work (Prasad, 2018). This multiplicity is demonstrated by the stratification along gender lines in which power is predominantly held by men in the higher status positions (Prasad, 2018; Sultana, 2010).

Feminists argue that gendered differences are preserved on an ongoing basis through multiple institutional practices (Prasad, 2018). These institutional practices are reinforced through the societal expectation that men are more suited for management and women as support staff (Prasad, 2018).

In this patriarchal system, men and women behave, think, and aspire differently because they have been taught to think of masculinity and femininity in ways which condition difference. Patriarchal system shows in or accept that men have, or should have, one set of qualities and characteristics, and women another. Such as 'masculine' qualities (strength, bravery, fearlessness, dominance, competitiveness, etc.) and 'feminine' qualities (caring, nurturing, love, timidity, obedience, etc.) (Sultana, 2010, p. 10).

The higher education sector is a patriarchal institution that values hierarchy, dominance, and competition (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). These qualities and characteristics are traditionally attributed to masculinity (Bystydzienski, Thomas, Howe & Desai, 2017) and oppress feminine characteristics. In fact, patriarchy has been found as

the primary obstacle to women's advancement within a hierarchical institution (Sultana, 2010).

Patriarchy at the institution level is extremely difficult to dislodge due to the resolute grip on the culture within the organization (Prasad, 2018). Prasad (2018) wrote that despite the numerous laws that are designed to ensure equal opportunity, patriarchal organizations are exceptionally resilient and difficult to change. Patriarchy is more than just a term used to describe women's oppression in the workplace; rather, it is a concept or tool to help explain women's realities (Sultana, 2010).

### **Methodology and Methods**

For the purpose of this study, the research question was addressed using a qualitative approach referred to as narrative inquiry methodology. According to Creswell (1994), a qualitative study is a process of understanding and giving meaning to social or human problems based on inquiry. It involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Narrative inquiry is a storytelling methodology in which narratives and stories of participant's experiences are studied (Kim, 2016). This type of genre can be in the form of autobiography, autoethnography, biographical research, oral history, or life story (Kim, 2016). Schafer (1981) refers to narrative inquiry methodology as "narrative actions" (p. 31). Narrative action for Schafer means the storyteller shapes their story through their tone and style of reliving the experiences, which helps the reader understand the journey of the storyteller (Hanly, 1996).

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experiences through a collaboration between the participant and the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through the narrative actions, the researcher and reader try to understand the human experiences of

women presidents in higher education. This research method examines the way a story is told by considering the participants' positioning, the people around them, and sequencing and the tension created by the revelation of some of the events the participant is sharing with the researcher (Riley & Hawe, 2004). A narrative inquiry allows the researcher to illuminate the experiences of the participants and how the discourse of the social and theoretical contexts shapes the participant's positionality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry allowed me to develop a better understanding of the lived experiences of the women presidents within higher education as they navigated the gendered institutions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Through their stories and oral histories, I was able to share their experiences and journey of becoming a woman president within higher education.

Interviewing is a critical component of narrative inquiry and can be a powerful method to use as a foundation of the research study (Beuthin, 2014). It is a way to explore the social, cultural, and institutional stories within the participant's experiences and validate those lived experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006). Therefore, interviews were my primary data gathering instrument for this research and consisted of two 90-minute semi-structured interviews with each participant and then I followed up with questions as needed for clarification as the progression of data collection was performed from other participants. A purposeful sampling technique (n=5) was used to include women presidents who have had two or more years of experience as president and at least ten years in higher education. This allowed the participant to have had meaningful experiences within the academy of which they can share.

To describe the typical college president is difficult because there are differences among the higher education sectors (Ross & Green, 2000). The role of the contemporary president can vary depending on the type of institution they are leading. The size of the student body, whether it is private or publicly funded, the types of degrees they offer, geographic location as well as historical background can all influence the role of that institution's president (Rile, 2001). Their responsibilities are "varied and unbounded" (Simon, 1967, p. 1).

Therefore, to ensure I documented stories from a variety of viewpoints, my criterion for participant selection consisted of the number of years within the academy as well as the type of institution they lead: large public associate's college; a large public doctoral university; baccalaureate college, designated as a historically black college; a private master's college; and a private baccalaureate college in the northeast.

I used the framework of temporality, sociality, and spatiality for a deeper understanding of the participant's experiences (Clandinin, 2006). In general, temporality is the fact that past events will also influence how future experiences are perceived (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The stories by the women presidents in higher education created an understanding of their lived experiences of overcoming the barriers in a gendered institution. They were able to share the lessons they learned through that journey.

Sociality is the idea that the interaction impacts both the personal and social aspects of the lived experiences (Wang & Geale, 2015). The women presidents reflected on their own reaction to the barriers that they encountered within the academy as well as the interactions with colleagues, administration, and students. Through storytelling, the



women presidents relived the interaction of the colleagues around them as they made the journey through the academy and ultimately as the president. Finally, spatiality refers to the context, time, and place in a particular setting and the spatial boundaries with colleague's intentions, purposes, and different points of view (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Based on this framework, most of the fieldwork involved interviewing using structured and semi-structured questions with four different categories that encapsulate the framework referenced above: their journey, current position, thoughts on leadership, and finally lessons learned. This research illuminated the experiences of these women as they navigated the gendered higher education institutions. They had the opportunity to tell their story regarding strategies they implemented to assist them in their rise through the ranks to become president. In particular, the women presidents described specific professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors that had implications for their career to progress to the position of president. The women college presidents also illustrated the challenges they had to overcome in their journey.

In qualitative research, rigorous data collection procedures result in the quality and trustworthiness of the results (Kitto, Chesters & Grbich, 2008). Once data collection was completed, a more rigorous analysis began. Data analysis is the process in which the researcher makes sense out of the data (Merriam, 2009). As I immersed myself in the transcripts, notes, and memos, certain words, patterns of behavior, phrases, and events repeated and stood out (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). I wrote the participant narratives as stories reflective of their own personal biography (Riessman, 2008). As I explored the data elements, I developed a coding system based on patterns and themes that involved

several cycles. The findings included detailed descriptions, specific examples, and inclusion of outliers (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

The last stage of data analysis, after interpretation, was to make meaning of the data (Butina, 2015). This was done simultaneously with the coding and categorizing. During this stage, the researcher is analyzing whether there are overarching themes among the five participants and their stories (Butina, 2015). Finally, the researcher must verify the validity and reliability of the procedures for accuracy (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) recommends using at least two strategies in any study. The first strategy I used was to have member-checking in which I shared the transcripts and my analysis with the individual participant to ensure I was representing their ideas accurately. In addition, I openly and honestly disclosed my own bias and positionality that I brought to the study which could have possibly shaped my interpretation of the findings.

### **Delimitations**

There were several important delimitations made in order to bound the scope of this study. The research design is a narrative inquiry approach that requires participants to fit a very specific criteria to be included in this study. The purposive sampling is used to select participants who self-identify as a woman and has held the position of college president within higher education at some point in their career. This research explored the lived experiences of women presidents in higher education who navigated gendered institutions to achieve their leadership roles. My goal was to determine whether there were specific professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors that may have implications for a woman's career to progress to the position of president within the higher education academy.

Although qualitative methods usually require fewer participants, I wanted to ensure I interviewed different members of the academic community with different backgrounds. Does it differ if it is in a large research institution, a small private college, a liberal arts college, a community college, or a historically black college or university (HBCU)? These questions could only be answered by a woman within that specific arena. Therefore, each participant was chosen based on their unique institution-type while intersecting the different race and sexual orientation to give the reader a wide range of participant experiences. Potential participants consisted of five women presidents. Therefore, this sample allowed for analytic generalization but would not be able to be applied to a wider population.

### **Limitations**

Research, in general, is used to achieve a comprehensive understanding by continuous sampling until no new information is obtained (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The goal of any good research is to achieve theoretical saturation by selecting individuals that can ensure all aspects of the phenomenon are included (Glesne, 2016). However, in general, narrative studies are meant to focus on the stories and experiences of a smaller number of participants (Creswell, 2013). The number of participants available to use in my study was limited due to the small number of women who hold this particular position in the academy. My study consisted of stories of five women, in different stages of their lives, with very different backgrounds, as presidents in very different institutions. This could have resulted in failing to capture the experiences of other groups of women; however, this will be an iterative process and more research must be done in the future.

Because I used a narrative inquiry method, another limitation is that the experiences that was told by the participants may have occurred quite a few years ago, so the study was reliant on the accurate recollection of the experiences. However, temporality is a key element of narrative inquiry. Through the method of narrative inquiry, I was not only concerned with the current lived experience of the college women presidents but the lived experiences on a continuum; contextualized with a longer-term historical narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As the women reflected on their experiences, they were able to provide a rich detail that may not have been important at the time but may have had a tremendous impact on their future successes.

### **Definition of Terms**

- Female is a biological category defined by chromosomes (XX), genitalia (internal), and hormones (estrogen). These individuals are usually assigned biologically female at birth (Beauvoir, 2010; Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender, 2017).
- Gender is defined by Prasad (2018) as “behavioral aspects of being a man or a woman and is produced in and through multiple dynamic social processes”. Gender is socially produced as either female or male, feminine, or masculine (Acker, 1992)
- Gendered Norms – emerging from the feminist scholars, gender norm is a social system that encapsulates resources, roles, power, and entitlement according to whether the person is a man or woman (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004)

- Male is a biological category defined by chromosome (XY), genitalia (external), and hormones (testosterone). These individuals are usually assigned biologically male at birth (Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender, 2017).
- Man is a political and social category. One is not born a man, one becomes a man (Beauvoir, 2010).
- Self-efficacy is the concept of one's belief in themselves and their ability to endure obstacles and achieve. According to Bandura (1982), "perceived self-efficacy is concerned with judgment of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (p. 122).
- Sex refers to the biological differences between males and females, such as the genitalia and genetic differences.
- Tenure and Promotion is granted within the academy for those faculty who demonstrate excellence in scholarly and academic achievement. Faculty must be hired as a tenure-track professor or tenured if they completed the T&P process. This is done by proving one had an outstanding performance in teaching and learning; research/creative/scholarly activity; and service.
- Woman is a political and social category. An adult female human being. One is not born a woman, one becomes a woman (Beauvoir, 2010; Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender, 2017; Merriam-Webster.com).

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a rationale for this study. In summary, research illustrated that more women are attaining higher degrees compared to men (NCES 324.20); however, women are significantly underrepresented in the higher education president's positions (Johnson, 2017). While the statistics and literature focus primarily on systemic explanations as to why women are underrepresented in the presidency positions, the research rarely focuses on these issues from a qualitative, participant's point of view. My research will focus on those issues from a narrative inquiry methodology, exploring the lived experiences of the women presidents within higher education to gain a better understanding of their journey. In chapter two, I will provide a background of the study by reviewing the literature regarding the gendered organizations and the inherent bias within the policies and procedures in higher education. Additionally, the theoretical framework within this chapter will give the reader insight into how different factors motivate the many social actors that influence this phenomenon.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In chapter one, I described the lack of women in higher education presidential positions. Although women have made some progress in obtaining leadership positions, this progress is slow, tenuous, and limited due to the gendered organizational structures and perspectives (Bornstein, 2008). “Women are underrepresented in senior faculty and administrative positions, resulting in far fewer women than men in candidate pools for presidencies” (Bornstein, 2008, p. 165). In order to solve this complex issue, there needs to be some discussion on how to create a pipeline of women faculty within the gendered academy to allow more women to be competitive with their male counterparts in the quest for the presidency.

This chapter will discuss the current challenges women face in their quest into leadership and eventually the higher education presidency. I will explore five broad themes in my literature review. First, I will review the literature relating to the experiences of women faculty in higher education. This will include the gendered bias within the tenure and promotion process as well as the advantages of mentoring programs and gender-friendly institutional policies. I will then discuss the literature regarding the barriers that women face through the hiring process to become a college president. Third, an analysis of the literature will describe the position of the college president, who they are, what they do and the evolution of the position over the years. I will then review the literature related to the unsolved issues or challenges women face as leaders. Finally, I

will conclude with a review of the conceptual framework I will be using. A summary of the chapter is included at the conclusion.

### **Women Faculty in Higher Education**

In order to better understand why women are underrepresented in the college president position, it is important to understand women's underrepresentation in other positions within the academy. In a report published by the American Council on Education (2016), women were more likely than men to have served as a Chief Academic Officer (CAO) or dean prior to becoming president. In fact, according to the American Council on Education, 46% of current women presidents reported serving in one of those positions irrespective of the institutional type. Important to note, the qualifications for both CAO and dean is to be a tenured professor in an academic department within an institution (ACE, 2012). Indeed, tenure is key for almost half of the women to obtain the presidency position within higher education.

Higher education is a gendered organization. This is illustrated by the fact that men hold the top leadership position with a higher salary and women are in positions of lower status. There are several barriers that women encounter in their quest to obtain status or tenure. It is true, the gender gap has been narrowing over time, with the number of women in full-time faculty appointments quintupling that of men (Flaherty, 2016). However, the proportion of all men faculty in tenured and tenure-track positions has been shrinking (Flaherty 2016; Kezar & Maxey, 2013). In 1969, tenure and tenure track positions accounted for approximately 78% of all faculty in the academy and the non-tenure track was 22%. In 2009, the percentages have reversed, in which 34% are tenured and 66% are non-tenure track (Kezar & Maxey, 2013). As women become tenured or



hired as a tenure track faculty, it does not compare to the magnitude in which they are being hired as non-tenure-track, instructors, or adjuncts (Kezar & Maxey, 2013). The perception of the non-tenured faculty, adjuncts, and/or instructors do not offer the same quality of instruction as the tenured faculty (Flaherty, 2016) and these positions are considered lower status. In addition, women in a non-tenured position may not be eligible to become a dean or CAO within an institution due to the required qualifications.

### **Tenure and promotion**

The panacea of the academy is being employed into a coveted tenure track position, so the faculty member can ultimately obtain tenure and promotion. A professor's pathway to tenure and promotion is through the tenure track. It is a process by which an assistant professor becomes an associate professor and then a full professor. However, to obtain the classification of a tenured professor, the majority of institutions have a policy that the faculty member must first meet specific qualifications as it relates to at least three metrics: teaching, research, and service.

Based on the type of institution, one of the primary metrics to awarding a professor tenure and promotion is to evaluate teaching effectiveness through student evaluations (Baldwin & Blattner, 2003). However, as far back as the 1980s, Basow & Silberg (1987) and others have challenged the validity of evaluations as a legitimate measure of teaching effectiveness (Wright & Jenkins-Guarnieri, 2012). Numerous research studies have revealed that there is significant bias in student evaluation of professors which could directly impact the tenure and promotion decisions (Basow & Silberg 1987; Bray & Howard 1980; MacNell, Driscoll & Hunt, 2015; Mitchell & Martin, 2018; Templeton, 2016).

## Teaching

Copious amounts of research and studies have been performed comparing the gender-bias of student evaluations. It is important to examine the student's unconscious bias, through a gendered lens, of women professors compared to men professors (Templeton, 2016). Mitchell and Martin (2018) found in their study that there are two key elements that women are evaluated differently than men professors. First, women are evaluated on their "personality, appearance, and perceptions of intelligence and competency" (Mitchell & Martin, 2018, p. 648). The second key finding is that women are rated more harshly than men even if personality, appearance, and perception of intelligence are removed (Flaherty, 2018; Mitchell & Martin, 2018). There is an overall bias of woman professors as students believe men are more qualified to teach and women are of a lower rank (Mitchell & Martin, 2018). In fact, Miller & Chamberlain (2000) found that students attributed women as teachers and men as professors, regardless of their credentials earned by any of the faculty members. Moreover, the students would rather take classes from a man professor than a woman professor and evaluated the different genders accordingly.

Based on empirical evidence, Mitchell and Martin (2018) found that "bias does not seem to be based solely (or even primarily) on teaching style or even grading patterns. Students appear to evaluate women poorly simply because they are women" (p. 652). Also, MacNeill, Driscoll, & Hunt (2015) performed an experiment in which assistant instructors of an identical online course posed as both a woman and a man professor. Even though it was an identical class, as well as an identical teacher unbeknownst to the students, the man professor was still rated higher than the woman. A

study by Basow and Sibling (1987) analyzed over 1,000 student evaluations for 16 women and men professors in the same department. The evaluations rated the professors on “scholarship, organization/clarity, instructor-group interaction, instructor-student interaction, and dynamism/enthusiasm, as well as giving professors an overall rating” (Selden, 1994, p. 1). In all areas, women professors were rated more negatively than the men counterpart (Basow & Sibling, 1987).

In another study conducted by Langbein (1994), 2,600 student evaluations were analyzed and found that women faculty are expected to be nurturing and supportive. However, women still received lower ratings than men (Langbein, 1994). As Shein (2001) found, there is an implicit bias in which men are expected to be authoritative and knowledgeable while women should be nurturing and compassionate. After at least five decades of research analysis proving that there are problems with using student evaluations, such as validity, reliability, gender bias as well as other issues, it is unconceivable that institutions continue to utilize the evaluations to assess the instructional effectiveness of a professor (Hornstein, 2017). Due to the discriminatory nature, student evaluations are biased toward gender and in using these evaluations as part of the tenure and promotion process, the institution may be knowingly discriminating against women faculty (MacNeill, Driscoll & Hunt, 2015; Mitchell & Martin, 2018).

### **Research**

Prolific scholarly publishing is the accepted measure in the academy for high research productivity. However, there is a recurring theme in research that there is intellectual and social isolation of women faculty which could directly affect their research productivity (Winkler, 2004). Research is extremely important in the faculty

evaluations and women publish less frequently than men faculty and they receive fewer extramural grants (Beaudry & Lariviere, 2016; Brooks, Fenton & Walker, 2014; Cole & Zuckerman, 1987; Jappelli, Nappi & Torrini, 2017; NSF, 1996; Schneider, 1998; Zuckerman, 1991). When women faculty were asked to provide their explanation as to why their publication rates were so much lower, the responses were all the same. Women faculty feel excluded, disconnected, marginalized, intellectually and socially isolated, and they have limited access to resources (Etzkowitz et al., 1994; Lawler, 1999; Leathwood & Read, 2009; Lester, 2008; Olsen et al., 1995; O'Leary & Mitchell, 1990; Park, 1996; Sonnert & Holton, 1995b, 1996; Sonnert, 1995a; Winkler, 2000). Since women are usually not included in the informal networks within the academy, isolated women faculty members must keep their 'ear to the ground' to discover opportunities within their department such as who receives salary adjustments, lighter teaching loads so they can spend more time on research, as well as obtaining other university resources (Winkler, 2000). These privileges are usually not based on merit but rather go to the individual faculty member that knows to ask for it (Winkler, 2000).

Moreover, citation rates are another metric many institutions use to measure research and scholarly effectiveness. There have been numerous studies in which the citation rate of women researchers has been compared to men. Lariviere, Ni, Gingras, Cronin & Sugimoto (2013) found that women in the coveted first or last author position received fewer citations than their men counterparts. Beaudry & Lariviere (2016) found that papers that have a greater proportion of women as co-authors are also less cited. In fact, they found that for the top-cited health field journals, "going from an all-male team to an all-female team reduces the number of relative citations by more than 10 and by

about 2 in the NSE (National Science and Engineering) field” (Beaudry & Lariviere, 2016, p. 1803). These statistics are discipline normalized rather than raw citation counts so this is significant (Beaudry & Lariviere, 2015). Moreover, these researchers found that when academics publish with a large proportion of female co-authors, they have consistently fewer citations (Beaudry & Lariviere, 2015).

Jappelli, Nappi & Torrini (2017) analyzed 180,000 research papers and found that for women, the odds of receiving a high research evaluation is .82 times lower than for men. The gender gap “cannot be explained by research output characteristics such as type of publication, the number of authors, international collaboration, or the language of publication” (Jappelli, Nappi & Torrini, 2017, p. 922). There is little evidence that citation rates are not gender bias. Therefore, it appears that the academy should not be utilizing this seemingly gender-biased metric to make personnel decisions such as whether or not the tenure track faculty should obtain full tenure.

### **Service**

Higher education is tradition-laden from the pomp and circumstance of graduation to the cherished values of service, community engagement, shared governance, and academic freedoms. In the founding of post-secondary education in the United States, it was determined in the early 1800s that service had a moral meaning: “The goal was not only to serve society but reshape it” (Boyer, 1990). The administration of institutions such as Harvard University and Stanford University wanted their faculty to use their vast knowledge to serve the community and use that experience to shape the research of their given field; thus, it was added as part of the faculty’s responsibilities as a professor (Boyer, 1990). The land grant colleges relished in the thought of community service.

However, other faculty across the nation believed it was an unobtainable task, added to an already overwhelming set of requirements (Boyer, 1990). In the present day, the academic professoriate are continuing to receive ever-increasing pressure from an administration that in addition to teaching excellence, utilizing new pedagogical approaches such as online teaching and flipped classrooms, and a high-volume of research, they are to provide student mentorship, service engagement within their department, as well as community engagement in which they become active members of the community (Ivey, Teitelman & Gary, 2016).

Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group (2017) posited that there are so few woman faculty within some of the departments such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), they are appointed to numerous committees representing their department to add the diversity in an effort to adhere to university policy. Unequivocally, serving on committees can advance one's career if the selection of the committee is strategic (Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group, 2017) but the service burden is heavier than their male colleague (Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group, 2017). It has been found that committee work is undervalued within the academy and can actually hinder one's chances at promotion due to the time spent (Bird, Litt & Wang, 2004).

In addition to committee work, there is an increased number of woman students which leads to an increased desire to have women professors as their advisors. The women faculty are preferred by women and minoritized students for advisement, career advice, as well as personal guidance (Bhatt, West & Chaudhary, 2020; New, 2016). Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group (2017) refer to this as care

work and point out that this work is hidden under the category of advising or chairing. Unfortunately, according to the Group, this work consists of time-consuming meetings with students, reading and commenting on draft papers, writing letters of recommendation, and providing general advice. This, again, takes time away from the faculty's research and thus slows down the tenure process. As the woman faculty are serving on inordinate amounts of committees, assisting the students with advisement, they are facing the glass escalator (Flaherty, 2016; Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Ward & Eddy, 2013). A glass escalator refers to the way men, specifically white men, are put on the fast track in career advancement while women are spending time on other tasks (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). They are being passed by the men faculty members who can spend hours on their research and are required to have representation on just a couple of committees.

### **Mentors and Advocates**

Women faculty, in their quest for tenure, face multiple challenges such as feelings of seclusion, isolation, and lack of work-life balance (Palmer & Jones, 2019). One way to overcome these challenges is a mentoring program (Palmer & Jones, 2019). Studies on women in higher education confirm that mentoring is critical in the career development, experiences, and achievement over time (Catalyst, 2007; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Madsen, 2008). After interviewing twenty-seven women executives, Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) found that women felt that men were groomed at a much younger age to take on the leadership positions while women had to wait until they were much older to get the opportunities.

Kram (1985) defined mentoring as a relationship in which one person (mentor) supports and guides the second person (mentee) through professional development and

advocacy. This mentoring could include coaching, advocating, counseling, and supporting the mentee to achieve their career goals (Brown, 2005; Palmer & Jones, 2019). The benefits of mentoring could include career mobility, career satisfaction, career commitment, career advancement, promotion, higher compensation, and higher retention (Medsen, 2008).

Cawyer, Simonds & Davis (2002) found that mentoring helps the women faculty navigate the profession of higher education. Women faculty must learn and understand the existing culture and mentoring can help with that acclimation (Palmer & Jones, 2019). Further, as women faculty start to prepare for the tenure process, they may struggle with confidence, unrealistic expectations, and complete lack of clarity (Palmer & Jones, 2019). Mentoring relationships may help relieve the anxiety related to the barriers and stressors that could be associated with the tenure process (Schrodt, Cawyer & Sanders, 2003). In fact, Palmer & Jones (2019) found women faculty seeking tenure may have a greater psychosocial need that could be met by having a mentor. In Palmer & Jones' (2019) study, women faculty shared that having women mentors who had already navigated the isolating tenure process were the most valuable to them because the mentors provided the support, wisdom, and understanding that was really needed during that time. However, due to the limited number of women that go through the tenure process, the women seeking tenure may be matched with a man mentor which could result in an unfilled pairing (Cullen & Luna, 1993, Winkler, 2000).

The literature is comprised of differing viewpoints on the benefits and pitfalls of cross-gender mentoring in which men mentor women or women mentor men (Christman, 2003; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Kram, 1983; Medsen, 2008; Palmer & Jones, 2019).



Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) discovered that the more successful women administrators were mentored or sponsored by men within the organization. In fact, one of the women they interviewed suggested the nominations are more accepted if it comes from a man rather than a woman sponsor. Madsen (2008) reported that for some women college presidents, they found that male mentors respected the strength and skills of competent women and therefore opened the path for jobs throughout their career. Although studies reflect that the productivity of faculty is greater for those who are advised by same-gender faculty (Christman, 2003), some women are discouraged from searching for those senior women administrators for advice and support because the under-representation of women in administration is a signal that being a woman is a liability and are seen as unfit mentors (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). Kram (1983) found that many women mentees struggle to establish a comfortable relationship with men mentors in senior positions.

Mentoring is an invaluable resource to recruit, prepare and retain women into the college presidency position (Brown, 2005). Many studies have reflected the fact that it is prevalent in higher education that men leaders mentor women leaders (Christman, 2003; Smith, Smith & Markham, 2000). Cross-gender mentoring is extremely important for both women and men mentors (Brown, 2005). It has been found that mentors can have a critical effect on the career path of women into higher education administration (Brown, 2005). Even women with stellar credentials find it difficult to rise to leadership positions without the advocacy of a powerful individual in a leadership position (Moore, 1982). The college president position is male dominated so theoretically men have a better opportunity to know the right person and have access to sponsorships (Brown, 2005). Women, often, are excluded from these opportunities (Brown, 2005).

In a study by Brown (2005), they found that half the presidents reported to having one to three mentors, and in some cases four or more. This is consistent with other research performed by Hansman (1988), Swoboda and Miller (1986), and Scanlong (1997). This is an important aspect to mentoring, in many cases aspirant college presidents do not have just one mentor but mentors that meet specific needs at that time.

Current women college presidents reported that academic presidents, provosts, and vice presidents were influential to the women as they progressed into upper administrative positions (Madsen, 2008). A woman president in Madsen's (2008) study said she never considered being a college president until her institution's president told her, "You could be a president" (Madsen, 2008, p.173). That was the validation she needed to move forward in her career. In fact, in Brown's study, more than one-half of the presidents' mentors were actually other college presidents. Of course, the majority of these mentors were men (Brown, 2005). Maxwell (1995) underscored the importance of leaders mentoring aspiring leaders.

A study performed by the American Council on Education (2018) found that current women presidents emphasized the value of mentorship by allowing the prospective president to see the position is achievable and to understand the path to get there. Women college presidents can further that belief by serving as role models and demonstrating how to balance a personal and professional life (Brown, 2005). Mentorship can help prepare the women faculty who aspire to become college president, so they are ready to replace those college presidents who are ready to retire (Brown, 2005).

American Council on Education (2018) reports that women need to have mentors on campus to provide guidance on their career, reflecting the fact that there is not one single path or model for success, as well as providing tips on how to advance into leadership. Because there are so few role models in higher education, aspiring women leaders have less social support for how to claim their identity as a leader within the academy (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). It should be incumbent upon current leaders within the academy to seek and prepare the future generation of women leaders (Palmer & Jones, 2019). The academy should develop a structure in which mentors are identified and cultivated so they can assist the new administrators to lead the institutions and share lessons learned for those coming through the pipeline (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). In addition, women that aspire to be college presidents need to identify their mentoring needs and strategize the best people to meet those needs, whether it be a man or a woman (Brown, 2005).

### **Institutional Practices**

Since the 1980's, in an effort to increase diversity among faculty, institutions across the United States started focusing on policies to ensure the balance or integration of the demands in the workplace with the demands of family life (Hollenshead, Sullivan, Smith, August & Hamilton, 2005; Smith & Waltman, 2006). Studies have found that modified duties, reduced or part time appointments, and tenure clock extension were most often used to create family friendly policies within higher education institutions (Hollenshead, Sullivan, Smith, August & Hamilton, 2005; Smith & Waltman, 2006). These policies provide "employees greater flexibility in the way they use their sick time,

schedule their work hours, fulfill their duties, and interweave pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting with their careers” (Hollenshead et al, 2005, p. 41).

Modified duties policy provides a faculty member a reduction in job responsibilities, usually for one semester or term (Hollenshead et al., 2005). The typical modified duties policy includes a reduction or release of classroom teaching or clinical duties (Smith & Waltman, 2006). In some institutions, this may also include a reduction in other responsibilities such as advising or committee service (Hollenshead et al, 2005). This reduction in responsibilities does not result in a decrease in pay (Smith & Waltman, 2006). Reduction or part-time appointment policy allows the faculty member to work less than a full-time appointment, either temporarily or permanently. This results in a reduced salary, workload and advancement timeline (Smith & Waltman, 2006).

Extending the tenure clock policy is the most commonly provided by higher education institutions. This policy gives a tenure-track faculty member typically one-year extension that will not be counted as part of their tenure probationary period (Smith & Waltman, 2006). This is given for specific circumstances which could include birth or adoption of a child, serious medical illness, or extensive care of a family member (Hollenshead, et al., 2005). According to a study by Waltman & August (2004), the vast majority of faculty that took advantage of this opportunity believed it had a positive impact on their career. In fact, one study found that faculty members who used the policy actually had higher promotion rates (Manchester, Leslie & Kramer, 2013). However, Antecol, Bedard & Stearns (2018) found there is no consistent evidence that the extension actually helps or hurts women faculty.

Research has found that universities that offered family friendly policies, inspired loyalty, increased morale, and a sense of community among the faculty (Hollenshead et al., 2005). Villablanca, Beckett, Nettiksimmons & Howell (2011) posited that balancing family with career trajectory was an important determinant leading to premature dropout or slower career advancement for women faculty. Women should be better represented in family friendly policies if higher education institutions plan on retaining them (Mayer & Tikka, 2008). Villablanca, et. al., (2011) reported that faculty found family friendly policies extremely important in the recruitment, retention and career advancement (Shauman, Howell, Paterniti, Beckett, Villablanca, 2018; Villablanca, et al., 2011).

Family-friendly policies are important to both genders and are directly linked to career satisfaction (Villablanca, et. al., 2011). Nielsen, Simonsen & Verner (2004) found in their study that women self-select into sectors that offer family-friendly policies. Therefore, institutions must do a better job at socializing the policy. However, Villablanca, et. al, (2011) found that awareness of the policies among the faculty they surveyed was low. Further, according to a study by Villablanca, et.al (2011), a significant portion of women compared to men (51% and 28% respectively) wanted to take advantage of the policies but did not due to multiple barriers. These barriers included concerns for service load, burden on colleagues, and financial considerations. Women faculty in this study also indicated they were concerned about repercussions and slower career progress (Villablanca, et.al, 2011).

Conversely, according to Shauman, et al. (2018), family friendly policies may cause the opposite effect of reinforcing gender differences. Their study found that women who took advantage of family friendly policies actually are stigmatized as less committed

to their job and penalized with less opportunities for career growth. Further, Gerten (2011) reported findings that while it is important to have family friendly policies, the higher education institution must also tackle the gender inequity of women. Institutions must separate career friendly policies from family friendly policies (Gerten, 2011). This means offering employees opportunities to balance their work and life through family friendly policies such as modified duties but also provide opportunities to further their career through tenure clock extensions to work on research. Men still hold more than three-quarters of the full professorships and it takes women anywhere between one to three and a half years longer than men to advance to a full professor due to the tenure and promotion barriers referenced above (Misra, Lundquist, Holmes & Agiomavritis, 2011).

Studies reveal women typically follow a very different path than men to obtain the college presidency position and tenure plays an integral role in that journey (Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk, & Taylor, 2017; Okolo, 2017; Selingo et al., 2017). In the latest presidents' survey, 82%-85% of the current women presidents previously served as a chief academic officer within the academy (Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk, & Taylor, 2017; Okolo, 2017; Selingo et al., 2017). One cannot become the chief academic officer without having tenure and status within the faculty ranks. Therefore, the traditional journey for a woman that aspires to become a college president must begin with tenure, rise through the ranks into the chief academic officer position prior to being considered for the position of college president.

### **Hiring process for administrators**

From the inception of the American higher education institutions, there are certain structures established for the control and oversight of the institution (Duryea, 2000).

When government entities or private donors seek to establish a new higher education institution, they begin with the formation of a governing board (Duryea, 2000). These governing board members are either elected or selected according to the legislation within the state (Eckel & Kezar, 2016). In some states, board members are selected by citizens, and in others they are selected by the governor (Eckel & Kezar, 2016; Trower & Eckel, 2017). Although the structure and selection of the governing boards may vary by institution, they all have the same role when it comes to the college president which is to recruit, hire, assess performance, support professional development, retain, and/or dismiss the president of the higher education institution (Duryea, 2000; Eckel & Kezar, 2016; Scott, 2018). Indeed, the future of the higher education institution resides in the decisions made by the governing boards (Eckel & Kezar, 2016).

It is the fundamental responsibility of the board to promote diversity within the institution (Schwartz, 2010). In fact, in the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (n.d.) published in the Statement on Board Accountability that a trustee must ensure the institution is inclusive in the overall operating practices. Schwartz (2010) acknowledges that although the student enrollment is increasingly diverse, the majority of the governing board members are white males. According to the Association of Governing Boards (2018), the percentage of women on these boards, for both public and private institutions, have increased over the years; however, they still comprise approximately 30%.

Since the governing board hires the president, and the majority of the governing board members are men, literature supports the premise of gender bias in the college president hiring process (Davison & Burke, 2000; Fiske & Talor, 1984; Kezar & Posselt,

2020). In fact, the gender of the evaluator is exceptionally important. Social psychologists have been prolific on the literature regarding stereotyping the candidate if they are a gender different than their own (Davison & Burke, 2000; Fiske & Talor, 1984; Kezar & Posselt, 2020). Members of a different gender are evaluated more harshly than of the same gender because they are familiar with their own gender attributes and are more stereotypical of the ‘out-group’ (Davison & Burke, 2000; Nesdale & Dharmalingam, 1986; Jussim, Coleman, & Lerch, 1987). As Brinton (2013) wrote in her review of Cecilia Ridgeway’s book, every social actor looks through gender tainted glasses. It is inherent in our social interactions and shapes our understanding of the out-group. It is infused in our every interaction, consciously or unconsciously (Brinton, 2013).

Fiske and Talor (1984) posited that individuals favor same-gender members over out-group members when the groups are in competition or status differences exist. The competition exists when there is a potential job opening that needs to be filled (Jacobs, 1989). There is a myriad of elements as to why discrimination exists in the hiring practices whether it be intentional or unintentional by the evaluator. Hiring usually involves quite a bit of subjectivity, regardless of what rubric the selection team utilizes, which increases the likelihood that discrimination will exist in the decision (Sheets & Bushardt, 1994). Kanter (1977) coined the term ‘homosocial reproduction’ which refers to the tendency of people to select incumbents who are socially similar to themselves and part of the in-group. The selection of social similarity plays a crucial role in shaping the demographic composition of organizations, as well as the structure of leadership opportunities within them (Kanter, 1977). A consequence of this phenomenon is the fact



that men's overrepresentation in managerial positions tends to reproduce the gender bias in the in-group preference which results in fewer women in leadership positions (Cook & Glass, 2013; Ridgeway, 2013).

Heilman, Fuchs & Tamkins (2004) found that when women are successful in a position that is traditionally thought to be a man's role, it can result in lower evaluations and less recommendations for organizational reward allocations. Heilman (2001) found that these gender stereotypes prevent women from obtaining the higher positions within the organizational structure. Heilman (2001) describes this gender bias in two main categories: descriptive gender stereotypes refer to how the two genders behave, and prescriptive gender stereotypes describe how the genders should behave. It is a short cut to make an impression quickly (Heilman, 2012).

Descriptive bias defines the lack of fit phenomenon which projects the societal belief as to what attributes a candidate must possess to fulfill a traditionally man position and what characteristics are universally attributed to women. In other words, men are believed to be task-oriented, ambitious, decisive while women are believed to be caring, nurturing, and indecisive (Heilman, 2012). When those stereotypes are projected onto the woman candidates, whether or not they are accurate, there is a perception of lack of fit for the position which was once held by a man. Moreover, in a study by Lyness & Heilman (2006), it was found that women were held to a stricter standard for promotion into higher ranks than the male counterparts. This unintended bias can, in some cases, occur without the evaluator even realizing it happened. Further, this gender stereotyping is also linked to poor performance ratings once hired into the position. The prescriptive stereotype is relevant when a woman is in direct contradiction of the traditional gender-

norms which results in the devaluation of the individual. If the woman administrator did not perform the job exactly as her male predecessor did, the evaluator believes the job was not performed satisfactorily (Heilman, 2012).

This gender competition and same-group bias have been found in a significant amount of both laboratory and research studies (Kezar & Posselt, 2020) and could have a direct impact on the number of women hired as college presidents. In fact, it has been found that a gender-integrated board leads to a reduction of the gender bias because they have women peers in the top leadership positions within the governing board (Cook & Glass, 2013). This could potentially allow more opportunities for women to be considered as part of an ‘in-group’ candidate. Analysis performed by Cook & Glass (2013) emphasizes the importance of having institutional diversity and organizations committed to increasing women leadership should focus efforts on increasing diversity on the decision-makers and more specifically on the governing boards.

### **College Presidents**

College presidents are the chief executive officers of higher education institutions and considered as the most powerful and influential individuals within the academic community (Rile, 2001). They are a unique group of leaders in the American higher education sector (Soares, Gagliardi, Wilkinson, & Lind, 2018) due to the depth and breadth of which they are responsible. The college or university president is the most visible embodiment of the institution’s mission, vision, values, and culture (Michael, Schwartz & Balraj, 2001). Ross & Green (1998) posited that the president holds the single most important position on the campus.

College presidents are expected to concurrently provide intellectual leadership to the academic community, possess administrative and financial acumen, fundraising ability, political deftness, exemplify institutional values, as well as shape the policies within the academy (Ross & Green 2000; Selingo, Chheng & Clark, 2017). They must be resilient innovators that can make strategic long-term decisions, take risks associated with potential policy shifts and thrive on “turning challenges or moments of campus crisis into opportunities and sustain progress” (Soares et al., 2018, p.1).

There has been extensive research on the demographic profiles of the college president (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Ross & Green 2000; Selingo, Chheng & Clark, 2017). Based on the extensive research, it has been found that the typical college president is a white male with an earned doctorate (80% with a PhD or EdD), average age of sixty, and has been president for approximately seven years (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Ross & Green 2000; Selingo, Chheng & Clark, 2017; Song & Hartley, 2012). The majority of the college presidents (73.3%) had been a full-time faculty member at one time (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Ross & Green, 1998). The most common field of study for college presidents are education or higher education followed by STEM fields (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Song & Hartley, 2012). The data also reflects the fact that women representation differs among institution type (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Song & Hartley, 2012). Women are more likely to become presidents in a public two-year college (32%) compared to any other institution type. As the number of college presidents have increased, public two-year institutions have had the most significant increase in the proportion of female presidents, with a 26-percentage point increase to 32% in 2011 (Song & Hartley, 2012).

The most common route to the presidency position, regardless of institutional type, is through the Chief Academic Officer position, or Provost (ACE, 2012). The next largest group were former presidents or CEO's. Further, over two-thirds of the presidents were promoted from a different institution rather than within the same institution, regardless of the type of institution (Song & Hartley, 2012). In fact, the majority of the presidents changed institutions three or more times except for the private doctoral institutions. Those presidents report to changing institutions only once or twice in their career (Song & Hartley, 2012).

In a study performed by McNair, Duree & Ebberts (2011), there are six core competency domains for a college president. They are as follows: organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, advocacy, and professionalism. Organizational strategy refers to strategically improving the quality of the institution, promoting success for all students, maintaining the mission, and protecting the long-term financial health of the institution. This should all be accomplished while keeping abreast of the current environment and understanding the future trends of the higher education sector. The second domain, resource management, is described as leading the institution equitably and ethically to fulfill the mission, vision, values, and goals of the institution. The third domain, communication, involves listening, speaking, and writing skills to participate in open and honest dialogue throughout all levels of the college and community. The fourth domain, collaboration, revolves around responsive and cooperative relationships across campus that nurtures diversity and inclusion. This collaboration should promote the success of the students and maintain the mission of the institution. Finally, advocacy and professionalism describe the president should

demonstrate ethical and moral behavior while advocating for the mission, vision, values, and goals. It is unsurprising that three out of four presidents regularly write about issues within the higher education institution (Song & Hartley, 2012). College presidents should set high standards for themselves and those they work with, including the students. They should demonstrate accountability to the institution. Scott Cowen, president emeritus and distinguished university chair of Tulane University, explains that due to the diverse set of stakeholders as well as the complexity of the mission of the academy, the university president is the ultimate test in leadership (Cowen, 2018).

The job requires intellectual, administrative, and social skills because college presidents must work with and report to such a large stakeholder group (Ross & Green, 2000). The president's stakeholders consist of faculty, staff, students, parents of students, governing board, politicians, public figures, the community, donors, and the alumni to name just a few (Fisher, 1984; Ross & Green, 2000). To the external community, the president represents the institution and its values while the internal constituents look to them to lead, direct, and control the institution (Nason, 1980; Wiseman, 1991).

The shared governance model, which is paramount in most policies of the academy, as well as the many stakeholders, keeps the president accountable and grounded (Fisher, 1984). Members of the faculty are strategic partners within the shared governance structure of the higher education institutions (Bensimon, 1991). According to Fain (2007), positive relationships with faculty will advance the college president's agenda. In fact, Bornstein (2003) posited that the legitimacy and support given to the president is a derivative of the relationship between the president and faculty. Birnbaum (1992) explained:

The faculty represents the institution's academic programs and its commitment to academic values. Faculty are obligated to judge whether the missions of the creation and dissemination of knowledge are being honored, whether a president is appropriately concerned with curriculum and student development, whether essential conditions for academic work are maintained, and whether the president operates in a manner consistent with a collegial community. (p. 58)

The governance model ensures faculty involvement and oversight in the development, implementation, and execution of academic programs. In addition, the governance structure ensures transparency in the operation of the institution to ensure an interconnected academic community working towards a common strategic mission. Fleming (2016) found in his study that faculty believe it is their responsibility to regulate the behaviors of the administration. The faculty as a whole is vital to the president's success as they work to incorporate change in the institution. The president's understanding of shared governance and his role of authority is paramount in his success or failure (Fleming, 2016).

Indeed, in consultation with the faculty representing the shared governance, college presidents shape the educational philosophy, culture, and direction of the institution (Blumenstyk, 2014). Gender diversity of the college president's position may allow for a different perspective to address the needs of the ever-changing student population as well as navigate the challenges that exist within higher education including affordability, accessibility, decreased funding, changes in pedagogy, technology, retention, to name just a few (Gagliardi et al, 2017; Oikelome, 2017). College presidents are facing some broad forces that are reshaping the institutions across the nation. These include demographic changes, defunding of the higher education institutions by the federal and state government, erosion of public support, and an increased number of

competitors (Hannum et al., 2015; Kippenhan, 2004; Tandberg & Laderman, 2018; Lennon, 2013; Maloney & Kim, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2017; Snyder & Dillow, 2012; Soares, Gagliardi & Nellum, 2017; Touchton, Musil & Campbell, 2008). Increasingly, over the next few years, college leaders will be challenged to solve the complex social, health, cultural, pedagogical, and financial issues within higher education (Johnson, 2017). The college president must have a strong, balanced leadership that promotes and demonstrates equity and diversity because all perspectives are needed to solve these very complex issues (Johnson, 2017).

### **Challenges of Women in Leadership**

Many qualified women leaders possess the abilities and leadership skills to be president within the higher education institutions. However, at the societal level, cultural barriers on the perceptions of women as leaders (Lucas & Baxter, 2012; Schein, 2001) and gender stereotyping (Pittinsky & Welle, 2007; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007) may hinder women from moving forward in the academy (Diehl, 2014). In a study by Oikelome (2017), the findings suggested that women in the academy are adversely impacted by the socially constructed gender roles in a sector that touts understanding and fostering diversity.

Traditionally, leadership has been equated to masculinity (Billing & Alvesson, 2000). Men outnumber the women in positions with high incomes, authority, and power, as well as high status (Billing & Alvesson, 2000). These values are normally attributed to men compared to the traditionally female-oriented values such as collaboration and equality (Billing & Alvesson, 2000; Bystydzienski, Thomas, Howe & Desai, 2017). In general, the workplace expects the men employees to provide strategic planning and lead

the department while viewing the women as the employee that gets the job done (Ridgeway, 2013). It is important to note that these gendered social identities are frequently projected on to the employees even if they have the same educational background or work experience (Ridgeway, 2013).

Women leaders are increasingly praised for their leadership skills and actually manifest the leadership styles most associated with the effective performance of a leader (Eagly, 2007). However, more employees report they prefer a man leader rather than a woman (Eagly, 2007). It is extremely difficult for a woman to succeed in what is thought of as a male-dominated role (Eagly, 2007). The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within higher education suggests that masculine leadership practices function to exclude women from having access to those positions (Dunn, Gerlach & Hyle, 2014).

Scholarly work on leadership has remained to be male-centric, conducted by men, and focused on men leaders (Dunn, Gerlach & Hyle, 2014). Consequently, the standard in which leadership roles have been derived has been the behaviors and characteristics of men (Dunn, Gerlach & Hyle, 2014; Woverton, Bower & Hyle, 2009). However, many women are believed to possess the leadership styles that are conducive to effective performance as a leader. Women leaders are seen as more transformative with their style “characterized by soft skills” (Bagilhole & White, 2008, p. 8). These soft skills include communication, emotional intelligence, teamwork, empathy, and flexibility (Majed, 2019).

However, research has found that organizational context plays an important role in the traditional gendered leadership style (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Madden, 2005). In



organizations with few women leaders, women “very often lead much the same way as their male counterparts do. It is when leadership roles are more integrated that women are more likely to exceed men in displaying democratic, participative styles as well as interpersonally oriented styles” (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 133). Studies show that this leadership style may result in more satisfied faculty, staff, students and governing boards compared to men’s traditional leadership style (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016).

### **Gender Bias of Women in Leadership**

Definitions of a successful leader vary depending on gender. Women and men leaders are expected to demonstrate different behavior and leadership styles and the assessment of what it means to be a successful leader is different by gender (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Loden, 1985). Data reflects that women remain under-represented in the top leadership positions within the academy. In 2018, women earned approximately 53.5% of the Ph.D.’s in the United States (NCES 324.20); however, they make up only 30% of the presidents within the academy (Johnson, 2017). Women continue to face barriers as they navigate through the organization (Bowling, Kelleher, Jones & Wright, 2006; Bullard & Wright, 1993; Hsieh and Winslow, 2006; Newman, 1996; Riccucci, 2009).

### **Glass Ceiling and Glass Cliff**

The most widely documented explanation for this gender inequity in leadership positions is explained by the invisible barrier of the glass ceiling that prevents women from gaining access to the positions (Barreto, Ryan & Schmitt, 2009; Gerdes, 2006; Kanter, 1977; Sabharwal, 2015). In addition, the glass cliff argues women are more likely to be assigned to a riskier, more precarious leadership positions, compared to men

(Bagilhole & White, 2008; Barreto, Ryan & Schmitt, 2009; Bruckmuller & Branscombe, 2009; Eisner & Harvey, 2009; Madden, 2011). Women who aspire to become leaders are often confronted with these impenetrable barriers, the glass ceiling and later the glass cliff, of which their male colleagues do not need to contend (Bruckmuller & Branscome, 2009; Cook & Glass, 2014).

Women had been aware of the invisible barriers to leadership positions for decades. The phenomenon was finally named in 1984 by a magazine editor, Gay Bryan, in an interview with *Adweek* (Barreto, Ryan & Schmitt, 2009).

The word ceiling implies that women encounter an upper limit on how high they can climb on the organizational ladder, whereas glass refers to the relative subtlety and transparency of this barrier, which is not necessarily apparent to the observer. (Barreto, et al., 2009, p. 5).

The glass ceiling metaphor is revealed through the lack of gender diversity within the number of women receiving terminal degrees and the number serving in leadership positions within the academy (Gerdes, 2006). Four criteria distinguish the glass ceiling from other types of gender inequality (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2011; Maume 2004). The first, discrimination still exists even after “controlling for education, experience, abilities, motivation, and other job-relevant characteristics” (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia & Vanneman, 2001, p. 657). Second, discrimination and barriers increase in severity as the individual moves up the leadership ranks within the hierarchical organization. Third, studies should reflect the data longitudinally and measure change over time. This data cannot be static comparisons but rather dynamic outcomes (Cotter, et al., 2001). Finally, the barriers increase over time throughout the course of the individual's career.

As women break through the ‘glass ceiling’ and are hired into leadership positions, research has found that the women's career trajectory on the other side of the

glass ceiling is also littered with obstacles that are different than their male counterparts. This 'second wave' of discrimination for women is referred to as the 'glass cliff'. The glass cliff phenomenon is encountered when women are finally selected to lead because it is usually during times of crisis when there is a greater chance of failure or criticism (Bagilhole & White, 2008; Barreto, Ryan, et al., 2009; Eisner & Harvey, 2009; Madden, 2011). Ryan & Haslam (2007) found that the glass cliff arises from the confluence of social psychological and social structural factors. These can be distinguished by two continua. Social psychological ranges from overt sexism and discrimination in the workplace to the belief that women are simply not competent to lead. Social structural factors range from a desire to find a scapegoat in the time of extreme crisis to the wanting to appoint a woman to the available leadership position. These processes are independent and may fall within all quadrants defined in the two continua: deliberate-malign, deliberate-benign, inadvertent-malign, inadvertent-benign (Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

In a series of experiments conducted by Ryan & Haslam (2007), they found that the likelihood of a woman candidate being selected over an equally qualified man candidate increased when the company had declining performance. Women are more likely to be promoted to high-risk positions (Powell & Butterfield, 2002; Ryan & Haslam, 2007). In fact, Ryan and Haslam (2005) found that companies appointed women to their boards when there were consistent performance issues prior to appointing the women. Interestingly, the savior effect works in conjunction with the glass cliff. Research has found that once a woman obtains their leadership position, most notably in a time of crisis, women are found to have less authority or opportunity to prove their leadership acumen compared to men (Cook & Glass, 2014). They have shorter tenures in the

leadership position (Cook & Glass, 2014) and are subject to intense scrutiny and negative evaluation bias (Kanter, 1987). Due to the inherent bias, confidence in their skills to lead an institution may be tenuous (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Schein, 2001).

### **Additional Barriers**

Gendered organization theories explain how institutional processes reproduce the gendered structures within the organization which simultaneously give the advantage to men while forming barriers to women's successes. Research illustrates that barriers remain as women try to obtain leadership positions (Bagilhole & White, 2008; Barreto, Ryan & Schmitt, 2009; Bruckmuller & Branscombe, 2009; Eisner & Harvey, 2009; Gerdes, 2006; Kanter, 1977; Madden, 2011; Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Sabharwal, 2015).

### **Intersectionality**

In recent years, copious amounts of research have been performed on the importance of considering the many ways in which multiple social identities intersect to shape the outcomes for women on the journey to leadership (Rosette, Koval, Ma & Livingston, 2015; Rosette, de Leon, Koval & Harrison, 2018; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Tillman, 2001). Kimberle Crenshaw developed the concept of intersectionality to illuminate the interaction between racism and sexism (McCann & Kim, 2013). Intersectionality is an important aspect to consider when studying gendered organizations and leadership. Indeed, one of the challenges that women encounter on their journey is the impact of their race and gender.

Intersectionality broadens the focus on the experiences of women who were born both white and middle class (Rosette, Koval, Ma & Livingston, 2015). The theory reveals the different experiences of women of color, immigrant women, as well as many other

groups. It exposes the challenges women of multiple identities encounter in their quest to achieve a leadership role (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Certainly, it is essential to understand how gender and race work in tandem to recognize how women of different racial groups are oppressed within the workplace (Rosette, de Leon, Koval & Harrison, 2018).

The journey to becoming a college president for a woman of color is significantly impacted by her gender and race (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Indeed, minority women have served as college presidents since the early 19th century (Coleman, 2012); however, they encounter many barriers as not just a woman but as a woman of color. In fact, these marginalized women are the most underrepresented in the college presidency position accounting for just 5% of the women college presidents (ACE, 2017). Of that 5%, over half of the women presidents of color lead an associate's or bachelor's degree-granting institution (ACE, 2017).

Research has identified three main barriers for women of color within the academy: lack of socialization with their colleagues, lack of significant mentoring, and the lack of professional development and networking opportunities (Jackson & Harris, 2007; Tillman, 2001). However, there is not much research regarding women leaders of color in higher education, making it extremely difficult to have clear insights into the lived experiences as well as the barriers these leaders encountered throughout their journey (Shakeshaft, 1999; Wilson, 1989).

Although women of color are making some progress through the ranks of higher education, there is no question, inequality still exists. In acknowledging intersectionality as a barrier, higher education administrators should focus on solutions that positively

impact the number of minority women leaders (Patel, 2016; Rosette, de Leon, Koval & Harrison, 2018). The experiences of the women throughout their journey should inform these solutions (Patel, 2016). Further, the academy must recognize that there is a positive impact on decision-making when one includes various ideas and insights based on the personal experiences of women with varied backgrounds and races (Patel, 2016). Indeed, there are pitfalls to studying women as a monolithic category, and instead, one must look at the intersectionality of race and gender in shaping workplace outcomes (Rosette, de Leon, Koval & Harrison, 2018). As women of color navigate these barriers of race and gender, they inspire the future generation of minority women leaders within the academy.

### **Social and Organizational Barriers**

Dzubinski and Diehl (2016) performed a cross-sector analysis of gender-based leadership to illuminate the sexism that is hidden in the workplace. They found that both social and organizational practices create gender inequities in leadership. The barriers can be organized into three levels: macro (societal), meso (group or organization), and micro (individual).

#### **Macro Barriers**

The macro barriers are at the societal level and prevent women from advancing into leadership because these barriers make it difficult to contribute their leadership expertise. Some examples of macro-level barriers that women encounter are as follows: control of women's voices, leadership perceptions, gender stereotypes, cultural constraints on women's own choices of career or education, gender unconsciousness, and scrutiny. The first macro barrier entails the restrictions on when and how women

contribute to the conversation. Some women may feel like they are interrupting and should wait until men finish talking before providing their thoughts. In Sandberg's (2013) book, she expressed the importance for women to be more assertive in the workplace. She referred to this as 'leaning in'. The problem, according to Orr (2019) is that women are not invited to sit at the table to actually be more assertive. Further, Diehl & Dzubinski (2016) reported that some women in leadership positions were criticized if they disagreed with a decision that had been made or, worse, they were left out of the conversations completely. In fact, many women have been taught that the woman's place is to support, not challenge, men's authority (Dzubinski, 2015).

The second macro barrier is leadership perceptions in which society associates leadership with masculinity. It is believed that women should reflect leadership styles like a man (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). However, women are stereotyped into being communal and men are agentic (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Rosette & Tost, 2010). The definition of agentic leadership is to possess the art of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal (Rosette & Tost, 2010). Agentic behaviors refer to give-and-take tendencies (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & van Engen, 2003). An individual who displays agentic behaviors is likely to be described as assertive and would utilize resources as leverage for obtaining a goal. Agentic behaviors include self-sufficiency, independence, dominant, aggressive, and task-oriented (Carli, 2001; Eagly et al., 2003). Men are more likely to display agentic behaviors than their female counterparts (Eagly et al., 2003).

Communal leadership style is defined as a leader that places more emphasis on communication, cooperation, affiliation, and nurturing (Eagly, 1987). Communal

leadership behaviors tend to be more open, fair, pleasant and persons in these roles show responsibility (Carli, 2001). Social science research theorizes, and overwhelmingly have proven, that collaborative leaders are more impactful and successful (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2008). According to Eagly (2014), the problem is that women face a double bind in the issue of leadership. If they perform as an agentic leader, they are criticized for acting outside of the gender norm. If they perform as a communal leader, they are considered to be ineffective leaders (Eagly, 2014). The perception of leadership traits has started to transition to less masculine traits and more towards an androgynous type of leadership (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2008). Higher Education as a patriarchal institution values competition and domination (Bergquist and Pawlak, 2008). These values are normally attributed to men compared to the traditionally female-oriented values such as collaboration and equality (Billing & Alvesson, 2000; Bystydzienski, Thomas, Howe & Desai, 2017).

The next leadership barrier at the macro level is gender stereotypes which refer to the oversimplification or generalization of women. One higher education executive that Diehl & Dzubinski (2016) interviewed stated that when she got pregnant, the board members assumed she would quit her job and stay at home with the kids. Societal constraints on women's educational or career choices is also a macro level barrier. This could be manifested in the societal prejudice toward the woman if she takes on a role that is not traditionally aligned with a woman's gender role. An example of this is a woman doctor or a woman construction worker. In reference to leadership, it is believed that women need to 'fit in' to the coveted position. They must dress like a man and act like a



man, so they will be accepted by the gendered institution (Bryans & Mavin, 2003; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Wajcman, 2013).

Gender unconsciousness is the next macro barrier and it refers to the lack of understanding of the impact gender has in the workplace (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). An example of this is that some people believe the glass ceiling or gender pay gap is an excuse women use to explain why they are not successful. The gender unconscious may be aware of the gendered power relations but choose to deny, minimize, or ignore it because the cost to address it within a gendered organization is too high (Bierema, 2003). For some women, it is easier to not question the status quo or work to change it (Bierema, 2003).

Women leaders sometimes face intense scrutiny as to how they handle a situation or decision making. This may be due to the fact that at the societal level, leadership is defined as masculine (Bell et. al, 2016; Dunn, Gerlach & Hyle, 2014). As a result of this scrutiny, Meister, Sinclair & Jehn (2017) found that identity asymmetry is an important challenge that women in leadership experience and may be part of the explanation as to why there are so few women in the top leadership positions. Identity asymmetry is defined as feeling misidentified at work when an individual believes that others attribute incorrect or unwanted identities to him or her, neglecting the characteristics that might be highly important in him or her (Meister et al, 2014). This asymmetry often is based on gender stereotypes (Meister et al, 2014). Many qualified women leaders possess the required leadership skills; however, at the societal level, the perceptions of women as leaders create significant barriers to overcome for women to advance in their careers (Lucas & Baxter, 2012; Diehl, 2014; Schein, 2001).

## **Meso Barriers**

The meso barriers are found at the organization. Among other challenges, these barriers include the glass ceiling, lack of mentoring, discrimination, male organizational culture, tokenism, and glass cliff. The glass ceiling refers to the invisible barrier that keeps women from advancing in the workplace (Maume, 2004). Women encounter an upper limit on how high they can climb on the organizational ladder (Barreto, et al., 2009).

Sabharwal (2015) performed a study to discover what happened to the women that break the glass ceiling and obtain a position in leadership. The study found that women continue to face challenges. Women leaders tend to receive less support from peers, excluded from networks, seclusion, isolation, and receive greater scrutiny and criticism even when performing exactly as their male counterpart (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Palmer & Jones, 2019; Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Sabharwal, 2015).

One way to overcome those challenges within an organization would be through mentoring (Palmer & Jones, 2019). Kellerman & Rhode (2007) validated that mentoring is critical in career development, experiences, and achievement over time. However, Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) found that men were mentored at a much younger age to take on leadership positions while women had to find their mentors which took significantly longer due to the lack of women in leadership positions.

The scarcity of women leaders could also be explained by the barrier of discrimination in the workplace. According to Castaño, Fontanil & García-Izquierdo (2019), one of the main characteristics of discrimination in the workplace is gender stereotyping. Gender stereotyping is illustrated by the historical division of labor

traditionally assigned in an organization (Castaño, Fontanil & García-Izquierdo, 2019). It has been evidenced that descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes influence hiring practices, mainly through the perception that women are less suitable for leadership positions (Castaño, Fontanil & García-Izquierdo, 2019; Heilman, 2001). Descriptive gender stereotypes refer to how the two genders behave, and prescriptive gender stereotypes describe how the genders should behave. It is a short cut to make an impression quickly (Heilman, 2012).

The hierarchical organization's cultures and norms are overwhelmingly male-centric. One higher education executive reported to Diehl & Dzubinski (2016), "What's astounding to me is that at the highest levels there's what I call the locker room mentality of old boys club, slap each other on the ass, and make lewd jokes" (p. 190). This executive was told by the leaders that if she cannot deal with the banter, she did not need to be there. Schein (2010), a leading scholar in organizational culture, observed that culture acts as a stabilizing and defining force of the organizational structure. If there is a patriarchal culture, that is what defines the organization. The hierarchical structure as well as the gendered norms are prevalent in many organizations (Schein, 2010).

The next barrier, tokenism, is the practice of recruiting a person from an underrepresented group to give the appearance of equality within a workplace (Niemann, 2016). In an interview with a higher education executive, Diehl & Dzubinski (2016) found that women leaders considered to be tokens find it difficult to have their voices heard or their status endorsed. Consequences of tokenism include isolation, role encapsulation, stereotyping, and loneliness (Niemann, 2016). Finally, the glass cliff is the phenomenon in which a woman is more likely to be hired in a leadership position during

times of crisis or economic downturn because the chance of failure is at the highest (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). However, Cook & Glass (2014) found that women that are placed in leadership positions during the time of crisis are found to have less authority or opportunity. Also, they tend to have shorter tenures in the leadership position and subsequently replaced by a man (Cook & Glass, 2014).

### **Micro Barriers**

The final level, micro barriers, operates within the individual and their daily interactions. These barriers are a result of the woman placing an extra burden of responsibility on their shoulders. These include barriers such as conscious unconsciousness, personalizing, psychological glass ceiling, and work-life conflict.

Conscious unconsciousness is similar to gender unconsciousness at the macro-level (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). These leaders deliberately choose not to notice, be affected by, or challenge the role gender plays in the workplace (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). A woman within a gendered organization may not acknowledge the fact that she is being overlooked, left out of meetings, or being marginalized (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). She just feels lucky to be a part of leadership. Personalizing refers to assuming personal responsibility, or blaming oneself, for the system or the organizational problems (Ely, 1995). An example of this is when the woman is not hired into a higher status position within an organization. The woman will determine that it was because she did not have the same experience or expertise of the man that was hired (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). It may never occur to her that it was actually due to the fact that she was a woman in a gendered organization. This is similar to the category of self-blamers as referenced in Ely's (1995) study. Some women are unable to conform to the prescriptive norms within

a gendered organization and instead blamed themselves for the inconsistency within the institution (Ely, 1995).

The next micro barrier is the psychological glass ceiling or unwillingness to appear assertive (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). This could lead to undervaluing one's abilities and exemplified by feelings of imposter syndrome, in which a woman does not feel adequate to carry out the tasks of the job. Women with imposter syndrome believe that it was luck that got them the job and soon management will realize they are not knowledgeable enough to have the job (Mullangi & Jagsi, 2019). These leaders could suffer from continuous self-doubt and a sense of fraudulence (Mullangi & Jagsi, 2019).

The last challenge is related to balancing work and family responsibilities. Emslie & Hunt (2008) performed a study on men and women in mid-life comparing their experiences of work life balance. The data suggested that gender is embedded in the way the participants negotiated home and work obligations (Emslie & Hunt, 2008). The thought that women must have an equal balance of time and energy at work and family life is a misnomer and setting many women up for failure (Emslie & Hunt, 2008). As stated by the participant interviewed by Diehl and Dzubinski (2016), men never have to figure out how to balance because they never put that burden on themselves.

The majority of literature dealing with the barriers women face in their quest for leadership positions has focused primarily on the role of women to overcome the barriers, not on the role of leaders within the organization or the employers (Castaño, Fontanil & García-Izquierdo, 2019). These cultural dynamics with macro, meso, and micro barriers can create real challenges for women who aspire to be in leadership, including lack of supportive workplace priorities, policies, and reward structures (Kellerman & Rhode,

2014). Research has shown that organizations that have gender diversity within leadership outperform organizations with a homogeneous leadership team (Catalyst, 2004a; Welbourne, Cychota & Ferrante, 2007). Therefore, understanding and eliminating these barriers could lead to improved organizational performance.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The research study will consist of layering two theoretical frameworks: Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, with an emphasis on self-efficacy theory, and the feminist theory, concentrating on patriarchy. I chose to create a conceptual framework due to the concurrence of two elements within this research question. The first element is the individual woman president's journey and how she leveraged specific professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors to progress to the position of president. The self-efficacy theory can address this element. The second element is the inherent bias within the organizations which could be manifested in women's oppression through a gendered organization. This element will be addressed by the theory of patriarchy.

The examination of the conceptual framework will be organized into three major sections. The first section will be a broad description of social cognitive theory and self-efficacy theory. This will be followed by an exploration of how behaviors and belief in one's own abilities may affect a woman's career. The second section will consist of a summary of feminist theory and an explanation of patriarchy. Finally, I will complete this section with examples of how the layering of these two frameworks is exemplified in higher education.

## **Social Cognitive Theory**

Social Cognitive Theory describes the understanding that learning occurs in a social context, social influence of individual experiences, actions of others, and environmental factors on individual behaviors (Bandura, 1989). This theory considers the intersection of acquiring and maintaining behavior while considering the social environment in which the individual performs the behavior. Social Cognitive Theory explains the opportunities for social support through instilling expectations, self-efficacy, and using observational learning and other reinforcements to achieve behavioral change (Bandura, 1989). It is directly related to the individual's knowledge acquisition and observing others within the context of social interactions, experiences, and outside influences (Bandura, 1989).

### **Self-Efficacy**

The correlation between self-esteem and leadership has been studied extensively for more than half a century with Bass (1960) finding that those individuals with higher self-esteem have the propensity to lead others (Mason, Mason & Mathews, 2016). Further, research has found that there is a direct relationship between those with self-esteem and leadership efficacy (Chemers, Watson & May, 2000). The core belief in this theory is that through motivation, accomplishments, and emotional well-being (Bandura, 1997, 2006), a person can influence the events that affect their lives. In the simplest of terms, a person can accomplish anything if they believe in themselves (Maddux, 2002). Self-efficacy is what a person believes they can do through their abilities and skill to change a challenging situation. This belief in oneself is developed over time through

positive experiences (Maddux, 2002). This positive reinforcement influences the tasks the individual chooses to learn and the goals that they set for themselves (Lunenburg, 2011).

There are four principle sources of self-efficacy which include past performance accomplishments, learning from others, emotional cues, and social or verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1977; Lunenburg, 2011). The first principle, experiences that result in the mastery of a task or an accomplishment in past performance, is the most important source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). If an employee succeeded at a task, they are more confident to take on similar tasks in the future. The second principle is learning from others, or vicarious experiences. This experience is more effective when the employee believes they exhibit similar characteristics to the colleague of which they are modeling. The third principle, the source of persuasion, can be either social or verbal. This is essentially the manager persuading the employee that they will be successful at the task. Finally, the emotional cues are the physical and physiological symptoms one feels when they are trying to accomplish something difficult. These symptoms include fast heartbeat, nausea, and sweaty palms. This can significantly impact the employee's performance depending on how they react or succumb to the symptoms. Feelings of self-efficacy develop gradually through life experiences and succeeding at a task builds the skills, coping strategies, and task knowledge to competently perform (Locke & Latham, 1994).

Efficacy is also linked to how resilient the person is when facing adversity and setbacks (Bandura, 1997). Succinctly, individuals with self-efficacy are "motivated, persistent, goal-direct, resilient, and clear thinkers under pressure" (McCormick, Tanguma & Lopez-Forment, 2002, p, 36). Locke (1991) found that effective leaders have characteristics of self-efficacy; in fact, copious amounts of leadership literature link



successful leadership with self-confidence (Bass, 1990; House & Aditya, 1997; House & Howell, 1992; Northouse, 2001; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992). Bass (1990) and Williams (1997) both posited that self-confidence is linked to self-efficacy in certain situations. However, according to the self-efficacy theory, self-confidence does not necessarily result in a successful leader. Instead, it is the inner belief of the individual that they have the capabilities and characteristics to successfully perform the leadership task (McCormick, Tanguma & Lopez-Forment, 2002). Wood & Bandura (1989) and Wood, Bandura & Bailey (1990) found that when the leader has self-efficacy beliefs in themselves, it positively impacts their decision making.

Murphy and Ensher (1999) found that when a female supervisor has self-efficacy, her team's performance and job satisfaction is high. Chemers et al. (2000) found that the self-efficacy of the leader "may be one of the most active ingredients in successful leaders, and team performance" (p. 276) and "contributes to leadership effectiveness" (p. 275). However, Hackett (1995) found that a leader will only take on the roles that are gender-appropriate given the circumstances. Gender role norms can dissuade the women from undertaking the leadership role position while completing a task (McCormick, Tanguma & Lopez-Forment, 2002). "When a high dominant female was teamed with a low dominant female in a problem-solving task, the high dominant female emerged as the leader. However, when a low dominant male was teamed with a high dominant female, the male usually emerged as the team leader" (McCormick, Tanguma & Lopez-Forment, 2002, p. 39). This theory of gender role norm has been replicated in studies by other researchers (Carbonell, 1984; Fleischer & Chertkoff, 1986; Nyquist & Spence, 1986). Some women have lower confidence in their leadership abilities, thus resulting in lower

self-efficacy because they have limited experience in the leadership role (McCormick, Tanguma & Lopez-Forment, 2002). Women leaders, such as those that are aspiring college presidents, must possess self-efficacy if they are to be considered in the leadership role.

Self-efficacy affects the employee's belief in themselves, their confidence, performance, and the tasks they are willing to learn (Lunenburg, 2011). Research has found that personal efficacy can influence the goals that people choose, their aspiration, how much effort they will put forth in a task, and how long they will persist in accomplishing a challenging task (McCormick, Tanguma & Lopez-Forment, 2002). Through self-efficacy, women leaders can ensure they pursue specific professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors that can significantly impact their career progression to the position of president.

### **Career Self-efficacy**

An application of self-efficacy, career self-efficacy, is a career choice and career development. Hackett and Betz (1981) recognized the importance of self-efficacy in career development. They wanted to find why women underutilize their talents and abilities as well as determine why they are unrepresentative in high status, higher-paying positions in male-dominated occupations (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). Hackett and Betz (1981) posited that women's self-perceptions of their ability are more impactful on the career choice than any other measure. They found that low expectations of success were the major source of underutilizing their skills and not applying for higher status positions.

In reference to career choice and career development, Betz (2000) suggested three major concepts. The first concept, approach versus avoidance behavior, describes what

one is willing to try compared to what they are not willing to try. This is determined by how risk-adverse they are in reference to their choice in education and ultimately their career. The second concept, expectations of performance, can consist of anything from how the woman feels like they will perform at a task, a position, or the entire profession. They must have the confidence in their abilities and skills. Finally, the self-efficacy's effects on persistence describe the challenges they are willing to face and how long they are willing to face those challenges as they are pursuing their long-term goals. They must be willing to persevere and overcome the gender barriers they will most likely encounter to obtain the higher status position.

The theoretical framework of self-efficacy describes the confidence, performance, and decision making of the individual woman. However, this study examines more than the tenacity of the leader. It examines the intersection of that leader as they navigate a gendered organization. This organizational theoretical framework is referred to as patriarchy. This framework addresses women's oppression by connecting patriarchy within the hierarchical organization. At the root of patriarchy is the understanding that it is not just one system that oppresses women but rather it is a combination of race, social class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity (Ehrenreich, 1976). These aspects are interwoven to create oppression for women through a gendered organization.

### **Gendered Feminist Theory**

Feminism, in general terms, refers to political activism for emancipatory purposes on behalf of women (McCann & Kim, 2013). Although the feminist tradition is characterized by great diversity throughout history, they all have shared specific concepts: sex and gender, the sexual division of labor, and patriarchy (Prasad, 2018).

Feminist theory strives to make sense of gender inequality by focusing on power relations, politics, and sexuality (Ferguson, 1984). The theories provide the tools in which researchers can understand the injustices against women and hopefully develop strategies to subjugate women's oppression in the future (McCann & Kim, 2013). It answers the types of questions such as who 'we' are as women, how we understand events that took place, and what kind of changes are needed to move us towards gender parity (McCann & Kim, 2013).

Feminist research differs significantly from traditional research because it seeks to understand why gender inequity exists within our own society throughout centuries (Prasad, 2018). Many times, it is written for and by women. There is a growing body of research into feminism and feminist paradigms. The paradigm allows the researcher to provide space for women's voices to finally be heard (Prasad, 2018). It will enable the reader to achieve closeness with the subject and understand the gendered nature of all social arrangements (Prasad, 2018). It provides the researcher with a voice to provide personal details (Prasad, 2018). And, finally, it helps with the process of knowledge and production (Prasad, 2018). Research questions with themes focusing on inequality, with the primary focus on discrimination, objectification, oppression, stereotyping, and patriarchy, must continue to be addressed and conferred. Hence, everyone is aware of the injustices that still occur (Kenny, 2017).

### **Social Contract**

The concept of gender equality has its origin in the Enlightenment, the historical period also known as the Age of Reason. Hobbes was one of the first, publishing *Leviathan* in 1651. It has had an extraordinary influence on political theory and ethics

from the 1700s to today. Without governments and laws, man lived in a state of nature, which lead to suffering and subjugation. He famously claimed that life in the state of nature is “nasty, brutish and short” (Orbell & Rutherford, 1973). To offset this suffering and obtain security and order within their lives, men agreed to a social contract which is a society based upon rules that everyone consents to. All people are ideally free and equal to accept the contract. Hobbes’s position on women was that they were equal to men. While as feminists today, we applaud this notion, it did not sit well with most people at that time. Women were considered inferior to men and were the property of their fathers and husbands.

The notion that all people are equal contradicted patriarchal notions about women’s “natural” inferiority. The philosopher John Locke attempted to solve this contradiction in his Second Treatise on Civil Government, which outlined the origin and justification for governmental power. It states:

To this purpose, I think it may not be amiss to set down what I take to be political power; that the power of a magistrate over a subject may be distinguished from that of a father over his children, a master over his servant, a husband over his wife, and a lord over his slave.....it may help us to distinguish those powers from one another and show the difference betwixt a ruler of a commonwealth, a father of a family, and the captain of a galley (Locke, 1947, p. 58).

This notion implies that while European men of property and privilege may be equal to one another, this did not apply to women or colonized people

Jean Jacques Rousseau’s (1762) interpretation of the social contract theory focused more on the fact that when people started to congregate in the same areas, living together in the same communities, division of labor was introduced. According to legal theorist Manzoor Elahi Laskar (2013), the pivotal moment was the invention of private

property. This invention led to “general will,” which is the surrender of their rights to the community as a whole rather than individuals. This “general will” consisted of blind obedience to the majority’s will (Laskar, 2013). Rousseau believed surrendering power to the government was absurd because man was giving up his freedom for slavery. A state has no right to enslave the people, and landowners should have the right to choose the laws under which they live. Rousseau was not an advocate of gender equality. He argued that women and men had different roles to play in society. He believed men desired women but did not need them to survive. Conversely, he advocated that women desired men and also required them to survive; for their wellbeing. He argued women were less rational than men.

In response to the classical theorists, Pateman (1988) wrote *The Sexual Contract*, which provided a feminist perspective to the social contract. She argued that women did not participate in the social contract even though the social contract was developed to end the patriarchal model of authority. Women’s exclusion from the contract reinforced women’s subordination. Pateman found the social contract theory to be two dimensional. The first dimension was the governance of the people by the state. The second was the patriarchal structure of the government of women by men in private (i.e., marriage contract) and public (i.e., employment contract). The latter dimension is of importance in my research.

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### **Patriarchy**

Patriarchy is a social practice that includes social, political, and economic systems that ensure men's dominance over women. It influences every area within society – family, school, work culture, and relationships. A patriarchal society tries to develop

some type of coherent principle that can explain the basis of subordination which triggers the particular oppressive experiences women encounter (Beechey, 1979). The patriarchal social practice, through language and knowledge, creates a power imbalance between men and women. Men control the knowledge and hence make women invisible in the world of ideas (Rowland & Klein, 1996).

Johnson (1997) describes patriarchy as male-centric, and the distrust of other men is the key motivational factor. Patriarchal attitudes believe that men should hold positions of power in society (Mason, Mason & Mathews, 2016). It encourages men to find security, status, and other incentives through the control of others (Hartmann, 1979). A patriarchal organization is highly misogynistic and hierarchical (Hartmann, 1979). Women's oppression is simply a by-product of this because their social system is male-dominated, male-centered, and male-controlled.

Indeed, according to MacKinnon (1979) and Becker (1999), the core of this discrimination has never been the mistreatment of women but rather the systemic motivation to advantage white men over those of other genders, classes, or races. Even though the crux of patriarchy is not necessarily women's oppression, the social system is operated by male dominance that values masculine traits. The culture is highly misogynistic. Patriarchy fuels control while valuing power, autonomy, independence, competition, aggression, and oppression (Hartmann, 1979). Men regard women not as equal but rather as an apparatus to fulfill the needs of men. As stated by Becker (1999), "Social structures and the individuals within them create and reproduce inequalities linked to sex, race, class, religion, ethnicity and other 'differences'" (p. 23). This



structure is manifested daily when men are celebrated and valued, and women are undervalued and maligned (Firestone, 1979).

Although it is true, laws have been passed in the mid-1960s to abolish inequality; it continues to be present in the social structures. As Becker (1999) posited, there are many forms of inequality, and women's inequality cannot be "adequately addressed simply by working on getting women 'a bigger piece of the pie'" (p. 25). It is important to note, women are successful in leadership as long as they comply with patriarchal values. The fact of the matter is, within a patriarchal organization, women are placed into positions of power as long as the women are "male-identified, male-centered, and act according to patriarchal values" (Becker, 1999, p. 34).

Further, women, as well as men, can oppress others within vulnerable groups (Becker, 1999). In fact, how much privilege a person has depends on their position and how that position is valued within the patriarchal society (MacKinnon, 1979). Patriarchy at the institution level is extremely difficult to dislodge due to the resolute grip on the organization's culture (Prasad, 2018). Further, Becker (1999) posits that patriarchy cannot be eradicated because it does not have core values other than sexism and male domination.

Gendered norms through a patriarchal institution may determine who gets hired, promoted, or rewarded based on the traditional division of labor (Acker, 2007). These gendered norms are entrenched in the organization and repeated consistently through interpersonal interactions formalized and regulated by the institutional practices and policies (Chen & Chen, 2012; Mastracci & Bowman, 2015; Stivers, 2000). It is a consequence of gender as a socially constructed phenomenon in which the antiquated

gendered roles, men are the breadwinner and a women's place is in the home, are maintained (Denhardt & Perkins, 1976; Mastracci & Arreola, 2016).

Acker (1990) posited that gendered organizations consist of practices "that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity" (p. 146) which is exemplified as male or female, masculine or feminine. Ferguson (1984) suggested that bureaucratic organizations are inherently gendered in terms of their structure and mode of operation. Masculine values and principles dominate the authority structure (Ferguson, 1984; Kantar, 1977) which could be true within the hierarchical structure of the higher education institutions. The male domination that is inherent in the social and cultural structures (Benjamin, 1988) is conceptualized, designed, and controlled by men, and reflects their interests (Acker, 1990). Femininity and feminist traits are of little value and women are regarded as simply fulfilling a man's needs (Becker, 1999). It is believed that the men control women from achieving essential productive resources, such as a living wage, by excluding them from access (Becker, 1999). However, as Becker pointed out, gender inequality cannot be addressed just by getting more women into leadership positions because the law of averages states that some women will definitely succeed. However, she believed that those that do succeed will be women that conform to the patriarchal norms and do not threaten the patriarchal order (Becker, 1999).

Kanter (1977) argues that the structure of hierarchical organizations is established with the women in dead-end low paying jobs at the bottom and considered tokens when they make it to the leadership positions. Mastracci (2013) concurs with Kanter, in a hierarchical organization, oppression of gender is found between the management and

those that are managed. This oppression is exemplified by women hold the clerical positions and men hold the management positions. Further, these social and cultural structures are evidenced through the practices of human resources management: hiring, promotion, and retaining (Mastracci, 2013).

Higher education institutions are oppressive towards women faculty. Indeed, the higher education institution is a gendered organization that fails to bring about proportional parity (Hannum et al., 2014). Further, an organization is determined to be inherently gendered when it inevitably reproduces gendered differences within the hierarchy and the occupations are gendered (Britton, 2000). Although more women are entering higher education, parity has failed to bring about gender equity (Guy & Fenley, 2014; Hsieh & Winslow, 2006) in a patriarchy system. Knowledge of gendered bias is demonstrated through the action and inaction at all levels of the organization and based on reflection, interaction, and professional observations (Prasad, 2018) such as the intentional or unintentional gendered practices currently implemented in the academy.

Based on data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), it could be implied that the higher education hierarchical structure also appears to be gendered. Even though 53.5% of the doctorate graduates are women, an overwhelming number of the women hired by the academy is at the level of instructor (56.6%) or lecturer (55.8%) compared to men in which the vast majority are at professor (66.5%) or associate professor (54.1%) levels. This is important for a couple of reasons. First, according to National Center for Education Statistics (2019), the average salary for a male professor (\$131,403) or male associate professor (\$90,721) is significantly higher than the salary for a woman instructor (\$66,103) or woman lecturer (\$60,188). Secondly,

within the hierarchy of the academy, the president presides over senior administrators (Pusser & Loss, 2020). These administrators are usually drawn from the tenured faculty ranks (Pusser & Loss, 2020) which as alluded to earlier consists mostly of men (56.3%). The position of lecturer or instructor is not on the tenure-track and therefore may make those individuals ineligible for the majority of the top administrative positions within academic affairs such as department chair, dean, or provost. Traditionally, the typical path for a college president is to be selected from academic affairs (Johnson, 2017).

### **Layering the Two Theories**

The conceptual framework that could be used to explain the lack of gender diversity within college presidency positions is the layering of self-efficacy and patriarchy. Chemers et al. (2000) found that the self-efficacy of the leader “may be one of the most active ingredients in successful leaders, and team performance” (p. 276) and “contributes to leadership effectiveness” (p. 275). Self-efficacy describes the importance of intentional career development by the woman who aspire to be a leader. As women actively perform tasks in a leadership role, their abilities, resilience, and confidence increase as they realize they can be successful at leading teams and making decisions. It is incumbent on the women to utilize their talents and abilities to achieve a high status, higher-paying position.

As it relates to the organization, patriarchy describes how women have less status in a hierarchical gendered organization. This is illustrated consistently across higher education, but most pronounced as the woman makes her way up through the ranks of leadership to presidency. As defined by Cotter et al. (2001), this is indicative of the glass ceiling effect. Discrimination still exists even after “controlling for education, experience,

abilities, motivation, and other job-relevant characteristics” (Cotter et al., 2001, p. 657). Further, discrimination and barriers increase in severity as the individual moves up the leadership ranks within the hierarchical organization as one looks at the data longitudinally. Finally, the barriers increase over time throughout the course of the individual’s career. As the participants within my study tell their own stories, the reader will understand how the women presidents navigated the gendered organization which will allow women to respond accordingly as they plan their career (Agostinone-Wilson, 2020) to presidency.

These two theories guide the study to better understand the lived experiences of the women college presidents. In addition, the methodological approach of narrative inquiry allows for the “ability to explore and communicate internal and external experiences” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 10). The internal and intrinsic factors being explored through self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977) and the external and extrinsic factors being explored through patriarchy (Beechey, 1979; Mason, Mason & Mathews, 2016).

### **Summary**

It is important to discover the experiences and challenges of women within the gendered organization as they navigate their career to the position of presidency. Singell and Tang (2013) found that “the internal leadership hierarchy within U.S. higher education is remarkably consistent across most universities such that it is relatively straightforward to compare the career trajectory of university presidents” (p. 220). The typical path to the presidency includes faculty position (e.g. associate professor or professor) and administration including department chair, dean, vice-president, and

provost (American Council on Education, Center for Policy Research and Strategy, 2017a; Bornstein, 2008; Cook, 2012; Singell & Tang, 2013; Walton & McDade, 2001).

As the total number of women earning doctoral degrees and hired into faculty positions within the academy increases, the overall gap of the genders begin to narrow (Flaherty, 2016). However, one cannot help but contemplate whether there is something that can be done to lessen the gender differences and/or biases in the tenure and promotion process to provide a more accurate measure of their contribution and impact to the academy. As referenced above, this difference between the time to achieve tenure for men and women genders could be attributed to competing demands of service and teaching, but it could also be attributed to the fact that there is a lack of role models and mentors for women, especially in the STEM field. This is extremely important because it could result in lower confidence in abilities and a feeling of exclusivity (Diehl and Dzubinski, 2016).

The explanation as to why there are so few women presidents (30%) could be that it is extremely difficult to get through the tenure and promotion process. Then the phenomenon of (un)conscious selection bias exists within the governing boards which are significantly man dominated. This bias is towards people that are different from them. This has been tested numerous times, through countless studies, and proven to exist (Heilman, 2012; Heilman & Haynes, 2008; Shore, 1992; Smith, Paul, & Paul, 2007; Verniers & Vala, 2018). In addition, another explanation as to the lack of women presidents was suggested in article written by Ward & Eddy (2013) in which women find there are so few women leaders ahead of them in the ranks, they just get discouraged and

simply do not accept new opportunities because women feel there is a glass ceiling and no room to advance.

Women are underrepresented in the role of college president. There is a large amount of literature on the challenges' women face in the gendered institution of higher education; however, there is little research focused specifically on the experiences of women who obtained the position of college president. The goal of this study is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences of the women presidents as they navigated gendered higher education institutions. In addition, the reader will learn the self-efficacy strategies the women college presidents implemented to assist them in their rise through the ranks to become president. Specifically, what attributes, professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors had implications for their career to progress to the position of president within the higher education academy. Finally, the study will provide an understanding of the challenges these women presidents had to overcome to achieve their positions.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

Humans have embraced the richness of storytelling to give meaning to the lived experiences of others as well as the sharing of one's own experiences (Polkinghorne, 1988). According to Atkinson (2007), "Our life stories connect us to our roots, give us direction, validate our own experiences, and restore value to our lives" (p. 224). The knowledge gained from narrative inquiry, specifically storytelling, can provided the reader with a deeper, richer, understanding of the subject, and insight into the stories for their own context (Wang & Geale, 2015). It places value on subjectivity, reflection, creativity, and sharing of feelings and experiences (Bruce, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry was exceptionally suited for a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants within my study. Narrative inquiry emphasized participant's stories as an important forum (Bruce, 2008) to illustrate the women's journey to the college presidency. My study expounded upon and contextualized the experiences of women presidents as they navigated the gendered higher education institutions. Indeed, storytelling provided the feelings, hopes, desires, and moral disposition of all the social actors within the research study (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007).

Due to the limited number of women in presidential positions, the use of this method was ideal because my study utilized a small sample (n=5) and the approach



allowed for an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences through their leadership position. This research, using narrative inquiry, consisted of stories by women in the presidency position that illustrated the personal experiences, the specific journey these women navigated, and the particular instances that they believe assisted them through a gendered organization. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) encouraged narrative inquiry as a powerful tool for reflection on personal knowledge and how knowledge is formulated.

This chapter outlines the methodological approach and the research design I used to conduct my study. I will describe my research question, sample selection procedures, data collection method, trustworthiness, and method for data analysis. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of my positionality and subjectivity as a researcher and a woman employed within higher education.

### **Research Questions**

Within this study, I addressed the following central question: What are the experiences of women presidents as they navigated gendered higher education institutions? My sub-questions are as follows:

1. What are strategies that women presidents implemented to assist them in their rise through the ranks to become president?
2. What specific attributes, professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors had implications for their career to progress to the position of president within the higher education academy?
3. What challenges did women presidents have to overcome to achieve their position?

## **Methodology**

There is a great deal of literature demonstrating the fact that women are underrepresented in presidential positions within higher education (Bilen-Green & Jacobson, 2008; Diehl, 2014; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Hannum, Muhly, Shockley-Zalabak & White, 2014; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016). As a researcher dedicated to building a pipeline of women leaders in higher education, I wanted a deeper understanding of women college presidents' experiences. I wanted to illuminate the voices of those women who successfully navigated the gendered organization and provide lessons learned from their lived experiences. A qualitative research approach is well suited for this research question which seeks to understand and give meaning to a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Narrative inquiry was derived from Dewey's philosophy of experience regarding reflective thinking which enables researchers to create connections between actions and the consequences of those actions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry is a methodology that researchers use because they believe that knowledge is embedded in the holistic nature of the stories (Bruce, 2008). As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explain, it is a study of the way humans experience the world. It is a methodology to describe, understand, and then present real-life experiences through painting the stories of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Featherstone, 1989). The narrative approach amplified the voices and provided a rich description of the lived experiences from the participant's positionality (Wang & Geale, 2015). By utilizing this qualitative design, I was able to understand the phenomena of the lived experiences of the women college presidents and their journey through a gendered institution.

The utilization of the narrative inquiry method of research is the understanding that narrative is a way of knowing (Kramp, 2004). This type of narrative knowing is expressed in the form of storytelling (Kramp, 2004). Storytelling is the most natural way of recounting experiences in a meaningful way (Polkinghorne, 1988). According to Polkinghorne (1988), people without narratives simply do not exist because life itself is considered a narrative. This inquiry method is used by the researcher when they know there is a story that can teach us, impact who we are, and ultimately change us in some way (Nielsen, 1999). Didion (1961) posited that narrative inquiry fills the blanks between what happened and what it all means.

One distinguishing point about narrative inquiry is the practice of thinking with rather than about stories (Morris, 2002). Thinking about a story separates the story and the reader. The reader consumes the story in an analytic and even a reductionist fashion (Estefan, Caine & Clandinin, 2016). Thinking with the stories inserts the story and the reader into a synergetic relationship (Estefan et al., 2016). This relationship allows the reader to determine how the story relates to them, impacts their lives and potentially draw similarities to other stories as they are “lived, told, retold and relived” (Estefan et. al., 2016, p. 2). As Clandinin & Rosiek (2006) wrote, inquiry is “a series of choices, inspired by purposes that are shaped by past experiences, undertaken through time, and will trace the consequences of these choices in the whole of an individual or community’s lived experiences” (p. 40).

The recounting of lived experiences is impacted by where they took place and how they were able to be relived through storytelling (Basso, 1996; Estefan & Roughley, 2013). Connelly and Clandinin’s (2000) narrative inquiry framework is used to

understand and study the experiences of the participant. In this approach, a person's current experience is viewed as a direct product of their previous experiences and is "honoring lived experiences as a source of important knowledge and understanding" (Clandinin, 2013, p.17). The researcher must see research as a puzzle whereby both researcher and participant add pieces to the 'whole' to create a clearer narrative of the experience under study (Haydon, Browne & Riet, 2017). I used the narrative inquiry method framework of temporality, sociality, and spatiality for my interview questions to develop a deeper understanding of the participant's experiences (Clandinin, 2006, 2007, 2013).

The temporal aspect refers to the understanding of the experiences as they are reflected upon through the biographic histories of the participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1987). It is the idea that past events influence how future experiences are perceived (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2007, 2013). As Clandinin & Connelly (2000) explain, temporality is "the day-to-day experiences that are contextualized within a longer-term historical narrative" (p. 19). The stories by the women presidents in higher education created an understanding of their lived experiences of overcoming the barriers in a gendered institution. Each of the participants expressed memories, as they began their career within higher education and making their way through the gendered organization. Their current observations as a president were interesting to understand their beliefs as to whether specific attributes, professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors had implications for their career to progress to the position of president within the higher education academy. The participant engaged in an

autobiographical reflective discussion that took them across time as it related to their professional career in higher education (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Sociality is the idea that the interaction impacts both the personal and social aspects of the lived experiences (Wang & Geale, 2015). In reference to the personal aspect, the participant looked inward to their personal feelings, hopes, reactions, and moral character as it related to the lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Regarding the social interaction aspect, the participant looks at the external conditions such as other people and their intentions, assumptions, expectations, and points of view (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The women college presidents reflected on their own reaction to the barriers that they encountered within the academy as well as the interactions with colleagues, administration, and students. Through storytelling, the women presidents relived the interaction of the colleagues around them as they made the journey through the academy and ultimately as the president.

Finally, spatiality refers to the context, time, and place in a particular setting and the spatial boundaries with colleagues' intentions, purposes, and different points of view (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The researcher must look at the physical location in the storyteller's landscape, which is broadly higher education, and analyze how the gendered barriers within that space affected the storyteller's own experiences (Wang & Geale, 2015). Also, I noted the type of institution, the discipline of the woman president, the decades in which they rose through the pipeline, and the region in the country of the institution that hired the participant as a president. All of these aspects could be important to the story as they may have a direct influence on their particular journey.

According to Lyons (2007), narrative inquiry is more than simply telling and reading stories; it is useful in capturing the complexities of their experiences. Because there are so few women in college president positions, this narrative inquiry approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences as they navigated the gendered organization. Ensuring there is an alignment of philosophy and methodology with the research purpose and methods used ensured a rigorous research process is performed.

### **Sample Selection Procedures**

Qualitative research should be transparent in how the researcher selects their participants

(Barglowski, 2018). As noted in the literature, the percentage of women college presidents is low at 30% (Johnson, 2017); however, in general, narrative studies focus on stories and experiences of a smaller number of participants (Creswell, 2013). Patton (2002) defined purposeful sampling as selecting participants strategically so that their lived experiences were illuminate the research question. A purposeful sampling technique (n=5) was used to include women presidents who have had two or more years of experience as president and at least ten years in higher education. This allowed the participant to have had meaningful experiences within the academy that they can contextualize their storytelling with a longer-term narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)

The list of participants is as follows.

- *Sistaprez* is a Black woman with 45 years in higher education. She had been the dean of students, campus provost and president in the

southwest and southeast. Her last institution in which she was a college president was a large public associate's college: high transfer-high traditional in the southeast.

- **Chris** is a White woman president with over 20 years in higher education. She has been a professor, department chair, dean, provost and now president in the south east and Midwest. She is currently the president of a large public doctoral university: very high research activity in the Midwest.
- **Christine** is a Black woman with over 20 years in higher education. She has been a professor, program director, provost, and president in the southeast. She is currently the president of a baccalaureate college, designated as a historically black college in the southeast.
- **Participant 4** is a White woman with close to 30 years in higher education. She has been a professor, department chair, associate provost, provost, and college president in the southwest and southeast. She is currently the president of a private master's college in the southeast.
- **Participant 5** is a White woman with close to 40 years in higher education. She has been a research associate, enrollment manager, associate director, and president in the Midwest and northeast. She is currently the president of a private baccalaureate college in the northeast.

I had a set of predetermined criteria in which I selected my participants; therefore, I implemented the criterion sampling method. Criterion sampling is a type of purposeful sampling, in which the researcher selects the cases that meet a certain criterion (Patton, 2002), which in this case, they were all past or present women college presidents. This type of sampling included identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are knowledgeable or have experience with the phenomenon of which I am researching (Cresswell & Plano, 2011). The selection of participants needed to be driven by appropriateness and adequacy (Kuzel, 1992, 1999). In addition to this understanding of the phenomenon, these individuals were available and willing to participate. They wanted to share their stories to shed light on their own experiences to help other women as they travel their path through the ranks within the academy. Indeed, locating willing participants with experience in the phenomenon is one of the biggest challenges in any research study and is extremely important to find the depth of understanding (Bernard, 2002; Spradley, 1979).

I wanted to ensure I interviewed women presidents with different backgrounds and experiences within the higher education sector. The literature explains that the role of the contemporary president can vary depending on the type of institution they are leading. The size of the student body, whether it is private or publicly funded, the types of degrees they offer, geographic location as well as historical background can all influence the role of that institution's president (Rile, 2001). This variation in the type of institution is important in the storytelling to determine whether there are differences in their journeys within the different institutional types and in different geographic areas. The criteria I used when developing my purposive sampling was the following: institution type, size of



student body, geographic area, type of funding, and variation in participant demographics. The criterion of race was outside of the scope of this research study.

### **Data Collection Method**

In qualitative research, rigorous data collection procedures resulted in the quality and trustworthiness of the results (Kitto, Chesters & Grbich, 2008). Interviewing is a critical component of narrative inquiry and can be a powerful method to use as a foundation of the research study (Beuthin, 2014). Narrative interviews are a vibrant approach that a researcher utilizes to create stories as a data source, which helps gain access to the participant's lived experiences (Duffy, 2007). After all, interviewing is a way to explore the social, cultural, and institutional stories within the participant's experiences and validate those lived experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006).

Based on Clandinin & Connelly's (2000) framework of temporality, sociality, and spatiality, most of the fieldwork involved interviewing using semi-structured questions with four different categories: their journey, current position, thoughts on leadership, and finally lessons learned (see Appendix 1). This is reflective of Clandinin & Connelly's (2000) framework by providing their lived experiences of the journey through their memories; the lessons learned by reflecting internally as well as externally; and the time, place and context were reflective throughout their storytelling. The semi-structured interview format is the most commonly used data collection method (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Taylor, 2005) and has proved to be versatile and flexible (Kallio, Pietila, Johnson & Kangasniemi, 2016). One of the main advantages of using this type of interview format is that it enables reciprocity between the participant and interviewer

(Galletta, 2012) which allowed the interviewer to improvise with follow up questions based on the responses by the participant (Polit & Beck, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Because the primary mode of data collection consisted of interviews, participants were contacted to take part in two semi-structured interviews, which were conducted virtually utilizing Zoom and lasted approximately 90 minutes each. Seidman (2006) posited that people's behavior becomes "meaningful and understandable" (p. 16) when placed in the context of their lives and the people around them. A researcher cannot obtain that context or the richness of the stories in just one interview. Therefore, Seidman (2006) advocates for three interviews to ensure the researcher can spend time delving into the contextual part of the stories. Due to the time constraints of my participant's very busy schedules, I decided to conduct two longer interviews rather than three. In my two sets of interviews, I combined the focus recommended by Seidman (2006) to ensure I obtained that context while not impeding too much on the women college presidents' schedules.

The first interview established the context of the participants' experiences and allowed them to reconstruct the details (Seidman, 2006). I asked them to reconstruct their early experiences in higher education, their journey through the gendered organization, and the interaction with their colleagues. The second interview reflected on the meaning of those experiences (Seidman, 2006). I asked the participants to reflect on the experiences and expound upon what opportunities or professional activities helped them navigate the higher education institutions. The participants also reflected on their lessons learned as they navigated the gendered organization(s). The semi-structured questions established a guideline, but the participant was encouraged to answer how she felt

appropriate (Seidman, 2006). The goal of the interviews was to achieve detailed stories of their experiences not brief answers (Riessman, 2008). The researcher must have the skill to probe. Probing comes from knowing what to look for in the interview, listening carefully to what the participant said and what is not said, and being sensitive to the feedback needs of the person being interviewed (Patton, 2002). This provided the richness to the storytelling.

The interviews consisted of five women presidents within a higher education institution to determine how they attained their position. I investigated the barriers they overcame to get the position and what lessons they have learned that they can pass on to those woman leaders that follow behind them. I was extremely interested in what made them successful in their quest for the presidency. I was intrigued by their stories and how they seemingly overcame the myriad of obstacles inherent in a gendered organization.

The two interviews took place within a one-month time span to accommodate the participants' schedules. Upon approval from the participant, the interviews were recorded in the moment. Later, I transcribed the interview and then converted the document into a transcript to be presented to the participant for review and acceptance. They were given a little over two weeks to review and provide any revisions or comments. The digital interviews were saved in a password protected location and will be deleted three years after completion of the research project.

Throughout the interview, I took notes that assisted me in formulating new questions as the interview moved along. Also, the notes provided information that stimulated early insights that should be pursued in subsequent interviews as well as facilitate later analysis such as important quotations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). Further,

after each interview, I memoed my thoughts, observations, and reflections about the interview which was a one- or two-page summary. This gave me time to reflect on the issues raised and determined how it would fit in the larger research question. Memo writing helped as I felt a little overwhelmed or discouraged in the midst of the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). Through this process, I developed links between the comments, ideas, and themes. In concurrence with Bogdan & Biklen (2011), these memos became more conceptual or speculative pieces linking findings to other situations or data points.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

Data analysis refers to the process of systematically searching and arranging the transcripts, notes, and memos that the researcher collects to develop findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). As Linneberg & Korsgaard (2019) make clear, the analysis of the data for a novice is challenging. The researcher must put forth purposeful work to discover the most important elements and write them into a convincing story that answers the research question (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). The method of turning the qualitative data gathered from interviews into a meaningful and trustworthy story is coding (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Coding, in the simplest form, is finding themes or meanings in the data and labeling them with a code. A code is defined as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldana, 2015, p. 3).

Once I collected and transcribed the data from the participants' interviews, I began pre-coding the individual transcripts (Layder, 1998). I color-coded, circled, and underlined significant quotes from the participants that I thought warranted attention

(Boyatzis, 1998). I kept the codes I used in a codebook to ensure consistency across transcripts since I did the coding one at a time rather than waiting until the end (Saldana, 2016).

As I read through the transcripts, notes, and memos, certain words, patterns of behavior, phrases, and events were repeated and stood out (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). I developed a coding system that involved several steps. According to Linneberg & Korsgaard (2019), coding should occur in two or more cycles. Saldana (2016) provided seven subcategories that can be used for coding research. They are grammatical, elemental, affective, literary and language, exploratory, procedural, and a final profile entitled theming the data. For the purpose of my study, I primarily used the following coding techniques for my first cycle of coding of my research: grammatical method and elemental coding.

Grammatical methods refer to the attribute codes which is the demographic information about the participants (Saldana, 2016). An example for my study would consist of participants' pseudonym; date; time; age; years in higher education; positions held; years as president. Elemental coding, specifically in vivo coding, consisted of my research questions and how the participants responded to them (Saldana, 2016). This type of coding is used to honor the voices of the women presidents and provides a heightened awareness of their specific circumstances (Saldana, 2016). I used their direct language from the transcripts as codes rather than research generated words or phrases (Saldana, 2016). The direct language was summarized on a document so I could review quickly for consistency, patterns, themes, and outliers. I wrote the narrative for each participant and organized the narrative summaries in chronological order for each participant by the

interview responses and built a table to easily cross-reference the data. This table had the interview questions, color-coded by participant's pseudonym and interview response, and a summary of the participant interview responses. This summary allowed me to analyze the responses across participants and begin the second step of thematic analysis to better understand how these women understood their lives and behaviors. Theming is an output, not necessarily a code, and consisted of a summary of the process with a metasummary of all the data points. Riessman (2008) described the stage of thematic analysis as

The investigator works with a single interview at a time, isolating and ordering relevant episodes into a chronological biographical account. After the process has been completed for all interviews, the research zooms in, identifying the underlying assumption in each account and naming (coding) them. Particular cases are then selected to illustrate general patterns – range and variation- and the underlying assumptions of different cases are compared (p. 57).

The process of generating findings out of qualitative data requires a “craft and artfulness on the part of the researcher” (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p. 259). The primary goal of the second cycle methods included the analytic skills such as “classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building” (Saldana, 2016, p. 69). It was during this phase that I looked for patterns that assisted me in answering my research questions.

There were two types of codes used in each of the two coding cycles. For the first cycle, the two types were descriptive codes and attribute codes. Descriptive codes were assigned to segments of data and it described the meaning of those segments in relation to the whole research topic (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). These codes were usually in the form of sentences or a set of statements (Saldana, 2015). As an example, when the participants all discussed the gendered policies, data unit coding was referred to as

‘policies’. Attribute codes were assigned at the larger segments of data (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Saldana, 2015). I had an individual attribute code such as age, experience, or other attributes that were relevant to the research. At the organizational level, my attribute code was the type of institution, the number of students, state or privately funded, or other potential sources of insights into the research question.

The coding structure was two cycles and depicted the progression from the data to the theory in which one can draw conclusions regarding the research question (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). Findings included detailed descriptions, specific examples, and the inclusion of outliers (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Utilizing coding allowed me to offer transparency into the process for the validity of the findings (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

### **Ethical issues**

Clandinin & Connelly (2000) posit that ethical matters need to be described throughout the narrative inquiry process because they change and shift through the entire process. It begins with informed consent from our participants. Certainly, informed consent, as well as privacy and confidentiality, are paramount in any type of research (Eysenbach & Till, 2001). The participant was made aware of the risks as well as benefits so she was able to make an informed decision as to whether or not to participate in the study.

Anonymizing qualitative research data can be challenging, especially for a highly sensitive subject such as breaking down the gendered barriers within higher education among a small population of women college presidents. Undeniably, writing “meaningful, readable research texts, while protecting my participant's anonymity”

(Netolicky, 2015, p. 1) was one of the biggest challenges of this study. Anonymity, in an ideal world, is defined as “a person will never be traceable from the data presented about them” (Saunders, Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 2015). Although I tried to maximize the anonymity, in narrative inquiry, it was difficult to do so in a “meaningful way” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 174). There are two competing priorities within narrative inquiry research: protecting the participant's identities and preserving the integrity of the data (Saunders, Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 2015). I implemented pseudonyms but completely concealing the identities of the women college presidents proved to be virtually impossible (Van den Hoonaard, 2003).

I attempted to overcome the challenge of confidentiality by implementing the following procedures. First, I assigned pseudonyms as recommended in the literature (Clark, 2006; Moore, 2012; Saunders, Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 2015). However, I found naming participants has the potential to become paternalistic and problematic, especially because researchers many times default to Anglo names. Therefore, I asked the participants to provide the pseudonym they would like for me to use in this research. I requested that they choose these pseudonyms carefully, so it did not reveal too much about the participant (e.g. Sistaprez). Second, I assigned a generalized description of the type of institution using Carnegie basic classification descriptions. I needed to pay careful attention to this because I did not want to decontextualize the type of institution because it is analytically important in my study. Ensuring the confidentiality of my participants was an ever-evolving approach to ensure the integrity of my research remained intact and I did not risk compromising the identity of my participants.



Further, the more comfortable a participant felt, they revealed more information than they had intended. It is important to remember that no matter what the participant may have revealed, they have the right to retract any information they do not want to be used and I must oblige the participant's wishes (Bolderston, 2012). Some participants found that revealing some of the storytelling was very emotional, which could result in potential ethical risk. I was prepared in advance with a plan to manage this risk. An example, I would be to either stop the interview or give the participant the option to take a break to compose themselves (Wang & Geale, 2015). I suggested that we change subjects and went back to the question later in the interview.

Subjectivity is who we are in relation to what we are studying, and the researcher must be aware of how that may impact the research process. Acknowledging my subjectivity helped provide a road map of research decisions; helped avoid the blatantly autobiographical study and allowed me to understand what is keeping me from learning. If I am not cognizant of my subjectivity, I may not have included those participants that do not share my understanding; fail to properly give credence to meanings of people whose experiences may be different than what I believed to be true; and I would have come to conclusions that may not be valid.

As alluded to earlier, the risk for the researcher is there are always two sides to every story and the truth lies somewhere in between. It is up to me, as a constructivist, to remember that knowledge does not need to be "true" in the sense that it matches ontological reality, it only needs to be perceived by others through their personal experiences (Husen & Postlethwaite, 1989). Constructivists recognize that how the participants interact with their world is based primarily on their background and social

perspective (Creswell, 2014). Applying the paradigm of constructivist throughout the study allowed for a deeper discussion on the barriers that were associated with five women's journey through a gendered organization in their quest for the college presidency.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness of the study is reflective of the confidence in the data, interpretation, and methods that had been utilized to ensure the quality of the study (Pilot & Beck, 2017). Over the past few decades, there have been numerous studies on what constitutes a trustworthy qualitative research study (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Polkinghorne, 2007). These techniques should "guide the field activities and to impose checks to be certain that the proposed procedures are in fact being followed" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 330). The researcher does not need to perform each of the twelve criteria listed by Loh (2013) but should select from the list as appropriate for the specific study. The criteria I used included, but was not limited to, the following: member checks, a dependability audit, and reflexive journaling.

Member checking is the process in which the participant reviewed the transcripts, description of themes, and final report for accuracy (Creswell, 2009). This provided the participant a chance to offer additional context or alternative interpretation (Patton, 2002). I provided the transcripts to the college presidents to ensure I was accurately reflecting their narrative. I asked them to return any changes to me within two weeks of receipt. I later provided the final two chapters, the narrative and findings, for their review. I requested that they return any changes to me within a little over two weeks of receipt.

Dependability audits reflected detailed description of the decisions I, as a researcher, had made throughout the research process. This provided the rationale as to how I interpreted my study findings. Reflexive journaling was performed at every step in the data collection and data analysis process. This type of journaling was systematically recording the data gathering and collection process, the analysis of the data and finally reporting it. This reflected my experiences and helped recognize the bias by me in the analysis of the data (LaBelle & Belknap, 2016). Through all of these processes, I was able to promote the trustworthiness of my data and ensure authenticity.

### **Limitations of Framework and Study Design**

This research explored the key aspects as it related to college women president's experiences as they navigate the gendered higher education institutions. However, not included in the research were interviews with the governing boards or search firms that oversee the president and the hiring process. Both groups would have provided insight into their perspective of hiring women into the presidency position. However, this was outside of the scope of my study.

Further, in order to do a purposeful study, I interviewed five college presidents that are women. I could have interviewed all of the women college presidents to provide additional stories; however, that would also be outside of the scope of a narrative inquiry. Moreover, according to the American Council on Education (2020), the majority of women presidents are employed by community colleges; however, the focus of my research was a broader examination that focused on individual experiences not specifically about the institution type. Within higher education, there is evidence in the literature that there is an overwhelming amount of undervaluing of race, gender, and

ethnicity (American Association of University Women, 2020; American Council on Education, 2020). My study concentrated only on gendered barriers, not race. So much could be studied regarding race and ethnicity within the confines of barriers women (and men) in the academy must overcome.

### **Researcher Positionality**

The researcher needs to position themselves within the context of their study and reveal any biases which may impact the research study. Subjectivity is our sense of how we feel like we fit in the world (Prasad, 2018). Awareness of my subjectivity and blind spots were extremely important to ensure I was not downplaying specific topics in the interview. Understanding and reflecting on the bias that exists within me, I needed to be careful to structure the questions strategically to ensure they were independent and subjective.

I passionately believe that gender discrimination and oppression must be understood and rectified. There is no reason that in the 21st-century women still make 80% of men's salary for the same job and must fight for equality in every facet of their lives. Specifically, as it relates to my dissertation topic, even though the platform for the new University of South Carolina president was diversity and inclusion, it is appalling there continues to be absolutely no gender diversity on the executive level reporting to the President as more and more white men are strategically moved into executive positions. Also, there are three women out of twenty-one on the Board of Trustees (one is there only because of her position in the State Department of Education). As Fauldi (1991) wrote so eloquently,

“Women's disillusionment comes from the half-gleaned truth that, while we have achieved economic gains, we have yet to find a way to turn those

gains toward the larger more meaningful goals of social change, responsible citizenship, the advancement of human creativity, the building of a mature and vital public world. We live within the confines of a social structure and according to cultural conventions that remain substantially intact from before the revolution. We have used our gains to gild our shackles, but not break them” (Faludi, 1991, p. 16).

Positionality refers to the combination of our statuses and identities (i.e. race, class, age, socio-economic status, etc.) and the interaction of that status with participants within the context of the research question. As a privileged white woman in the Office of the Provost at a Research 1 institution, I am similar to the participants in which I would like to interview based on my class and gender. However, to add diversity to my research, I interviewed women that are different from me in race and institution-type. In my quest for a doctorate in Higher Education Administration later in my career, I may have taken a less conventional path, but I feel like I have many similarities to my participants in this arena. I am passionate about higher education, I am passionate about educating our next generation of leaders, and I am passionate about making a difference for the future of the academy.

As an Assistant Provost and Chief of Staff, I have a unique position in that I can see how policies are developed and further, how they are implemented. I have a front-row seat as to how the tenure and promotion process works and recognize the unintended bias that those processes entail. I can commiserate with many of my participants about faculty demands, the lack of funding for salaries or startup, the vast number of hours "wasted" in the committee work in which they must participate, and the perpetual problem with parking on campus. I can celebrate with them when they receive a Fulbright award or commiserate as we discuss the pitfalls of RCM budget models. We can compare how shared governance works on our campus versus theirs and the difference between

governing board responsibilities. This shared understanding hopefully helped with my rapport with all the participants I interviewed.

The contribution between the researcher and participant for the final creation of the research project should help with the power dynamics between the two (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009) in addition to building the rapport as referenced above. The power dynamics within the interview process was significant due to my lower position within the academy. Collaborative research often shares power more equitably. As Glesne (2016) wrote, "As people work together toward a common goal or purpose, particularly when addressing injustices and inequities, people from various economic, cultural, and racial backgrounds can become partners in a struggle, and they more easily maintain friendships" (p. 48). I tried to alleviate the power structure by making them full participants throughout the entire process.

The feeling of true participation is based on a message of dignity and acknowledgment of one's equal right to contribute knowledge and experience that matches the message. This message need not imply a simplistic view of the symmetric partnership but genuine respect for individual perceptions and experiences. (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009, p. 286).

I have a significant bias regarding the subject matter of my research study as well as those participants that I interviewed. I used the awareness of these biases as motivation to reach beyond my initial reaction and to research further into the responses. To understand that bias, I utilized the method of 'bridling' my interview. Dahlberg, Dahlberg & Nystrom (2008) define bridling as, "the restraining of one's pre-understanding in the form of personal beliefs, theories, and other assumptions that otherwise would mislead the understanding of meaning and thus limit the research options" (p. 129-130). Bridling, according to Dahlberg (2006) achieved two things. First, I remained open to the

phenomenon with what Dahlberg, Drew & Nystrom (2001) describe as an attitude of availability. I had the openness to listen, understand, and respect the phenomenon (Dahlberg, Drew & Nystrom, 2001). Second, I did not attempt to make quick judgments but rather waited to understand the phenomena and the meaning (Dahlberg, 2006). As Vagle, Hughes & Durbin (2009) posit, bridling allows the researcher to be skeptical for what they know of the phenomenon when conducting the research but are still aware of the “phenomenology’s interest in understanding the meaning of the lived experiences” (p. 353).

Although I, as a researcher, wanted to understand my bias that I brought to the research, I did not want to overlook the value of my own perspective that could have added insight to the research project (Gadamer, 1976). As Kramp (2004) wrote, “Biases need not be obstructive or intrusive for you, as researcher, if you interact with an awareness of them and are sensitive to their potential” (p. 115). In fact, the knowledge of my bias assisted me as I listened to the experiences and engaged with the participants through the storytelling (Kramp, 2004). The study was impacted positively by me from the base knowledge I possessed from my unique position in the academy and my passion to provide the "how" and "why" to women in the leadership pipeline. I understood the office politics that occurs within the administration in higher education. The rapport I built with my participants was due to my base knowledge and background which helped them feel comfortable talking to me.

The unintentional negative impact I had on the study was due to my subjectivity that manifested in the unintentional biases that I have due to my feminist slant and my jaded perspective. I am severely disillusioned right now due to the unfolding events I

have witnessed first-hand most notably over the last few years. I cannot help but bring that bias with me like an armor I carry everywhere I go and through everything I do. I acknowledge and understand that it was difficult to put that armor down and record the responses accurately and with objectivity; however, I understood that it was imperative that I did so.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have outlined the qualitative method I utilized in my research paper, narrative inquiry. This method is well-suited for obtaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of the women presidents as they navigated the gendered higher education institutions. I outlined criterion sampling which is the purposeful sampling technique I implemented for selecting the participants (n=5). The criteria I used was institution type; the size of the student body; geographic areas; and type of funding, private or publicly funded. I then discussed the rigorous data collection process which consisted of two 90-minute interviews with each of the five participants. I reviewed the coding cycles, at least two, and the types of coding I utilized in my data analysis of the interviews. the confidentiality of my participants was foremost in my mind when conducting this research and therefore was one of the main ethical issues that I must contend. Finally, I discussed how I ensured the trustworthiness of my data and my positionality as a woman in higher education. In the next chapter, I will report the results of the study.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES**

The participants in this study were from across the United States representing different institutional size, regions, and types: small and large; Southwest, mid-west, and east coast; north and south; public and private; doctoral research 1, baccalaureate college including a historically black college and university (HBCU) and associate college (Basic Classification Description, 2020). Regardless of the institution's basic characteristics, all five college presidents have been in their position for at least two years.

Each participant agreed to two 90-minute semi-structured virtual interviews via Zoom. The first interview focused on their individual journeys and the position of the presidency. The second interview focused on thoughts on leadership and their words of advice. After completing the interviews, each participant was sent the interview transcripts and allowed to redact, edit, or make corrections. After constructing each participant's narrative, the narrative was sent to each participant for member checking. Each participant was given four weeks to review their narrative and send back revisions or comments.

It is important to note that the world was experiencing the novel coronavirus pandemic during the time I conducted my interviews and collecting data. COVID significantly impacted higher education, as most institutions had to quickly adapt to a range of challenges. The first challenge included the swift change of pedagogy,

transforming exclusively to online teaching (Quezada, Talbot & Quezada-Parker, 2020) and virtual graduation ceremonies (Bevins, Bryant, Krishnan & Law, 2020). A second challenge is the financial shortfalls resulting from refunds for housing, study-abroad programs, and, in some cases, a refund for a portion of the tuition and reduction or elimination of sporting events. It is projected that in 2021, there will be fewer international students enrolled, fewer out-of-state students attending the institutions, and nontuition revenue sources will erode "as refunds or vouchers for next year are issued for housing, meals, and parking" (Bevins, Bryant, Krishnan & Law, 2020). This pandemic played a role in many of the college presidents' responses because it is significantly impacting their daily lives.

Each participant had a unique journey that shaped their rise to leadership within the academy. The narrative inquiry allowed me to research their lived experiences and the context which encompassed their distinctive experiences. In this section, the women college presidents' experiences are told through the narratives of Sistaprez, Chris, Christine, Lee, and Alex.

### **Sistaprez**

The interviews with Sistaprez were held in October of 2020 via Zoom. She is a gregarious African American female with a sense of humor that allows one to see the hilarity in life's everyday events. She began her higher education journey with an undergraduate degree in psychology and sociology with plans to become a child psychologist. While attending college, her mother became ill, and Sistaprez stopped her education upon completing a master's degree in developmental educational psychology. She found a job teaching psychology in the Southwest and was eligible for tenure after a

few years. She taught for ten years, during which she "put a husband through law school, then graduate school and finally decided it was time for me to go back." She finished her doctorate in Education Administration with a special concentration in community colleges. The program in which she graduated was specifically designed to provide the tools to become a higher education administrator or college president.

Upon graduation, she started applying for jobs that would move her from a faculty position to a presidency position. She was hired as the director of developmental education. Shortly after, other support programs were added to her portfolio, and her title changed to director of academic support services. She stated that she was asked to take on these additional duties, "with no additional money, of course." When the coordinator of counseling resigned, Sistaprez was named the acting director of counseling as well. Again, she did not receive any extra compensation. She enjoyed the work; however, she had divorced her husband and, as a single mom, she wanted a fresh start. She explained, "I had lived in [Southwest city] all my life, except graduate school."

She started applying for positions around the Washington, D.C. area. As Sistaprez stated, "In 1976, I had visited there during the Bicentennial, and I had never seen so many educated Black people in one place in my life. I decided if I ever moved, I wanted to move to 'chocolate city.'" She applied and obtained the position of dean of student services at a community college in the southeast. Sistaprez pointed out, "Because they had no vice presidents in their structure, as dean, I was the chief student services officer." When she met with the community college president, she let him know that she was interested in becoming president. She told him that she would "appreciate it if he gave me

some opportunities that perhaps the dean of students wouldn't ordinarily have so that I could, you know, have those experiences to move forward."

In less than two years, she became provost of one of the campuses of another community college. Due to the fact that the community college president was located at another campus, as the campus provost, she was the de-facto president in the community and on her campus. When the community college president retired, ordinarily, the vice president would have been made acting president. However, the vice president was applying for the job, so he could not assume that interim role. Therefore, the retiring president put together a management team to run the institution's day-to-day operations while searching for a president. Sistaprez was named the management team's chair, which "in essence made me acting president, without the title." After about six months in that position, she realized she could do the job and really enjoyed it. She applied for two presidencies, and at the age of 47, she obtained a president position in a very conservative, very close-knit, small town in the southeast. She thrived in that environment and enjoyed her job. Her friends joked, "A big mouth Black woman, very liberal, going someplace that is so conservative, but I had a blast! It was a great community." She was president at this institution for six and a half years. She stated, "It's a small community. Everybody knew everything I did every minute of the day that I was in town. After the six years, I think, 'I'm ready for a bigger fishbowl.' So, I told my child, who would have been going into ninth grade and changing schools anyway. If I did not get a job that summer, I would stay four more years and let him finish high school. My child said, 'Bump that! If we find a job making more money, we are going!'"

She applied for and obtained a presidency position in a very large community college in the southeast. She moved from 2,000 students to well over 23,000. It was definitely a "quantum leap!" She told me that it was the fact that she had already worked at a community college and knew the structure and leaders that made the transition a little easier. To her, it was just a bigger institution. When she had been president for about three years, the state's Governor reached out to her and asked if she would be willing to work in his office and help with articulation agreements. He had been watching her career over the years and was quite impressed with her leadership, financial acumen, and ability to work with other senior institutions. He had asked her three different times, but she declined due to the pay cut and the miles she would have to travel to and from work each day. She finally relented and agreed to serve in his office because she realized it would be a great experience. Governors in that state only get one term, so she knew this was only a four-year job. Once her position was completed, she was nominated for a presidential position at an accreditation institution in the Southeast. She has been in this position for the past sixteen years and "has an impact on over 780 institutions rather than just one."

Sistaprez remembered fondly, and with good humor, her first day as president at that institution. It was January 2nd, and registration for the spring semester had just started. She described with laughter in her voice, "This was before online registration. It was when students would sleep on the sidewalk outside the door so they could be the first one to get the classes they wanted." She was walking around and monitoring the process as students were registering. She joked with some of the underclassmen, "Y'all aren't talking to each other? Y'all might want to talk and get a date for the weekend, you know,

don't miss this opportunity." She then noticed the business office cashier had a longer line than the line to register for classes. That did not make sense to her, so she walked over and asked, "what is going on here?" She discovered that some of the clerks were not coming in until later, and the cashiers were falling behind. Sistaprez grabbed the cashbox and started taking the money from the students. When the word got around campus that the new president was cashing students out during registration, the staff and administrators were mortified. Sistaprez responded, "students pay my salary, and I will never ask someone to do something that I am not willing to do." She believes her job as president is to keep the processes moving.

Sistaprez has been a president three times as of this interview, twice at community college institutions and once at a regional body for the accreditation of colleges and universities. She spent the first six months meeting with individual faculty members and administrators. She said, "the first six months of each of those positions were different because of the institution's culture." She advised anyone interested in going into an administrative role to take a minute and learn the institution's culture before making any organizational changes.

I mean, it's just going to be frustrating for you and for the people with whom you work if you don't. You know, it's crazy if you don't because you'll be gone very shortly. You have to learn who the real leaders on campus are, you have the official power, but that does not mean you're in charge. You know, you've got to gather faculty who say, 'we will be here when you're gone.' So, it's really, let's try and play around in the sandbox and getting them to move forward with you when they see what your vision is for that particular institution. If they don't trust you, and if they don't feel that you mean what you say and that you don't have that integrity, they're not going to follow, you won't be there long.

Sistaprez laughingly describes the job of the college presidency as a cheerleading job. She says that you must "lift and empower the people inside the institution so they

will do exciting, impactful things.” The result of these impactful things allows the president to “go outside the institution and into the community and brag about what the institution is doing.” She pointed out that she had been a cheerleader “many years and many pounds ago,” so she knew what to do. In addition, with her degree in psychology, she loves to interact with people.

When asked about her detractors, she was quick to respond with a couple of impactful stories. First, every time the newspaper would interview Sistaprez for any of the jobs she obtained, they would always ask, "Do you think you got this job because you are Black?" She would reply flippantly, "I don't know, you have to ask the people that hired me. I would like to think it is because I'm academically qualified and have enough experience to pull it off." She admitted through laughter; they stopped asking the question after that response.

The second story regarding a detractor was when she was provost. Two faculty senate members were not pleased the community college president hired Sistaprez as provost. She describes the beautiful campus by a river like most college campuses; it did not have a lot of space for parking lots. The lot in which faculty and staff parked was gravel, but the provost was provided a spot close to the building because the person in that position travels throughout the day. Sistaprez heard from one of her staff members that the two faculty senators were "at it again," so she called them into her office. Of course, she alerted the president of her plans to talk to the two faculty because she knew he would be the next level for their complaints. When they arrived in her office, Sistaprez said, “Y’all, I understand you have a problem with where I park and where you have to park.” She asked for an explanation, and one faculty chided her for not doing anything

about parking on the campus. Sistaprez responded, “I am so honored that you would think that in my first six months, during the recession, that I can do something that the other four provosts before me were unable to do...which is to manufacture money to get a parking lot.” She did go on to point out if she did have the money, it certainly would not go towards faculty parking. She discovered that the one faculty member would arrive late for class due to other obligations and parking so far away made the problem worse. Sistaprez asserted,

I knew when I took this job that people were not going to like me because I was younger than everybody else...I was a woman and a minority. But you know what? I got the sign on the door that says I am the provost, and that is where the provost parks. I ain't going away anytime soon. So, either you get on board, or you get gone—either one. I will help you find a job someplace else. But if you are going to be here, and you are going to be a faculty leader, we've got to work together; otherwise, the whole campus will be unsuccessful.

These two faculty senators worked so closely with Sistaprez throughout her tenure at the institution that they ended up being very close. In fact, they continue to be in touch years after she left that institution. She learned to work with detractors rather than against them. Her communication style is being direct, with honesty and sometimes humor. Further, she does not take herself seriously. She enjoys listening to people, asking for suggestions, and implementing as many good suggestions as she can. She points out that they have been at the institution longer and understand the culture.

As a single working mother, she had to resign herself to the fact that her house was not going to be as clean as it had once been, and she had to make friends in whatever community in which she lived. She remembers one group of friends that had three boys that lived across the street from her. So, anytime Sistaprez needed someone to watch her child, she would barter and agree to watch their three sons on another day if her child



could stay with them that particular day. This relationship with the neighbors resulted in her child having many “aunts and uncles” all over the state in which they lived. Her child still considers that state home, even as an adult.

I asked her for some words of advice to aspiring college women presidents. Her first piece of advice was always to have that elevator speech ready to give at a dinner. She learned this the hard way. She had attended a dinner that was coordinated by a community group that was active with the college in which she was president at the time. In fact, the vice president of the group was on her foundation board. One of the local legislatures was asked to be the keynote, but she could not attend at the last minute. So, over dessert, one of the members asked Sistaprez if she could speak. She did not know anything about the organization; she had been president for approximately three months, so she fiendishly went through the program to figure out their mission and goals. After dessert, she went to the podium and just started talking. She luckily knew a few people in the audience and included them in her speech. When she was done, she received a standing ovation.

When I asked her about her great successes in her career, she immediately attributed it to timing. She was in the right place at the right time. However, after reflecting on her career, she recognized that she spent over ten years on the academic side and five years in student services. This experience made her a more marketable applicant for academic leadership because she knew both sides of the academy. In addition, she always heeded her grandmother's advice, “you never know who is going to have to give you your last glass of water, so do not be rude.” The academy is very intertwined and a relatively small community. One must be mindful that you never know when you will

need something from someone you worked with at a previous institution. She ends the conversation with, "everything happens for a reason... that is something that I learned. It is not my plan but the Lord's plan."

### **Chris**

Chris, a White woman, has been a college president for a large public institution in the Midwest for a couple of years. Her educational background is an undergraduate degree in the humanities and a juris doctorate. In the years between obtaining a humanities degree and a law degree, she worked in the business sector. Although she had every intention to be a practicing attorney, a few years in the position made her question the decision. She said, "I didn't really see myself reflected in the people I was working for, not just in terms of gender or other discrete characteristics but in lifestyle, their happiness, the kind of family life they were able to have. I just did not think I wanted to go too far down that path and then feel stuck." She reached out to a very influential professor from law school. He recommended that she consider higher education and nominated her for an open faculty position within the business college at the institution in which he was employed. She applied for and was hired into a tenure-track position as a business school faculty member. Chris stated,

I was on the tenure track, so I was expected to publish immediately, but because I didn't come up through a traditional path ... Normally, most people come off of their dissertation and spin out research projects and potential publications from the work they began while they were a grad student. I didn't have that. So, when I became a junior faculty member and assistant professor on day one, I started with an empty pipeline, so to speak, and had to start writing from scratch. And so, my first year and a half were deeply focused on building a pipeline and establishing credibility and legitimacy as a scholar. I worked hard my entire career, but that first year and a half is an absolute blur trying to get that done, but I did. And then I was lucky, in the sense that I can write. You can ask really legitimate research questions and write at a very high-quality level and

have reviewers dislike it, and that is part of the process. My first few pieces were accepted pretty easily with very few revisions. And so, I sort of caught up, if you will, from the lag of not having a dissertation, by virtue of that combination of hard work and great reviewers.

While discussing the development of teaching efficacy, Chris admitted that the first year was challenging, as it is for every first-time professor. There was very little training at that time, and although she knows the subject matter, it is “the rhythm of it” that is difficult. At first, she struggled with how much is appropriate to cover in a certain period of time. How do you anticipate questions, and how do you develop fair assessments to determine whether the student mastered the material? She admits that “the first time I taught was brutal, but then I became more agile and mastered the process.”

When I asked about her experience of receiving tenure, she pointed out that because her field was non-traditional, she referred to it as a "niche boutique," the standards for tenure were very unclear throughout the entire process. She, like most faculty going up for tenure, felt vulnerable but was successful. Once tenured, she “became very active in my professional academy and went into the pipeline to become the editor in chief of our flagship journal. You start low, and then each year, it's an automatic tick up and then eventually the editor in chief. It was a six-year term.” As an assistant editor, the editor-in-chief had to step down, and Chris was next in line to serve. She had to make some very big decisions about publishing during a period of time in which online publishing and online submissions were beginning to be implemented by journals across the country. Under Chris's leadership, her team transformed the journal to online, reflecting positively on her. She was now recognized externally for leading teams and implementing significant changes. During that same time, the department chair in

which Chris had provided service teaching outside of her department was asked to step down. In a search for an interim, the dean asked Chris to step into that leadership position for the remainder of the semester, which ultimately turned into 18 months.

Reflecting on her journey, Chris realized she would not have had the opportunity to become department chair in her own department. She stated, “In my home department, I would have never been a department chair. In fact, it is the same person as the department chair today as it was back in the 90s.” If it were not for that opportunity in another department, it would have been very unusual for a faculty member that entered the academy in a non-traditional field to be considered for administration. From that position, she was recruited to become department chair of a larger department at a different doctoral university and later dean of that college. She left that university to become the executive vice president and provost of a flagship university in the Southeast, where she flourished. She implemented innovative programs, developed the university’s strategic plan, and led during a naturally occurring catastrophic event that impacted the state.

After a few years in the provost position, she was recruited to be president of a large research state university in the Midwest at the age of 50. She describes the role of the president as “indescribable,” especially during the COVID pandemic. She points out that people’s relationship with the university is not employer/employee but rather more of a family member. Chris believes,

People love their university like it’s a member of their family, and people who work for the University are mission bound people who often have the choice of working in other places and opt to make less or deal with, you know, some of our unique bureaucracy because they love the place so much.

Chris retells a story of an executive within a search firm that she heard speak a few years ago. If you would like to be a college president, the executive said, you must be willing to love the university like unrequited love. Chris confirmed, “You have to love it and never expect it to love you back. That is the job.” She points out that no other business or leadership position would be described in such a manner, but she attests it is 100% true in her observation.

In describing her first six months as president, she advises new presidents to build relationships quickly. According to Chris, this period of the journey was a lot of fun but exhausting because you must meet many constituents within the university and across the state. A new president is out every night and working seven days a week to ensure the faculty, staff, students, and community members know the person behind the position.

I asked Chris for some final words of advice. With respect to her journey, as a faculty member that followed the non-traditional route, she found that it took a lot of effort each time she pursued a position having to explain why, despite her non-traditional journey, she could succeed at a specific job. So, she would target opportunities where being a non-traditional applicant might be an advantage. She would look at places where they celebrated different viewpoints and a fresh set of ideas. For example, when Chris went from department chair to the college's dean, there were four distinct departments. The hiring committee was worried that they would hire a dean with an affiliation to one of the four departments and show favoritism in their decision making. Because Chris was in a "boutique" discipline, she was department-neutral, which was a significant advantage. Of course, this targeting limited her options throughout the years but obviously did not stop her from becoming president.

The second piece of advice was given to her by a former Board member and CEO of a large company. He said, “Do not take jobs where you are not going to feel like your day was valuable.” Some people move up the organizational chart because they feel like they are supposed to progress continuously. However, she thinks one should determine “whether or not you want someone else driving the train that you are on or would you rather be driving that train? If driving the train allows you to feel purposeful, then pursue the next level job. If not, the beauty of higher education is you can have an extremely fulfilling career as a senior faculty member. There are a lot of ways to be fulfilled in the kind of work we are lucky enough to do.”

### **Christine**

The interviews with Christine were held at the end of October and beginning of November via Zoom. She is an African American female with a reputation across the state in which she resides as an advocate for women in leadership. She is president of a four-year bachelor’s institution in the Southeast designated as a historically black college or university (HBCU). Her passion is student success and to transform higher education that serves underrepresented students. She has been in higher education for a little less than twenty years and president for close to ten years. She has a law degree as well as a doctorate in higher education leadership and policy. Her journey into the presidency began at a historically black college with a degree in political science. She later obtained her juris doctorate and practiced law for about ten years. Then a friend asked Christine to teach a class at a local college. Since she never taught before, her first response was a quick “no!” She was finally persuaded to teach and absolutely loved it. She looked forward to going to class, and the students were inquisitive, engaged, and interested. At

the conclusion of the semester, one of the students left a note that read, “you changed my life.” Christine said, “So the idea that in two hours a week for 16 weeks, you can change somebody’s life, seemed pretty intoxicating to me and so I became drawn to teaching.”

She ultimately left the practice and became a faculty member. She started her career as the director of a program, and in less than a year, the president called and asked her to serve as the senior academic officer for distance education. It was a great fit because the college was expanding distance education into multiple states, which is a highly regulated process, and her attorney skills helped oversee this progression. After taking this more expanded role, she realized that she needed a terminal degree if she wanted to move higher in the institution. While she was enrolled in the doctoral program, the president, to whom she reported, decided to “give her a break” and put her in a leadership role in fundraising and development. This new role was a lot of work, especially at night and on weekends. However, it was a great experience in terms of thinking through developing resources for the institution and making a case for financial support. Upon completing the doctorate, she became dean and then ultimately senior academic officer and provost for several years at the institution. She determined she was ready to become president, “at least that's what I thought. I don't know that you're ever really ready for the presidency, but that was my thinking.” Christine began applying and was appointed president of a private baccalaureate institution at the age of 43. She later accepted the position of president of an HBCU in the Southeast of which she currently serves. She was the first woman president at both institutions.

I asked Christine whether the pressures of the college presidency are different for an HBCU compared to other types of institutions; it was a resounding "yes!" She stated,

“The students within an HBCU are typically first-generation Students of Color.” A large majority of her students are PELL dependent, which means their family makes less than \$30,000 a year, and almost 30% are facing some type of food or housing insecurity. For many of her students, “the college campus is their home.” This past year, she had a student that was killed during the summer while the campus was closed. It weighs heavily on her because she believes if the campus were open, he would still be alive. She has to constantly weigh the decisions she makes related to the academy with her unique student population's safety and well-being.

Another example was the emotional trauma of post-George Floyd's murder on the Minneapolis streets by a police officer. Demonstrations and protests against police brutality erupted in cities and towns across the world. She lamented, “I felt strongly that the students needed to be on a campus where they can ‘unpack’ the trauma in a constructive way, but the pandemic made that a risky and challenging decision.” Indeed, her concerns for the student body are significantly different than they would be for a four-year, primarily White campus.

When asked what advice she would give to those aspiring women college presidents, she provided a few recommendations. First, she encourages women to “take advantage of any opportunity that allows them to develop intellectually through multiple experiences. Don’t be so pigeonholed into finance or fundraising or whatever it is...” She points out that when we think of educational experiences, we think of publishing and teaching, all of which are excellent experiences. However, she encourages women to think a little more broadly about “the ‘town and gown’ fundraising, understanding finance and budgets, as well as other functions that are critically important to the



presidency.” One should seek out opportunities to present to the academic leadership and develop the skillset of engaging at every level within the academy.

The second piece of advice is to “choose wisely.” The right institutional fit really matters. She states, “Don’t let the desire to be a president outweigh a really good thoughtful process about where to be a president and under what circumstances.” Next, Christine urges women not to be “myopic about pursuing a linear path but instead be open to new ways to think about things, take advantage of new opportunities, look at different types of institutions and other learning models.” Further, a broad training and a more liberal arts focus is beneficial for aspiring higher education professionals because the academy will continue to evolve. The person who is adaptable, innovative, and transformative will survive. Those that are linear and narrow in focus will most likely not survive. She urges any aspiring leader, male or female, to really embrace those experiences and broaden that spectrum of experiences and knowledge. She said, “[I] believe that people should be broadly trained and [institutions should] have a broad swath of people.”

Finally, “relationships matter, so invest in yourself.” Christine acknowledges an aspiring college president will need recommendations from people who can vouch for the quality of one's work and how well one works with others. She has provided numerous interviews for other aspiring presidents. It is often less about their academic credentials and more about how well they get along with others, their communication style, and their sense of humor. She said,

We, as women, do the really hard work and tend to rely on that work. Because we earned the desired position, we tend to underestimate the extent to which just being likable actually matters in that process. It may sound trite, it may sound diminutive, but I’ve seen it happen a lot! I’ve

seen people that are heads and shoulders brighter or more experienced ultimately not get the job. And it really comes down to the extent to which that Board can see themselves engaging with, spending time with, collaborating with the person.

In conclusion, for women wanting to be college presidents of an HBCU, the advice Christine provides is that, in general, these institutions can be somewhat close-minded and gendered. Overall, HBCUs tend to be somewhat conservative since they are usually affiliated with a church, and there is still quite a lot of sexism in the church. For example, when Christine speaks on behalf of her college in the churches very often, she cannot go into the pulpit. She has to sit in the pews because they do not allow women in the pulpit. In general, the president reflected, HBCUs do not necessarily see women as leaders, even though historically black colleges were born to provide opportunities to people excluded from opportunities.

## **Lee**

The interviews with Lee were held in November via Zoom. She is a White woman currently the president of a four-year bachelor's institution in the Southeast. She has been in higher education for close to 30 years and president for just over six years. Her journey began immediately after graduation; with an undergraduate degree in business, she worked for a private firm supervising staff. She realized that the individuals she was interviewing did not have the basic concepts of their trade, which was frustrating to her. After about two years, she decided to start thinking about what she really wanted to do with her career. She spoke to some of her favorite professors from college, and they encouraged her to obtain her Ph.D. and teach. She had taught some in-house classes in the private firm and was slated to teach in the national office, so that was something she

enjoyed doing. Their other advice was to go to the best school you can afford and go to one that does not require a master's degree. She found that institution in the Southeast.

Upon graduation from the Southeast's doctoral program, both she and her husband taught briefly in the same field at postgraduate institutions in the Southeast area.

Eventually, they were both hired as professors by an institution in the Southwest. They both went through the tenure process together and were successful. I asked Lee about the evolution of her teaching efficacy and her experiences with student evaluations. She explained that she “won a teaching award the very first time I taught. So, I was always pretty good at explaining things.” I then asked Lee, “you come with a different perspective than the other college presidents I've been interviewing because your husband is also a professor. I've read so much literature on the fact that in the student evaluations, women are judged harsher than men. Would you find that to be true or not in your case?”

She responded,

Um, not for me. You know, I think one of the things is, I'm tall, and so I carry myself differently than someone who is a lot smaller, right? One of my colleagues who went through the Ph.D. program with me, she is probably size two or three, and she would not get good teaching evaluations. One time the evaluation even mentioned stature. And then, there was another female faculty member at [the institution in the Southwest] who she and I could say the exact same thing, and she'd get dinged for it in the evaluation, and I wouldn't. So, I would attribute it to my, you know, sugary southern drawl. So, I just never had that. I don't get it. Or if I did, I never saw it as different for being a female.

Once she obtained tenure, the chair within her department announced he was stepping down.

So, kind of looking around the room, I thought, first of all, half the people were there when I was a student and were not necessarily very progressive in their thinking. You know, our students are passing the [qualifying test] at higher rates. Why should we do anything differently? I've just never really been comfortable with the status quo. I like to find ways to do

things better and more interesting. I get bored pretty easily. That's why I think the semester kind of timing is good for me because the class is over, you get to start over again and try to do it better. So, I did sort of the proverbial threw my hat in the ring. And several people said, I had no idea you'd be interested in this, and I said, well, neither did I. But again, just kind of looking around the room, I thought, I don't want him to be a department chair, and I don't want him to be a department chair.

She decided to apply and became department chair. She took the position very seriously, reorienting the staff to serve the entire department and not just the chair. She built camaraderie within the department by organizing meetings with the faculty, so they had an opportunity to talk about their latest research or ideas they have for the department. The department worked as a team. However, Lee grew frustrated because every time she tried to do something different from how it had always been done, she was given reasons why it could not be done rather than thinking outside of the box. She believes it was part of immaturity from a leadership point of view, but she decided to step away from the role of department chair and go back to faculty.

Shortly after, the dean asked Lee to be the undergraduate associate dean. She really enjoyed the position because she was able to work with the students and learned a lot about how administrative roles work. The exposure helped her develop the skills of giving people bad news or talking people through ideas. During that time, she was in a leadership program where the institution matched up the administrators who had potential with the senior leadership. She was matched with the provost of the institution.

Later, the provost asked Lee to become a team member of his office, and she politely declined. However, a few months later, the provost came back and said, "So you just come and figure out what you can do to help me." Lee thought,

And so remember, as department chair, I would work on things like hiring faculty, doing the raises, and the HR stuff, so to speak, right? And then, as

the associate dean, I also learned about, you know, student issues, just all the different kinds of things that would happen within the provost office. It was really a fun time because I totally got to define what my job is. I got to assess what needed to happen and then figure out how to make it happen.

One of her biggest “wins” was early in this position. She had heard complaints from faculty for years that they received their contracts late in the academic year. They just wanted to receive them by April 1st, but it was always challenging to implement. So, Lee worked backward on the calendar, collaborated with human resources, and figured out a way to get faculty their contracts by April 1st. This change in the contract’s timeline was pivotal in her career because she earned the faculty's respect. That was not her intent because she just wanted to fix a broken process, but it turned out to be a big win. Her initiative and tenacity throughout her tenure in the position garnered faculty, staff, and administrators' respect. She ultimately became vice provost and then interim provost and finally provost of the institution.

At the age of 51, she left the state and became president in the Southeast, her current employment. She describes the presidency as “the most interesting and difficult thing” she has ever done. She enjoys the fact that she gets to define, in a sense, her job and what needs to be addressed that day. She said a president really needs to figure out the right people with which to build relationships. In a word, she describes it as “overwhelming and completely gratifying.” The first six months as president, you “learn, learn, learn, learn,” and then try to figure out how to make it better. She remembers how fun it was to walk into the institution with “new eyes,” recognize some really hidden gems, capitalize on them by allowing people to know about them, and their impact on the students or community.

Lee offers excellent advice as it relates to lessons learned. She said, "For me, I would not be where I am now without my husband." She points out that the family situation matters and having a supportive husband who knows how to maintain their identity as a college president's spouse is key to success. She also makes sure her children are involved in her work as much as possible. When asked to be provost, she made it clear that she would take the new role as long as it did not interfere with her children's activities, such as kindergarten graduation or an important soccer game.

Interestingly, she found one of the side benefits was that her children really developed their social skills. They were able to see a different side of Lee that many children do not get the opportunity to witness: the professional-side of "mom as a leader." In our family discussion, Lee illustrated further by telling a story of her own daughter's experience. As Lee worked on the first edition of her book, her then seven-year-old child sat on her lap throughout the writing process. In her child's mind, even today, they helped write that book. That strategy, of combining work and family, worked for this president in creating a more realistic balance of two competing demands: work and family.

Her final words of advice are "to be confident, dare to try new things, and if it does not work, or you do not enjoy it, that is okay. There is a leap of faith that you must make with the first time you 'dip your toe' into taking on a leadership role. So, just have confidence and go for it!"

### **Alex**

I met Alex a few years ago at a conference for women in higher education. I was surrounded by numerous crusaders, who were powerful women college leaders. Overcome with feelings of, "what am I doing here?" I remember vividly approaching her,

apprehensive about breaking into the circle of conversation. Alex welcomed me with her infectious million-dollar smile, which I honestly think she is unaware that immediately puts one at ease. She greeted me into the conversation, and we eventually started to discuss what all graduate students discuss with anyone that will listen: the topic of my dissertation. At the beginning stages of developing the theories, I was not confident in my conceptual framework, much less the method I would be using. She was incredibly supportive of my idea of creating a roadmap for aspiring women college presidents. She gave me some excellent sources, discussed her journey with me, and chatted about theories I should research. During this conversation, I learned in more detail about the glass cliff and the women within the academy that may have fallen victim. As we parted ways, she asked me to contact her when I was ready to start my dissertation. She wanted to help. I could not do this dissertation without this president, so I called her when I was ready. It had been several years since I talked to her briefly one night over cocktails. I thought there is no way she would remember me, but I had to try. Not only did she remember me and our conversation, but she was also ready, willing, and immediately scheduled time for the interviews.

Alex is a White college president of a liberal arts college in the north. As I asked the numerous questions via Zoom during November, Alex quietly pondered each question to ensure she provided the best, most thoughtful response. The authenticity revealed throughout our conversations allows one to truly appreciate and understand her journey. Her insightful answers enabled one to quickly realize she truly cares about developing all leaders but, most importantly, women leaders within the academy. This leadership development is obviously extremely important to her.

Alex became president at a liberal arts college in the Northeast at the age of 48. Her journey was an interesting one, which began with a doctoral degree in management. She entered the academy through healthcare. She worked as a research associate in the hospital system associated with the university. She taught physicians how to do research. Later, she joined a research unit within that same healthcare system and focused on medical research and healthcare policy research. She witnessed her colleagues under tremendous stress having to publish, generate research dollars, and conduct research, and so many of them left the institution due to the unrealistic expectations. This observation resulted in Alex to re-evaluate her career choice.

She moved over to a position focused on college-based institutional research and then was asked by the president to lead a couple of special projects as an institutional researcher. At that time, the president asked Alex to assume an administrative role similar to the Chief of Staff. She was his liaison and represented him in meetings. Later, he asked her to become the dean of admissions and financial aid. Alex said, “it was an intentional decision to leave academic medicine and move to higher education institutions directly through research.”

During the presidential transition at the institution, Alex decided it was time to explore other positions. She had been there for ten years, so it was difficult because she considers herself someone who will stay with an organization for a long time and give 100%. She explained, “I enjoy doing meaningful work which takes time.” So, in an effort to move her family closer to her parents, she accepted a job as a vice president with responsibilities that ultimately included admissions, financial aid, international student services, and marketing. Her portfolio grew over time, and, as Alex pointed out, “if you



stay at an organization for a long time and do good work, you will obtain additional duties.” While she was describing this position, she had to pause for a minute to provide a piece of advice for women that want to advance in their careers. She points out that “one can advance not only by moving from one institution to another but also by broadening one's portfolio within the same institution. As the institution gets to know you and grows in its confidence in you, you can be very successful.”

After about ten years, there was a presidential transition at that institution, and Alex felt the desire to start looking for another job. Although the position of vice president is critical within the academy, they are not responsible for making the really difficult choices. She grew dissatisfied with the "extent to which I was able to express my leadership." So, she was at a crossroads: go to another institution in a similar position or pursue a presidential position. She chose the latter. She did something that she recommends to anyone looking for this type of career change. She contacted search firms, introduced herself, and described her portfolio of work. She asked the firms to tell her whether or not there were institutions that were looking for presidents with her type of experience. She contacted three different search firms and received three different perspectives. Alex asserts that although most presidents during that time came from the academic side of the institution, “it goes to show you, it is not all about one path forward.”

Alex approached this decision-making process as a researcher. She first wanted to understand whether or not applying for presidential positions made sense for her. Secondly, she tried to determine whether there would be a good fit between her experiences and what an institution was looking for in a president. Although her

background was unique, she described the fact that as a researcher, she “can make well-grounded decisions based on truth and reality.” Her admissions, enrollment, and financial aid background allowed her to understand a big part of higher education's "economic engine." She had a unique perspective that others that came up through the traditional path may not understand or appreciate.

Another unique perspective of Alex was that she worked for, and as an extension, was mentored by, primarily all men throughout her career. She stated, "for the past 35 years, my view of leadership was shaped by men. There is no question about it. If I had worked for women, I'm convinced that I would be a different leader than I am now." She further explains that she modeled her approach to problem solving and interacting after the way her male supervisors would solve problems. This leadership modeling is an important point because it has had an impact on her career. For example, in one of her external reviews, which occurs every five years, she was described as distant, cold, and too formal.

Further, someone in the review labeled her as a sphynx, which means she is not interested in sharing her emotional side. This descriptive label is most likely a direct reflection of how she is perceived as a woman who leads like a man. She said, "I think they are seeing the fact that I am a female, and they measure me against what they think a woman should be." For Alex, it has been a challenge to meet everyone's expectations. It is assumed the constituents would not need a male counterpart to show more of their emotions. It is an inherent bias of expectations given to male and female leaders. However, on the other side, Alex confirmed her Governing Board feels very comfortable with her and appreciates her analytical approach to solving problems.

Alex describes the president's role as a "high stakes black box" for several reasons. First, some of the decisions the president makes and are challenged to make are extremely important. She postulated, "the determination of the most important or impactful decision to make that day is challenging at times." Secondly, she describes the presidency as a black box because everybody has an expectation of you, but you do not know what those expectations are, and they may be competing with one another. As stated earlier, some of the expectations may be because she is a woman leader. Alex points out, "no one tells you what these expectations are, but they all have a list in their head."

Further, every year is different within the presidency position. When she mentors aspiring and current presidents, she assures them that whatever they are experiencing this year will be different next year. How they respond to the challenges will be different based on experiences. Finally, she said it is a physical experience. She describes it as mentally taxing and challenging to stay healthy. If you are a president, at least at a liberal arts college, you are continually eating out with constituents or traveling to fundraise. The position is also very stressful because the "buck stops with you."

As final words of advice,  
Do not forget you really can be a good leader regardless of your background, your previous experience, your culture, what people have told you about being a woman, what people have told you about women leaders; it is all about you and what you can do. The fact that you are a woman should not impede you from being a great leader. You can do anything that anyone else can do, no matter the gender.

She emphatically stated that you must believe in yourself first because there will be plenty of opportunities for people to try to stop you and bring their own bias to bear in

your progress. Self-confidence will allow you to overcome any boundary or challenge that may develop.

### **Additional Findings**

The interviews comprised other topics that were a bit more sensitive as it related to their position of president. The topics consisted of navigating their relationships with the governing board and the executive team. These discussions were extremely important to the research questions; however, the responses had the potential to place the women college presidents in precarious positions since they are currently employed by the institutions in which they provided the narratives. In an effort to keep these types of significant insights confidential and protect the women, I combined the information and did not attribute it to one specific president.

### **Governing Boards**

When asked about the duties and responsibilities of the governing board within their institution, one president described the duties as to “protect and advance the academic reputation of the institution; give and ask for financial support for the institution; and hire and fire the president.” She explains further, “I tell [the board members] that their responsibility is to make sure that the right person is sitting in my seat.” She reminds current and aspiring board members, “every board member shares the responsibility [of hiring the president] equally.”

The relationship with the board members is obviously significant for a college president. I inquired as to how the women presidents built a solid relationship with the governing board members. One president stated, “My relationship, I think, is built on mutual trust. I’m not saying that lightly; we work hard at it because, at the end of the day,

I'm still an employee." Another stated, "I work really hard to make sure they are informed. My colleagues and I, we work hard to make sure that they know what they need to know so that they can actually be prepared to make the decisions they need to make. And I'm glad we took that approach."

It has been reported in various studies that the board is generally 70% white males. I was interested in the president's view of gender diversity on the governing board. One president stated, "God, they're still predominantly male; however, it is getting better. But it's still about 90% male and white. You know, I have nothing against men and nothing against white folks but, if you have an institution that's got a 60% diversity enrollment, you'd like to see a little more than 2% diversity on the board." So, I asked the presidents whether the diversity on the board mattered and, if so, why? One president provided an excellent example of a patriarchal society in which women are treated differently as a leader. The president stated,

My board chair, at my inauguration, stood up and said while he was introducing me, 'Well, you can take one look at her and see why we hired her.' In that moment, he made me feel this big. So, I was going to give a thank you so much for being here. My heart is full; it's been the greatest day, the greatest honor of my life, you know, blah blah blah. I was planning a two-minute speech and done. Now I have got to give a 20-minute speech because I must show you that I'm not stupid because he just made me stupid at that moment. He made me stupid, and so I could have had a fit with the board chair, but that's just not politically smart. I gave him a hug, a peck, and thank you so much. Then I gave a 20-minute speech on my strategic vision for the institution at a gala, which I had no intention of doing, right? What is it they say, 'never stop the party for speech,' but he made me, so I had to pivot to a different strategy to get the point across. I couldn't let that one sit. I just couldn't let that one pass because it was four hundred people in the room ... I mean, I couldn't let that one pass.

Months later, once the relationship was built, she approached the board chair and told him how it made her feel. It was a great learning experience for both of them. Her

lesson learned was, “I think we do have to choose those moments when the battle isn’t always against the board chair or the person who committed the affront. It really is sometimes just dispelling, taking the energy out of it. I had gone a different direction.” The women agreed that it is so important to find those impactful moments and seize the opportunity to learn from each other.

### **Executive Team**

In all cases, the women college presidents assumed responsibility for an executive team that their predecessor established. I was curious about the dynamics of working with a team that may have different expectations than the new president. One of the presidents stated, “So they have to understand that me asking to be put first is not me being a princess. There is some genderism in that some people do it automatically for the male president and struggle to do it for the female president. I have seen it with one person who just had to get used to it, and it was fine, but for another...he just couldn’t do it, and he’s not working here anymore. He did it fine for my predecessor. He just couldn’t do it for me.”

Further, another president stated that she asked for resignation letters from her entire executive team when she started her position. She said, “So, I asked for a letter of resignation with the understanding that for the first six months, we’re going to be evaluating skills consistent with my mission and vision and goals for the institution. At the conclusion of that period, I’ll either accept or tear up the letter of resignation, but I’m going on record telling them we’re doing an assessment.” She found that “Some will start looking for a job just in case. They can always turn it down if they get another [job]. But when the president comes in and just sort of cleans house, one you haven’t given

them the opportunity to demonstrate whether they're qualified or not, based on your mission, and secondly, you haven't given them a chance to find another job right? nothing creates ill feelings more than yanking the rug out from somebody and jeopardizing their family's financial wellbeing."

Relationships with the governing board and executive team are not easy to navigate. The women college presidents found that gender plays a significant role in the daily interactions. However, the women found that being thoughtful in the response rather than reactionary builds mutual trust and understanding, enhancing the relationship and collegiality.

### **Leader to Aspiring Leader: Sharing of Advice**

This section will include findings from the research and career advice for aspirant women college presidents based on the women college president's personal experiences, successes, and failures that impacted their career trajectory. This will be followed by guidance to women as they start to lead within the academy. Their perspectives are valuable because their "...activities and behaviors are crucial to understanding and taking action on improving social situations (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011, p. 673).

### **Career advice for aspirant women college presidents**

The two presidents with the non-traditional journey into higher education both stated that a career path does not need to be linear or traditional: tenured faculty, department chair, dean, vice provost, provost, and then president. However, all the presidents suggested that an aspiring college president should spend some time in the administration. If one cannot work in the provost office, join the faculty senate, serve on the budget advisory committee, or do something at the university-level. An aspiring

college president must have a sense of what it would take to lead a college. Although most people who "sit in the departments think they do have that sense," the reality of running a college is vastly different than the observations by a faculty member in the department. One president stated, "I did not fully appreciate the entire mechanism of the university until I sat in the provost office." As another president stated,

Get as much exposure as you can. Try to get yourself into positions where you can actually see what is happening. Ask people for access to those environments. You really need to see how people think and how they navigate through the challenges that they have. If you cannot get access within your own college, go through an American Council on Education (ACE) fellowship program. Try to find someone willing to serve as a mentor and spend time on their campus. It is a great experience to watch and learn. Consider taking your own vacation time and spend a week shadowing a president to watch their day-to-day opportunities and challenges.

Additionally, one college president stressed the importance of having athletics experience. If a college president is going to work at a university with a large athletics department, they must learn something about sports. One President laughingly remembered an old adage, "the two things that take down a university president with a medical school are docs and jocks." The president said that people are so passionate about athletics that sometimes it makes them irrational. In some cases, "people care so profoundly that if your team is doing poorly, it will be viewed as your leadership of the entire institution."

Next, one president offered, "do not be afraid to get outside of your comfort zone. Learn everything you can about every facet and do not be pigeon-hold into finance or fundraising or whatever it is..." If one is interested in becoming a college president, learn what is happening externally and, more specifically, within the institution type they would like to lead. The best way to prepare, other than learning, is to "just show you can



do whatever task they give you really well." The president went on to say, "The people that I have seen who have not been successful and could have been were those who were always looking for the next job. They were never really committed to the work that they were doing at that particular time." To summarize, one must give whatever position they are in 100% of their attention and capabilities.

For one president, her a-ha moment was when she obtained the deanship. She said, "I was sort of surprised that the rest of the world saw me in the way that I had hoped to be seen because until it happens, you do not know if they ever will." She explained that she was confident in her leadership abilities and she was ready for the next step in her journey. It was reassuring to her that others recognized her talents and abilities. Further, advice from another president was that if an aspiring leader presents themselves like the job that they want, that is how people will see the leader. If the aspiring leader is in one position and hope to be in another, never stop giving 100% to the current role but start presenting themselves as the other role. She stated, "Sometimes it can be very superficial in terms of dress and professionalism, packaging, and sometimes it is in your own identity so that others would want to tap you on the shoulder when the opportunity comes along." The president indicated that there must be a balance between humbly doing the current job well and seeing themselves as the sort of person who should absolutely be considered for the next position. An aspiring leader must be intentional and thoughtful.

### **Do not be afraid to take risks**

Upon reflection, the presidents realized their biggest successes occurred during different times throughout their careers, but it all began with taking a risk. One president

talked about taking on the new role of distance learning for their institution. The success of offering upper-division courses across private institutions within the university was a success that allowed people to see that this president knew how to lead successfully.

Another president explained the editorship was her great success. She stated, "the main thing that got me going into administration was successfully doing change management for the editorship. The second one was the successful launch of a hybrid MBA program" when she was dean. She points out that it is crucial to "understand the risk-reward balance that sometimes you have to go out on a limb if you want to stand out."

Most of the presidents did something in their careers that allowed them to be distinctive. They were able to leave a little signature to illustrate how they made the institution better at every institution in which they were affiliated. An example of this is when Lee changed the processes so that faculty could receive their contracts by April 1st. This process change provided the ability to garner the faculty and administrators' support, which is paramount to success within higher education. In addition, these presidents work hard, and they have the natural ability to get the work done. Lee suggested that success is measured as incremental "wins," and if the aspiring leader does a good job, she will be fine.

A president stopped me in the interview process and emphatically stated, "Before we move on, I will say one thing that I think is a mistake: trying to do something in order to stand out." She wanted to make sure the readers understood that it should be about what is best for the institution. Otherwise, you will most likely "fall flat."

## **Conclusion**

This chapter included the narratives of Sistaprez, associate college president in the southeast; Chris, doctoral research 1 president in the Midwest; Christine, baccalaureate college HBCU president in the Southeast; Lee, private baccalaureate college in the Southeast; and Alex, private baccalaureate college in the Northeast. Their personal narratives discussed how they first became interested in higher education administration, their journey within the academy, their leadership development experiences, and the experiences as a woman college president. The women leaders then provided advice to women that aspire to become leaders within the academy. Next, I will discuss my findings, discussions, implications for practice and theory, and future research recommendations.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of women presidents in higher education who navigated gendered institutions to achieve their presidency roles. As more women enter the professional leadership positions within the academy, more knowledge must be gathered to understand if specific professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors had implications for a woman's career to progress to the president's position. The conceptual theories used to frame this study are Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory and the feminist theory of patriarchy. Paramount to this narrative inquiry is the juxtaposition of the individual woman president's journey as she navigates the inherent bias, illustrated by self-efficacy theory, within a gendered organization, which is demonstrated through the theory of patriarchy.

I chose to create a conceptual framework due to the concurrence of two elements within this research question. The first element is the individual woman president's journey and how she leveraged specific professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors to progress to the president's position. The self-efficacy theory can address this element. The second element is the inherent bias within the organizations, which could be manifested in women's oppression through a gendered organization. The theory of patriarchy will address this element.

I studied the lived experiences of women college presidents who shared their journey in higher education. The following research question guided my study: What are the women presidents' experiences as they navigated gendered higher education institutions? My sub-questions are as follows:

1. What strategies do women presidents implement to assist them in their rise through the ranks to become president?
2. What specific attributes, professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors had implications for their career to progress to the president's position within the higher education academy?
3. What challenges did women presidents have to overcome to achieve their positions?

This study utilized a qualitative method referred to as narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experiences through a collaboration between the participant and the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This research method allowed me to illuminate the participants' experiences and better understand the women presidents' lived experiences within higher education as they navigated the gendered institutions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Through their stories, I shared their experiences and journey of becoming a woman president within higher education.

The final chapter provides a discussion of the research findings. The findings and discussions are organized by the sub-questions referenced above. I will attribute some narratives related to the findings to specific presidents; however, I will feature other stories more generally for confidentiality. As noted earlier, I ensured my participant's confidentiality, so they felt free to provide private, reliable information without fear of

retribution from constituents. I will then address the limitations of the study and implications for practice. Finally, I will provide recommendations for future research and concluding remarks.

**Research Question #1: What are the strategies that women presidents implemented to assist them in their rise through the ranks to become president?**

This research question sought to understand the strategies women college presidents implemented throughout their journey to become a college president. During the interviews, the five women college presidents cited two specific strategies that helped them prepare and ultimately attain the presidency position. The first strategy was based on personality type and the second strategy related to locating, developing, and utilizing support structures such as mentors and executive coaches. Mentors were strategically selected during the earliest part of the president's career and changed throughout their journey based on specific needs and requirements. These mentors are used to share their advice and knowledge based on their personal experiences. Kurtz-Costes, Helmke, & Ulku-Steiner, (2006) found that women need mentors who can show them how to advance despite the institutional barriers.

Executive coaches are used later in the president's journey and were selected to assist with career development and leadership skills. Executive coaches enhanced each president's self-awareness and provided impartial opinions regarding blind spots, decision making, and communication. The appeal is the fact that this type of coaching is a "highly cost-effective way to deliver executive career development geared to specific strategic objectives of an organization" (Hall, Otazo & Hollenbeck, 1999, p. 39). In

addition, the five women college presidents found that family support enhanced the ability to have a work and life balance, which led to a more satisfying journey.

### **Professional and personal support structures.**

Studies on women in higher education confirm that professional support structures are critical in career development, experiences, and achievement over time (Catalyst, 2007; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Madsen, 2008). All five women college presidents reported to have had mentors, and some also had executive coaches to assist them through the journey. The difference between the two is simple but significant. A mentor shares their advice, knowledge, and expertise (Zerzan, Hess, Schur, Phillips & Rigotti, 2009). The mentor guides the mentee in the right direction based on the mentor's personal experience (Zerzan, et al., 2009). An executive coach focuses more on identifying goals and prioritizing those goals to meet the result (Kombarakaran, Yang, Baker & Fernandes, 2008). An executive coach is an individual who consults one-on-one with a senior leader for the “purpose of improving or enhancing management skills” (Orenstein, 2002, p. 356). It is much more of a structured and formal process and one in which generally the executive coach is paid (Kombarakaran, Yang, Baker, & Fernandes, 2008). The presidents understood that they required support structures for two very different aspects of their journey. First, mentors were used for guidance and advice as they made their way through the journey. Second, executive coaches were strategically used to improve their professional acumen, including leadership skills, communication skills, and prioritization of goals.

## **Mentors**

American Council on Education (2018) reported that women need to have mentors to provide guidance on their career in an effort to advance into leadership. Brown (2005) found that 56% of the women college presidents that he surveyed had mentors. As Medsen (2008) found, the benefits of mentoring could include career mobility, career satisfaction, career commitment, career advancement, promotion, higher compensation, and higher retention.

The first mentors for the majority of the five women college presidents I interviewed were their professors. Alex stated, "In my early career, they would have been my professors... you know, they were already kind of built-in and knew me." These mentors helped the presidents evaluate their next steps early in their careers as they began their journey. Each of the presidents told narratives of contacting their favorite professor while contemplating a career in the academy. The presidents confirmed that they had more than one mentor, which is consistent with the literature. Chris stated,

You choose mentors that offer different things; they are like friends. You have friends you would go shopping with, friends you spill your heart out to, friends you would travel with, and friends you would not travel with. Choose mentors across the spectrum of the kinds of advice and support that you might need: job experts, family balance experts, people whom you can vent to and trust they will not repeat it.

In a study by Brown (2005), he found that half the presidents reported having one to three mentors, and in some cases, four or more. This is substantiated by other research performed by Hansman (1988), Swoboda and Miller (1986), and Scanlong (1997). The five women college presidents found that having several mentors, with different life experiences, positively impacted the advice received by the mentee.



## **Selection process**

The selection of a mentor is the most important factor in a successful mentoring partnership (Pegg, 1999; Poulsen, 2013). Mentors must be committed to the role and skilled in providing support (Pegg, 1999). Therefore, mentors and mentees should determine together whether the mentor is the most appropriate advisor based on the current and long-term professional aspirations (Pegg, 1999; Poulsen, 2013). A president posited that “the selection process is important.” As president, she began the selection process by finding college presidents of which she has “tremendous respect but may be in an institution that is very different” from hers to alleviate any competitiveness. Those individuals that are similar to her in age and institution type will be colleagues and friends but could not be mentors.

Mentor selection changes throughout one’s career as their journey within the academy progresses (Poulsen, 2013). As one of the college presidents shared, the best mentor is “someone who has been there and done that. They have already lived that experience and can share the lessons learned with you.” She finds that she gravitates to older people to be her mentor and has discovered that they can contribute to her “success in a meaningful way based on their own experiences.” In addition, Alex advised that if the mentor is at the peak of their career, they may not have the time or be as invested in the mentee’s success as someone who is a little further in their career. The mentor would most likely want to help the mentee become successful, but they are still working on their own career success and may not have the time to provide the mentoring that the mentee would require. Therefore, in the quest to find a mentor, the college president suggested that one should be mindful that some mentors are still on their journey.

These mentor relationships are invaluable in advancing a woman's career through the academy and increasing the number of women college presidents (Brown 2005). As one president stated, "I think mentors are critically important. If you've got mentors who have a little mileage on them, they have probably seen whatever it is you're dealing with before ...except COVID." The presidents all agreed that having mentors, hearing their advice and lessons learned, has helped the presidents navigate the journey from beginning their career within the academy to the presidency position. The presidents agreed, it is an excellent way to learn from others' successes and challenges.

Another president echoed Alex's advice. She found that there is a type of mentor to avoid. She stated that men, in their competitive prime, may not always be as helpful. She suggests that it is important to choose mentors who seek to help rather than compete with the mentee. As an example, she stated that she selects male presidents as mentors that were close to retirement age, so they do not feel like they are in competition with her or threatened by her. She posited,

They are getting toward the point where they are going to meet their maker and have decided that maybe sexism isn't something they want to account for at the pearly gates. So, they do tend to try a little harder to actually help someone.

In this study, every president indicated "mostly men" when I asked about the gender of their current mentors. Literature comprises differing viewpoints regarding cross-gender mentoring in which men mentor women or women mentor men (Christman, 2003; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Kram, 1983; Medsen, 2008; Palmer & Jones, 2019). A president stated, "I have women peers whom I admire a great deal, but if you ask me about a mentor, all of my images would be men." To further illustrate the gender of a

college president's mentor, Brown's study (2005) found that more than one-half of the presidents' mentors were actually other college presidents, which are primarily men.

Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) discovered that the more successful women administrators were mentored or sponsored by men within the organization. Although, Chris stated, "I am gender-neutral on mentors. I think that people willing to share their wisdom come in all packages." She then said very succinctly, "Yes, they were mostly men because there are more men who do what I aspire to do." Most of these mentors were men (Brown, 2005) since most college presidents are men (Johnson, 2017).

### **Executive Coaches**

Most of the presidents interviewed used an executive coach when they moved into the presidency position. In fact, the use of executive coaches for managers has increased significantly over the past decade. Researchers found that executives who worked with executive coaches were more likely than other managers to set specific goals and seek ideas for improvement than the managers without executive coaches (Smither, London, Flautt, Vergas & Kucine, 2006). Further, another study found the best way to improve a manager's effectiveness and enhance self-awareness and behavior management is by utilizing an executive coach (Luthans & Peterson, 2004). Executive coaching has quickly become one of the most important managerial tools to date (Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2006).

A president said, "[women] need to know who they are and need to sort of understand what they are going to do in those spaces where they have some blind spots." As another president succinctly stated, "how careers develop, one does not have an opportunity to reflect on one's blind spots and how it will affect decision-making,

leadership, and reactions to certain challenges that may arise." Reflecting on one's blind spots and the impact it may have on the decision making is vital to the success of a leader.

Further, the presidents who have an executive coach all agreed that many decisions must be made on a day-to-day basis and having an objective outsider who can talk you through the situations is beneficial. One president stated,

By the time you become president, you are not done. You are entering a new doorway. It is a space you have never been in before, no matter what you have done. I would say you cannot fully prepare for this job in higher education, and you need someone who can be supportive.

One president found having an executive coach extremely beneficial. She provided a great example of the benefits. Through her interactions with the coach, she participated in a personality type test (The 7 Personality Types of the World) and discovered that her personality type was one of a "warrior."

That was very, very transformative in terms of how I thought about the challenges that were in front of me. I believe that is why people are willing to mentor me because they saw that I was a warrior, and if they gave me a challenge, I knocked it down. I was able to do it, and I did not shy away from difficult things, so I developed the necessary courage. Fortunately, I also have native intelligence, and I could be groomed.

I asked the presidents that utilized an executive coach how they located a good one. They all found their coach by asking people they trusted or admired. They agreed that you need to find the right person you can trust, have confidence in their abilities, and have mutual respect in which you are both honest. Alex stated, "it is a significant relationship."

## **Family**

Research supports that a leader's family life matters at work (Ten Brummelhuis, Haar & Roche, 2013). It influences the leaders' well-being and also how they lead. Research has found that leaders with strong family support lead to a more motivating and supportive leader (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Ten Brummelhuis, Haar & Roche, 2013). Indeed, the five women college presidents valued the importance of having a supportive family unit in their life while in the college president's position. One President stated, "I would not be where I am without my husband, and I think the family situation can matter." However, it is not always going to be easy, so one "must choose [your spouse] wisely."

All five presidents have children, and they each incorporated them into certain aspects of the career as a strategy to balance work life and home life. In fact, women leaders with children who successfully combine their family and working roles actually possess "personal characteristics and develop strategies that enable them to overcome the conflicts between their work and family roles, finding higher job satisfaction, and psychological well-being" (Cheung & Halpern, 2010, p. 185). Sistaprez recounted a story about one of her going-away parties. The person who was the emcee was a friend, so after everybody gave the accolades and speeches, he called the president's child up to give a speech. The child was about nine years old at the time, walked up to the podium, cleared his throat, and said, "ditto." Later that year, as they were driving one day, the president's child said, "Do children ever give speeches?" The president said, "Yeah, we have about 15 minutes now. Do you want to give a speech?" The child gave a great speech because he listened to everything his mom said over the years at other venues.

Another president incorporated their children in the president's work as much as they could. When she was asked to be the executive vice president and provost, she agreed to take the position, "but it cannot interfere with my kid's events. I am not going to miss kindergarten graduation." She was adamant that she would not spend four hours at a football game in the box and just "farm my kids out somewhere." However, one of the side benefits of having them as "part of this world" was that they developed their own skills, could talk more easily to adults, and could see a different side of their mother.

Diehl & Dzubinski (2016) found that having a family while in a leadership position in the academy is not always accepted by society. This type of gender bias is a stereotype in which women are expected to stay at home with their children, and men should support the family (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). It is a consequence of gender as a socially constructed phenomenon. The antiquated gendered roles, in which men are the breadwinners, and a woman's place is in the home, are maintained by society (Denhardt & Perkins, 1976; Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). One president stated, "There was actually a woman on our executive council after I became executive vice president and provost. She would undermine pretty much everybody on the council. On one occasion, she said, 'I am surprised that you took the job since you have children at home.'" This type of sexism undermines women in leadership positions. Another example, a good friend of one president, who was male, told her one time that he could never be married to a female president. He thought it would be difficult for the male spouse to find their identity. However, for the women presidents I interviewed, their spouses were incredibly supportive, employed in a field in which they were trained, and enjoyed campus activities.

The data suggested that gender is embedded in how the participants negotiated home and work obligations (Emslie & Hunt, 2008). They must figure out how to achieve the elusive balance between work and life (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). The thought that women must have an equal balance of time and energy at work and family life is a misnomer and setting many women up for failure (Emslie & Hunt, 2008). The women presidents I interviewed found that supportive spouses help with household duties; it is a partnership at home. These women presidents also found that by integrating their family into the responsibilities incumbent upon a president, such as campus events, they could find some type of balance between their family and work-life obligations. Also, the children benefited from the exposure to academic life.

### **Strategies for introverts**

As the five women college presidents described their journey, it became clear that a large part of the job was making speeches to large crowds, fundraising with donors many nights a week, and communicating with many groups of constituents. I asked the presidents for advice to those aspiring leaders that may be introverts. Every presidency will “require exposure and provoke judgment”; therefore, it is one president's advice to write. She said, "We are in a new world where the blogosphere is wide open. In the Chronicle of Higher Education, those are still "go-to publications," and your voice can be heard. You can be definitive in your writing.” The president said she writes all the time, and she is surprised at the people who approach her, that read the piece and really enjoyed it. Her advice, "there are ways to be heard, and so while you are going to have to train yourself to give a firm handshake, with good eye contact, and walk direct, and all

that sort of stuff, there are still ways to use your voice to establish a place, a space, and a reputation for good leadership.”

One of the most prominent myths regarding leadership is that introverts are not capable of leading. In a study, 65% of senior executives attribute introversion as a barrier to leadership (Grant, Gino & Hofmann, 2010). In fact, many people attribute a good leader to being outgoing, gregarious, and extroverted (Crockett, 2018). However, leadership is defined as the “process of influencing others in a manner that enhances their contribution to the realization of group goals (Ancowitz, 2015, p. 1). many of the trait’s introverts reflect are actually tremendous strengths in a leadership capacity (Farrell, 2017; Grant, Gino & Hofmann, 2010). Introverts have unique personality traits that can make them outstanding leaders if properly leveraged. These traits consist of listening and reflection skills, preparedness, and introvert-led environments that tend to be calm (Crockett, 2018; Farrell, 2017).

One of the presidents considers herself an introvert with lower emotional intelligence. She usually skips the "niceties and jumps straight into business." She learned that she had to motivate herself before an interview or dinner meeting. Further, she confesses that she is fine for a graduation or a large gathering, but "if you have me sitting around a table with a couple of donors that I do not really know, that is going to be more difficult for me.” What she has found that works, “I will ask many questions so that I do not have to do all of the talking.”

All the presidents agreed, one can be an introvert and a college president but choose wisely on the institution-type. The smaller the institution, the fewer constituents one will need to meet. However, the introvert will need to develop adaptive skills because



eventually, they will need to run a campaign or ask donors for money. A college president's duties do not change based on the personality, so professional development and coaching may help attain the skills needed.

In conclusion, scholars have consistently found that mentoring plays an important role in a women's career path advancement (Brown, 2005; Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2011; Madsen, 2008). The five women college presidents' strategies to assist them in their rise through the ranks to become president included mentors at every stage of their journey. Indeed, mentoring is important for women at all levels of the academy, from faculty to administration (Brown, 2005; Madsen, 2008, 2012). These mentors were selected based on the president's specific needs at that time as well as the mentor's past experiences. This selection process was important to the presidents because they needed the mentors to provide lessons learned and keen sound advice. They were all in agreement, pick a mentor that was no longer on their journey to alleviate the competition and get the mentor's full attention.

Another strategy was selecting an executive coach to help the women college presidents find their blind spots and provide honest feedback on their behavioral styles within the academy. These executive coaches helped the Presidents with personality tests, communication and set goals to assist them on their journey. Moreover, having a supportive spouse and integrating their family into the president's obligations helped the women college presidents feel more balanced in their work and life. It also provided an excellent experience for their children. This section concludes with strategies for the college president who may be an introvert. For those aspiring leaders who are introverts,

write editorials and develop adaptive skills. Introverts have unique traits that make them excellent leaders.

**Research Question #2: What specific attributes, professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors had implications for their career to progress to the position of president within the higher education academy?**

This research sub-question sought to understand the specific qualities and opportunities the five women college presidents utilized to advance their career trajectory. Participants discussed the attributes of a good leader in higher education, and the adaptation of those qualities as the academy confronts the pandemic. The study then reveals the most impactful professional development experiences of which assisted the presidents in their career progression. Finally, details were provided regarding opportunities and behaviors women will need to navigate a patriarchal institution.

**Attributes of a good higher education leader**

College presidents are the chief executive officers of higher education institutions and are considered the most powerful and influential individuals within the academic community (Rile, 2001). They are expected to provide intellectual leadership to the academic community, possess administrative and financial shrewdness, fundraising ability, political skill, demonstrate institutional values, and shape the academy's policies (Ross & Green 2000; Selingo, Chheng & Clark, 2017). The definition of a good leader within higher education varied by each president. Some of the terms they used were “courageous,” “humble,” “good listener,” “motivator,” “politically astute,” and “strategic.”

One president succinctly summarized an excellent higher education leader as understanding multiple needs at a single moment and prioritizing those needs. A higher education leader must be "able to read the tea leaves" and "determine which way the wind is blowing politically, socially, and economically." Another president stated,

The best leaders are astute observers of human behavior and good listeners. There are lots of nonverbal cues that help you navigate an environment. It becomes clear who the real power brokers are in the room, and it is not always the chair. It becomes clear who holds sway with the Board, whose vote counts twice. So, the ability to be quiet and observe long enough to figure out where those sorts of outlets are in the room is really, really important. The mark of a good leader is one who is astute enough to pick up on those cues and then leverage them.

Higher education is evolving to meet the current emergencies and adapt to the changing world around it (Kretovics & Eckert, 2020). This constant adaptation is evident based on these women presidents' responses as they are navigating the current situation with the pandemic, civil discourse, and political unrest. These changes require a leader who can be risk-averse, manage a crisis, identify opportunities, and carry out the institution's mission (Birnbaum, 1992; Ivancheva & Syndicus, 2019; Kretovics & Eckert, 2020; Lynch, 2014).

The pandemic has created an unprecedented crisis (Kruse, Hackmann & Lindle, 2020). Higher education presidents must restructure the systems, ensure instructional quality while operating with a significant financial shortfall (Kruse, Hackmann & Lindle, 2020). According to each of the presidents, during this pandemic, they have received correspondence from angry constituents regarding everything from the lack of face-to-face classes, the lack of activities and sporting events, and the virus spread within the community. One president lamented that she is becoming "the embodiment of what people are upset about. They are not really upset at you; they are upset at the character,

the president.” Managing through a crisis within the academy requires attention to multiple audiences, internal and external constituents. The key to conveying this message that considers both situation and the context of the campus community is difficult (Kruse, Hackmann & Lindle, 2020).

Regarding the financial shortfall, Chris stated, "We are in a position of the double whammy, a premature cliff in student enrollment and states not having any money. We are going to have to contract, like hard and fast... and I am worried about it." Another president lamented, "You cannot reduce the cost of this very labor-intensive industry down to zero... ever. Also, you can't save your way to prosperity; you have to continue to focus on quality. It is the only thing that really matters in higher education. That is going to be a difficult thing to do with net tuition revenues just dropping." Studies found that the financial impacts within the academy have been compounded because higher education is one of the only sectors that still remain negatively impacted by the Great Recession (Laderman & Weeden, 2020).

To manage this crisis requires leadership proficiencies in “analytic and communication skills, flexibility, empathy and compassion, presence and availability, transparency and honesty, and established trust and respect” (Gigliotti, 2020). Moreover, one president suggested, “you need to learn to compartmentalize these types of exchanges. It has nothing to do with you as a person but the situation that they find themselves in currently.”

Women college presidents must overcome various challenges within a gendered institution and the wake of an impending upheaval of the academy to achieve and maintain the position of president. Therefore, based on the responses from the five

women college presidents, as well as literature, a successful higher education leader will be one that can adapt. Aspiring leaders will need to be astute as they strategically navigate the political and social relationships. Moreover, they will need to be risk-averse as they encounter the ever-evolving emergencies that occur within the institution (Gigliotti, 2020).

### **Self-efficacy as an attribute**

College presidents must manage risk, communicate to a myriad of constituents, and provide financial effectiveness as they lead a higher education institution. This primes the question, are presidents born to be leaders, or can they be taught to lead? Whether or not leadership can be taught is a debate that has been waged for decades (Channing, 2020). This question garnered the same response from each of the five college presidents. Yes, it can be taught, but each of the five women college presidents alluded to the fact that if one wants to lead within the academy, they must have latent leadership abilities, and they also must exhibit self-efficacy.

This self-efficacy is described as the confidence, performance, and decision making of the aspiring women leader (Bandura, 1986). As one president stated, "they must have the willingness and desire to put themselves out there and to reach out to others, and then learning how to do that effectively." Another president stated, "My professional development came through mentoring that I was fortunate enough to have. I watched people a lot. I think there are latent leaders, but I do not think being a natural leader is enough. I think you have to learn it."

Further, a president explained that the institution's different cultures could also impact a leader's effectiveness. "As a leader, you have to be comfortable with the culture

in order to lead it well. Those kinds of skills are developed by watching people lead." Indeed, every organization has its own culture, including group norms, shared values, and a "consensus around the goals and objectives" (Duncan, 2018). According to Duncan (2018), "Culture includes the way people interact with each other, how they solve problems, and how they justify themselves." Bass (2008) states, "The values, beliefs, norms, and ideals embedded in a culture affect leadership behavior, goals, and strategies of organizations." A higher education leader must understand and embrace the specific and entrenched culture in that institution to lead it well.

Finally, Christine stated,

I am not a wilting flower. As a result, I do tend to kind of come in guns blazing and contributing to earn my place. I have been tempered over time because you miss cues when you are always talking and not listening, so I have had to train myself to be quiet and observe, get the lay of the land so that you can figure out when and where to enter in more impactful ways. Finding the right mentors and finding the right professional development experiences can short circuit many heartaches and keep you from falling down a whole bunch of times. In addition, picking up the phone and asking for help is a learned behavior for me. There are several organizations out there that do a good job of helping you make those important connections, and I would not sell those opportunities short.

Research has found that personal efficacy can influence the goals that people choose, their aspirations, how much effort they will put forth in a task, and how long they will persist in accomplishing a challenging task (McCormick, Tanguma & Lopez-Forment, 2002). Through self-efficacy, women leaders can ensure they pursue specific professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors that can significantly impact their career progression to the president's position. Professional advancement opportunities should include the professional development of the aspiring

leader. These types of opportunities can promote and enhance behaviors to advance one's career (Armentrout, 2017; Kempster, 2009).

### **Professional development opportunities and activities**

Advancing one's career can begin by embracing professional development opportunities. These opportunities can provide tremendous career development through skill-building, as well as tangentially professional networking opportunities. Professional development can refer to many types of educational experiences (Mizell, 2010). The five women college presidents discussed two types of professional development opportunities: structured workshops provided by associations or institutions and idiosyncratic learning by observing and communicating with those who do the job.

The goal of professional development is to develop new skills for the purpose of advancement in the field. The presidents cited a few programs such as the American Association of Colleges conference, Council of Independent Colleges, the American Council on Education (ACE) Leadership Program, and the Harvard Management Development Program. One of the presidents that attended the Harvard program agreed it was quite useful and significantly impactful in her career development. According to the website, the program is an intensive two-weeks that prepare higher education managers with the "tools and insight to think more strategically, balance competing demands, and engage in more forward-thinking leadership" (Harvard Management Development Program, 2021). In the two weeks, the participants learn financial management, managing relationships, institutional values and integrity, and the curricular and institutional perspectives on diversity. As one president stated, professional development "helps open your eyes to other parts of the institution."

Professional development workshops provide instruction on understanding communication skills, writing skills, dealing with difficult individuals, dealing with conflict, making hard decisions, and other sessions to develop individuals into their different roles across the academy. One president pointed out, "There is getting a job, and then there is the job. No one is going to ask you to do the job if you don't present yourself the right way, so I encourage people to go through the workshops." The president then posited, there are types of programs that could actually help an aspiring college president decide whether she really wants to become president.

One president was fortunate to have a position where she observed her institution's president in an administrative role in which she served as a liaison representing the president. She explained, "It was kind of a chief of staff role with the rest of the institution." She said that it was extremely beneficial to learn what the president's job was, which helped her realize that she could successfully do the job. The president suggested that aspiring women leaders consider the ACE fellows' program if observing the president is not an option at their institution. She was confident that this program would provide the same opportunities. The ACE Fellows Program supports future higher education leaders by ensuring they are ready to step into the president's position. The Fellow spends a period of time with a president of an institution to observe the day-to-day activities and decision making. Further, the program provides seminars, team-based projects, and visits to other campuses. Finally, ACE Fellows are assisted in developing a network of higher education leaders across the world in addition to an opportunity to observe and participate in key meetings and events (ACE Fellows Program, 2020). A study performed by the American Council on Education (2018) found that current women



presidents emphasized the value of mentorship by allowing the prospective president to see the position is achievable and to understand the path to get there.

Christine said, “ACE [American Council on Education] has several programs explicitly designed to create pathways for women and women of color.” They provide search firm consultants, mock interviews, critique your responses, and as one president quipped, “it is painful and horrible but really helpful!” Moreover, the organization will also assign mentors to help establish those relationships. According to a couple of presidents, this leadership development program is the “gold standard.” However, each of the Presidents wanted to make sure I knew they did not endorse one program over the other.

Many participants believed their gender provided more opportunities for their professional development because these types of programs were available and tailored for women in leadership. The hope is that this type of targeted leadership building could yield more women in the top leadership roles within the academy. An example of a targeted leadership development program is the ACE Women’s Network. The mission is to “facilitate the networking of women interested in pursuing leadership opportunities in higher education” (ACE Women’s Network, 2020). They achieve this by facilitating networks for sharing best practices and assists with local leadership training.

A president admitted she went to an ACE Women’s Network annual conference every year but probably learned more in the bar than in some of the sessions. She said, “just talking to people, one on one, learning about their experiences to me was more valuable.” She quickly clarified; the workshops were of value, but the one-on-one experience, without interruptions, asking specific questions to someone with experience

or knowledge was beneficial. Observing a leader through their everyday activities can reveal a myriad of “situations, stressors, and behaviors” (Armentrout, 2017, p. 1). The five presidents described observation as the most impactful professional development.

One of the presidents stated,

[The most impactful professional development] is being in the room when decisions get made. It is seeing how people navigate both through good and bad, how they make mistakes and recover. There is a lot to be learned from watching people make mistakes because they survive their mistakes. If you are going to be in the presidency or any leadership role, you are going to make mistakes, and the more you can watch people make mistakes and problem solve, watch how they talk to people, it is huge professional development. So, the best professional development opportunity for me is being in the room at the table; even if you are working, you have a job that you are doing at the table, you are not just like, watching, you are actually there. There is such value in that, you know?

Chris realized that she learned a great deal by being at the table during an institutional crisis where she worked as a provost. She stated, "watching the communication, how the president made decisions with balanced and shared governance. But ultimately, it is the president's decision as opposed to the more ongoing decisions that the president makes that are fundamentally shared governance.” Through this interaction, both the verbal and non-verbal communication, the overt and subtle behaviors, the observation of a leader had a tremendous impact on future leadership style and judgment. Research has confirmed, observation and feedback from a leader can significantly enhance the observer’s leadership effectiveness (Armentrout, 2017).

In summary, through self-efficacy, these women college presidents sought to learn structured developmental skills through workshops and institutes. Still, the implementation of these skills was achieved by observing and watching others. Indeed, observational leadership learning has been shown to be significant in formative

leadership learning (Kempster, 2009). Research has found that the dynamics of observational leadership learning is shaped by the “interaction of motivation, attention, availability, attainability, relational proximity and career” (Kempster & Parry, 2014, p. 1).

Bandura (1977, 1986) operationalized the observational leadership learning by suggesting it is a four-step learning process which included attention, retention, production, and motivation. This process includes the fact that if the observer is to learn anything, they must pay close attention to the leader and their behavior. The observer must remember the behavior they observed and replicate it when the need arises. Finally, and most importantly, the observer must have a reason for imitating the leader's behavior. This reinforcement could be obtained by a positive outcome or an incentive (Bandura, 1977, 1986). All five women college presidents provided examples in which the observation of a mentor while they led, provided the women presidents the behavior in which to imitate when they became a leader. As one of the presidents stated, as a provost, she observed her president make decisions while in a natural disaster and it facilitated her to find her own leadership styles. All five presidents relayed stories of learning by observing their mentors; watching the mentors lead meetings, make decisions, and communicate with constituents. Indeed, observation is powerful and can provide the behaviors required to be an outstanding leader.

Clearly, through self-efficacy, the five women college presidents developed the confidence in their leadership acumen by exerting control over their own motivation and behavior. They achieved this by engaging in multiple aspects of professional development. This development consisted of attaining leadership skills and abilities by

workshops, programs, and observation of other leaders. By successfully obtaining these skills and abilities, their confidence in themselves and their leadership abilities was amplified.

### **Behaviors and opportunities for women in navigating patriarchy within the academy**

Research has demonstrated that higher education institutions are gendered organizations and oppressive towards women faculty and administrators (Hannum et al., 2014). This oppression is illustrated when there are gendered differences within the organization's hierarchy and occupations (Britton, 2000). Although more women are entering higher education, parity has failed to bring about gender equity (Guy & Fenley, 2014; Hsieh & Winslow, 2006) in higher education. To overcome this patriarchy, most of the five women college presidents described their strategy to obtain a more prominent role in the academy: become indispensable, assume additional responsibilities, and have your voice heard by contributing to the conversation.

The first strategy to obtain a more prominent role in the academy is to become indispensable. According to an article in Harvard Business Review, what makes the leader indispensable to their organization is not being good at many things but “being uniquely outstanding at a few things” (Zenger, Folkman & Edinger, 2011). In a study of more than a quarter-million 360-degree surveys of 30,000 developing leaders, it was found that if a leader has just one outstanding strength, their overall leadership effectiveness rose to the 64 percentile of effective leaders (Zenger, Folkman & Edinger, 2011). Two profound strengths placed the leaders close to the top quartile. Zenger,

Folkman & Edinger (2011) suggests finding complementary behavior to be a successful leader.

An example of this strategy is from Lee. When the institution was looking for a provost, Lee stated, "I was the only one who knew how everything worked. I had gotten the confidence of the faculty because I did things that should have been done." Lee earned the administration's trust because she was collaborative and always wanted to learn more. She exhibited the tenacity to get the job done and the collaborative spirit to work together. The two strengths resulted in earning the respect and trust of the faculty, staff, and administrators.

The second strategy to obtain a more prominent role in the academy is to take on additional tasks and increase responsibility. Indeed, an aspiring leader must recognize that additional responsibilities can accelerate growth in one's career (Chakravarty, 2019; MacArthur, 2019). Those who accept greater responsibility usually get higher-profile assignments and are the first to be noticed when higher positions become available (Chakravarty, 2019). According to research, there are two ways to successfully navigate the increased responsibility: communicate interest and volunteer (Chakravarty, 2019; MacArthur, 2019).

One way to increase responsibility is to communicate interest (Chakravarty, 2019; MacArthur, 2019). One of the presidents advised telling the administrators that you are interested in taking on more responsibilities. As Sistaprez stated, "Step up and let people know that you are willing to work. I do not know that any of the presidents, vice presidents, or deans are mind readers; they do not know your skillset or interests. So,

make it known!" However, if given the additional responsibilities, the presidents advise that creative problem solving is critical.

The other way to increase responsibility is to volunteer to do a task (Chakravarty, 2019; MacArthur, 2019). One president advised that sometimes one should not wait to be asked. Additional responsibilities go to those that take the initiative without being asked to do so (MacArthur, 2019). The president stated that volunteering for assignments not in your job description and demonstrating the additional capacity to perform the assignment proficiently is essential. She said, "Do not be afraid to take on something that is not necessarily in your lane." Another president offered advice to provide status updates on progress throughout the project. These updates are essential in demonstrating you can do more.

A president quantified, if someone sees the potential in you and approaches you to assume additional responsibilities, do not automatically say "no" because you are comfortable where you are. Further, she stated, "Leaders have to be willing to take on a bit of ambiguity in order to move forward." Sistaprez said, "Even turtles extend the neck a little bit to make progress." She stated, it is a risk, but one has to weigh the risk to see whether it is worth it. Just make sure you communicate the status of your progress and creatively solve problems as they arise.

The third strategy to obtain a more prominent role in the academy is simple on the surface but difficult for many. As a woman sits at the all-male table where decisions are being made, one president suggested to just talk louder if you want to be heard. Dzubinski and Diehl (2016) found restrictions on when and how women contribute to the conversation. In Dzubinski and Diehl's research, they found that some women may feel

like they are interrupting and should wait until men finish talking before providing their thoughts. The president's advice to aspiring women college presidents is to have your voice be heard. However, one president cautions, there is always a "balance between coming across as brash, angry or overly aggressive, and relatively firm." She continues, "As women, we get tagged with the former description more readily." One of the presidents suggested "taking opportunities to weigh in on a conversation." Further, she stated,

It is very easy for us to sit and listen quietly because it is consistent with our personalities as women – generally polite. We will listen and allow someone to express themselves without interruption. Unfortunately, very often, those opportunities go by in which you could demonstrate competence in a particular area. So, really insert yourself for lack of a better way to contribute in a meaningful way. It is a learned behavior, and it is not consistent with the way we were raised, taught, or socialized. You need to train yourself to insert yourself in those meetings to find those opportunities.

Finally, one president advised aspiring leaders to seek out and embrace opportunities to understand higher education finance and resource acquisition, including finance and budget. She cautions, if a leader does not understand those aspects of the academy, they will not be very effective in higher education. Further, additional advice was to watch your language, "do not be afraid to take credit – if you lead something, say you led it; if you built it, say you built it; if you wrote it, say you wrote it. It is tough to teach narcissism, but sometimes it is necessary!"

In conclusion, research sub-question 2 reflected on the specific attributes, professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors that had implications for these five women college presidents' careers to progress to the position of president within the higher education academy. First, to be a great leader, one must be

humble, strategic, politically astute, and motivating. The aspiring women college president should invoke self-efficacy by developing themselves professionally by attending workshops or programs to assist with their leadership skills. In addition, take advantage of observing other leaders and learn from their successes and mistakes. Finally, to overcome the gendered organization and secure your place in the academy as a leader, the five presidents' advice is to become indispensable, take on additional responsibilities, and have your voice heard when sitting at a table in which decisions are being made.

**Research Question #3: What challenges did women presidents have to overcome to achieve their positions?**

Many women college presidents have the abilities and leadership skills to be president within higher education institutions. However, institutional barriers regarding women's perceptions as leaders (Lucas & Baxter, 2012; Schein, 2001) and gender stereotyping (Pittinsky & Welle, 2007; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007) exist. This institutional bias impedes the woman leader's momentum from moving forward in the academy (Diehl, 2014). University presidents face multiple competing demands to lead higher education institutions successfully. The job requires social skills because they must work with and report to such a large stakeholder group (Ross & Green, 2000). The president's stakeholders consist of governing boards, the executive leadership team, and faculty, to name just a few (Cowen, 2018; Fisher, 1984; Ross & Green, 2000).

As each of the five women presidents alluded to, relationships are critical for a college president's success or failure. I analyzed this research question by discussing the



relationships with the governing board, executive leadership team, faculty on the campus, and other women leaders.

### **Navigating governing board relationships**

Governing boards are ultimately responsible for overseeing a complex organization of constituents with responsibilities including academics and research, public relations, fundraising, athletics, facilities, as well as many others. In the Statement on Board Responsibility for Governance (2010), the Association of Governing Boards stated that “The board partners with the president ... to achieve the mission, sustain core operations, and attain the strategic priorities of the institution” (p. 3). Further, the Commission on Strengthening Presidential Leadership (1984) offered that “an effective presidency starts but does not end with an effective board. We have found that the following tend to go together: an effective board, an effective chair of the board, an effective presidency, an effective president” (p. 12). The partnership between the governing board and the president is paramount in the success of the university as they collaborate and implement the strategic mission, vision, and goals of the institution.

The Association of Governing Boards (2016) reported that 68% of trustees were male, and the vast majority of trustees were white; only 5.5 percent were Black/African American (Seling, 2007). This gender imbalance can result in divergent gender communication styles (Johns, 2013). In a meta-analysis, Bucur (2014) found that men and women differ significantly in communication styles. As an example, men are more dominant in their speech while women use indirect communication. Further, research has shown that while women use communication to build social connections or relationships, men use language to exert dominance and achieve specific outcomes (Mason, 1994;

Merchant, 2012; Wood, 1996). Due to the gender difference between the governing board and the women presidents, communication style and expected outcomes could significantly impact the relationship. Special attention must be given to the different communication styles based on gender if the relationship is to be successful (Mason, 1994; Merchant, 2012; Wood, 1996).

The governing board within the five women college presidents' institutions varied in size based on institution type. Further, the president's role related to the governing board differed by each president, whether it be an observer of the governing process, ex-officio of the Board, or the board member's nominator. However, the findings reflected significant commonalities across all presidents' responses. The first was that the board members could be paternalistic, reflecting a gendered organization (Acker, 2007). Therefore, in an effort to maintain good relationships, the presidents found that they must work continuously on building mutual trust and transparency. Clear, concise communication is the key to the women college president's success with a significantly male-centric governing board (Dufour, 2017; Mason, 1994; Merchant, 2012; Wood, 1996).

Sultana (2010) stated that a patriarchal society gives men absolute priority, which results in women's subordination. Women's subordination is illustrated by women's inferior position, vis-a-vis male domination, and the lack of decision-making (Sultana, 2010). One college president admitted that at a prior institution, the governing board was very involved and patriarchal. She stated, they "sort of patted me on the head, but when there were real decisions to be made, they were ever-present and very intrusive." Due to the fact that this was her first presidency, she did not know any better and assumed all

governing boards micromanaged every decision. In her next presidency, she ensured the governing board and president's roles were mutually agreed upon prior to accepting the position. She set the boundaries early, and it has been an outstanding relationship.

Another president felt that the board treated her like "they will not hit a girl," which she described as their "reluctance to be critical." Finally, one of the presidents quipped, "I worked at a college where the president had the worst board in the universe. I actually wrote my dissertation on boards of trustees because I figured there has got to be a better model!"

Findings reflect the key to garnering mutual respect between the board and the president is copious amounts of two-way communication (Dufour, 2017). It is essential to the relationship. Each of the presidents discussed the importance of talking to each of the board members to ensure they know good news and challenges. One president stated, "you never want them to be blindsided."

Ultimately, the president is the board's employee, so there must be mutual respect and assurance that the board members will be apprised of what they need to know to be prepared to make well-informed decisions (Dufour, 2017). Communication is "the secret to some longevity and success," stated one president. Further, studies have reflected a connection between the president-board relationship and the length of the presidency (Dufour, 2017).

### **Managing the executive leadership team relationships**

The presidents all agreed that the relationship with the executive leadership team is the second most important for the position's success. The senior leadership team is a collection of the key decision-makers that have the authority to work collaboratively to

achieve the institutions' vision and goals (Kezar, Dizon & Scott, 2019). A dysfunctional senior executive team can slow down, derail or even paralyze an institution (Kruyt, Malan, & Tuffied, 2011).

Many of the presidents reported having had challenges with the existing executive leadership team that was in place when they arrived at the institution. Each of the presidents told a story of having to relieve at least one member of their position in an effort to move the institution forward and achieve their vision. One president stated, "I blew it the first time. I did not bring anybody with me because it was my first presidency, and I did not have anyone to bring with me." She thought she did not want to "rock the boat," but two things happened. The first, everybody got comfortable in their position, and when she made changes later, "they were shocked, and it was painful." The second, the leadership team that was in place did not understand her "vision of the institution." She wanted to move the college in a specific direction. Unfortunately, the individuals in the positions to make that happen "did not have the skills, expertise, or ambition to move the institution." The first priority of an effective team is to get the right people on the team and the wrong ones off (Kruyt, Malan, & Tuffied, 2011). Further, the key to achieving a great team is deciding what contributions the team as a whole, and the members as individuals, must make to achieve an organization's goals (Kruyt, Malan, & Tuffied, 2011). It took the president three years to build her executive leadership team, which significantly impacted her institution's transformation. As a result, she negotiated in her contract with her next presidency to hire her own leadership team. She asked for the entire leadership team's resignations, and then she decided whether to accept the letters or give extensions to their employment contracts.

She cautions,

Higher education is a small world. You are going to see some of those people again. You may be sitting across from them at an American Council on Education meeting. So, it is important to try to deal with people – to be kind but firm, to be honest, and direct. They may not like you or agree with the decision, but if you carry it out with some decency and integrity, I think it will serve you well in the long game.

Sanaghan (2019) suggests that bringing in trusted advisors to assist with the presidency's transition seems like a good idea, but it usually fails in reality. The existing executive team understands the institution, the culture, and the complexity of the campus, which could be beneficial to the president. Therefore, Sanaghan (2019) recommends the president not make any changes to the team for at least one year. One president found this to be true in her experience. She entered her first presidency with the leadership team that was already in place. She found the team's composition too big, and certain people should not have been part of the team. She waited a year to ensure she understood each of their responsibilities and changed the team based on her vision of the institution. She ended up adding some colleagues to the team and removing others.

All of the presidents now have collaborative groups that they trust, working together on the shared mission, vision, and goals. Just as the president communicates with the governing board, the presidents ask their leadership to communicate with them. One president tells her team, "We can get through any problem together, so let us avoid surprises. As long as we have a good lead time, there is not a problem that we cannot solve together." One president summarized that there needs to be "mutual respect, open communication, and a shared vision for the executive leadership team."

## **Cultivating Faculty Relationships**

The relationship with faculty is also significant for the success and longevity of the presidential position. Members of the faculty are strategic partners within the academy (Bensimon, 1991). Positive interactions with faculty will advance the college president's agenda (Fain, 2007). In fact, Bornstein (2003) has found that the president's legitimacy and support is a derivative of the direct correlation between the president and faculty.

To build strong relationships with the faculty, the five women college presidents spent the first six months of each of their presidency meeting with faculty across the institution. During these meetings, the presidents explained their vision while listening to the faculty's ideas. Each of the presidents tried to find ways to implement some of the suggestions. As one president stated, "They had been there longer than I, and they understand the culture." The presidents also made faculty governance an integral part of the decision making. One president invited the faculty senate chair "a seat at the table and part of the emergency management group."

Further, the presidents strive to be incredibly transparent and available, so faculty are not caught by surprise on a decision that is made that affects their job. One president advised, "If you can make the time, and your provost does not feel crowded by it if you can spend time with faculty, there is a big payoff that comes with that." In an effort to continually communicate, one president does town hall meetings for all faculty and then meets with groups by department. She has had "brown bags or lunch and learns in which the president gets to learn about research interests."

Indeed, this relationship is extremely vital because the president must rely on the faculty to share and execute their institutional mission and vision (McKinniss, 2016).

Alex stated, “It's difficult to get through difficult times if you don't have enough trust built with faculty.” If there is a lack of trust, the misunderstanding leads to quite a bit of frustration for the president as they try to lead the institution (ACE, 2017).

Sistaprez stated, “You have to learn who the real leaders on campus are, you have the official power, but that does not mean that you're in charge.” She further states, “If they don't trust you, and if they don't feel that you mean what you say and that you don't have that integrity, they're not going to follow, you won't be there long.” This lack of trust and confidence could explain the cause for some of the president's turnover within an institution (Harris & Ellis, 2018; Palmer & Freeman, 2020). A study in 2017 found there to be 349 faculty expressions of no confidence between 2000 through 2014 aimed at institutional leadership; 64% were directed at the president/chancellor of the institution. Most of the reasons for the no-confidence claims were associated with traditions of academic culture, leadership, and governance (Frantz & Lawson, 2017). A motion of no confidence is a statement as to the belief the president is no longer deemed fit to hold the position. McKinniss (2016) reported

When you lose the support of core constituencies like faculty, it is very difficult and untenable to continue to lead. Because faculty are at the core of your institution, and if you know that a big chunk of them don't want you there, in a way it sort of questions the legitimacy of your leadership, even though you may be by law the president.

Thus, as all the presidents stated, the relationship with the faculty is extremely important for the longevity of the presidential position. After all, the faculty are the “foot soldiers” who carry out the president's vision (Caulfield, 2015). If they do not have the

confidence or a shared vision, all the presidents agreed, you will not be in the job for long. As Sistaprez reaffirmed, “you'll be gone very shortly.”

### **Navigating the relationships with other women leaders**

Despite the challenges and barriers, more women are moving into leadership positions within higher education. In a study by Davidson (2017), it has been found that mutual growth occurs through the connection of women colleagues. The relationship between women leaders contributes to the positive experiences of women in leadership. These relationships benefit from mutual support, shared laughter, shared moments, and validation while facing self-doubt or uncertainty, clarity, safety, and strategizing (Andrew & Montague, 1998; Davidson, 2017). In fact, “relationships between women leaders and their colleagues may be an alternative for challenging existing patriarchal power inherent in organizational cultures” (Jordan, 2010, p. 10).

Unfortunately, not all women in leadership have found collegiality with other women leaders. A president said, "I will tell you that my toughest critics are other women, my greatest detractors have been other women, my most recalcitrant employees have been other women." She believes that if we are "going to turn this corner in terms of equality in higher education," it will be critically important to be sensitized to the fact that we unconsciously or hinder other women from leading. Women need to support each other and when we start getting into leadership positions, hold the door open for those women coming up behind us. The only way we will have diversity in leadership is if women intentionally and unselfishly assist women in having a seat at the table next to them.



As one president stated, we have all read the books that share the characteristics of men and women in the workplace; however, when women in the environment are unsupportive, it is much more complicated and "incredibly painful." Further, she said, "I keep just assuming that the girls are going to stick together and support each other. I continue to have to learn the hard way that it just not always the case." I asked the president, "do you think it is because there are limited seats?" She stated,

I worked at a PWI [predominantly white institution] and HBCU, and someone asked me, having worked in both, is there a real difference? I said, yes. For white people, generically speaking, there has always been enough: land, work, jobs, opportunity, money. So, they share freely because there is plenty, and so they are gracious, and they share. For people of color, unfortunately, there has never been enough. They operate in scarcity, and as a result of that, they hoard. They do not share. You can bet that the person in the Bible that quartered the manna was somebody of color. You see one African American in a room, and you do not see them really jumping in to help pull up someone else because their position is too tenuous, and they are afraid to gamble on you. If I give you a reference and screw it up, I will be jeopardized. I am just going to wait it out.

There are limited seats at the table for women in which decisions are being made. As more women have a sense of belonging within the ranks of leadership in the academy, one would assume the result would be confidence in their position at that table. In turn, this confidence would lead to women welcoming others to sit at the table with them. She responded,

I think the same can be said of women. So, absolutely, I think that parity requires there will be more women at the table. I think there has to be a healthier sense of belonging among women so that they are more inclusive and more welcoming of other women. We want inclusion, not just equity. Equity is a number, is there an equal number of women and men: 50%/50%. That is equity, but inclusion is when you let them talk and participate in the decision making."

Studies reflect that women leaders derive benefits from other women who understand, share common experiences, and offer perspective (Davidson, 2017). If

women continue to isolate themselves, being the only representative in a homogenous group, it will exacerbate the effects of stereotyping and isolation (Whitford, 2020). When women leaders start to work together, they will challenge the status quo of a gendered institutional culture (Davidson, 2017) and potentially increase the number of women within the academy's leadership pipeline.

The analysis to the question, what challenges did women presidents have to overcome to achieve their positions is summarized in one word, relationships. As Christine stated,

The reality is the number of people that are qualified [to be president] by virtue of degree, skill, experience is typically exponential, there are 4,800 colleges and universities in the country. I would dare say there are a whole lot more than 4800 people that can do the work that we do. What distinguishes people, those who ultimately serve in those roles, and those who don't, really is relationships. It's entirely about being in the right place at the right time with the right people on your side, on your team cheering for you.

Leaders with authentic relationships built on trust and mutual respect understand that investing time in creating these connections makes the team more successful. Indeed, effective leadership is built on relationships, and without it, performance suffers.

This section included a discussion on the findings related to each of the research questions, including strategies for success, professional development opportunities, and challenges women college presidents must overcome.

### **Summary of Findings and Discussion**

These women college presidents implemented strategies to assist them in their rise through the ranks to become president. These strategies consisted of using mentors, executive coaches, and a supportive family. They each found that utilizing mentors early in their career facilitated them to discover their next steps within the academy.

Throughout their career, mentors were selected based on the advice and support required by the women presidents at that specific time in their journey. The presidents encouraged mentees to be mindful of the selection process. It should be thoughtful, finding mentors that have experience but are not in the midst of their own journey.

Each of the presidents utilized executive coaches to support them with prioritizing goals and enhancing their management skills. They found it beneficial to have an objective outsider, an executive coach, to help find their blind spots and provide honest feedback to their management style. A supportive family is also extremely important in which the spouse shares the family responsibilities. These presidents found that by integrating their family into activities and events across campus, they could find some balance between their family and work-life obligations. In addition, the children benefited from the exposure to academic life.

College presents are expected to provide intellectual leadership to the academic community concurrently and exemplify institutional values (Ross & Green 2000; Selingo, Chheng & Clark, 2017). According to the five women college presidents, a good higher education leader must also be courageous, humble, politically astute, and strategic. The leader must understand the multiple needs of the constituents and prioritize those needs efficiently and effectively. They must be able to "read the tea leaves" to determine the strategic next steps.

The five women college presidents each utilized two types of professional development opportunities. The first, structured workshops provided by associations or institutions. The second, observing leaders as they embrace successes and face challenges. The professional development workshops provide instruction on developing

individuals into their different roles across the academy. The observation of leaders provides a perspective into the implementation of those learned skills. All of the presidents agree leadership can be taught, but there must be some latent ability before the professional development and mentoring.

According to the five women college presidents, to be a great leader one must be humble, strategic, politically astute, and motivating. Further, the aspiring women college president should invoke self-efficacy by developing themselves professionally by attending workshops or programs to assist with their leadership skills. In addition, they should take advantage of observing other leaders and learn from their successes and mistakes. Leadership is challenging, and mistakes will inevitably be made. As revealed by the five women college presidents, learning from others is a great way to develop oneself professionally.

The five women college presidents' strategy to obtain a more prominent role in the gendered higher education institution was to become indispensable while taking on more responsibilities. One president advises making your voice heard in those meetings where decisions are being made. One must be confident in their abilities and persistent in their decisions. An aspiring college president should seek opportunities to understand all facets of higher education, such as finance, resource acquisition, and even athletics. For those aspiring leaders who are introverts, write editorials and develop adaptive skills to succeed in leadership.

Finally, relationships with the constituents are essential for the success of a college president. To maintain good relationships, the presidents found that they must work continuously on building mutual trust, transparency, and a shared vision. Due to the

diverse set of stakeholders, the communicative and communal attributes usually ascribed to women in leadership are crucial for the overall experience in building these relationships (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). Next, I will discuss the implications for practice and implications for theory.

### **Implications of practice**

Findings from this study resulted in several implications of practice. The implications should provide a roadmap for aspiring college women leaders based on five women college presidents' journeys from different institutional types. Their experiences as they navigated the gendered higher education institutions were similar irrespective of their institution-type. Each of their journeys started at different points in their career; some started right after graduate school, others started following an established career. However, they all navigated the gendered organization by being tenacious, communicative, and learning as much as they could throughout the journey.

### **Recommendations for leading in a gendered institution.**

Women have made significant gains in higher education and are now earning more degrees than men (NCES 324.20) and compose half of the college-educated workforce (Frey, 2019). However, women continue to be underrepresented in senior leadership positions while men continue to outnumber women in high-income, high-status positions within the academy (Billings & Alvesson, 2000; Whitford, 2020). Findings in this study suggest that it is challenging for a woman to be recognized as a leader in a gendered institution. One illustration of this bias is that the woman leader is usually referred to as the woman president; of course, men are referred to as merely president. The qualities of a leader and the path to attain leadership roles are still

primarily based on an outdated male model that excludes women. The following are recommendations derived from this study for aspiring women leaders to lead within a gendered institution by invoking self-efficacy.

Although more women are obtaining higher-level positions within the academy, the institutional gendered bias regarding women leaders is one of the most significant barriers. In fact, this bias is the primary reason women are not made eligible for leadership positions. There are three areas in which substantial gendered barriers exist. The areas are referred to as the sticky floor, glass ceiling, and glass cliff.

Table 5.1: The conceptual framework prescribes how an aspiring woman college president can overcome gendered barriers by utilizing self-efficacy.

<b><u>Gendered Leadership Barriers</u></b>	<b><u>Invoking Self Efficacy</u></b>
Sticky Floor	Professional development, mentoring, and observation
Glass Ceiling	Professional development, mentoring, observation, executive coach
Glass Cliff	Salary negotiation and clear expectations from Governing Board
Inherent Leadership Bias	Strong verbal and non-verbal communication

The sticky floor describes the institutional attitude of maintaining women in supportive positions with few opportunities for growth and formal leadership opportunities (Booth, Francesconi, & Frank, 1998, 2003; Dahlvig & Longman, 2020). Women are hired into the academy as adjuncts, instructors, or non-tenure-track faculty and remain in that position for the entirety of their careers. Due to the low status of their

position, they are simply kept out of decision-making or leadership opportunities. The glass ceiling is the phenomenon in which a barrier exists that excludes women from advancing toward the top of a hierarchical institution (Booth, Francesconi, & Frank, 1998, 2003; Saleem, Rafiq, & Yusaf, 2017). Women that face the glass ceiling are usually prevented from receiving promotion or leadership positions within the academy (Booth, Francesconi, & Frank, 1998, 2003; Dahlvig & Longman, 2020; Saleem, Rafiq, & Yusaf, 2017).

To overcome the sticky floor or the glass ceiling, findings from this study suggest that self-efficacy is the key. Through self-efficacy, women leaders can ensure they pursue specific professional advancement goals which will have a significant impact on their career progression to the leadership position. She must take control of her motivation and behavior by seeking out professional development opportunities. These opportunities could consist of observing other leaders inside or outside of the institution; attending regional or national conferences, even if she must pay for it; and joining professional organizations where she meets other aspiring leaders. These actions will also build the professional support systems that will assist the aspiring leader in navigating the gendered organization. Indeed, self-efficacy through professional development opportunities can promote and enhance behaviors to advance one's career.

Once women get through the pipeline, the fear is they will be faced with the glass cliff. The glass cliff is a situation that essentially sets up high-performing women to fail by giving them risky leadership positions (Dahlvig & Longman, 2020). It would make sense for an aspiring woman leader to avoid these risky positions; however, women see

any leadership role as the only opportunity for advancement, no matter how precarious the situation.

The glass cliff will become very relevant in the next few years due to the financial constraints the higher education is currently facing due to the pandemic, lack of state funding, and enrollment decrease. Some institutions will be facing some real hardships simultaneously as more women are making their way through the pipeline to the presidential positions. So, I asked some of the presidents about their thoughts on this glass cliff predicament in which aspiring women college presidents potentially find themselves. One president stated, “this notion that they have to try us out to make sure that we are competent, men seldom serve as interim presidents. Women very often will be interim before they become president.” Another president stated that she knows women that were hired in institutions that had financial stress. She pointed out that there are exceptions, i.e., Brown University and Harvard University, but the problem is that when those women leave, women do not usually follow them.

To successfully navigate the glass cliff, the aspiring leader should consider the level of risk when negotiating salary to ensure fair compensation. She must also ask for a clear definition of performance metrics in the role to get an idea of what success will look like for the governing board. Finally, seeking continuous feedback from the governing board, executive team, and faculty will ensure she is aware of any issues as they arise.

Findings also suggest gender bias exists among the colleagues of women leaders. Each of the five women college presidents discussed the gendered bias they experienced as a woman leader. One of the presidents reflected that there is always that misogynistic dean who “does not respect a woman in the leadership role and they undermine you as



sport, to show the rest of the room that he does not think I am actually his boss.” As a woman leader, one must figure out “a way to use humor or how to deflect because you are not going to convince those people that you really are the boss by arguing with them. You must focus on the task at hand.” Advice from one president is, “I think you should fake it until you make it about being comfortable in your skin as the leader, and also not devolve if not everybody sees you that way.” Another said, “It is an unfortunate reality, and the only way to change it is to accept it and then go in and do a really great job.” Certainly, the leader must be confident, prepared, and committed to being recognized as a leader.

One of the best ways for a woman leader to be accepted and respected by her colleagues is by emanating confidence through effective communication. The study revealed that verbal and nonverbal communication is essential for the leader’s success in a gendered institution. Indeed, strong leaders understand that they need to use verbal and nonverbal tools to deliver an effective message. If employees have never had a woman leader before, one of the presidents stated, “they will hear you differently.” Further, she said, “In most cases the communication style is different, and the pitch [of a woman’s voice] is higher.” So, as a first-time leader, a woman must understand that it will be different for everyone. One of the presidents suggested, “I think sort of over-explaining how things are going to happen and why they are going to happen in a particular way is probably not a bad idea.”

In addition, nonverbal communication is just as important. Constituents are always watching the leader’s affect, demeanor, and how she carries herself in many different situations. A woman leader must be cognizant of her body language. As one of

the presidents revealed, “We wear it on our sleeves sometimes when we are a little nervous or upset about something. So, we must condition ourselves to get our game face on a little bit because you would be surprised at the extent to which people are watching.” Numerous studies confirm the significance of nonverbal communication in building trust and rapport with colleagues. The nonverbal cues, how a leader looks, listens, and reacts, demonstrates whether the leader cares, is truthful, and how well they are listening. When the nonverbal signals match up with the words the leader is expressing, it increases trust, transparency, and collegiality.

It is challenging to lead in a gendered institution, but self-efficacy through professional development will alleviate some of the challenges and barriers that are incumbent to the academy. Communication is a key to any leader’s success, but it is crucial for a woman leader. Verbal and nonverbal communication will enable the leader to build trust and successfully navigate the organization. However, to make the academy leadership more gender-equitable, there needs to be a change in the academic culture. This change should be a commitment to inclusion and recognition of diverse contributions to ensure equity within the academy by the individual stakeholders and the institution (Bystydzienski et al., 2017).

### **Recommendations for higher education institutions**

As a researcher dedicated to building a pipeline of women leaders in higher education, the following are recommendations for the institutions based on my findings through the narrative inquiry. Institutions must prioritize diversifying the leadership at all levels of the organization. According to Kellerman and Rhode (2014), “A wide array of research finds that the most important factor in ensuring equal access to leadership

opportunities is a commitment to that objective, which is reflected in workplace priorities, policies, and rewards structures” (p. 32). This study revealed several ways in which higher education institutions can promote, recruit, and retain women college presidents. Table 5.2 is a summary of these suggestions.

Table 5.2: The conceptual framework prescribes how patriarchal organizations must combat leadership barriers for women by intentionally removing the gendered bias.

<b><u>Institutional Barriers</u></b>	<b><u>Overcoming Patriarchy</u></b>
Developing Women Leaders	Create a pipeline of leaders through a Developmental and Career Leadership Program
Recruiting Women Leaders	Hire a search firm and coordinate diverse search committee.
Retaining Women Leaders	Competitive salary and benefits package; Governing Board mandated annual diversity training.

To build a pipeline of women leaders within the academy, the institutions must develop a leadership program that provides aspiring leaders' professional development. This program will prepare a diverse group of future leaders; diversity must be a part of its overall mission. The focus should consist of two key components. The first component would be opportunities for personal goal attainment through institutional level projects. The second component would be a mentoring program with senior leadership within the institution.

Findings from this study indicated that each of the five presidents worked on special projects that ultimately helped shape the leader they are today. These projects also provided the women the confidence to lead an institution and gain the respect of their colleagues. Institutions should create a program that provides aspiring leaders within the institution to work on projects that can expand their leadership skills and solve the

institution's most significant problems. The projects should develop and ultimately display the leadership and decision-making abilities of the aspiring leader. Research has found that woman leaders must internalize a leadership identity, which is an iterative process. An aspiring leader must take decisive action, such as working on a project or convening meetings, that affirms themselves as a leader. In addition, the interaction with others informs the sense of self as the leader and her fitness in that role.

In a gendered institution, men employees are expected to provide strategic planning and lead the department while viewing the women as the employee that gets the job done (Ridgeway, 2013). Moreover, in reference to projects, research has indicated that men seem to be given the strategic projects while women are assigned more operational projects (Ridgeway, 2013). To alleviate this gendered bias, the institution must also develop a clear rubric for the development assignments, including evaluation criteria and metrics. The individuals should also be given clear guidance on the expectations and what a successful outcome would resemble. This should alleviate the bias in the assignment of a project and scoring of the results upon completion.

Chris relayed a story of the benefits of working on and successfully completing a project, which led to leadership positions within the institution. She worked on the flagship journal in which she had to convert the publication to entirely online. This project displayed her leadership talents as well as change management skills. It resulted in future opportunities across campus, which created the path for her leadership journey. Chris stated that she would not have been asked to be the department chair if she did not have that opportunity. Another example of the benefits of leading a project was revealed by Christine, in which she worked on the contracts for distance education. This resulted

in her obtaining the confidence to develop and lead a program across the institution in many locations.

If aspiring leaders were given the opportunity to do these types of institutional projects early in their careers, the pipeline would be built for future leadership opportunities. As a person's leadership abilities grow and challenging assignments expand, others' affirmation gives the aspiring leader the courage and fortitude to step outside of their comfort zone. Many women need this affirmation before they would consider applying for a leadership position.

The second component is a structured mentoring program, which would provide practical advice from a mentor, build relationships with senior administrators, and offer support as the mentee navigates their journey into leadership. In an effort to encourage aspiring women leaders, senior management must ensure the leaders within their institution are engaged and stay that way. This engagement would be accomplished by recognizing the aspiring leaders early and often while linking their individual goals with the institution's strategic plan.

Findings indicated a strong support system was crucial to participants. Institutions should develop a mentorship program in which senior administrators are matched with aspiring leaders. This program would be an excellent way for the aspiring leaders to gain practical advice and support from the mentor (Brown 2005). As stated earlier, mentors are invaluable in advancing a woman's career through the academy and increasing the number of women college presidents (Brown 2005). All five college presidents reflected on the impact mentors had on their journey and the advantages of having a mentor.

Christine succinctly stated that the mentors should have the experience, “been there done that.” The presidents learned from observing other leaders, which increased the social and academic confidence and empowered the women presidents to make difficult decisions. When Lee was faculty, she was selected by the provost to work in his office because they were in a program in which he was her mentor. He learned her strengths, abilities, and leadership skills through the program and was confident she would be successful in his office. In fact, he was so determined; he would not take “no” for an answer and offered her a position in which she could define her role, as long as it was in his office. Lee further stated in our interview that the institution’s president mentored one of her colleagues at that time, and that colleague is now a president at another institution.

A well-functioning developmental and career mentoring program requires institutional strategic planning and buy-in from the organization to connect the senior administrators with those aspiring leaders. This program will increase the mentees knowledge and build leadership skills through observation. In addition, through collaboration of mentor and mentee, they should develop future goals. The institutions should have policies outlining the extent to which the mentor and mentee interact with each other and what milestones should be achieved throughout the process. The mentoring program would have success if implemented specifically to increase diversity in the leadership pipeline.

The pipeline provides a system for identifying when someone is ready to move to the next leadership level. These employees, developed and nurtured through the professional development programs, should result in an excellent applicant pool when the

institution is searching for a leader. Indeed, pipelines ensure institutions always have access to top talent that understands and embraces the institutions' unique culture (Dutta-Moscato, Gopalakrishnan, Lotze & Becich, 2014).

One of the governing board's responsibilities is to recruit and hire the president (Mastracci & Bowman, 2015). Another responsibility is to promote diversity within the institution (Schwartz, 2010). Because most of the governing board members are men, the literature supports the premise of gender bias in the college president hiring process (Davison & Burke, 2000; Fiske & Talor, 1984; Kezar & Posselt, 2020). Thus, due to the organizations gendered bias, there is no guarantee that a woman would be hired for the president position even if they were in the pipeline. Therefore, it should be an institutional policy that an outside executive search firm is employed to conduct an unbiased search of the institution's president.

The search firm would ensure policies and procedures are established to guard against gender bias in the candidate pool. These firms identify candidates from a diverse candidate pool, which helps to eliminate unconscious biases based on age, gender, race, or ethnicity. In addition, institutional board policy should ensure the search firm advertises in places that are fostering high-performing women, such as professional organizations, women's colleges, as well as the leadership pipeline developed at the institution. Indeed, utilizing a search firm would encourage a more diverse pool of candidates.

Research supports that the evaluator's gender is significant in the hiring practices. Social psychologists have been prolific in the literature regarding stereotyping the candidate if they are a gender different than their own (Davison & Burke, 2000; Fiske &

Talor, 1984; Kezar & Posselt, 2020). Hence, the governing board should assemble a diverse hiring committee that would include some board members and some executive leadership team members. The committee should consist of different races, gender, and ethnicity. Traditionally, leadership has been equated to masculinity; thus, using a search firm and assembling a diverse hiring committee should alleviate gender bias in presidential recruitment and hiring.

In reference to the governing board, building and maintaining a healthy relationship constructed on mutual trust and respect is compulsory to retaining the president. A few of the presidents discussed the way in which the patriarchal governing board treated the women leaders. One president stated that based on lessons learned from her first presidency, prior to accepting the president position at the second institution, she insisted on an agreement of duties; those that belong to the governing board and those of the president.

All participants agreed that the governing board's relationship is one of the most important in their position. Therefore, the governing board should remember their role and not impede on the decision making that is incumbent of the president. A few of the presidents recounted stories in which the governing board members made decisions outside of their purview, treated the women presidents with disrespect, or treated them as described by one president like they “didn’t want to hit a girl.” Therefore, the institution should put in the procedures that the governing board provides regular, clear, and most importantly, constructive feedback to the president, which is essential for the president’s growth and professional development. Moreover, the governing board should be open to regular, clear, and most importantly, constructive feedback from the president as they



form a relationship built on trust and rapport. Research has confirmed, feedback from the governing board can significantly enhance the president's leadership effectiveness (Armentrout, 2017). I am sure the same can be true if the board was open to hearing from the president.

All governing board members should be mandated to participate in an annual diversity training. Research indicates that when individuals participate in this type of training, there are long-lasting positive effects on diversity-related outcomes (Lindsey, King, Hebl & Levine, 2015). However, the key to diversity training's effectiveness is the participant's motivation to learn and empathize. Other than adhering to the mandate, the board members' motivation should be to prevent civil rights violations, increase inclusion, and promote better teamwork (Lindsey, King, Hebl & Levine, 2015).

Finally, the woman president's retention would most likely be achieved if she received a fair and competitive salary and benefits package (Bilen-Green & Jacobson, 2008). One president relayed a story that she was provided very little annual leave time at the first university in which she was president. As she began to hire her executive team, she found they were offered more annual leave days than she was provided. She asked the governing board chair why there was a difference, and it was simply because she did not ask for more. Of course, this perceived deception by omission deteriorated the trust and mutual respect between the president and the governing board chair.

The governing board should dismantle the gender bias by recognizing the fact that society continues to discount women as leaders. Women still make 80% of men's salary for the same job (AAUW, 2020). To retain the woman college president, the governing board should ensure they provide a competitive salary with benefits by conducting a

salary study of all presidents within the institution's type and size. The average of those salaries should be offered to the president.

Gendered organizations establish and condone social and organizational practices to create gender inequities in leadership (Whitford, 2020). Higher education should be a workplace of inclusivity, productivity, and collegiality. The academy leadership should reflect the student body in which they serve and be inclusive. The most crucial element that must change at the institutional level is the support of women and their career trajectories.

This study identified the importance of exposing aspiring women leaders to leadership opportunities, supporting the women as they ascend through the leadership pipeline, and fostering the leadership skills needed to oversee a higher education institution. The skills can be attained by developing a program that provides professional development and mentorship. The recruitment of women would be through this established leadership pipeline. Also, utilizing a search firm and forming a diverse search committee would safeguard gender diversity in the hiring. Finally, retention for women presidents would be realized if the governing board had clearly defined duties and allowed the president the latitude of leading the institution. In addition, the governing board should provide a competitive salary and be mandated to participate in diversity training every year. Indeed, higher education is a gendered institution. However, it is incumbent upon the academy to develop programs and policies to alleviate the gendered bias that many patriarchal hierarchies encounter.

### **Recommendation for future research**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experiences of women presidents in higher education who navigated gendered institutions to achieve their presidency roles. As more women enter the academy, more knowledge must be gathered to understand if specific professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors had implications for a woman's career to progress to the president's position. Previous research (Bilen-Green & Jacobson, 2008; Hannum et al., 2014; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016) focused on the shortage of women in senior administrative positions in higher education but did not adequately address women's experiences as they navigate gendered barriers within the academy. Institutions must understand women's experiences who navigated those barriers to attract and retain more women leaders.

My research consisted of stories of five women, in different stages of their lives, with very different backgrounds, as presidents in very different institutions. In the scope of this study, the five participants fit a narrative inquiry study. Future research could expand the sample size as more women become leaders within the academy. By increasing the sample size, the researcher will have the ability to see whether the journeys of all women in higher education are comparable, regardless of institution type and funding, or are there more stories still yet to be told? As Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (2005) stated, by illuminating the complexity of the unique experiences of more women college presidents, hopefully the reader will find one narrative in which they will see themselves reflected.

In addition, not included in the research are interviews with the governing boards or search firms that oversee the president and the hiring process. Both groups would

provide insight into their perspective of hiring women into the presidency position. All five presidents discussed the governing board's importance in the president's success and finding the right fit for the institution and the culture. The interviews with the governing board members would provide insight into lessons learned with previous presidents from their perspective and the skill set needed to be successful in the position. Search firms would be outstanding resources to determine what aspiring college presidents need to know regarding the development of their curriculum vitae, interview process, and what institutions are searching for in a president. Alex used the search firm to assist her in deciding whether to seek a presidential position.

There is evidence in the literature that there is an overwhelming amount of undervaluing of race, gender, and ethnicity (American Association of University Women, 2020; American Council on Education, 2020). Research should be conducted on the race and ethnicity of women college presidents within the confines of institutional type and the barriers women encounter within the academy. Although the selection of women for college presidents is on the rise, the juxtaposition of race, gender and ethnicity with institution type shapes the experiences of the journey. The research will reveal whether more women college presidents are chosen for associate colleges or special focus two-year institutions compared to the master's colleges and universities or the doctoral universities. The institution types have a different status, and the president earns significantly less in salary and benefits at the associates or two-year institutions.

### **Concluding remarks**

Researchers play an essential role in bringing previously excluded voices to the foreground of public attention. This study sought to understand five women presidents'

life experiences in higher education who navigated gendered institutions to achieve their position of president. As more women enter the academy, more knowledge must be gathered to understand if specific professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors had implications for a woman's career to progress to the president's position. Previous research focused on the shortage of women in senior administrative positions in higher education but did not adequately address women's experiences as they navigate gendered barriers within the academy. Institutions must understand the experiences of women who navigated those barriers to attract and retain more women leaders in the near future.

After analysis, this study concludes that the five women strategically used robust support systems, consisting of mentors, executive coaches, and family. Indeed, the five women college presidents' strategies to assist them in their rise through the ranks to become president included mentors at every stage of their journey. This strong foundation of support was critical to participants' success throughout their journey.

The presidents also suggest that all aspiring women college presidents should invoke self-efficacy by developing themselves professionally by attending workshops or programs to assist with their leadership skills. Through self-efficacy, women leaders can ensure they pursue specific professional advancement goals and activities, opportunities, and behaviors that can significantly impact their career progression to the president's position. Aspiring leaders should also take advantage of observing other leaders and learn from their successes and mistakes. The five presidents described observation as the most impactful professional development. Finally, to overcome the gendered organization and secure a leadership position within the academy, the presidents' advice is to become

indispensable, take on additional responsibilities, and have your voice heard when sitting at a table in which decisions are being made.

This institutional bias impedes the woman leader's momentum from moving forward in the academy (Diehl, 2014). University presidents face multiple competing demands to lead higher education institutions successfully. The job requires social skills because they must work with and report to such a large stakeholder group (Ross & Green, 2000). The presidents agreed, relationships with constituents are critical for a college president's success or failure. Building and maintaining a strong relationship with the governing board, executive team, faculty, and other women leaders will be invaluable. The cornerstone of the relationships should be trust, mutual respect, and transparent communication.

Institutions can dismantle gender discrimination and unconscious bias through the hiring practices used to promote, recruit, and retain women leaders. A pipeline of women leaders can be developed through mentoring programs as well as professional development within the institution. These women will be proven leaders and understand the culture of the institution. Therefore, the recruitment of future women leaders should be obtained through this pipeline within the organization.

One of the governing board's responsibilities is to recruit and retain the institution's president. In an effort to remove the unconscious bias of the governing board, who are mostly men, a search firm should be used, and a diverse hiring committee should be established. The hiring committee should be of different genders and races, consisting of some governing board members and some executive team members. Mandating the governing board to attend annual diversity training, and providing a

competitive salary, will help retain the woman college president. These institutional changes will lead to a cultural shift within the gendered organization and ensure more women are in the leadership pipeline and ultimately obtain a higher education leadership position.

The five women college presidents' experiences as they navigated gendered higher education institutions were similar irrespective of their institution-type. Each of their journeys started at different points in their career; some started right after graduate school, others started following an established career. However, they all navigated the gendered organization by being tenacious, communicative, and learning as much as they could throughout the journey. Much remains to be studied on the experiences of women leaders. However, exploring women's experiences and challenges within leadership is valuable to promote successes and remove the academy's gendered barriers. This research was performed to advance more women into the role of the college presidency within higher education.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

#### **Introduction**

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As we previously discussed, I am conducting a research study to understand the experiences of women presidents as they navigated gendered higher education institutions. You have stated that you meet these qualifications and are interested in helping me with my research. I am going to ask you a series of questions covering your career path to presidency, barriers you may have faced in your career, and individuals who were influential early in your career.

Do you mind if I record the audio and video of this interview, so I may reference it again as I write my research findings? Do you mind if I take written notes as we talk? You can end the interview at any point any time if you wish. Feel free to ask me questions for clarification as we go through this process. We will limit the interview to 90-minutes as scheduled.

#### **Interview Day #1**

**Basics: First, I would like to get some basic information – mostly demographic, but also some information about your personal situation.**

1. Your name?
2. Gender you most identify with.
3. Race you most identify with?
4. Age? How old were you when took over presidency?
5. Your current title?
6. Your field of study?
7. How long have you been in higher education? How many years as a president?
8. Number of children? Elder care?

**Your Journey: Now I would like to focus on your journey to the presidency. This next set of questions will be about how you entered in to the academe.**

1. Tell me about how you decided to enter the academe. If you would, talk about your undergraduate major, any particularly influential professors, your decision to go to graduate school, and how/when you decided to become faculty.
2. Tell me about the timeline of earning tenure.
  - a. How did your teaching efficacy evolve?
    - i. Probe: How would you describe your relationship with your students?
  - b. How would you describe your research accomplishments? If no research, move to next question.
  - c. How did you decide which service opportunities to pursue? Why did you select the ones you did? Which ones were assigned to you?
    - i. Probe: Male/Female? Did you volunteer or were you volunteered? Were they useful in your career or scholarly work?
3. Tell me about your journey to become an academic administrator? (provide examples – glass ceiling, glass cliff, tokenism, male organizational culture)
  - a. Probe: How did you overcome them?
  - b. Through all of this, how did your colleagues treat you?
  - c. How did you know you would be a leader?
4. Did you face institutional barriers – through policies or people – that made it more difficult for you to advance through the ranks, compared to your male counterparts?

**Your Position as President: This next series of questions will focus on your experience as a college president.**

1. How would you describe your job as president of a university?
2. How were the first six months when you assumed your position?
  - a. Probe: Was it what you expected? What surprised you?
3. Who did you perceive as your detractors? How did you approach them in your work?
4. Tell me about your relationship with the governing board?
  - a. Probe: What are some ideas that you found worked or did not work to cultivate that relationship?
5. Describe your relationship with your executive board?
  - a. Probe: How did you establish that relationship?
6. How would you describe your relationship with faculty?
7. How would you describe the faculty senate presence on campus?
8. How do you work with faculty and/or staff unions? (if no unions, move to #9)
  - a. Probe: What have you found works for the relationship? Have you worked with them before?
9. Describe one of your biggest successes early in your career.
  - a. Probe: What lessons did you learn, and how did it contribute to your greater success?
10. Describe a time that you consider a failure and what did you learn from that?
  - a. Probe: Were there one or two decisions early in your career that you wish you could take back?

11. What is one of the toughest decisions you have had to make and how did it impact your life?
  - a. Probe: What process did you go through to reach that decision? Looking back, was it still the right decision?
12. Describe the most impactful professional development experiences you had in your ascent to president. What were they?
13. Did you have a mentor or mentors throughout your career?
  - a. Probe: How did you choose them?
  - b. Probe: Were they women/men? Do you believe it must be a woman? Was it helpful?

## **Interview Day #2**

**Today I want to focus on your thoughts about leadership.**

1. How would you define a good leader in higher education?
  - a. Probe: Define what a great leader is to you.
  - b. Do you think leadership can be taught or is it something intrinsic in specific individuals?
2. How do you think leaders are developed?
3. What is the biggest challenge facing leadership in higher education today?
  - a. Probe: What keeps you up at night?
4. What is one mistake you witness leaders making more frequently than others?
  - a. Probe: Are those mistakes different by gender?

5. What are some strategies that can help women achieve a more prominent role in their institution?
6. When a woman shows up to work, what must she be cognizant of as she leads?
7. What do you think is the most significant barrier to female leadership?
8. What will be the biggest challenge for the generation of women behind you?

**And, lastly, I want to tap into your wisdom and ask for some words of advice.**

1. How would you describe some of your ah-ha moments in your career?
  - a. Probe: What do you know now that you wish you knew as you became a leader?
2. If you had to start over from scratch, knowing what you know now, how would you do it differently?
  - a. Probe: Would you still go into administration? Would you still follow the same path?
3. Do you think women in the South/Midwest/North/West Coast lends itself to a unique perspective with regards to leading?
  - a. Probe: How would you define it?
  - b. Probe: Have you ever worked in other regions?
    - i. If so, what are some differences you faced?
    - ii. If not, do you have colleagues that may have different challenges than you?
4. What career advice would you offer future higher education leaders? How should aspirant women college presidents prepare?
5. What question do you wish I had asked but did not?

6. Final Words of advice.

**Interview Conclusion Script:**

Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today and answer my questions. I am grateful to learn from you and your experiences. Your story will be a great asset to this study. As discussed, I will be using pseudonyms for all participants and will remove all personal information including your name, contact information, and institution names to protect your identity. I will email you the transcript to review and allow you to confirm or edit the information as you prefer before it is included in my final dissertation. If possible, I will ask you to respond within three weeks of receiving the email. Do you have any final questions before we end the interview? Again, thank you so much for your participation.