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Intertwining Personal and Professional Domains: Examining Challenges, Strategies, and the Impact of Mentoring on Careers of Women in Higher Education Senior Leadership

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CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND THE IMPACT OF MENTORING ON THE

CAREERS OF WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION SENIOR LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

Women are underrepresented in higher education senior leadership. Though this work focuses on senior leadership roles, it is important to note that this underrepresentation reaches beyond senior leadership roles and impacts all college and university employment levels, including recruiting and retaining qualified and diverse faculty members. The challenge is to identify push factors, glass ceilings, and other barriers that prevent women's equitable representation. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences women in higher education senior leadership roles identified as they navigated their career paths, including identifying personal, professional, and institutional challenges women face and the strategies they employed. Additionally, this study examined the role mentoring and mentorship programs played in addressing the challenges women in senior leadership roles face.

This phenomenological qualitative study employed a feminist theoretical framework to examine the lived experiences of women currently in higher education senior leadership positions. Using an online survey, data were collected from 26 women. These women were asked to participate in a small focus group discussion. Of the 26 women, 13 participated in semi-structured small focus group interviews to answer follow-up questions and further discuss their experiences. An interesting nuance of their lived experiences shared was how personal and professional challenges were intertwined. This intertwining was also reflected in the participants' approach to their strategies to address these challenges. Findings suggest that implementing a mentoring network program will create an equitable representation of women and positively influence future women leaders of higher education.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"I wonder if we as women in leadership are working in spaces that we have created, or are
we living and working into the vision and understanding of what men have cast."
~Participant – focus group 2

Introduction

Women are underrepresented in higher education senior leadership (Airini et al.,

2011; Brock, 2010; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Hannum et al., 2015; Jones & Palmer,

2011; Miller et al., 2018; Smith & Slate, 2018), holding less than 30% of senior

leadership roles across colleges and universities. However, underrepresentation is not

limited to this group; women of color, people who are disabled, and people of other

marginalized groups are substantially less visible in positions of senior leadership than

their white male counterparts (American Council on Education, 2017). Although there

have been many advances regarding equity since the 1960s, women's underrepresentation

in senior leadership roles is not limited to higher education (Cook & Glass, 2014). A

paucity of representation of women in leadership is seen across industries and roles.

Analyzing the paths of those few who hold leadership roles can serve to identify lived

experiences of female leaders in higher education.

Background of the Issue

National Context

While there have been many advances in gender equity in the past century, there

is still a significant underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. After the Civil

War, the quest for gender equity in the United States increased. Beginning in 1869,

several western states and territories granted women the right to vote (Hildenbrand,

2000). However, a constitutional amendment giving women the right to vote was denied

in 1878 and was not passed for over 40 years with the passing of the Nineteenth

Amendment (Hildenbrand, 2000). The Women's Rights Movement lost steam for a few years, regaining momentum in the 1960s as more women rejected the traditional role of housewife and desired to enter the workforce. Congress passed the Equal Pay Act in 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, protecting women from discriminatory hiring practices based on gender (Heath, 1981). Decades after the Equal Pay Act, women are still struggling with discrimination and equity in pay. As of 2017, about four out of every ten women have been discriminated against in the workplace because of gender (Parker & Funk, 2017). In 2010, President Obama declared April 20th as National Equal Pay Day, recognizing that despite years of progress women are still not paid as much as men are in the workforce. April 20th was chosen because this date on the calendar illustrates the number of weeks into the year women must work to earn the equivalent of their male counterparts (Webb, 2010). As of 2018, women make on average of approximately 80 cents for every dollar paid to men. Although not in the scope of this research, pay inequity can be a factor to women being underrepresented in the workforce.

Fortune 500 companies, federal and state governments, higher education, and other industries in the United States are currently evaluating the impact of women's underrepresentation in senior leadership roles in their industries (Smith & Slate, 2018). Based on the data from 16 Fortune 500 companies in 2018, women represent 20.5% of senior managers and only 6.4% of CEOs. (see Figure 1.1) Likewise, women are underrepresented in government elected offices (Noticeably, women of color are substantially less visible in government elected offices.). (see Figure 1.2) This underrepresentation of women is evident in higher education as well. (see Figure 1.3)

Figure 1.1

Gender Disparity in the Leadership of Fortune 500 Companies (2018).

GENDER DISPARITY IN THE LEADERSHIP OF THE FORTUNE 500

SENIOR MANAGERS
20.5% WOMEN
MEN
79.5%

CEOs
6.4%
93.6%
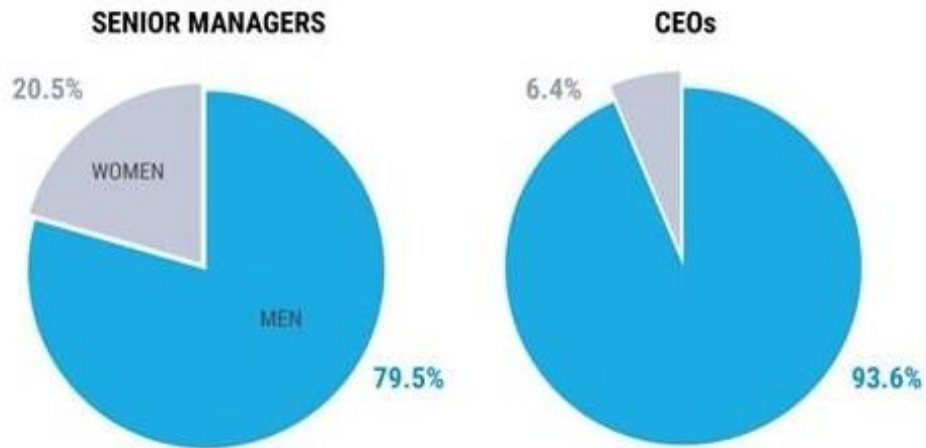
Figure 1.2

Women in United States Elected Offices (2018).

Women in U.S. Elected Offices

Percentage of men in role · Percentage of white women in role · Percentage of women of color in role

Office			
President	100.0%		
U.S. Congress	81.0%	13.0%	
Governors	88.0%	12.0%	
State legislators	75.0%	20.0%	
Mayors of 100 largest cities	81.0%	13.0%	
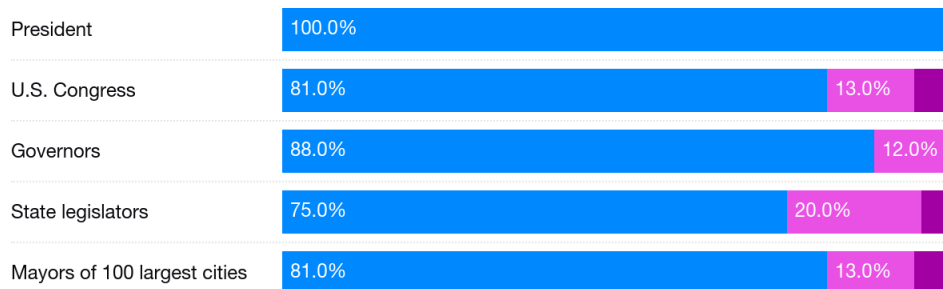
Figure 1.3

College Presidents, by Gender (2018).

College Presidents, by Gender

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

● Men   ● Women
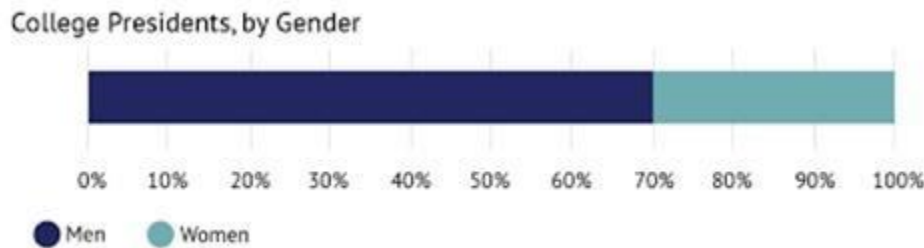
One of the primary challenges in this process is identifying glass ceilings (Jones & Palmer, 2011) and other barriers that prevent women's equitable representation in their respective fields. DeFrank-Cole et al. (2014) defined glass ceilings as unseen yet officially acknowledged obstacles that prevent women and members of minoritized communities from advancing in rank in a profession regardless of their credentials and achievements. Gender role stereotypes, stereotype threat, lack of female role models/mentors, childcare, and other caregiver duties are significant challenges women face when seeking leadership roles (Ely et al., 2011). However, identifying these glass ceilings is not enough. For women to be represented equally in authority roles, it is crucial to address the challenges women face on the path to senior leadership roles in Fortune 500 companies, federal and state governments, and other industries, especially in higher education.

Situational Context

Women, representing 50.8% of the United States population, are well represented in the workforce (United States Census Bureau, 2020). According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, women represent 47% of the overall workforce and represent 55.3% of those employed in higher education (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). In

addition, more women in the United States are pursuing and earning more associates, bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees than in any other time in history, representing more than half of the students enrolled in colleges and universities (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). (see Figure 1.4) Although women are well represented in the workforce and currently represent a more significant percentage of the student population in higher education, their representation is not reflected in women's advancement to senior leadership roles in organizations, including higher education.

Figure 1.4

University degrees earned by males versus females in the U.S. during the year 2014.
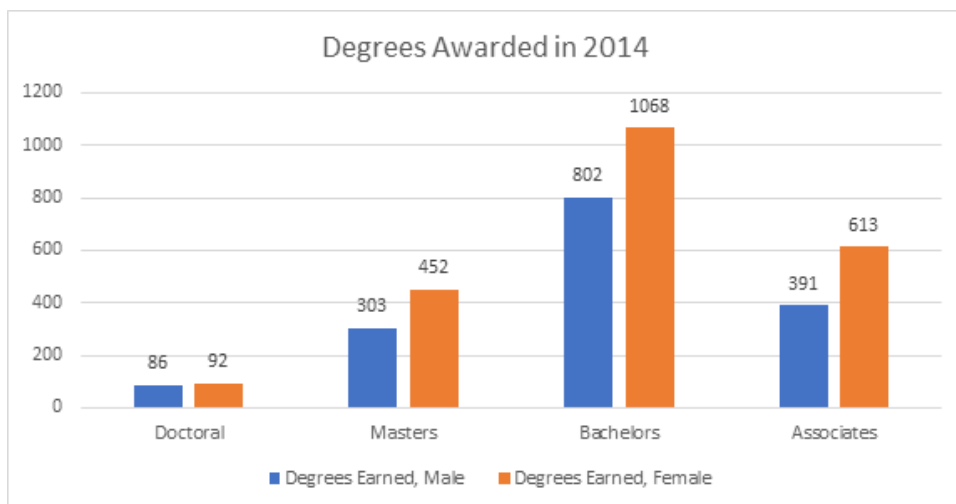
The American Council on Education (ACE) released a report in 2017 on the Status of Women in Higher Education. As of 2014, women represented 51.69% of all earned doctoral degrees awarded in the United States, with the number of doctoral degrees earned by women predicted to be 52.45% by 2024. In addition, women represented 59.87% of all earned graduate degrees awarded, with the number of graduate degrees earned by women predicted to be 58.32% by 2024. Similarly, women represented 57.11% of all earned bachelor degrees awarded, with the number of bachelor degrees

earned by women predicted to be 58.15% by 2024. Finally, women represented 51.06% of all earned associate degrees awarded, with the number of associate degrees earned by women predicted to be 64.60% by 2024. See Figure 1.5.

Figure 1.5

Projected earned degrees by males versus females in the U.S. by the year 2024
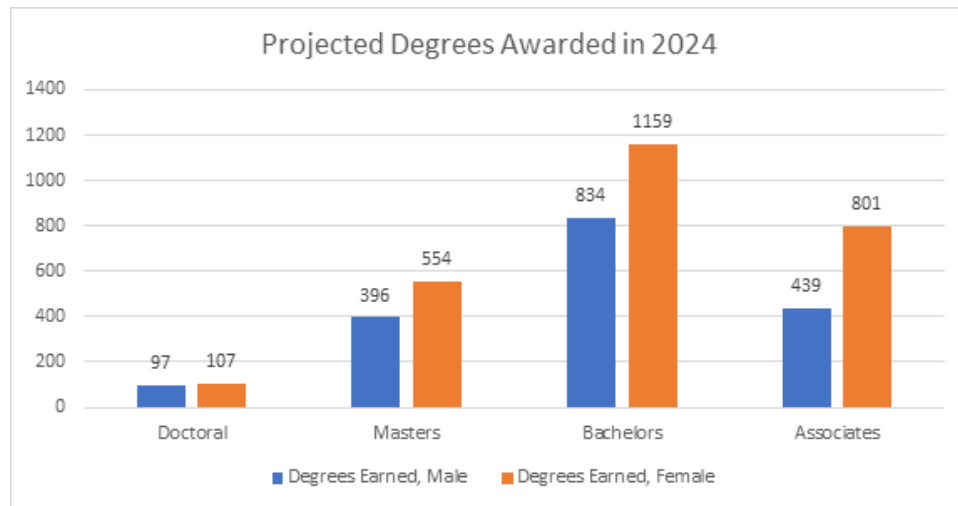
Even though there are more women than men currently pursuing an advanced degree in the U.S. (with this number projected to grow), the number of women in organizational leadership roles continues to lag significantly behind the number of men (Eagly, 2007; Madden, 2011). In higher education in the United States, women represent less than 26.4% of senior leadership roles across colleges and universities (Cook, 2012; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Gallant, 2014). With the number of women achieving high credentials and qualifications, it must be examined why relatively few of them hold positions of authority.

The disparity between the higher number of women who earn advanced college degrees and women's underrepresentation in leadership roles is problematic. This underrepresentation reaches beyond senior leadership roles and impacts all college and

university employment levels, including recruitment, hiring, developing, and retaining qualified and diverse faculty members. The representation gap is on display to higher education student bodies as well, who continue to see leadership positions dominated by men, perpetuating the belief of younger women that a primary challenge to advancement for women is their gender. This disparity is not merely a numbers game; rather, there is significant concern regarding the impact of the lack of female perspectives and voices where key decisions are being made.

Currently, colleges and universities face significant challenges, including the rising cost of tuition (see Figure 1.6), declining enrollment (see Figure 1.7), declining completion rates, the role of technology in the classroom, the global, social, and political climate, and the COVID-19 global pandemic (Hemelt & Marcotte, 2011; Polikoff et al., 2020). To address and solve these challenges will require a diversity of thought, the recognition and open-mindedness to more than one way to approach an idea (König et al., 2011); this includes of the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Recognition of the importance of open-mindedness is essential in addressing diversity issues at higher education institutions' leadership levels. To do so, those in a position of power must be willing to acknowledge and encourage different perspectives, which, in turn, could lead to creative and critical solutions to these challenges (Thomas, 2018). Hemmings & Evans (2018) argued that an increase in the diversity of thought increases an organization's (1) recruitment and retention; (2) professional development; (3) problem solving; (4) risk mitigation; and (5) understanding of internal and external constituents. Approaching the challenges colleges and universities face today with a diversity of thought has the potential of finding strategic and creative solutions to the

rising cost of tuition, declining enrollment, and declining completion rates. Without women in positions of leadership providing their perspective, diversity of thought is missing, and the opportunity to be open-minded to the experience of women is not present.

Figure 1.6

U.S. Higher Education Enrollment (2011-2019)
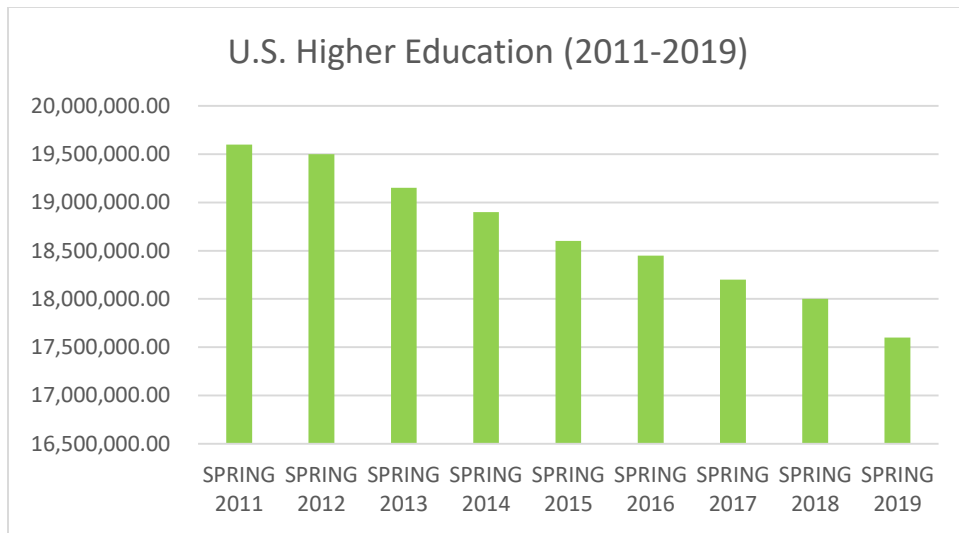
Figure 1.7

Published Tuition and Fees (1990-2020)
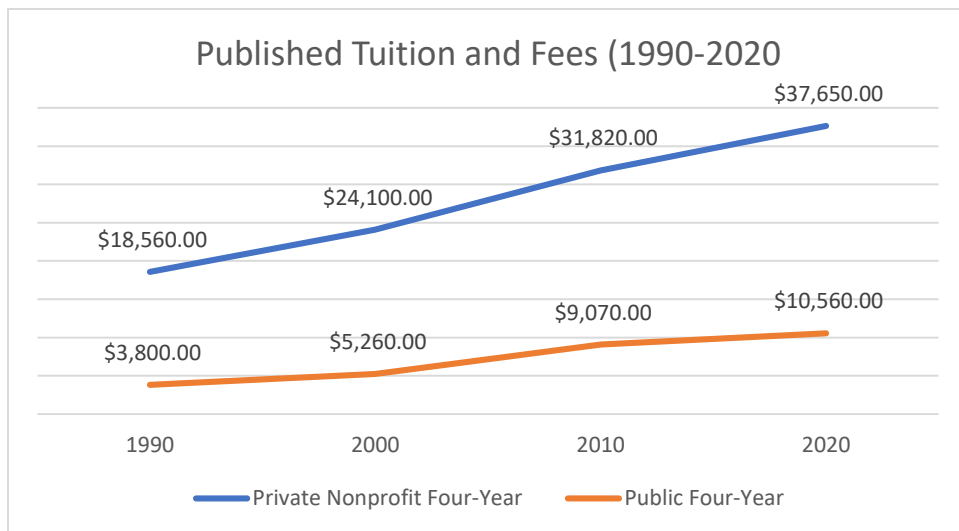
To address this challenge, women in leadership positions can serve as role models and mentors, therefore, empowering younger women, which in turn has the potential to help close the representation gap. One of the most critical challenges related to the underrepresentation of women in higher education senior leadership roles relates to the impact mentors have on less experienced individuals. Having a mentor is associated with increased success throughout an individual's career (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Mentors can increase a mentee's professional success by sharing real lived experiences in the field. Furthermore, mentors can increase the interest and motivation of the mentee by acting as a sounding board, making connections and networking opportunities, and serving as a sponsor for career advancement (Axelrod, 2019). However, this suggestion has a serious barrier, the lack of female mentors. Fewer women in elevated roles mean fewer female mentors are available to guide female protégés through existing institutional hierarchical structures and to help them forge new paths for female leaders' continued success in academia. Less likely to identify female mentors, women in higher education seeking advancement opportunities must look to male counterparts to provide this guidance. Harris (2019) maintains that male managers report feeling too nervous about being accused of harassment, therefore, shy away from workplace activities. In response to the #metoo movement, increasing numbers of men are reporting less willingness to mentor female colleagues. Therefore, in addition to fewer female mentors available and male mentors withdrawing their support, the mentoring pool is shrinking further, creating more challenges for women to gain the valuable insight to achieve higher education leadership positions.

An analysis conducted by Butrymowicz and D'Amato (2020) revealed that more than 50 public and nonprofit colleges and universities have closed or merged since 2015. Furthermore, they state that more than 500 colleges and universities are currently showing signs of financial crisis. With so many institutions in financial crisis and on the verge of closing, it is crucial to solve the issues facing higher education today. Perhaps even more important, however, is addressing the current state for the longevity and development of higher education as an industry in the future. Leaders of today will shape the policies, experiences, and outcomes of future consumers of higher education. Therefore, it is vital to focus on forward-facing factors, such as the impact of lack of mentoring (Betts & Suarez, 2011) and the impact on the diversity of thought (König et al., 2011). Although not in the scope of this research, identifying and addressing the challenges women face on the path to senior leadership roles in higher education may lead to addressing and potentially gaining further understanding regarding the underrepresentation of people of color, people who are disabled, and people of other marginalized groups.

Personal Context

As a woman working in a university setting, my career path has led me to seek higher education leadership opportunities. With twenty-four years of experience, I have witnessed many of the challenges colleges and universities face today described in the previous section. I understand the implications of rising tuition costs, declining enrollment, and retention rates and how they directly affect pay, benefits, and job security. I recognize the need for diversity of thought and qualified mentors to address and solve these complicated challenges.

Arriving at my current position in higher education required me to overcome many of my own personal challenges. As a divorced, single mother of four daughters without many options, I had to turn to family, friends, parish, and even the government to provide the basic necessities for my family. The challenges of those days included everything from keeping the lights on, to how to get around without a vehicle. As my daughters entered their high school years, I realized a few things. First, I wanted my daughters to have more options in life than I had, and to do that, they needed a college education.

Additionally, our current situation would not afford them a college education. That coupled with the fact that no one in my family had ever gone to college, I had no working knowledge of even getting my daughters registered in college courses. At that time, I started looking for jobs in local colleges and universities, hoping to figure out the admission process. I accepted an entry-level position in the registrar's office at a local university and began the task of learning everything I could as to how the university worked.

Wanting to be a good role model provided another challenge. Fearful that I was not smart enough to take college courses, I enrolled in a course thinking that if I worked hard, I could earn a C as that was average, and I at least had average intelligence. My daughters would see me address and overcome the challenge, and the message to them would be that they could address and overcome the challenge as well. This strategy has paid off as my oldest daughter has earned a masters in early intervention in deaf education, my second daughter has earned a Ph.D. in industrial organizational psychology, my third daughter just earned an Ed.D. in collaborative high impact

instruction, and my youngest daughter has earned a bachelors in communication studies. This strategy has paid off for me as well; I not only did better than average in my first course, but I also continued to take courses, and I went on to earn a bachelors in contemporary studies with a minor in religious studies, a masters in educational technologies, a masters in management, an MBA, and I am completing an Ed.D. in collaborative high impact instruction. My education has afforded me the opportunities of vertical movement within the university with the intention of pursuing leadership positions.

Therefore, as a woman in higher education, I inherently seek to benefit from identifying and addressing the challenges women face on the path to leadership roles in higher education. However, this study is not to serve individual women or me but rather to broaden the view of diversity of thought by inviting women into discussing their (under)-representation.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences women in higher education senior leadership roles identified as they navigated their career paths. Components of these lived experiences included identifying personal, professional, and institutional challenges women face when navigating their higher education careers. Juxtaposed with these challenges, the purpose of this study was to identify women's current strategies they use to address workplace challenges. In turn, this study aimed to extend the conversation for women in senior leadership roles in higher education by discussing concrete strategic recommendations for women on leadership trajectories and determining what impact mentorship has on the career

advancement of women pursuing higher education senior leadership roles. To add to the existing bodies of scholarship related to the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions in higher education, this study examined the challenges women in senior leadership positions reported and their strategies to address those challenges. Additionally, this study examined the role mentoring and mentorship programs played in addressing the challenges women in senior leadership roles face on their career paths.

Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this study was: *What lived experiences do women in higher education senior leadership roles identify as they navigate their career paths?* Several sub-questions also informed this study:

- What challenges do women in higher education senior leadership roles report they faced on their career paths?

- What strategies do women in higher education senior leadership roles report they employ to address the challenges on their career paths?

- How do women describe the mentoring they received as they rose to leadership positions?

- How do women describe their role in mentoring other women pursuing advancement?

Definition of Key Terms

For this study, the following terms are defined to guide the research discussion flow and maintain consistency in the subsequent chapters.

Double bind: Bateson, Jackson, Haley, & Weakland (1956) defined double bind as situations in which a person is placed in a position where they will be punished regardless of what they do or say.

Diversity of thought: König, Jöri & Knüsel (2011) defined a diversity of thought as recognition and open-mindedness to more than one way to approach an idea.

Gender role stereotypes: Best & Foster (2004) defined gender role stereotypes as psychological traits believed to be more characteristic of one gender to the other. These stereotypes are closely related to gender role ideologies, and they have often been used to account for variations in gender role ideologies across cultures.

Gender schemas: Priess & Hyde (2011) defined gender schemas as mental structures that organize incoming information according to gender categories and in turn lead people to perceive the world in terms of gender. They also help people to match their behavior with the behavior they believe is appropriate for their own gender.

Glass ceilings: DeFrank-Cole et al. (2014) defined glass ceilings as unseen yet officially acknowledged obstacles that prevent women and minorities from advancing in rank in a profession regardless of their credentials and their achievements.

Glass cliff: Haslam & Ryan (2008) defined glass cliff as the phenomenon of hiring women to senior leadership roles when the organization experienced consistently poor performance by the prior leader, or the organization is in crisis, when the chance of failure is higher.

Higher education senior leadership: For this study, Higher Education Senior Leadership Roles will be identified as women holding the title of

Chancellor, President, Vice President, Associate/Assistant Vice President,

Dean, and Associate Dean in a college or university.

Mentor: Hewlett (2013) defined mentor as a person who listens and

offers advice, guidance, and support as needed for professional purposes and

personal development.

Mentorship: Nicholl & Tracey (2007) defined mentorship as the

pairing of a senior, more experienced person, with a junior, less experienced

person focused on professional leadership and career context.

Pull factors: Daly & Dee (2006) defined pull factors as external factors

such as job opportunity, compensation, and location that induce academics to

move to new roles, positions, or institutions.

Push factors: Daly & Dee (2006) defined push factors as internal

factors that drive individuals from their role, position, or institution.

Stereotype threat: Steele & Aronson (1995) defined stereotype threat

as a psychological threat that occurs when one is in a situation for which a

negative stereotype about one's group applies. When a person of a

marginalized group acknowledges a negative stereotype exists in reference to

their group, they demonstrate apprehension in engaging in the activity.

Conclusion

As described in this chapter, great strides have been made toward gender equity in

the workplace, comprising approximately 45% of the workforce (Bureau of Labor

Statistics, 2020). Nevertheless, women remain underrepresented in senior leadership

positions in colleges and universities (Cook, 2012). This study gathers the stories and

experiences of twenty-six women in higher education senior leadership roles as they navigate their academic career paths. The study is organized into five chapters, beginning with the introduction, which includes the background of the issue by examining the national, situational, and personal context, purpose of the study, and research questions. Chapter two provides the justification and support behind the study through the conceptual and theoretical frameworks and a review of the relevant literature. Next, chapter three focuses on the methodology and analysis procedures. Then, chapter four describes the results and findings of the study. Finally, chapter five summarizes the findings of the study, revisits the research questions, and discusses the implications of the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter one presented the national, situational, and personal context for this study. This chapter provides a brief overview of the challenges women have faced in higher education and the personal, professional, and institutional barriers when pursuing senior leadership positions. The epistemological stance, ontological orientation, and theoretical framework provide the justification and support behind the study design. Additionally, this chapter presents a review of the literature related to women's underrepresentation in higher education senior leadership positions.

Epistemological Stance, Ontological Orientation, and Theoretical Framework

This section begins with a discussion of the overarching epistemological stance and theoretical framework guiding this study. To address women's underrepresentation in higher education senior leadership roles, we have to understand their experiences. This study drew on the perspectives stemming from social constructivism and feminist theoretical frameworks (Chambers, 2009; Wharton, 2009).

Epistemology is the study of knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through the epistemological stance, the researcher outlines how the knowledge is gathered and how it is justified. Epistemologically, feminist theories are primarily situated within the construction of knowledge within social constructivism and feminist theoretical frameworks (Wigginton & Lefrance, 2019). Social constructivism states that knowledge is co-constructed between the researcher and the research participants and is shaped by individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Taken together, this stance provides a framing to examine gender differences through human interaction as a part of a social

collective, when the understanding of gender experiences is informed by co-construction of knowledge and meaning.

Ontological orientation refers to the researcher's relationship to the reality of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research's ontological orientations are situated within the lived realities and identity struggles that woman face in colleges and universities interwoven with socially constructed power structures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study employed an online survey and focus group discussions to help co-construct new learning between the researcher and the participants. The online survey allowed participants to answer the questions anonymously, giving all participants an option to attend a focus group to expand the discussion of the challenges they encountered.

The theoretical framework is the lens through which to examine the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study employs a feminist theory seeking to address the social justice issues in our society. Similar to social constructivism, feminist frameworks argue that reality is known through the study of social structures. Feminist theories provided a theoretical framework for this study. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe a feminist research approach as one that "centers on women's diverse situations and the institutions that frame the situations" (p.27). Feminist frameworks center on women's diverse situations and the institutions that make them problematic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The feminist theory framework guided the intention and design of the online survey and focus group questions by challenging the injustices of current societal views.

Introduction to Relevant Literature

The following section provides a brief overview of the historical and current challenges women in higher education face in their pursuit of senior leadership roles. The current relevant scholarship is then organized into three major categories. These major categories begin with a discussion of personal, professional, and institutional challenges identified by women. This section concludes with the impact of mentorship on women when pursuing leadership positions. It is important to understand the themes of these major categories as concepts that influence this study and the research questions. By gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges women face on their career paths and the impact of mentorship, this study will be able to answer the overarching research question centered around lived experiences identified by women in higher education senior leadership roles.

Historical Challenges and Barriers for Women in Higher Education

Historically, women have faced many challenges, especially in opportunity and equity in access to postsecondary education (Spencer-Wood, 2011). Research shows the higher education organizational structures in the United States were based on the European models of the university, which were designed and created by men and strictly for men (Altbach, 1999; Cohen, 1988; Geiger, 1999). In 1636, Harvard College (now University) opened in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with the primary purpose of developing men to become ministers and government leaders (Spencer-Wood, 2011). Women were not accepted into universities at that time, as society viewed them as physically and intellectually inferior to men and incapable of doing college work (Nidiffer, 2002).

In 1855 women were beginning to be accepted into universities as students; although societal norms limited their fields of study as there were culturally established roles. This was designed to limit negative consequences to marriages, family, and society in general (Nidiffer, 2002; Thelin, 2004). In the 19th century, as women's societal roles began to change, so did their opportunities. However, these opportunities remained limited to three acceptable categories: secretarial, nursing, or teaching (Sadker & Sadker, 1995).

Women were first admitted to doctoral programs in 1890, and by the end of World War I, women were enrolling in colleges and universities in more significant numbers steadily increasing over the next two decades (Glazer-Raymo, 2002). This upward trend continued until World War II, which was a significant event regarding the increase in women's enrollment and hiring as faculty members in higher education, as women filled the roles vacated by men recruited into the military. With an increase in women's enrollment as students and increased women faculty hiring, colleges and universities began to promote women to leadership positions (Geiger, 1999; Glazer-Raymo, 2002). Since 1987, women have outnumbered men in enrollment and earned degrees and yet are not equally represented in higher education senior leadership roles. (see Figure 2.1)

Figure 2.1

University degrees earned by males versus females in the U.S. 1967-2020 with women leadership trend.
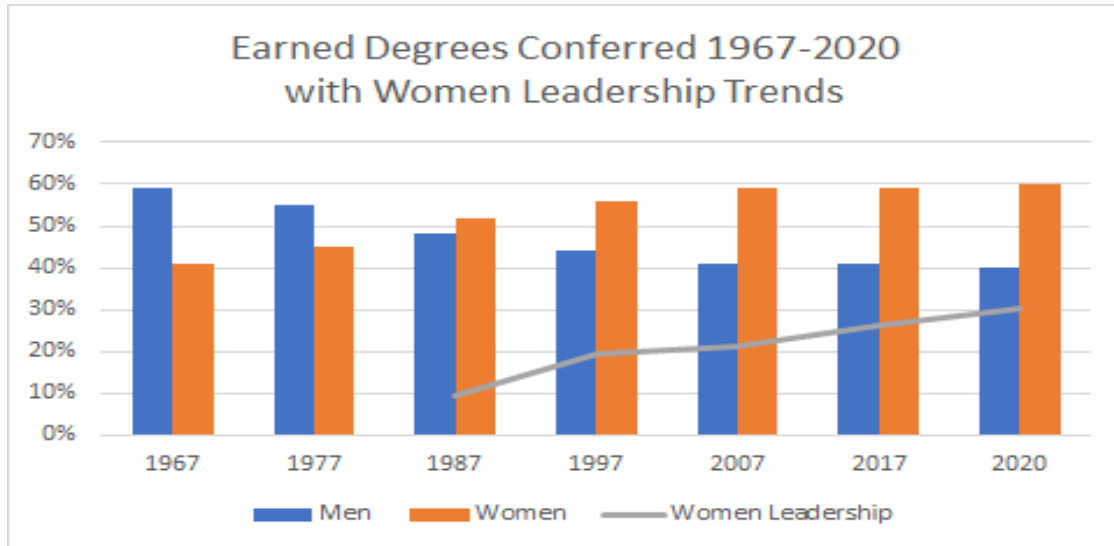
Current Challenges for Women

Although women hold 70% of positions in education overall and currently represent 55% of the higher education workforce (see Table 2.1), research consistently reveals an underrepresentation of women in leadership roles (Airini et al., 2011; Brock, 2010; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Hannum, Muhly, Shockley-Zalabak & White, 2015; Jones & Palmer, 2011; Smith & Slate 2018). As defined in chapter one, leadership roles will be identified as women holding the title of Chancellor, President, Vice President, Associate/Assistant Vice President, Dean, and Associate Dean in a college or university. Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) argued that this trend continues to be true, especially for senior leadership positions, even though more women are earning advanced educational degrees than men. To explain this inequity, extensive research has been conducted to identify the challenges that have prevented women in higher education from advancing to senior leadership (Baugher & Martin,

1981; Hall & Sandler, 1984; Iverson, 2011). Current scholarship organizes these challenges preventing women from advancing in rank into three major challenge categories: personal, professional, and institutional (Laud & Johnson, 2013, Murray & Chua, 2014, Virick & Greer, 2012). To understand the lived experiences of women in higher education senior leadership roles, we must understand all of the aspects of their lives.

Table 2.1

2019 Employed Persons by Education Industry

Industry	Total Employed	% of Women
Educational services	14,193	69.6
Elementary and secondary schools	9,369	75.8
Colleges, universities, and professional schools, including junior colleges	3,795	55.3
Business, technical, and trade schools and training	94	59.5
Other schools and instruction, and educational support services	935	67.1

[Numbers in thousands]

Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019). Retrieved March 1, 2019.

Personal Challenges: Push/Pull Factors and Work-Life Balance

Personal challenges specific to women advancing in rank in the workforce are often described as push and pull factors. Daly & Dee (2006) define push factors as internal factors that drive individuals from their role, position, or institution; and pull factors as external factors such as job opportunity, compensation, and location that induce academics to move to new roles, positions, or institutions. To illustrate the internal and external factors leading women on and off their career ramps in higher education, Daly and Dee (2006) provide descriptions of pull and push factors. Pull factors (i.e., on-ramps)

refer to external factors such as job opportunities, compensation, and location that encourage women academics to move into new roles, positions, or institutions. Push factors, in contrast, are internal factors that drive women out of their current roles, positions, or institutions. Simply stated, external factors pull women into the workforce, and internal factors push women out of the workforce.

Push/pull factors have an impact on an individual's career trajectory. More so than men, various internal and external factors influence the course of women's career decisions (Tan & DeFrank-Cole, 2019). Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) argued that men's career paths are typically predictable and organized by linear paths to leadership positions. In contrast, they stated that women's career paths are nonlinear, especially regarding their trajectory towards leadership positions. These push and pull factors represent significant challenges women face when advancing their careers which has the potential to unpredictable and nonlinear paths to leadership positions. The challenge is for women to identify the push/pull factors that have the potential to negatively impact their career path and to develop strategies to address these personal challenges especially when pursuing leadership positions.

Identifying and addressing personal challenges is vital due to the impact push/pull factors have on creating frequent interruptions in a woman's career and consequently lead to many starts and stops along their career path. Nair, Lim, and Cheik (2016) argued that these starts and stops, which they describe as internal factors, were more influential in women's career decision-making than external factors when deciding to leave a position or institution. Specifically, these internal factors were identified as job opportunities, work locations, university image, and compensation. However, Jome, Donahue, and

Siegel (2006) argue that although compensation is a significant pull factor, women desire to be successful in their careers beyond the monetary component of their positions.

Additionally, Hewlett, Forster, Sherbin, Shiller, and Sumberg (2010) described these internal and external factors that create stops and starts on a woman's career path as on-ramps and off-ramps. They argue that while organizations readily provide off-ramps for women, when internal factors cause a shift in a woman's career path, on-ramps are not equally available when women are ready to re-enter the workforce. Furthermore, these researchers argued that the role organizations play in this process is one of the primary reasons women have difficulty locating on-ramps, consequently losing much of their earning power and/or potential. Universities must identify and address recruitment, hiring and retention practices that contribute to the lack of on-ramps for women reentering academia.

Powell and Mainiero (1992) argued that women's relationships and personal lives (i.e., push factors) also strongly influence women's career choices. Relationships and family responsibilities are leading push factors for women out of the workforce. Women often approach their career decisions by considering what best suits their current lifestyle, particularly in relation to the other people in their lives (e.g., partners, children, parents) (Hewlett, 2007). These push factors continue to play a more significant role in women's career decisions than men's career decisions. For example, Hewlett and Luce (2005) revealed that men typically leave the workforce for strategic reasons. These reasons included earning a degree, additional education or training, and changing careers. In comparison, women were much more likely to describe their reasons for leaving the workforce in relation to family responsibilities or lack of satisfaction or meaningfulness

in their current positions. Current research on push/pull factors reveals an imbalance between men and women and the reasons they leave the workforce. While men leave positions more strategically, women weigh personal relationships and responsibilities when deciding to advance their careers or leave the workforce.

Historically, women's work was performed inside the home and included childrearing, caring for elderly parents, and other domestic tasks. When women enter the workforce, they typically retain their home responsibilities, potentially creating an imbalance between work and home (Manning, 2018). These internal factors, push factors, are why Hewlett and Luce (2005) reported that of women who have children, 43% voluntarily leave the workforce. Additionally, they reported that 17% of women who left the workforce felt their jobs were missing meaning and were not personally satisfying. Nevertheless, 93% of highly qualified women reported they had a desire to return to their careers. In order to do so, women must find a work-life balance.

Work-life balance is directly tied to well-being and identity. Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) argue that work can offer meaning for people as it provides purpose, identity, and community. Hanson, Hammer, and Colton (2006) linked work satisfaction to better mental health and family satisfaction. Similarly, Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, and Grzywacz (2006) stated that if a balance between work and family is reported, greater family satisfaction and greater work satisfaction are reported. Because work is important to identity, it is important for work to be positive and satisfying. Individuals must be able to create a healthy balance between work roles and personal roles in order to be satisfied in both family life and work life.

Morganson, Major, and Bauer (2009) define work-life balance as fulfilling role-related expectations in both work and personal life domains. While there are exceptions, women have historically worked in the home in the role of caretakers, while men have worked outside of the home in the role of the primary provider. Manning (2018) describes these role differences as workplace domains. A woman's private domain has historically included work performed inside the home, while a man's public domain includes work performed outside the home. When women enter the workforce (i.e., the public domain), they retain their private domain responsibilities (e.g., childrearing, caring for elderly parents, and other domestic tasks). Therefore, Manning (2018) argues that an imbalance between work and home is inevitable.

Comer and Sites-Doe (2006) contend that women are less likely to achieve a work-life balance, especially if they have young children. This lack of work-life balance is further exaggerated if their partner is unsupportive, working on their own career, or nonexistent. Similarly, Strong, DeCatro, Sambuco, Stewart, Ubel, Griffith, and Jagsi (2013) stated that work-life balance, while a challenge, is critical, especially for women with young children. When work and home life are out of balance, additional pressures and stressors create a work-family conflict creating potential challenges for women who are striving to advance their current position. This work-life imbalance creates a work-life conflict which can be one of the leading push factors women face personally.

Work-family conflicts could potentially create obstacles in the pursuit of leadership roles in higher education. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) define work-family conflict as an inter-role conflict in the private domain (home) and the public domain (work) in which the pressures of one of the roles are made more difficult by participating

in the other role. Scholars have researched the blurred boundaries of work time and family time and the ongoing search for balance.

Acker (2006), Cha (2013), and Williams (2010) reported that when asked about work-life balance, women discuss the challenges of managing their family responsibilities and their professional responsibilities much more than men. These challenges have the potential to cause more stress for women than they do for men, such as managing additional responsibilities of caring for children and/or elderly family members (Kinnunen et al., 2004; Marchand et al., 2016). This is especially true for women pursuing promotions or leadership roles (Elinas et al., 2018; Williams & Dempsey, 2014).

In addition to managing responsibilities, women also report more frequent work-family conflict when caring for elderly parents as a need. The National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP (2020) reported that 17% or 41.8 million Americans care for elderly parents and/or family members who have chronic healthcare needs. Of this total number, women provide 61% of the caregiving responsibilities, and 27% of these women care for two or more adults. With this generational context, the private (home) domain work for women has only increased, with little to no reduction or shared sense of responsibilities from male partners.

Neal and Hammer (2007) refer to family members taking care of aging parents and their children as members of the sandwich generation. In their national longitudinal study, Neal and Hammer (2007) reported that women were absent from work due to family care responsibilities significantly more than men reported. Work-life balance, work-life conflicts, and other push/pull factors are personal challenges that have the

potential to stall a woman's career path to leadership positions. Therefore, to address the issue of the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles in higher education, it is crucial for universities to understand the personal challenges, internal/external motivations, and push/pull factors women face on their career paths when pursuing leadership positions.

Professional Challenges: Glass Ceilings and Glass Cliffs

Professional barriers specific to women advancing in rank in the workforce are often described as glass ceilings, the unseen yet officially acknowledged obstacles preventing women and minoritized groups from advancement (DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014). Research conducted in the United States workforce revealed that women hold fewer leadership roles despite their educational and academic achievements, arguing that glass ceilings served as primary barriers across corporate settings, colleges, and universities for those group members looking to advance (Betts & Suarez, 2011). Another professional barrier for women who finally break through the glass ceiling are glass cliffs. Haslam and Ryan (2008) define glass cliffs as the phenomenon of hiring women to senior leadership roles when the organization experienced a consistently poor performance by the prior leader or the organization is in crisis when the chance of failure is higher.

Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) argued that although women were no longer excluded from lower management levels, women were crashing into invisible barriers on their rise to senior leadership roles. Introducing the term glass ceiling in 1986, Hymowitz and Schellhardt stated that women could aspire to higher ranks; however, they could not break through the invisible barrier that prevented them from reaching the highest

positions in their disciplines. DeFrank-Cole et al. (2014) defined glass ceilings as unseen male dominated hierarchies yet officially acknowledged obstacles that prevent women and minoritized groups from advancing in rank in a profession regardless of their credentials and their achievements. Even with considerable progress regarding parity, in the supposedly progressive halls of higher education, Ballenger (2010) argues there is still evidence of glass ceilings that obstruct equity for women pursuing senior leadership roles.

Loden (1996) discussed the glass ceilings women encounter as biased judgments and collective experiences women face on their career paths towards leadership. Valian (2004) argued that these judgments and experiences result from gender schemas that overrate men's performance and underrate (and underestimate) women's performance fulfilling similar professional careers. Furthermore, Valian (2004) states that these gender schemas, although small and at times are barely visible, over time accumulate and provide men with more advantages than women. This, in turn, negatively influences society's perceptions of women's leadership competencies. Nevertheless, Malveaux (2013) maintains that women have persisted in moving their careers forward to attain senior leadership roles despite gender schemas and glass ceilings. However, Cooper (2015) argues that women who finally break through the glass ceiling may face glass cliffs.

Haslam and Ryan (2008) describe a glass cliff as the phenomenon of hiring women into senior leadership roles under different circumstances. The first instance occurs when a female leader is hired after an organization has experienced consistently poor performance by the prior leader. The second occurs when an organization hires a

woman while it is in crisis. In other words, a woman is hired into a leadership role in which the chance of failure is higher. Haslam and Ryan (2008) found that women leaders are typically preferred as a new hire when an organization is in crisis. This essentially creates a situation where women, when breaking through into senior leadership positions, are set up to fail; this situation has a dangerous potential of reinforcing a stereotype that women are not effective leaders.

The common practice of hiring female leaders into senior roles while an organization is in crisis often leads to negative performance outcomes for female leaders. If the organization fails under the female leadership, women then are perceived as incompetent, thereby confirming biases and gender schemas that women cannot lead as well as men. If, however, a woman does succeed, institutions are often quick to take credit for their willingness to hire a female leader, positioning themselves as innovative and progressive. Under either circumstance, women are likely to either be called out as the individual to blame or part of the team without receiving individual credit.

Institutional Barriers: The Double Bind

When women break through the glass ceilings and avoid falling into glass cliffs, a final concept that works to explain women's leadership experiences is that of the double bind. Bateson, Jackson, Haley, and Weakland (1956) defined double bind as situations in which a person is placed in a position where they will be punished regardless of what they do or say. Eagly and Karau (2002) argue there are two forms of prejudices toward women in leadership roles due to conflicts between the characteristics linked with the female gender stereotypes and the male characteristics typically associated with leadership. The first form, perceiving women less favorably than men as potential

candidates for leadership roles, and the second, evaluating behavior and performance of leadership less favorably when enacted by a woman. The double bind concept explains the challenges women leaders experience in being recognized as both likable and competent at the same time, and can be seen in language, stereotypical gender traits, leadership style and higher competency threshold.

Lakoff (1973) applied the double bind theory to describe the differences in women's and men's everyday language, describing women's language as having the primary goal of calming and reassuring. Lakoff (1973) argues that society holds women to speak and act as members of their sex or risk the loss of respect. The expectation is women use language to build and enhance relationships, in contrast to men using language to build and enhance social dominance and control. These language differences show up also in differences in leadership styles between women and men.

The concept of the double bind is perhaps most salient in discourses related to leadership. Jameson (1995) recognized that double bind maintain that women leaders must exist and behave within traditional feminine stereotypes. Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, and Tamkins (2004) argued that leadership has been stereotyped as masculine with traits that include strength, power, and control. These stereotypical descriptors contrast with feminine stereotypes that include softness, weakness, care, and support.

In turn, women are met with a no-win situation or double bind. When women leaders stay within the confines of their stereotypical gendered behaviors, they are viewed as pushovers who are unable to make decisions (Lakoff, 2007). The same phenomenon does not exist for men. Similarly, Pierce (1995) found that male leaders

who showed empathy were viewed in a more favorable light, often described as considerate.

To further contrast female versus male leadership styles, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) describe women as leaders who take care while men are leaders who take charge. Differences in leadership styles between men and women perpetuated along gender lines lead to perceptions of women in leadership that deter women from taking charge (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Women leaders who act and speak in a consistent way with their gender types are viewed as too soft, but those who act and speak in ways that contradict gender stereotypes are viewed as too tough, while men are typically applauded for advancing change. These predicaments of the double bind routinely frustrate women leaders.

This leads into the next double bind predicament, being viewed as competent while also being disliked. Stereotypical feminine leadership styles have been positioned as incompetent (Jameson, 1995). When women leaders act and speak assertively in traditionally valued leadership roles that go against their gender stereotype, women are viewed as competent. However, as Catalyst (2007) argues, when women leaders are perceived as competent, they are rarely viewed as likable. In addition to likeability factors, female leaders who depart from gender stereotypes are viewed as unhappy and less attractive (Ibarra et al., 2013a). In contrast, when women leaders act and speak in ways aligned with their gender stereotype, they are viewed as effective interpersonally and likable but not necessarily competent.

Eagly and Carli (2007) argue that, unlike women, men in leadership positions are not penalized for acting more or less likable. This component of the double bind forces

women leaders to constantly circumnavigate and manage gender stereotypes and expectations. This is especially true regarding a third double bind predicament, higher competency threshold.

To be viewed as highly competent, "Women have to prove themselves at a greater level than men do to achieve the support men seem to get by default" (Artis, 2018, p.3). Women leaders are subjected to higher competency standards and receive lower rewards than men in leadership positions (Catalyst, 2007). Women leaders are often put in the position of repeatedly proving that they can do their jobs and at the same time managing stereotypical expectations. Even when women leaders produce identical work as men in leadership positions, a female's work will be regarded as inferior (Heilman, 2001).

Mentorship

Research related to women's perceptions of workplace bias, glass ceilings, and other barriers (e.g., institutional policies, practices, and ideologies) continues to point to frequent lack of mentorship opportunities for women (Ballenger, 2010; Dominici et al., 2009).

Dunn, Gerlach, and Hyle (2014) profiled three women in positions of administration in higher education, showcasing the divergent pathways they experienced. The first administrator identified as an intentional leader, reflecting she knew early in her career her focus would be on a leadership role in higher education. The second administrator never having a formal plan, responding to opportunities, reflected on having a lack of a road map; and the third administrator, skeptical of leadership roles and the people who pursued those roles, never intended on becoming a leader (Dunn et al., 2014). A common theme for all three leaders mentioned above was the lack of

mentorship opportunities available to them during their respective careers. These researchers suggest a direct correlation to mentorship opportunities and advancement opportunities.

While mentorship in one's profession yields increased success in one's career (Diehl & Dzubinski 2016) it is concerning that there is a lack of mentorship opportunities for women to advance in higher education leadership roles Teague (2015). Virick and Greer (2012) and Cook and Glass (2014) researched mentorship and found that women's lack of mentorship opportunities increasingly leads to women being overlooked when opportunities for promotions were available. Therefore, these researchers agreed that women's promotion opportunities increased when the opposite is true, and mentorship opportunities were available. Similarly, Betts & Suarez (2011) and Ballenger (2010) argue that with fewer women in leadership roles, this leaves fewer mentorship opportunities for women aspiring to achieve higher education leadership positions. These results suggest insufficient mentoring resulted from too few women in leadership positions available to mentor other women.

Conclusion

Chapter two provided a brief overview of the challenges women have faced in higher education and the personal, professional, and institutional barriers when pursuing senior leadership positions. Additionally, this chapter presented a review of the literature related to women's underrepresentation in higher education senior leadership positions.

Chapter three will present the context for the study, including relevant information regarding the setting and participants. Additionally, this chapter describes the data sources, data collection procedures, and analytical strategies for data analysis.

Finally, this chapter concludes with a description of measures taken to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical considerations. Chapter four will present, discuss, and summarize the finding from the online survey and focus group interviews in relation to the topic of the underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership. Finally, Chapter five will provide a descriptive summary of findings for each of the research questions.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Analysis Procedures

Introduction

The previous chapter provided a strong foundation for this study, outlined a theoretical framework, as well as provided a brief discussion on the historical challenges faced by women employed in higher education. Additionally, the previous chapter presented a review of the literature related to the phenomena of women's underrepresentation in higher education senior leadership roles through the four relevant conceptual tenets: (1) push/pull factors; (2) glass ceilings/glass cliffs; (3) the double bind; and (4) mentorship.

Chapter three presents the context for the study, including relevant information regarding the setting and participants. Additionally, this chapter describes the data sources, data collection procedures, and analytical strategies for data analysis. Finally, this chapter concludes with a description of measures taken to ensure trustworthiness of the research, dependability, credibility, and ethical considerations.

The overarching inquiry of this study was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences women in higher education senior leadership roles identified as they have navigated their careers thus far. A qualitative research design was employed to better understand the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership. Specifically, phenomenology was chosen as the qualitative approach for this study to prioritize the participants' voices and gain an understanding of their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach utilized distribution of an online survey followed by extended discussions with three focus groups. Collectively, these methods provided a description of participants' experiences of women in higher

education senior leadership roles. The women recruited as participants in this study described the personal, professional, and institutional challenges they have encountered when pursuing advancement, as well as their strategies for combatting adversity throughout their careers.

Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this study was: W*hat experiences do women in higher education senior leadership roles identify as they navigate their career paths?* Several sub-questions also informed this study:

- What obstacles do women in higher education senior leadership roles report as challenges faced on their career paths?

- What strategies do women in higher education senior leadership roles report they employ to address the challenges on their career paths?

- How do women describe the mentoring they received as they rose to leadership positions?

- How do women describe their role in mentoring other women pursuing advancement?

Research Context

Research Design and Institutional Review Board Approval

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative design to examine the experiences of 26 women holding senior leadership positions in higher education. Prior to conducting the study, the appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained and approved informed consent forms were used to recruit participants. See Appendix A for copy of IRB approval letter. The IRB approved consent forms were

presented to prospective participants by e-mail, inviting their participation in an online survey. In clicking the survey link, participants granted consent to participate. The IRB approved consent form was presented again prior to the women's participation in focus group discussions. At that time, verbal consent was obtained for participation and recording of the discussion. All participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. See Appendix B for copy of the IRB approved informed consent.

Online Survey Recruitment

Participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling, a process of intentional recruitment of people meeting specific criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Smith et al., 2009). The specific criteria for this study were women in higher education institutions holding senior leadership roles. The identified potential participants in senior leadership roles included women in the following positions: Chancellor/President, Vice President, Associate/Assistant Vice President, Deans, and Associate Dean. The process of identifying potential participants for this study was via an online search through independent universities with public directories in the Midwest and expanded to include universities across the United States. This search yielded a total of 18 public and private universities (varying in size) across ten states, with 112 women identified in senior leadership roles. Participants were then recruited via an e-mail invitation asking them to complete an online survey. As part of the online survey, participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in small focus groups to answer follow-up questions and further discuss the topic of women in senior leadership roles in higher education. In sum, two sources of data collection were then used: an online survey and focus group discussions.

Online Survey Data Collection Method

Using an online survey data collection method (Fink, 2009), an e-mail was sent to each potential participant recruiting her to participate in the study through the online survey. See Appendix C for a copy of the online survey questions. Data were collected from 26 women across 12 universities currently holding senior leadership positions in higher education. This total reflected a 23.21% response rate across all invitation e-mails issued.

Once participants had agreed, they were asked to complete a Microsoft Forms online survey consisting of four sections with six questions in each. Participants were asked to take the survey in one sitting, as the survey did not allow for partial completion before submission. The average time to complete the survey was nine minutes and seven seconds.

The first section of the form requested general demographic information, including age, race, marital status, the highest level of education, program of study, current position, and list of institutions in which they held a senior leadership position.

Section two asked the participants if they faced any personal challenges when pursuing their higher education senior leadership role. If yes, they were then asked to describe the personal challenges. Follow-up questions in this section asked participants to describe strategies used to address the personal challenges they listed. Additionally, this section of the survey asked participants if they sought guidance from a mentor to address the personal challenges. If answered yes, participants were asked to describe their mentoring experience.

Section three asked the participants if they faced any professional challenges when pursuing their higher education senior leadership role. If answered yes, participants were then asked to describe the professional challenges. Follow-up questions in this section asked participants to describe strategies used to address the professional challenges they listed. Additionally, this section of the survey asked participants if they sought guidance from a mentor to address the professional challenges. If answered yes, participants were asked to describe their mentoring experience.

Section four asked the participants if they faced any institutional challenges when pursuing their higher education senior leadership role. If answered yes, participants were then asked to describe the institutional challenges. Follow-up questions in this section asked participants to describe strategies used to address the institutional challenges they listed. Additionally, this section of the survey asked participants if they sought guidance from a mentor to address the institutional challenges. If yes, they were asked to describe their mentoring experience.

Online Survey Participants. The participants were diverse in age. The ages of the participants ranged from 7.69% (n=2) 31-40 years old, and 23.08% (n=6) 41-50 years old. The largest percentage of participants were 51 and older with 38.46% (n=18) 51-60 and 30.77% (n=8) older than 60 (See Table 3.1). The marital status of the participants showed less diversity as the majority of the women reported being married or in a domestic relationship 88.46% (n=23), and 11.54% (n=3) reported being single, never married.

Table 3.1

Age Distribution of Participants (n=26)

Range of Ages	Percentage	Number of Participants
>61	30.77%	8
51-60	38.46%	10
41-50	23.08%	6
31-40	7.69%	2

Although there were three different levels of education, 80.77% (n=21) of the

respondents held doctorate degrees, with 11.54% (n=3) holding master's degrees, and

7.69% (n=2) holding bachelors (See Table 3.2). The least amount of diversity is evident

in race, with almost 96.15% (n=25) of the respondents reporting as White.

Table 3.2

Degree Distribution of Participants (n=26)

Degrees	Percentage	Number of Participants
Doctorate	80.77%	21
Masters	11.54%	3
Bachelors	7.69%	2

The senior leadership roles were in five categories: Chancellor/President, Vice

President, Associate/Assistant Vice President, Deans, and Associate Dean.

Chancellors/Presidents were 11.54% (n=3) of the participants, followed by 38.46%

(n=10) holding Vice President, Associate Vice President or Assistant Vice President

Positions, and 50% (n=13) of the participants holding Deans' positions (See Table 3.3).

Table 3.3

Senior Leadership Role Distribution of Participants (n=26)

Senior Leadership Role	Percentage	Number of Participants
Chancellor/President	11.54%	3
Vice President	15.38%	4
Associate/Assistant Vice President	23.08%	6
Dean	19.23%	5
Associate Dean	30.77%	8

The professional areas for each of the senior leadership roles were in divided

between three categories: Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Other Administrative.

Academic Affairs were 57.69% (n=15) of the participants, followed by 19.23% (n=5) in

Student Affairs, and 23.08% (n=6) in Other Administrative (See Table 3.4).

Table 3.4

Professional Category Distribution of Participants (n=26)

Professional Category	Percentage	Number of Participants
Academic Affairs	57.69%	15
Student Affairs	19.23%	5
Other Administrative	23.08%	6

The institution types were distributed in five categories: Small Private College,

Small Private University, Mid-sized Private University, Mid-sized Public University, and

Large Public Research University. For the purpose of this study, a small university or

college is defined as an institution with less than 5000 students, a mid-sized university or

college as an institution with 5000 to 15,000 students, and a large university as an

institution with more than 15,000 students. One woman was employed at a Small Private

College representing 3.85% of the participants, followed by 7.70% (n=2) at a Small

Private University, 38.46% (n=10) at a Mid-sized Private University, 46.15% (n=12) at a

Mid-sized Public University, and 3.85% (n=1) at a Large Public Research University

(See Table 3.5).

Table 3.5

Institution Type Distribution of Participants (n=26)

Institution Type	Percentage	Number of Participants
Small Private College	3.85%	1
Small Private University	7.70%	2
Mid-sized Private University	38.46%	10
Mid-sized Public University	46.15%	12
Large Public Research University	3.85%	1

Focus Group Recruitment

As part of the online survey, participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in a small focus group to answer follow-up questions and further discuss their experiences as women in senior leadership roles in higher education. Focus group discussions were used to explore the lived experiences of these women leaders, as they allowed for participants to engage in lively conversation that could reveal more robust, varying viewpoints than might have emerged through individual interviews alone (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Of the 26 survey participants, 50% (n=13) agreed to participate in small focus group discussions. The participants were sent an additional e-mail with 14 potential focus group meeting times during the first week of February. See Figure 3.1 for potential focus group meeting times. The e-mail included a link to an online form and the participants were asked to select all times they were available to meet.

Figure 3.1

Potential Focus Group Meeting Times

Potential Focus Group Meeting Times - Central Standard Time				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:00 am	9:00 am		9:00 am	9:00 am
2:00 pm	12:00 pm	2:00 pm	12:00 pm	12:00 pm
5:00 pm	4:00 pm	5:00 pm	4:00 pm	5:00 pm

Focus Groups as a Data Collection Method

       Semi-structured interview questions (Seidman, 2013) were presented to the small focus groups in a flexible format, allowing for open conversation between the women (Patton, 2015). Each of the focus group conversations were recorded using *Zoom* technology, and later manually transcribed to aid the researcher in subsequent data analysis and enhance the researcher's ability to facilitate the conversation. Data gathered from the small focus group conversations were used to elaborate and expand upon the online survey data (Burkholder et al., 2020). The integration of data from the online survey and the small focus groups informed the inferences of this study.

       Focus Group Participants. Based on the time slots selected, the thirteen participants were divided into three focus groups based on their availability. Two of the focus groups had four participants, and the third focus group had five participants. The focus group discussions lasted one hour and took place through *Zoom* videoconferencing technology. Open-ended questions (Seidman, 2013) allowed the focus group participants to share their personal, professional, and institutional experiences on their career paths towards their higher education senior leadership role. Participants recounted their personal, professional, and institutional experiences and their strategies to address the

challenges. Finally, the participants were asked specifically about their mentorship experience and what advice they viewed as helpful in navigating their careers.

Data Analysis Procedure

Thematic Analysis

The process of thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018) began with collecting data from the online survey and creating notes on each participant based on their online survey answers. The thematic analysis continued with a review of the focus group *Zoom* recordings. The focus group recordings were then transcribed manually. Finally, the researcher reviewed the participant notes and the focus group transcript before coding the data.

Qualitative Analysis

A multi-tiered analysis was used to code the data, which were looked at across three major categories: personal, professional, and institutional. Using a constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), the data were analyzed to determine if patterns and themes were emerging. Throughout the constant comparative method, open, axial, and selective coding were used to further identify themes. The identified themes are discussed in detail in chapter 4. Open coding (Saldana, 2016), the first phase of data analysis, was used to review the data line-by-line from the online survey and the focus group transcripts to begin labeling words and phrases. During the open coding phase, conceptual categories were identified and grouped. At the next phase of data analysis, axial coding (Saldana, 2016) was used to analyze the open coded labels looking for repeated patterns that could be connected and placed into larger categories. Selective coding (Saldana, 2016), the third phase of coding, involved analysis of the two previous

phases again, allowing major themes to emerge. These major themes were then compiled to form a comprehensive representation of the collective experience of the women who participated in this study.

Trustworthiness of the Research

In qualitative research design, it is important to interrogate the trustworthiness of the data, as a researcher interprets the meaning of the participants' experiences (Buss and Zambo, 2014). In this study, careful consideration was paid to the processes of data collection, analysis, interpretation, and the presentation of the findings. Several strategies were incorporated into this study to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, including dependability, credibility, and ethical considerations.

Dependability

Dependability is a concept used to refer to consistency and duplication of the research. Audit trails and triangulation were strategies used in this study to ensure the trustworthiness criterion of dependability (Burkholder et al., 2020). Audit trails ensure the dependability of the study by allowing the researcher to systematically retrace the process in which the development of ideas evolved into the final findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, a detailed journal was created to describe how decisions were made, and what steps were taken throughout the process. Included in the audit trail are the participant notes, focus group transcripts, and codebooks. How data was collected, stored, analyzed are all carefully documented, including how codes, themes, and categories were derived from the data sources.

Additionally, data triangulation ensures the dependability of a study. Data triangulation is the cross-referencing and synthesis of multiple data sources (Butin,

2010). Use of data triangulation in a study allows the researcher to verify the accuracy of the overall data (Burkholder et al., 2020) and enables a more valid analysis and conclusion. In this study, two sources of triangulation, an online survey and small focus group interviews were used to corroborate evidence, revealing the codes and themes, thereby ensuring dependability and credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Several deliberate steps were used to organize, code, and analyze the data collected. The small focus groups provided participants with an opportunity to further share their experiences on their career paths towards senior leadership roles in higher education. Both points of data collection were analyzed by document review and transcript analysis. Furthermore, triangulation of the data limited potential researcher bias by facilitating validation of the data through cross verification of the data collected from the online survey and the data collected from the focus group discussions.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the truthfulness of the research, which determines whether the findings are reliable as it relates to the study (Forister & Blessing, 2016). To ensure credibility in this study, the researcher used analyst triangulation through the use of peer review code checking by asking a colleague familiar with the research to conduct an external check at each phase of the coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The reviewer coded each set of blinded transcripts (i.e., all identifying information was removed) with the researcher-generated codes. Before advancing to the next phase of coding, the colleague completing the external check and the researcher met to discuss any disagreements or divergence in the coding process. Discussion continued and codes were refined at the end

of each of these meetings. Following each round of external review, the researcher advanced to the next phase of coding.

Additionally, intrarater reliability indicates the consistency with which the researcher takes measurements (Forister & Blessing, 2016). One method of improving intrarater reliability is to consistently follow an established protocol and to routinely check for consistency (Burkholder et al., 2020). To ensure the quality of this study, the researcher systematically utilized the audit trail to ensure intrarater reliability.

Ethical Considerations

There is a balance that must be met to ensure the reliability of the study and the protection and confidentiality of each participant (Butin, 2010). These ethical considerations are also needed to provide evidence of validity in a qualitative study. Prior to conducting the study, the appropriate IRB approval was obtained, and the approved informed consent forms were used to explore the research questions. The IRB approved consent forms were presented to the participants in an e-mail prior to taking the online survey. By clicking on the survey link, participants gave their consent to participate in the survey. The IRB approved consent form was presented again prior to the focus group discussions where verbal consent was obtained from each woman for participation and recording of the discussion. All participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. It was further stated that the video recording was only for the purpose of notetaking so the researcher could stay present in the conversation. It was conveyed to the participants that the recordings would be saved on a password-protected computer and the researcher would be the only person reviewing the recordings. This step was deemed important, as participants would be discussing leadership issues in their current

positions and their respective universities. To further ensure the protection of the participant's identities, pseudonyms were assigned.

Conclusion

In summary, chapter three described the methods and procedures selected to conduct and collect data for this study. This study used a qualitative phenomenological research design with an online survey and semi-structured focus group interviews for data collection. The participants were purposively selected for the study based on the criteria of being women in higher education senior leadership. Participant recruitment, data collection methods, and data analysis were described. Finally, the trustworthiness of the research was outlined.

Chapter four will present the findings from the online survey and focus group interviews in relation to the topic of the underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership. Finally, Chapter five will provide a descriptive summary of findings for each of the research questions.

Chapter 4: Results/Findings

Introduction

The previous chapter described the methods and procedures selected to collect and analyze data for this research study. This study used a qualitative phenomenological research design with an online survey and semi-structured focus group interviews for data collection. The participants were purposively selected for the study based on the criteria of being women in higher education senior leadership. Participant recruitment, data collection methods, and data analysis were described. Finally, the trustworthiness of the research was outlined.

This chapter presents the findings from the online survey and semi-structured focus group interviews in relation to the overarching goal of this study aimed at gaining a better understanding of the lived experiences women in higher education senior leadership roles identified as they have navigated their careers thus far. The flow of this chapter is structured around the primary research questions and four sub-questions: *What lived experiences do women in higher education senior leadership roles identify as they navigate their career paths?* Several sub-questions also informed this study:

- What challenges do women in higher education senior leadership roles report they faced on their career paths?

- What strategies do women in higher education senior leadership roles report they employ to address the challenges on their career paths?

- How do women describe the mentoring they received as they rose to leadership positions?

- How do women describe their role in mentoring other women pursuing advancement?

Participants' Profiles

The following provides pseudonyms, general demographic and academic information for each of the 20 participants reporting challenges in their personal, professional, or institutional lives. An important note was that there were not any patterns that emerged in responses according position level, professional category, or institution type (See Tables 3.3, 3.4, & 3.5).

Ann, an online survey and focus group participant, has worked in Information Technology (IT) and IT security for many years before transitioning to higher education. Initially, on the online survey, she reported that she did not face any personal, professional, or institutional challenges while pursuing her current position. However, in discussions as a focus group participant, she identified having to "adjust her personality in a male-dominated environment" as the primary challenge area in her pursuit of a senior leadership position. When asked to describe the strategies she used to address this challenge, she stated, "I have always made sure my resume was the best on the stack, keeping up with the latest certification." Ann identifies as a white woman between the ages of 41-50. She holds a bachelor's degree and currently is an Assistant Vice President at a mid-size private university. Ann indicated she was drawn to participate in this research because she applies a general rule of "yes" when invited. She further stated that she perceives no harm in saying yes, and for her, usually, participation turns out to be a positive experience.

Bridget, an online survey and focus group participant, identified family obligations, gender bias, and "getting colleagues to think outside of your current role" as the primary challenge areas in her pursuit of a senior leadership position. When asked to discuss the strategies she used to address this challenge, she stated, "seeking out female mentors, and addressing gender bias when it occurred." Additionally, she discussed the importance of doing her job with integrity. Bridget identifies as a white woman between the ages of 51-60. She holds a doctorate degree and currently is an Executive Assistant Vice President at a mid-sized public university. Bridget indicated she was drawn to participate in this research because it just "struck a chord" with her. She stated, "I think it is an important topic, and I have thought about the challenges women face at each level as I have progressed into higher administrative roles." She further stated she was glad somebody was interested in researching this topic, and she wanted to be "part of the conversation."

Christine, an online survey and focus group participant, has been at her current university for many years and has held various roles in student affairs and academic affairs. She identified family, balancing motherhood, and finding appropriate childcare as the primary challenge area in her pursuit of a senior leadership position. When asked to describe the strategies she used to address this challenge area, she stated, "integrating my family into the life of the institution so that my children love where I work because it was a part of our family." Christine identifies as a white woman between the ages of 41-50. She holds a doctorate degree and currently is a Vice President at a mid-sized private university. What drew Christine to participate in this research was her interest in talking with other women about their career paths. Additionally, she stated, "I have been doing a

lot of reflection on what, why, and how I have gotten to where I am in my career; and why and how I am interested in where my career is heading, so the timing of your research is perfect."

Donna, an online survey and focus group participant, initially reported that she did not face any personal, professional, or institutional challenges while pursuing her current position. However, during the focus group discussion, she identified an unsupportive spouse, emotional abuse, and family issues as personal challenges in her pursuit of a senior leadership position. When asked to describe the strategies she used to address these challenges, she stated, "prayer, prayer is my number one strategy; and focus, focus, focus." Donna identifies as a white woman over the age of 61. She holds a doctorate degree and currently is an Associate Dean at a mid-sized private university. Donna was drawn to participate in this research as she wanted to give back. She stated, "So many people helped me with my dissertation, so it just feels right to help out." Additionally, she stated, " I am very interested in the topic, and I love meeting new people and getting some additional insights into different topics."

Erica, an online survey participant, reported a primary challenge in her pursuit of senior leadership as the persistent stereotyping regarding her training and abilities. Additionally, she stated, "I carried the triple role of wife, mother, and full-time academic." When asked to describe the strategies she used to address this challenge area, she stated, "I served on committees and volunteered to take on tasks that allowed me to learn every aspect of the graduate medical education office." Erica identifies as a white woman over the age of 61. She holds a doctorate degree and currently is an Associate Dean at a mid-sized private university.

Francis, an online survey participant, reported work-life balance as the only challenge area in her pursuit of a senior leadership position. When asked to describe the strategies she used to address this challenge, she stated, "working hard has always been my go-to strategy for everything in life." Additionally, she sought the advice of her "predecessor and my former associate dean, who are both women that I respect." Francis identifies as a white woman between the ages of 51-60. She holds a master's degree and she is a Vice President at a mid-sized private university.

Grace, an online survey and focus group participant, initially reported that she did not face any personal, professional, or institutional challenges while pursuing her current position. Higher education is a second career for Grace as previously, she served many years in a branch of the federal government and rose through the ranks to senior executive administration. She stated, "I really had to try to figure out what higher education was all about." Additionally, she shared that there was no one at her previous institution to help her navigate through higher education. Grace identifies as a white woman over the age of 61. She holds a doctorate degree and currently is a Dean at a mid-size public university. Grace was drawn to participate in this research by a desire to help others. She stated, "I have had several challenges as I have progressed through the different ranks and have always reached out to younger women to mentor them, but there just had not been very many opportunities to do that, so I would like to see and talk with more women and if there is an opportunity to help, I want to do that."

Haley, an online survey participant, reported the following challenges in her pursuit of a senior leadership role:

Female mentors taking on additional duties with no additional consideration (no

time release, no additional compensation, and at times no recognition from

superiors), therefore she expected her direct reports to do the same, thus

perpetuating the tendency for females to assume higher levels of responsibility

without commensurate compensation/workload balance as challenges she faced

when pursuing a senior leadership position. These same mentors were not married

and did not have children, and they did not consider work-life balance when

establishing expectations for direct reports. Senior leadership is very male-centric

with an implicit bias toward male voices. One example, in meetings, senior

female leaders state an opinion and idea that receives passing acknowledgment,

then a male leader restates the opinion or idea, which receives significantly more

attention and often is credited with generating the idea.

She addressed these challenges by "cultivating male mentors to balance the influence of

female mentors, engaging a professional leadership coach to garner frank feedback and

coaching, and confronting bias in a professional and planned manner." Haley identifies as

a white woman over the age of 61. She holds a doctorate degree and currently is a Dean

at a mid-sized private university.

Isabel, an online survey and focus group participant, is a retiree of one university

where she worked for many years in student development and prior to becoming a faculty

member in higher education administration at her current university. Initially, she

reported:

I have faced three significant barriers in my own experience. First, I have worked

almost exclusively for male leaders, many of whom I have found dismissive of

women's voices. Next, I have faced rather significant unethical leaders. Finally, as a mother, I have always maintained a focus on my children and parenting. When asked to describe the strategies she used to address these challenge areas, she stated, "I have made constant decisions about my ability to battle role versus fit into my organization. I have turned to colleagues for support, and I had advocated for myself when necessary and stepped back from roles as needed." Isabel identifies as a white woman between the ages of 51-60. She holds a doctorate degree and currently is an Associate Dean at a mid-sized private university. Isabel was drawn to participate in this research by her interest in the topic.

Jillian, an online survey participant, reported the cost of living independently, affording a business wardrobe, and learning to travel on her own as primary challenges in her pursuit of a senior leadership position. When asked to describe the strategies she used to address these challenge areas, she stated, "Good, hard work and lots of listening." She also shared that she prayed a lot and practiced a lot." Jillian identifies as a white woman between the ages of 51-60. She holds a bachelor's degree and currently is an Assistant Vice President at a mid-sized private university.

Kimberly, an online survey participant, reported a lack of confidence as the only challenge area in her pursuit of a senior leadership position. She reported addressing this challenge by receiving and accepting encouragement from others and attending professional development workshops. Kimberly identifies as a white woman between the ages of 41-50. She holds a doctorate degree and currently is an Associate Dean at a mid-sized public university.

Lynn, an online survey and focus group participant, has worked at several larger institutions during her career. She shared that she was raised by a single mother, whom she describes as her role model. Lynn also shared that she feels blessed to be in a supportive relationship and has been with her partner for many years. She described her partner as "a great mirror and her biggest fan." Initially, she reported four challenges in her pursuit of a leadership position:

> First, I am a lesbian, so the major issue is always how out to be in the application process and positions. Then, the decision about whether to pursue a doctorate or not was a significant challenge for me to address. Next, self-doubt about whether I had the qualifications to meet the requirements of the position(s) in which I was interested in pursuing. And finally, one institution where I was, while co-ed when I arrived, was historically male. There were many people, I learned later, who were not sure a woman could do this job.

When asked to describe the strategies she used to address these challenges, she described creating a great network of colleagues from whom she could seek advice. Additionally, she shared,

> Regarding the final situation, I ended up leaving the institution much sooner than I had intended. The culture was deeply ingrained with male norms and expectations and had a deeply-seeded fraternity culture that was unsafe and unhealthy. I was the first female Dean of Students hired by the first female President, and the Greek community was feeling very vulnerable in that context. The existing male students and their alumni worked very hard to discredit us and

to create a victimhood culture that made doing good, honest work incredibly challenging every day.

Lynn identifies as a white gay woman between the ages of 51-60. She holds a doctorate degree and currently is an Associate Academic Vice President at a mid-sized private university. What drew Lynn to participate in this research was her interest in the topic of women in leadership. She has also taught in the doctoral program in higher education leadership at her university. Lynn described an appreciation for the challenge in recruiting participants to a study. She has a personal rule, similar to Ann, that when asked, she will participate, as she understands the importance of good research.

Marie, an online survey and focus group participant, initially reported completing her Ph.D., balancing work demands, and a lack of confidence in herself as challenge areas in her pursuit of a leadership position. When asked to describe the strategies she used to address these challenges, she stated, "lots and lots of planning, reflecting, and putting one foot in front of the other." Marie identifies as a single white woman between the ages of 31-40. She holds a doctorate degree and currently is an Associate Vice President at a mid-sized public university. Marie describes what drew her to participate in this research:

> When I saw your research topic, there have been experiences that I have had and I have wondered if I am making a bigger deal out of them in my own mind than they really are. And, to hear the stories of others, but then also, I am excited to read what you find because I want to know if it is a story that I am making up in my own mind, [sic] if it is the stories that many of us were making up, or if there is a reality to it and the barriers to access everything.

Nora, an online survey and focus group participant, initially on the online survey, reported that she did not face any personal, professional, or institutional challenges while pursuing her current position. However, during the focus group discussion she shared how a decision was made when she was out on maternity leave about her ability to do her job. This decision taught her that she had to stand up for herself. Her strategy to address the issue was to get a babysitter and go to campus to take care of the issue. Nora identifies as a white woman between the ages of 51-60. She holds a doctorate degree and currently she is a Vice President at a mid-sized public university. Nora describes what drew her to participate in this research,

I thought about your question, and the timing was just right. I think that we are also transactional at the moment, so it just was an excellent opportunity to pause and reflect a little bit about my career, so maybe it was a little selfish.

Olivia, a survey and focus group participant, shared three primary challenges in pursuit of her leadership role, with the first being that she felt "compelled to lose weight." She also stated that no one provided training or professional development. Additionally, she stated, "tenured professors wanted to design and/or prohibit aspects of my job that I have the credentials to do." When asked about her strategies to address these challenges, she stated, "I had to self-encourage and advocate for myself. I also spoke with other professionals for advice." Olivia identifies as a black woman between the ages of 31-40. She holds a doctorate degree and currently she is a Dean at a small private college. Olivia describes what drew her to participate in this research,

All through, and even throughout the higher learning part of my PhD program, I understood that there were difficulties with access. Isolating all of the different

issues with women starting before you even get to the position. As well as once

we are here then that is a whole another [sic] level as well. So, if I can meet other

people who are experiencing these same things, I was willing to assist so that [sic]

may help others as well.

Pamela, a survey and focus group participant, reported the primary challenge in

her pursuit of a senior leadership position as having children, "this set back my career in

terms of progression to leadership." Ultimately, securing a leadership role required

moving her family from one Midwest city to another state to secure a leadership position.

Pamela identifies as a white woman between the ages of 41-50. She holds a master's

degree and currently is a Vice President at a mid-sized private university. Pamela

describes what drew her to participate in this research as,

I think there is always value to helping and supporting graduate students who are

asking relevant important questions and helping to move knowledge and

understanding forward, so that we can make sound decisions in the future. I

acknowledge my position of privilege and that I have a budget, and I have hiring

authority and so I am mindful of how I do that from an equity diversity and

inclusion kind of lens.

Quinn, an online survey and focus group participant, reported that she was in an

abusive first marriage, and her partner at the time forbid her to obtain a terminal degree.

She shared with the group that now she is married to a very supportive man. They have

had a long-distance marriage a few times, including when she pursued a fellowship in a

higher education professional community. Her husband relocated with her for her first

Presidency at a university in the northeast. They relocated again for her current position.

Quinn identifies as a white woman over 61 years old. She holds a doctorate degree and currently is the President of a small private university. Quinn was drawn to participate in this research given her interest in the topic. She shared that throughout her years in higher education, she has followed how things have changed and how things have not changed for women in higher education. Additionally, she shared that people helped her when she was pursuing her doctorate, and she would like to pay it forward.

Rachel, an online survey and focus group participant, reported being a woman in a predominately male field as a primary challenge area in her pursuit of a senior leadership position. She stated, "There were many people who doubted that I had the expertise to do my job, or who treated me differently due to my gender." An additional challenge she identified was "raising small children while being an academic leader." When asked to describe the strategies she used to address these challenge areas, she stated, in one particular case, she left the institution "to find a place where the leadership style was a better match for her and where there were women in prominent roles throughout the institution." Rachel identifies as a white woman between the ages of 41-50. She holds a doctorate degree and currently is the Dean at a large public research university.

Stephanie, an online survey participant, reported being a single parent as the only challenge area in her pursuit of a senior leadership position. She addressed the challenge by taking advantage of her university's flexible scheduling and learning to say "no" when needed. Stephanie identifies as a white woman between the ages of 51-60. She holds a doctorate degree and currently is the Associate Dean at a mid-sized private research university.

Teresa, an online survey and focus group participant, initially on the online survey, reported that "men in long term leadership who know each other and do not want to work with females in leadership" as a primary challenge while pursuing her current position. When asked to describe the strategies she used to address this challenge, she stated, "eventually I discussed the issue with my Provost." Teresa identifies as a white woman between the ages of 41-50. She holds a master's degree and currently she is a Dean at a small private university. Teresa described what drew her to participate in this research as,

> An opportunity to get together and talk with other women who are in higher education leadership. I am one of three women on our senior leadership team, so it is nice to have a chance to talk with other women. It can be lonely not having other women to talk to and share ideas.

Analysis Introduction

The data from this phenomenological qualitative study were gathered from two data sources: an open-ended online survey and three semi-structured focus group interviews. Twenty-six women completed the online survey, and out of that pool, 13 women participated in the focus group interviews. The online survey requested general demographic information, including age, race, marital status, the highest level of education, program of study, current position, and list of institutions in which participants held a senior leadership position. See Appendix C for a copy of the online survey questions. Additionally, the survey asked a series of open-ended questions inviting the participants to describe any challenges, strategies, and mentoring experiences. The semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted via *Zoom* teleconferencing software,

with the primary researcher using a PowerPoint presentation with embedded questions to guide the conversations. See Appendix D for a copy of the Focus Group Interview PowerPoint presentation.

Reliability of chosen measures

Creating a neutral and reliable survey can be challenging (Hoy & Adams, 2015) as survey instruments have several limitations. These limitations include not providing exact measurements, possible low response rates, and susceptibility to inconsistencies due to the self-reporting nature (Burkholder et al., 2020). Addressing the reliability of the online survey, the researcher used focus group interviews as an additional data source to collect data not readily captured by the online survey. The advantage of focus group interviews is that they provided the researcher the opportunity to investigate participant survey responses further and observe participant reactions related to the topic of the underrepresentation of women in higher education senior leadership (Forister & Blessing, 2016). This triangulation process built a more compelling representation of the phenomenon and ensured the reliability of the data by using multiple data sources (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher uploaded and analyzed data from the online survey and the transcripts from three focus groups into *Taguette,* an online open-source tool for qualitative research. Codebooks were created using inductive reasoning to code responses from the online survey and the focus group interviews. These codebooks addressed each sub-questions regarding challenges women in higher education senior leadership faced on their career paths, strategies they reported to address those challenges, mentoring they

received and mentoring they provided to other women. To gain an understanding of the participants' experiences of challenges faced on their career paths, the researcher read through all the transcripts.

Transcripts were reviewed again, line by line, with an emic focus to center the participant's perspective rather than the researcher' perspective (Burkholder et al., 2020) using open coding, which was used to identify 167 codes, 76 codes pertaining to their personal lives, 76 codes pertaining to their professional careers, and 14 codes pertaining to the higher education institutions where they were employed.

Following the open coding process, the data was reviewed again using axial coding, where data that were previously grouped were examined more closely, separated, and coded again based on common characteristics giving the researcher clearer insight into the meaning of the data (Saldana, 2016). This process resulted in 41 categories, 14 categories pertaining to their personal lives, 19 categories pertaining to their professional careers, and eight categories pertaining to the higher education institutions where they were employed. Finally, selective coding, in which data are reintegrated to identify themes and patterns to answer the research questions (Burkholder et al., 2020), was used to identify nine underlying themes:

- three themes pertaining to their personal lives
- three themes pertaining to their professional careers
- three themes pertaining to the higher education institutions where they were employed.

The above coding processes were employed to answer the first research sub-question: *What challenges do women in higher education senior leadership roles report they faced on their career paths?*

Next, the researcher repeated the coding steps above to answer the second research sub-questions: *What strategies do women in higher education senior leadership roles report they employ to address the challenges on their career paths?* The researcher read through all the transcripts again line by line using open coding, which was used to identify 152 codes, 35 codes pertaining to their personal lives, 107 codes pertaining to their professional careers, and ten codes pertaining to higher education institutions where they were employed. Following the open coding process, the data was reviewed again using axial coding, resulting in 36 categories, 11 categories pertaining to their personal lives, 20 categories pertaining to their professional careers, and six categories pertaining to the higher education institutions where they were employed. Finally, selective coding was used to reintegrate the data to identify eight underlying themes:

- three themes pertaining to their personal lives

- two themes pertaining to their professional careers

- three themes pertaining to the higher education institutions where they were employed.

Finally, the researcher repeated the coding steps to answer the last two research sub-questions: *How do women describe the mentoring they received as they rose to leadership positions? How do women describe their role in mentoring other women pursuing advancement?* The researcher read through all the transcripts again line by line using open coding, which was used to identify 71 codes, 60 codes pertaining to their

experience receiving mentoring, and 11 codes pertaining to their experience mentoring other women in higher education. Following the open coding process, the data was reviewed again using axial coding, resulting in 19 categories, 13 categories pertaining to their experience receiving mentoring, and six categories pertaining to their experience mentoring other women in higher education. Finally, selective coding was used to reintegrate the data to identify five underlining themes:

- three themes pertaining to their experience receiving mentoring
- two themes pertaining to their experience mentoring other women in higher education.

The underlying themes for each sub-question will be discussed in more detail in the data analysis results section below.

Data Analysis Results

The overarching research question guiding this study was: *What lived experiences do women in higher education senior leadership roles identify as they navigate their career paths?* To answer the research question, sub-questions were used to identify challenges, strategies, and the impact of mentorship women reported on their journey through their career paths.

Challenges Reported

RQ1: What challenges do women in higher education senior leadership roles report they faced on their career paths?

Personal Challenges

Participants were asked on the online survey and in the semi-structured focus group interviews to describe the challenges they encountered in their personal life while

pursuing their advanced positions. During qualitative analysis, three themes emerged as challenges women face in their personal lives while pursuing their senior leadership roles in higher education. Those themes were self-confidence, family, and work-life balance.

Self-confidence. Women have many things to consider when entering the workforce and challenges that must be addressed. The first theme that emerged when discussing these challenges was self-confidence. The lack of confidence emerged with the participants in areas of identity, body image, personal finance, and the ability to navigate their surroundings. When asked about personal challenges she faced when pursuing her senior leadership role in higher education, Jillian, an online survey participant, stated:

> Sometimes the little things become bigger challenges than you would think. For me, the cost of living on my own, building a business wardrobe, and learning to travel on my own. As I write this today, these things do not feel like challenges, but when I was first starting in higher education, they were at times overwhelming.

Self-confidence emerged as a theme with several participants when they discussed pursuing an advanced degree. Lynn, an online survey and focus group participant, stated, "It was the decision about whether to pursue a doctorate or not and if it was important to me" when contemplating her personal challenges. Marie, an online survey and focus group participant, also shared about her pursuit of a doctorate, "Keeping my faith and keeping my confidence, especially while completing my Ph.D." Marie's confidence level contrasted with Kimberly's, an online survey participant who shared her most significant personal challenge: her lack of confidence. Ann, an online survey and focus group

participant, also experienced a lack of confidence as she shared that she was her own worst enemy. She explained, "I did not even consider applying for it cause… I have not quite been at that level yet."

Lynn addressed another personal challenge: she identifies as gay, which made her question if "other people would accept me in whatever leadership role I took on." In the past, when reflecting on her sexuality and leadership opportunities, she worried about others accepting her for who she is, especially if she would pursue a position as president.

Family. The second theme that was identified in the analysis of personal challenges is family. While families can be a great support system, they can also be potentially challenging. Participants in all three focus groups discussed the importance of supportive family and friends. Lynn repeated several times, "I cannot say enough about good spousal support." Describing her home life, she stated:

> I feel very blessed that I have been in a relationship with my same partner for 31 years. She is 17 years older than me … she is retired, and what she says to me constantly is I am your greatest fan; I am your biggest fan. It is good to know that I have that person behind me, and she is both a great mirror for me so, when I do something stupid, which of course happens in these roles all the time, and I will go home and I will be grousing about she will be like … let's talk about it. So she is a great mirror for me, but she is also the person who I know is always in my corner. So whatever questions or concerns are raised, it is always because she wants me to be my best and that I don't ever take that for granted.

Quinn and Donna shared similar stories about their second spouses who were incredibly supportive and that they supported a commuting marriage. Quinn shared that while

pursuing a fellowship to advance her position, she and her husband lived in separate states for seven years. Teresa sympathized with Quinn and shared that she has a similar relationship with her supportive husband as they are still in separate states.

Donna, a focus group participant, described her first husband as jealous. She stated: "coupled with some mental illness and emotional abuse, this led to family issues that needed much attention. I really struggled." She continued, "I do not even remember doing my dissertation… Things were so bad at home, and it was; generally, it was horrible." She followed that up in the focus group discussion by adding that her current husband "supports everything I do." Quinn, a focus group participant, echoed Donna's experience sharing that her first husband "was very abusive as well." Describing her family life, Quinn added, "In order to move into a leadership role, I needed to obtain my doctoral degree. At that time, I was married to my first husband, who forbid me from pursuing my terminal degree."

Donna sympathized with Quinn as she shared her story of physical abuse by her first husband. She has since remarried and is now with a supportive man. Quinn also discussed that while her current husband is incredibly supportive of her career choices, other family members were not as supportive. When moving away from her family to pursue professional development, she elaborated saying:

> They felt like … I should not have left. I know it is a different generation… his
> mother sent the neighbor over to find out if we were getting divorced. My mother,
> literally during a family gathering, got down on her knees and wailed…

Family obligations are not just limited to spouses but also children. Childcare needs provide another challenge to women navigating their professional careers.

Bridget, a focus group participant, stated that "family obligations" in general were a personal challenge. Stephanie, an online survey participant, agreed and shared that as a "single parent," family obligations were both a blessing and curse. "I have to rely on my family so much, and then I feel guilty when something extra is asked of me. Of course, I say yes because I could not do what I have to do without their help". Christine sympathized with Stephanie and stated: "finding appropriate childcare is extremely challenging." Rachel jumped into the conversation: "I also had to deal with raising small children while being an academic leader. It is not easy."

Isabel agreed with the balance of family responsibilities while working, stating: "Lastly, as a mother, I have always maintained a focus on my children and parenting." This balance can be difficult and can be harmful regarding career advancement. Pamela replied that "having children set my career back in terms of my progression to leadership." When discussing the multiple roles women have, Erica stated, "I also carried the triple role of wife, mother, and full-time academic which often conflicted: my husband had a job that required several cross-country moves, so I started over several times." These multiple roles can be seen across the board and can have significant implications on career trajectory.

Work-life Balance. The final theme that emerged when discussing personal challenges was motherhood and work-life balance. When the discussion turned to a work-life balance, many women shared their struggles. Francis stated generically, "Work-life balance issues" when asked about what challenges she has faced. Marie also replied, "balancing work demands." Christine elaborated in her answer, "balancing motherhood with working full time and pursuing leadership; not being able to socialize

with male supervisors when work gets done, but in an unofficial capacity." These women were clearly bothered by the challenges of balancing their work demands and their personal life demands. The discussion became more prevalent in the focus group. Bridget mentioned how "balancing family and career and… how you manage that challenge." For her, balancing a husband and three children with work and "it is hard not to be resentful at times when… you see a man whose wife… is doing all that at home for him while he can focus 100% on his job."

Olivia continued the discussion when she mentioned she just became pregnant and how this is part of the problem trying to decide when to tell her employer "Because I know how they feel about people with children." Marie agreed with her, sharing her own frustration and anger. She began to tear up in the focus group as she explained, "I am wrestling with my own frustration and anger that my professional life and my academic life took up so much time that I did not get to invest in family or relationships." Olivia comforted her in saying that even though she has a family, she, unfortunately, "treats my family as though I am single because there is no other way to do it that I figured out."

Professional

The participants were asked to share the professional challenges they encountered on their career path. When analyzing the professional challenges, the three themes that emerged were bias and discrimination, training and support, and leadership.

Bias and Discrimination. Gender bias and discrimination was an important theme that emerged when discussing the professional challenges women are facing. Bias and discrimination were reported in all aspects of these women's lives, including identity, motherhood, male coworkers, and gendered language used with their universities.

Bias and discrimination relating to identity were discussed by Lynn when talking about her sexuality. When discussing the challenge of identity with regards to her career path, she stated, "I am a lesbian, so a major issue is always how 'out' to be in the application process and positions."

After the discussion of identity, the discussion turned to the challenges of being a mother when pursuing a leadership position in higher education. Bias and discrimination related to being a mother were present when Christine stated, "others insinuating that I 'could not do it with three kids and/or ALWAYS questioning 'how do you do it with three kids.'

Participants identified gender bias in two different ways: gender bias related to working with male colleagues and working with male-centric institutions. Bridget simply reported "gender bias" when asked what professional challenges she faced. Ann elaborated in the focus group by saying: "I am going to have to get past the stigma of being a highly technical person, and you know the world; most women are not seen as highly technical." Not being seen as qualified in her field led to her feeling the need to go after every certification and continuing education to ensure her resume is the "very best." She finished by adding:

> They never see me coming… They will start down a typical path and feel like they are going to lose me, and then they recognize that… I am not only right there with them, but I am probably going to [sic] end up guiding them where we need to go… It is kind of a fun experience these days.

Bias and discrimination were again seen in the hierarchy within the institutions. Jillian reported "class systems with faculty, staff, and administrators. Many viewed

earned credentials as more important than work experience." Olivia also added to this discussion by commenting, "sometimes in meetings that a woman's voice is not heard or spoken over or even sometimes repeated as though it was an original idea from whoever else."

Gendered language also came up in the focus group discussion when Grace mentioned how she thinks about how a man would write or respond. Bridget agreed with her and said that she sometimes feels like her colleagues are only responding to her in a certain way "because I am a woman." Following up with her own experiences, Marie continued by saying, "when we are strong and opinionated in how we respond to something and clear in articulation, then it is… 'oh, they are on their period.'"

Many of these challenges with bias and discrimination can often lead to women feeling like they are in competition. Olivia started this conversation by discussing trust issues. She continued, "there being so few of us it almost forces us to… be in this competitive state which therefore it generates this lack of trust." Agreeing with her, Bridget said, "sometimes, as women, we are not each other's best friends." She added, "we feel like we are more in competition with each other than I think men do." The implications of this competition resulting from women not trusting each other appears again later in this chapter when discussing mentorship.

Training and Support. Another theme that emerged when analyzing the professional challenges was the issue of training and support. Olivia simply replied **"**no one provided training" when asked about her professional challenges. Jillian quickly found that being female affected the training and support she received as a challenge in her professional life. She elaborated on the lack of leadership training she was offered by

saying "early on it was being young and female and not being taken seriously." She wondered out loud if, "also being from a rural area often I was viewed and referred to as very 'country'." Being country combined with being young were cited as Jillian's lack of training and development opportunities. Erica, holds a doctorate in Social Work and Family Therapy, found that her education affected her training and support, stating:

> My degree is an unusual one in this country, so I was often stereotyped regarding my training and abilities; I was often dismissed for leadership in the medical school as I did not have an MD. I do have an undergraduate degree in microbiology, so I have argued around many barriers on the basis of that.

Leadership. The final theme that emerged with professional challenges was leadership. Two very different aspects of leadership were discussed when talking about professional challenges. On opposite ends of the spectrum, one participant introduced the idea of unethical leaders, while another participant discussed colleagues not seeing you as a leader. Isabel simply answered, "I have faced rather significant unethical leaders." Bridget added "I continued to take on progressively greater leadership roles within the same organization and it was sometimes a challenge to get colleagues to think of you outside of your current role."

Olivia reported issues with tenured professors in leadership positions. She added: "tenured professors wanted to design and/or prohibit aspects of my job that I have the credentials to do. Had to negotiate salary. Felt compelled to lose weight to be successful." Isabel explained a similar issue with a former dean, as she stated "I had a significant conflict with a former dean. It was an uphill battle and certainly changed my career trajectory."

Women in leadership positions can add to the professional challenges women face. Haley discussed several challenges when reporting to two women leaders. First, when working for women who "tended to take on many additional duties with no addition consideration" the expectation was that she would do the same. Haley felt like this was especially true if the supervisor was "not married and did not have children, they did not consider work-life balance when establishing expectations for direct reports."

Isabel shared an experience she had when she worked for someone whose spouse worked for her. When she had to fire her boss's spouse, even though she had the support of the president, her boss punished her on a regular basis. She shared an experience of being set up to fail because the person before her could not do what needed to be done.

Institution

The participants were asked in the online survey and in the focus group to share the institutional challenges they experienced. Following data analysis, the three themes that were identified in the analysis of institutional challenges were: male-centric organizational cultures, institutional policies and financial barriers.

Male-centric Organizational Cultures. The first theme found in the institutional challenges was found when women were discussing how their institutions were mainly male centric in leadership. Lynn explained that she felt the environment in the historically women's colleges that are now coed is dramatically different from the environment at the historically male colleges. She also described how she worked for the first female president and she was the first female dean at a historically male institution. She added "I felt like I was constantly being tested." Rachel elaborated in the discussion of her professional challenges when she said:

The primary barrier was being a woman in a predominantly male field. Many

people doubted that I had the expertise to do my job or treated me differently due

to my gender. I also had to deal with raising small children while being an

academic leader.

Isabel agreed, "I have worked almost exclusively for male leaders, many of whom I have

found to be dismissive of women's voices." When reflecting on male leadership, Olivia

said her impression is that their approach is to teach me "how to be a man."

Pamela shared that she had to remind her male colleagues that she was working

with them and not for them. Haley stated that a challenge was "Male centric senior

leadership with implicit bias toward male voices." She continued saying, "One example,

in meetings senior female leaders state an opinion and idea that receives passing

acknowledgement, then a male leader restates the opinion or idea which receives

significantly more attention and often is credited with generating the idea." Rachel shared

a similar experience explaining "The primary barriers was being a woman in a

predominantly male field. There were many people who doubted that I had the expertise

to do my job, or who treated me differently due to my gender."

Two participants found that being at an institution that was male-centric did not

allow them any opportunity for growth. Teresa explained the problem as "Men in long

term leadership who know each other and do not want to work with females in

leadership." Describing her experiences with a male-centric organizational culture, Marie

added:

Being blocked from opportunities for growth and development from male

supervisors. Being an interim and internal candidate and then not being selected

for the job. Having others make decisions about my department and role without including me in the conversation.

Institutional Policies. Another theme found when discussing institutional challenges was an issue with institutional policies. Olivia simply stated "The tenured faculty as the gatekeepers." Quinn agreed in her reply, stating:

Because I was employed [at a large, public university] as a tenured faculty member and lower-level administrator, I had to move from that institution in order to make the jump to a leadership role beyond the associate dean level. Some of my doctoral professors ... had lower expectations of me and my work because I was on the faculty... It was very common 20 years ago or more to be one of a handful or the only female in the room where I was treated differently, from where I sat, to how I was addressed to expectations to get coffee/take minutes.

Sympathizing with Quinn, Rachel added her experiences with unwritten rules and accepted practices:

At one of my institutions it became clear to me that very few women leaders would be able to succeed at the highest levels, regardless of their performance. I do not even think the people in charge can see their own blind spots to realize they are creating barriers. Even though I had more experience than most of my colleagues, I was not even interviewed for an interim position at the level above me. While I honestly did not want the position, there were two women who absolutely should have been interviewed. Instead, only one person was

considered, and it was a man. This is just an example of how gender bias played out for me at that institution.

In the focus group, Bridget began a discussion about opportunities that exist depending on the size and type of the institution. She continued, "I'm not talking about skill set, I'm talking about if those positions exist to move up in to." Christine echoed the same concern "there are not very many seats at the table, so when you get a seat at the table you have a responsibility to use your voice."

Financial Barriers. The final theme that was identified in the institutional challenges was financial. Haley shared one of her biggest challenges was when her female mentors took on additional duties with no additional compensation, it was expected that her direct reports do this same. This type of behavior "perpetuates the tendency for females to assume higher levels of responsibilities without commensurate compensation." Nora shared her experience with having to negotiate to get promoted. She explained how leadership was not pursuing her for a promotion until she was offered a leadership position at another university and shared that information with her president. At that point the conversation turned into a negotiation with the intent to keep her, Nora said the president stated, "no we need you here and here is your new position." Olivia shared a similar experience when she had to negotiate a salary. Her frustration was that she had the credentials, was highly qualified, and undercompensated.

Grace shared her feelings of now that she is a dean, she is privy to more information, such as the finances and the financial stability of the institution. She continued "working in senior leadership allows one to be privy of the institutions working business models." At that point, Olivia wondered out loud, "this makes me

question if our institution is stable enough to have a wide, diverse faculty… too often

institutions are doing things in name only and not doing the hard work of creating safe

space. I wonder how much of that inability to create a safe space for all people is because

of finances."

At the end of the focus group, finances came up again when asked what we did

not cover in the discussions. Marie was surprised that pay inequity didn't come up in

great detail, saying "we skirted around it".

Strategies Reported

RQ2: What strategies do women in higher education senior leadership roles report

they employ to address the challenges on their career paths?

Personal

After the participants were asked to share their personal challenges, the researcher

asked the women to share the personal strategies they used to overcome these challenges.

The themes that were identified during data analysis were taking care of self, supportive

network of family and friends, and work-life balance.

Along with a lack of confidence, many women in the focus groups shared the

need to prove themselves. Teresa, an online survey and focus group participant, said, "I

feel like I had to do that, and part of that was… feeling that I needed to prove myself." A

similar challenge described by Ann was the struggle of adjusting to the academic

environment. She explained that she had help adjusting on "how to engage people, how

to respond to that frustration… adjust my sensibilities and approach from what would

work in corporate America to what works better in Higher Ed." This is similar to a

discussion by Bridget, an online survey and focus group participant, as she explained

how she struggles with emotion in the workplace. She continued:

In so many ways for me, approaching my work with empathy and emotion is

what makes me feel like I do a good job… I never wanna [sic] remove the

personal element of my work, but in certain environments that is viewed as

negative.

Taking care of self. The first theme reported when discussing the personal

strategies women using when facing these challenges was the importance of taking care

of themselves. Self-care is important because it can affect all aspects of people's lives.

Teresa mentioned that is can be difficult for her "to identify strategies of caretaking of

self." She continued by saying that she is finally at the point of feeling okay with taking

time off work and learning to strategically plan to take care of herself.

Bridget described how one of her strategies was "approaching my work with

empathy and emotion." This strategy allowed her to keep her work and leadership

authentic to who she is.

Supportive network of family and friends. The second theme that was found was a

supportive network of family and friends, with a specific note on the importance of a

supportive spouse. Many of the participants in both the online survey and focus groups

mentioned how their spouse being supportive has helped them tremendously.

In addition to a supportive spouse, a few participants mentioned a supportive role

model. Lynn shared how she had an "incredible role model along the way" as she

completed her master's degree. Ann shared that she also had a "strong female role model

who took an interest in me and my career." Christine echoed this strategy in identifying

"a number of individual women and networks of women that I turned to on a regular basis." Isabel shared how she felt like "I don't know if I would have survived my career without other women."

Grace described how she was "very intuitive in picking up on that support network. She continued by saying that it was important to watch your back and find people you can trust.

Work-Life Balance. The final theme that was found when discussing the personal strategies women use when facing these challenges was the importance of work-life balance. Nora shared how she is still working to feel "ok with being gone" and "finding a personal balance." Even after having to force herself to find it, her strategy is to "leave the stress at work," sometimes even having to put it on her calendar to find 10 minutes to get up and walk away. Olivia also shared that she found a healthy work-life balance by setting boundaries. Stephanie elaborated by adding that she takes advantage of her universities' flexible scheduling and has learned to say "no" when needed. Christine agreed and shared that one of her strategies for finding balance was "integrating my family into the life of the institution so that my children love where I work because it was a part of our family."

Professional

After the participants were asked to share their professional challenges, the researcher asked the women to share the strategies they used to overcome these professional challenges. Following data analysis, the two themes that emerged when analyzing the professional challenges were overcompensating and professional networking groups.

Overcompensating. The first theme that emerged when asked about the professional strategies' women use was increased position engagement, the commitment an employee has to the organization and its goals (Krauss, 2012). Ann described one of her strategies was to make her resume the "very best" to be considered for roles. She also often felt the need to over train and be overly prepared to overcome some of the challenges. Additionally, she felt the need to take every opportunity that came her way. Pamela echoed the same strategy with saying that before bigger meetings "I do a lot of work before I get there."

Another strategy that was mentioned by Bridget was the importance of approaching a problem with someone head-on. She added "anything that I feel like I can do to enhance the communication I'm going to do and for me it is usually the more direct the better." Stressing the importance of communication, she also talked about how it was best to talk about things in an open and honest way.

Grace added that one of her strategies she uses for attending meetings is to not sit next to female friend or colleague. Using this strategy, she would always try to sit "across from provost so they look at me."

Professional Networking Groups. The next theme that emerged was the importance of networking. Quinn described how she joined a professional network group before accepting a leadership position. Quinn explained how the professional network group helped her, along with three mentors that allowed "opportunity for feedback and dissecting and digesting and learning." This same strategy was shared by Grace as she described how she joined an association for deans. Donna explained how it was some of her supportive colleagues who encouraged her get involved in mentorship and

professional organizations. She also specifically mentioned several colleagues who are women who helped her when changing positions. Ann commented in the focus group that she was working with a network of "strong female role models" who guided her, specifically in how to adjust her personality in a male dominated environment.

Quinn agreed and explained that one of her strategies was to build a strong team around her. She continued "I don't have to be the smartest person in the room… I just have to have the smartest person that I can possibly get that knows that to be on my team." Lynn shared that she has a similar strategy in how she builds her team. She explained that when building a team, she looks for "people to fill talent gaps" not trying to find people with her same skillset.

Institution

After the participants were asked to share their institutional challenges, the researcher asked the women to share the strategies they used to overcome these challenges. During qualitative analysis, the three themes that were identified were: talk with leadership, service to institution and leave the institution.

Talk with Leadership. The first theme that emerged when discussing the strategies women used when facing institutional challenges was talking with leadership. When asked about a professional strategy, Teresa shared how she tried to discuss issues with her provost. She felt that this was a good strategy for communication with leadership. Along with this strategy, Haley shared one of her strategies was "confronting bias in a professional and planned manner." With open communication, these participants felt they could work through these challenges.

Bridget discussed her strategy of lifting up other woman's voices. This was echoed by Olivia in the focus group as she explained "I have… been very mindful in my leadership roles to want all women to rise… having the faith that all women have that attitude is sometimes difficult.

Service to Institution. The next theme that was identified was service to institution. Erica shared one of her strategies for her present position was serving as a committee member of a university committee and volunteering to take on tasks "that allowed me to learn every aspect of the graduate medical education office." This helped her when she was ready to apply for a dean position.

Similar to Erica, Lynn explained that one of her strategies was to participate in "key leadership roles in my professional organization." This allowed her to create a network of colleagues that she could turn to for advice.

Leave the Institution. The final theme that emerged was the option to leave the institution. Olivia answered "I relocated" when asked what strategy she used when faced with professional challenges. When faced with no other option, Quinn felt she had no other option but to move. She explained, "because I was employed [a large, public institution] as a tenured faculty member and lower-level administrator, I had to move from that institution in order to make the jump to a leadership role beyond the associate dean level." Isabel had a similar experience, stating "the institution knew of the conflict I faced, supported me, AND supported the dean. I ended up leaving that role and the institution."

In a focus group, Nora also had an experience where she felt that she had to relocate to move up. She explained, "I had to accept a job somewhere else in order to be

promoted here." Pamela sympathized with her, sharing that she was often overlooked and had to relocate for a promotion as well. Marie explained that the best advice she has received was to remember that "the institution is not as committed to me as I want it to be, and it is ok for me to go."

Mentoring Received

RQ3: How do women describe the mentoring they received as they rose to leadership positions? Mentors can be seen in individuals or professional organizations. Several participants shared stories about their role models and other mentors who helped them along their path. When asked about the mentoring programs offered at their institutions, many participants said that they did not know if they offer one, and the institutions that do offer a mentoring program are typically for students. Lynn explained that her institution takes teaching and learning seriously, and her institution offers mentoring to new faculty to help them think about their teaching and learning. This program allows faculty to share ideas and think differently about their teaching. Bridget shared that her institution does have a mentor program for new faculty to be paired with a tenured faculty member, but she is currently in the process of developing one for chairs.

When asked to share their experiences with working with a mentor and mentoring, the participants share a variety of experiences. The themes for mentorship women received were separated into positive and negative experiences. These experiences are described below.

Positive Feelings Towards Working with a Mentor. Many of the participants shared their positive experiences working with a mentor. Jillian, who described her mentoring as a mix of formal and informal, replied that her "wonderful female boss

introduced me to her contacts and shared how she valued my work." Isabel describes her

mentor from a previous role as a "woman leader who I valued, who valued me and my

work, and who treated me with tremendous respect."

Christine shared that she agrees "there is a need for more women leaders or more

women to serve as mentors." Ann described her mentor of two years who worked with

her on how to influence an organization and how to work across the organization. She

shared "I can't imagine being here today without them." Donna added that it was her

mentor who helped her when she felt discouraged about her career.

Quinn explained how she was mentored by the university's female president and

two of her male vice presidents. Her female mentor helped her by allowing her to travel

and see what she does. Donna described her first mentor was a female president. Ann

also describes being mentored by a strong female who helped her "adjust my personality

in a male dominated environment."

Erica replied that her first clinic medical director was a "superb mentor" and she

would not have survived without him. Nora described her mentor, "Fortunately I caught

her attention early on and she just gently opened doors for me." While she sees the value

of mentorship, Lynn shared that she sees "the value of a network... and how it can make a

difference."

Negative Feelings Towards Working with a Mentor. Haley shared that she had

two mentors who were both female and tended to take on many additional duties without

additional consideration. This led to her taking on additional duties, which began to affect

her work-life balance. Christine shared how much she appreciates female mentors

because of a bad experience she had with a male mentor. She explained, "he knew

nothing about me, nothing about my life. I know everything about his life." Isabel

sympathized with her and shared how she is now connected to a mentor who doesn't

know any more than she does and is too busy to meet.

Christine shared how she had a conflict with one of her mentors, who was also her

boss, that started when she told her she was pregnant, and her boss had never had

someone who was pregnant report to her. Teresa explained that there is a vulnerability

that comes with being mentored. She continued, "there is vulnerability and allowing a

mentorships relationship to develop and I don't feel safe." This was also echoed by Grace

who shared how she feels that a mentorship relationship "needs to be someone you can

connect with on a personal level."

Quinn described how she had three mentors, one female and two males. The two

male mentors were both vice presidents, and what she really learned was "how not to

engage people." She said you can also learn a lot for a negative mentor.

Mentoring Other Women

RQ4: How do women describe their role in mentoring other women pursuing

advancement? The themes for mentorship women gave were separated into positive and

negative experiences. These experiences are described below.

Positive Experiences as a Mentor. Many of the participants discussed how they

enjoyed mentoring others. Grace explained that as she progresses through the different

ranks, she reaches out to younger women to mentor them. Donna added that she feels

honored when asked to be a mentor and "happy to share and happy to listen." Ann shared

that she tries to do what her two female mentors did for her, she has been working with

younger women in IT, "helping out whoever I can." Christine replied that "when I hear

the word mentor, that's me." She continued in sharing how she was a mentor to a younger man who is a CFO. She is assisting him, especially while he is struggling to supervise.

When asked if she sees herself as a mentor, Lynn replied "Yes, and the why is I feel like it's my responsibility." She continued: "If I can help people navigate the external and reframe the internal, that is usually what I try to do." She describes herself as a mentor for colleagues and students. She continued "others come to me with their challenges and hopefully I can help them and then I realized the light bulb goes off… that might work for me." In a similar comment, Teresa explained that leadership for women is a "long game, you can't be in it for the short term."

Donna agreed with everyone and said that she wants to mentor, "I want to give back." Quinn agreed and said it is typically the best part of her week. Teresa shared that she feels like it is "part of the leadership I try to have." Bridget agreed and elaborated that her mentoring can even be for personal advice, "it's not having the expertise but taking the time." She continued, "it becomes part of the leader you are."

Negative Feelings about Being a Mentor. When asked if she saw herself as a mentor, Marie replied, "I know I should but I do not because I question my own value in my work... I trust myself as a mentor when I have a good knowledge base in something and I can share that knowledge." She concluded by saying that being a mentor is a title that she would feel more comfortable if someone else gave her. Olivia added that with all of her duties she does not have time to be a mentor.

Olivia shared that yes, she does see herself as a mentor, but the reason why she does not do it more is because "part of that knowledge is my intellectual property that I'm not getting credit for already... it's about creating the boundaries."

Overarching Research Question

After the data were analyzed and themes were identified to answer the sub questions regarding the challenges, strategies, and the impact of mentorship women reported, the themes were analyzed to answer the overarching research question regarding the lived experiences women identified as they navigate their career paths. The challenges were complex and often overlapped each other. Taking care of themselves and their families was a struggle, as well as balancing work life. The participants also encountered bias and discrimination at their institutions, and often lacked training and support, especially from leadership. Additional challenges were centered around their institutions being male centric, institutional policies that did not encourage advancement, and issues with financial stability of the institution.

To overcome these challenges, the participants shared many strategies they developed while trying to advance their career. The importance of taking care of themselves, creating a supportive network of family and friends, and developing a healthy work-life balance were strategies shared by almost every participant. Additionally, position engagement, as well as networking and mentorship were strategies used to overcome the professional challenges. Finally, talking with leadership and service to the institution were useful strategies; however, many participants experienced the need to leave the institution in order to advance their career in the end.

The women who participated in this study also shared positive and negative experiences when being mentored while working to advance their career. It was clear that many participants appreciated their positive experiences but also stated that they learned just as much from a negative experience with a mentor. The majority of the participants also shared positive experiences of mentoring other for personal and professional growth. These women reported mentoring was rewarding and important for them to give back to their industry. A few women shared their negative feelings about being a mentor to others, although these comments were more about the lack of time and confidence.

The engagement in the online survey and the atmosphere of the focus groups gave the impression that the majority of these women acknowledged the challenges they encountered and faced them head-on with a positive mentality. These participants were reflective and hopeful that if they were proactive with their strategies to overcome their challenges and continued to build and promote mentoring programs, the younger generations of women wanting to rise to leadership positions will have brighter paths.

Conclusion

In summary, chapter four presented the findings from the online survey and focus group interviews relating to the topic of the underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership. Finally, Chapter five will provide a descriptive summary of findings for each of the research questions.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings from the online survey and focus group interviews relating to the topic of the underrepresentation of women in higher education senior leadership. This chapter will provide a discussion and analysis of findings for each of the research questions as it is connected to the extant literature. Additionally, this chapter will connect all the previous chapters, conclude the study, and provide an organizational improvement plan.

Discussion of Findings/ Relationship to the Literature

The overarching research question guiding this study regarding women's lived experiences on their career path to senior leadership roles in higher education was: *What lived experiences do women in higher education senior leadership roles identify as they navigate their career paths?* Several sub-questions additionally guided this study:

- What challenges do women in higher education senior leadership roles report they faced on their career paths?

- What strategies do women in higher education senior leadership roles report they employ to address the challenges on their career paths?

- How do women describe the mentoring they received as they rose to leadership positions?

- How do women describe their role in mentoring other women pursuing advancement?

The lived experiences of the women who participated in this study are reported in personal, professional, and institutional categories. In their personal life, the participants

of this study discussed challenges they encountered navigating spouses, family, and children. The participants reported they turned to their family, friends, and personal networks as strategies to address these personal challenges. Additionally, the participants of this study discussed challenges they encountered navigating bias and discrimination, training and support, and leadership in their professional life. The participants reported overcompensating in their careers and turning to professional networking groups as strategies to address the professional challenges. Finally, regarding their institutional life, the participants discussed challenges they encountered navigating male-centric institutional cultures, institutional policies, and their institution's financial stability. The participants reported talking with leadership, increased service to the institution, and leaving the institution as strategies to address the institutional challenges. The experiences the participants of this study shared, and the strategies they employed to address the challenges in their personal, professional, and institutional lives, were consistent with and corroborated the theories of current relevant literature.

An interesting nuance of the lived experiences shared by the study participants was how personal and professional challenges were intertwined. This intertwining of their personal and professional lives was also reflected in the participants' approach to the strategies they employed to address these challenges. The participants who discussed incorporating their families into the institution or who worked at family-friendly institutions could turn to and draw on the wisdom of their personal and professional networks when addressing personal and professional challenges. An interesting omission of the study participants was that they did not share any experiences of employing institutional networks within their universities when facing professional or institutional

challenges. Therefore, when challenges within their universities occurred, which could not be resolved, the lack of perceived institutional networks available to the participants left them with no other choice but to leave the institution.

Personal: Push/Pull Factors and Work-Life Balance

The participants of this study provided detailed descriptions of their personal, professional, and institutional challenges and the strategies they employed to address those challenges as they navigated their careers as women in higher education senior leadership roles. The personal challenges described by the participants reinforced the concepts of push/pull factors and work-life balance described in current literature. Additionally, this study illuminated strategies participants employed to address these personal challenges, therefore, contributing to the existing literature.

Daly and Dee (2006) define push factors as internal factors that drive individuals from their role, position, or institution. Powell and Mainicro (1992) researched how relationships and personal lives can influence women's career choices. Without being able to let go of the caretaker roles, women must make career decisions that fit into their current lifestyles. These push factors can lead to women pursuing a career path that is not linear. According to Manning (2018), women balancing their family life and work life can potentially struggle with the feeling of imbalance. The majority of the participants in this study echoed these struggles as they shared the challenges they faced in their personal life. These personal stories showed the mental and physical demands of balancing self-care and family care and how they often overlapped with the demands of their career.

The participants in this study discussed the importance of finding time for self-care as a helpful strategy when addressing personal challenges. In highly stressful periods, self-care was a strategy reported by many participants for their physical and mental well-being. The participants' responses on self-care reinforced Hanson, Hammer, and Colton's (2006) research that linked work satisfaction to better mental health and family satisfaction. Personal life satisfaction is important because family and personal relationships can be one of the leading push factors; therefore, having a supportive network of family and friends was reported as another essential strategy for the participants as they develop their career paths. According to Strong, DeCatro, Sambuco, Stewart, Ubel, Griffith, and Jagsi (2013), a work-life balance is critical for women. Elinas, Fouad, and Byars-Winston (2018) agree that this balance is essential for women pursuing leadership positions.

Additional push factors were seen in the stories shared by the participants as they discussed their professional challenges, such as the lack of training and support and issues with leadership. According to Artis (2018), women face challenges of having to prove themselves more than men to receive the same level of support. This continual proving of oneself leads to women working harder and potentially struggling more to be seen as highly competent. Similarly, women leaders are subjected to higher competency standards and receive lower rewards than men in leadership positions (Catalyst, 2007). The study found similar findings in the challenges shared by the participants regarding the lack of training and support they received for advancing their positions. The participants in this study shared strategies such as position engagement and mentoring networks that helped alleviate some of the challenges. When faced with challenges

involving their current position or a possible promotion, the participants in this study

shared how their position engagement help them progress forward. Some examples of

this strategy were the need to be overly prepared and qualified, improving

communication, and strategic seating arrangements. The participants in this study also

encouraged mentoring networks, an informal collection of friends, family, or colleagues.

These mentoring networks involve women seeking out training and professional

development and collaborating with like-minded individuals. Employing mentoring

networks was a strategy nearly every participant mentioned to overcome professional

challenges. This finding is in line with the pilot study for this research that explored the

impact of mentorship on the underrepresentation of women in higher education

leadership roles. The mixed-methods pilot study found that while 68.75% of women

identified as a mentor, a significant number of participants reported their mentoring

networks as an informal collection of family, friends, peers, and colleagues. See

Appendix E for pilot study findings.

The remaining push factors that the participants shared were the institutional

challenges, such as taking on additional duties without additional compensation. When

faced with these challenges, participants suggested strategies such as talking with

leadership and service to the institution. Talking with leadership was an effective strategy

shared by many participants, especially when addressing conflicts and discrimination.

Another strategy that was found for overcoming institutional challenges was service to

the institution. Serving on committees and professional organizations can be a strategy

for advancing a career path. However, when other strategies failed to work, several

participants shared that they were forced to leave their institutions to advance their careers.

Due to the scope of this study and the questions asked, the participants shared fewer pull factors (than push factors) they encountered on their career paths. Daly and Dee (2006) define pull factors (i.e., on-ramps) as external factors such as job opportunities, compensation, and location that encourage women academics to move into new roles, positions, or institutions. Donahue and Siegel (2006) argue that although compensation is a significant pull factor, women desire to be successful in their careers beyond the monetary component of their positions. Sharing a passion for their careers, and echoing Donahue and Siegel's research, the participants were eager to discuss job opportunities and compensation, as these challenges were visible during their pursuit of leadership positions; however, time constraints during the focus group interviews did not allow for prolonged dialogs. With continued conversations, deeper discussion around pull factors could lead to closing the gap in representation and compensation of women in higher education senior leadership.

Professional: Glass Ceilings and Glass Cliffs

With all of the advances in equity women have made in the last few decades, glass ceilings and glass cliffs still challenge women as they advance in their professional careers. DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Reed, and Wheatly (2014) defined glass ceilings as unseen yet officially acknowledged obstacles that prevent women and minorities from advancing in rank in a profession regardless of their credentials and their achievements. Many women in this study shared stories of glass ceilings they encountered on their career paths. One participant specifically said she was the most qualified candidate for

the position but was not hired for the job. Another example of encountering glass ceilings was reported by nearly every participant as they shared stories of not being taken seriously early in their careers, and therefore, they felt they were not seen as qualified by supervisors and people in positions of power. Some participants found that female voices were often overlooked or diminished by these same people. Valian (2004) argued that gender schemas continue to accumulate and build more glass ceilings for women. This type of environment typically lacks growth opportunities for women pursuing leadership positions.

During a focus group interview, a participant shared that not all promotions are for ethical reasons. She shared with the group after she was promoted, she discovered it was for the reason of firing a very disruptive employee who turned out to be her boss's wife. This glass cliff situation put her and her team in a compromising and uncomfortable position. According to Cooper (2015), women who are finally able to break through the glass ceiling and get promoted to leadership positions face another challenge to their success, the glass cliff. Haslam and Ryan (2008) define glass cliff as the phenomenon of hiring women to senior leadership roles when the organization experienced consistently poor performance by the prior leader, or the organization is in crisis, when the chance of failure is greater. One participant shared her experience with a glass cliff when she was hired to make the decisions needed to save the department financially because the prior male leader was unable or unwilling to address the financial crisis. These glass cliff experiences will continue to ensue because, as stated in chapter 1, many colleges and universities in the United States are facing multiple crises. If this trend

continues, more women will be advanced to address these crises. Therefore, women must approach their careers strategically to ensure their professional success in academia.

Institutional: The Double Bind

Many of the participants shared stories about a double bind they experienced on their career paths. Bateson, Jackson, Haley and Weakland (1956) defined double bind as situations in which a person is placed in a position where they will be punished regardless of what they do or say. This was seen when the participants felt like they were each other's own worst enemy. Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs and Tamkins (2004) argued that leadership has been stereotyped as masculine with traits that include strength, power, and control. These stereotypical descriptors contrast with feminine stereotypes that include softness, weakness, care, and support. When women portray stereotypical feminine behaviors, they are seen as not strong enough for the leadership position. If women try to portray masculine behaviors, they are seen as cold and unapproachable. Lakoff (1973) agrees that society holds women to speak and act as members of their sex or risk the loss of respect.

Research by Jameson (1995) recognized that double-bind maintains that women leaders must exist and behave within traditional feminine stereotypes. Data analysis of the institutional challenges reported in this study confirms extant literature regarding feminine stereotypes and the double bind situations that are harmful to women's advancement in their careers. These stereotypes are a challenge women continue to face today as they pursue leadership roles and are a leading cause of their underrepresentation in senior leadership in higher education institutions.

Impact of mentoring networks

Regardless of their experiences with a mentor, the majority of the participants in this study agreed that a mentor is critical for a career path to leadership. Additionally, Ballenger (2010) found that insufficient mentoring resulted from too few women in leadership positions available to mentor other women. Women who did not go through professional mentoring programs thought challenges were unique to them and making the problem more significant in their minds than it was. Women who did go through outside professional mentoring had a clear understanding that mentorship was necessary, and all saw themselves as mentors, and mentoring was a part of their leadership style, making a stronger case for more mentoring. The women in this study agreed that there is a need for more female role models for women on their path to leadership positions.

The data analysis for mentorship was grouped by positive and negative feelings towards working with a mentor and positive and negative experiences as a mentor. Many of the participants shared their positive experiences working with a mentor, most of whom were mentored by other women. These positive experiences gave them the skills and confidence they needed to pursue a leadership position at their institution.

While the majority of the stories the participants shared were positive, several participants shared some negative experiences they had working with a mentor. Most of these negative experiences the participants shared revolved around the mentor not building a secure relationship or getting to know them as a person while working together. Some other experiences involved the mentor taking on extra responsibilities and not having the time to devote to mentoring. However, even as they shared these stories,

the participants agreed that they learned just as much from a negative experience with a mentor as they did from a positive experience with a mentor.

The majority of the participants reported they see themselves as mentors and want to give back as a mentor when asked about their feelings of being a mentor to younger professionals. A few participants shared some of their negative experiences as mentors, specifically lacking the confidence to mentor and trusting their knowledge and skillset. One participant shared that with all of the struggles and challenges she faced to gain her knowledge and skillset, she remains hesitant to mentor others because her knowledge is her intellectual property. She feels that she does not receive the credit deserved for this intellectual property; therefore, she feels compelled to set boundaries, so others do not receive her credit for her work.

According to Cook and Glass (2014), women's promotion opportunities increased when mentorship opportunities were available. Aligning Cook and Glass' research, the participants of this study confirmed the importance of mentorship opportunities. Although they discussed working with mentors, overwhelmingly the participants discussed tapping into their networks to address challenges they encountered on their career paths.

Organizational Improvement Plan

Chapter one explained a problem of practice centered around the underrepresentation of women in higher education senior leadership roles. This study explored the lived experiences women faced on their path to senior leadership roles in higher education. The problem of practice and this research study now leads to an organizational improvement plan (OIP).

Because the women of this study reported their personal and professional lived experiences are intertwined, the OIP proposed below reflects that intertwining. Additionally, the findings regarding the personal challenges suggest that women and their personal networks should incorporate work-life balance strategies, including implementing self-care routines.

General Recommendations for Promoting Women in Senior Leadership. The findings regarding professional challenges suggest that women on career paths to senior leadership roles in higher education should approach their careers strategically to ensure their professional success in academia. The following outline provides a data-informed action plan for women to engage when pursuing senior leadership positions in higher education.

1. Stay current on issues and challenges in higher education

    a. Attend leadership conferences, workshops

    b. Stay current with the field through journals, blogs, and social media

2. When searching for a position, apply to:

    a. Institutions using gender inclusive language on the job posting and the institutions' websites

    b. Institutions that fit with professional goals

    c. Institutions that fit with personal goals

The findings regarding institutional challenges suggest universities should do the following to address the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles. The following steps are suggested for academic institutions to provide environments that are supportive of equality of women in senior leadership.

1. Assess the current situation

   a. Review recruiting, hiring, and retention policy and procedures regarding bias, discrimination, and gender diversity. Address the findings to create an environment that increases the opportunities for women pursue leadership positions

   b. Hold discussion sessions with current women faculty, staff, and leadership to gain an understanding of their experiences within the university under the current policies and procedures and identify any push/pull factors, glass ceiling and glass cliffs, and double bind issues. Addressing the finding of the need for additional conversations

2. Set goals to address bias, discrimination, and gender inequity – addressing the stereotypes that women continue to face as they pursue leadership roles, the findings of this study suggest the following

   a. Focus on building and maintaining a gender inclusive culture and climate with by-in from:

      i. Board of Trustees

      ii. Senior Leadership

   b. Use gender inclusive language when recruiting and hiring

      i. Educate hiring committees on institutional gender goals

   c. Develop retention policies that include

      i. Family-friendly policies with flex time approaches to accommodate family and personal commitments.

Mentoring as a Tool for Promoting Women in Senior Leadership. Another way for women to approach their careers strategically and ensure their professional success in academia is to participate in mentoring programs. Aligning with the research that argues women's promotion opportunities increase when mentoring opportunities are available, this section of the organization improvement plan is divided into two parts: mentoring programs women should participate in, and mentoring women provide to other women.

Institutional recommendations - Universities should develop a three-tiered approach to mentoring and networking programs.

1. Peer-peer onboarding mentoring – nearly every woman in this study identified being assigned a mentor when hired. The mentor was typically a faculty member that had been with the university for three to five years. These mentors were in place to acclimate the new person to the ins and outs of the university. Although referred to as mentoring, the described interactions closely resembled onboarding activities.

2. Professional development networking

    a. Professional Development – comprehensive leadership development programs with an option out approach (women automatically enrolled) instead of the current option in or nomination approach, which builds and develops women in the pipeline

3. Institutional Leadership development networking

    a. Advocate on behalf of potential women leaders – to address the competition women in this study reported with other women; this recommendation aims to increase women's trust in each other.

Recommendations for women pursuing leadership:

Identify and work with:

1. Mentors - participants of this study reported a need for more women leaders or more women to serve as mentors.

    a. Work with mentor

    b. Be a mentor

2. Networks of Women in Higher Education – participants of this study reported a value in networking and how it can make a difference.

    a. Join in the conversation

3. Leadership development – participants contributed their success today to leadership development organizations.

    a. Participate in institutional leadership development programs

    b. Advocate for women in the pipeline to senior leadership in higher education.

With the implementation of the above organizational improvement plan based on the findings of this study and current literature, women in leadership, future women leaders, universities, and stakeholders can gain confidence that they are addressing the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles in higher education.

Delimitations

The research study was specifically limited to the population of women in higher education senior leadership roles. Employing online surveys and focus group discussions, this purposive sampling was of women who shared an interest in the underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership.

Limitations of the Findings

The first limitation of this study was the use of the online survey. Surveys are known to have limitations and are susceptible to bias due to the self-reporting nature (Burkholder et al., 2020). The design of the online survey for this study created additional limitations. The survey branching bypassed mentoring questions if "no" was selected when asking if the participants faced a challenge in either their personal, professional, or institutional lives. Another limitation of the online survey was the wording of the questions. Attempting to divide the challenges into personal, professional, and institutions may have affected the outcome of the data. As one participant reported, "I guess it is a little bit hard for me to separate personal and professional barriers. Some of what I called personal barriers are technically professional barriers."

The final limitation for this study could have been Group Talk Influence, which is the potential for the responses of one participant influencing the responses of another participant (Burkholder et al., 2020). This influence was beneficial because it encouraged participants who initially reported no challenges in their personal, professional, or institutional lives; however, they could join in the conversation after recalling a similar incidence shared by another participant. This influence could have been limiting as each focus group discussion was steered by the challenges of the first participant.

Implications for Future Practice

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of women's lived experiences in senior leadership positions in higher education. The women leaders in this study provide descriptions of the challenges they faced and the strategies they employed

to address those challenges. Although they reported the impact of mentoring on their career paths, turning to family, friends, and peer networks were equally important as mentoring networks in their leadership development. This is an important contribution because the personal and professional lives of women are intertwined.

Further research on the topic of the underrepresentation of women in higher education senior leadership roles should include the role of the spouse and additional family dynamics and the impact these issues have on women pursuing senior leadership roles in higher education. Additionally, existing research conducted on the divorce rate of women in senior leadership positions states that a current trend is that more women file for divorce when moving into higher-level professional positions (Hald et al., 2020). When women move vertically in the public domain (work), the shift can cause power struggles in their private domain (home), increasing perceived conflicts and lack of respect (Ordway et al., 2020). Further research is needed to expand on the impact of women's vertical movement in public domains on their private domains, especially regarding the increase in divorce rates.

Conclusion

The atmosphere of the study and the focus group interviews were encouraging and positive as women shared the experiences of their journeys. While all the experiences shared were unique, they confirmed and added to the current literature. The women in the focus groups shared different and yet similar experiences, and they were all sympathetic to the experiences of the other women. Even though it was emotional at times, the participants agreed their emotions were their superpower. The focus groups seemed to give the women a platform and empower them, adding to their confidence to

discuss the topic of the underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership. Providing more space and opportunities for women to share their experiences is crucial for creating a more equitable representation of women in higher education senior leadership.

This study has provided the opportunity for me to develop as a researcher, an educator, and as a leader in higher education. It has helped me critically reflect on my problem of practice and delve deeper into the importance of equitable representation. Through the implementation of the three-tiered mentoring and networking program in my organizational improvement plan, I hope to be able to take on the role of change agent and engage participants in a professional development model with the intent to positively influence the development of future women leaders in the field of higher education.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

November 29, 2019

Dear Ms. Johnson:

The Fontbonne University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your study proposal entitled, "Underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership roles." You may begin your research at any time.

The approval number for this project is **FBUIRB112920-JJ**. This number needs to appear on any materials that research participants may see. This includes informed consent forms, questionnaires, surveys (both hard copy and digital), and any other materials given to participants.

Your approval will expire one year from today's date, on November 29, 2020. If you need an extension or the protocols of your study change, please contact Dr. Joanne Fish, the IRB Chairperson, at jfish@fontbonne.edu.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joanne Fish, IRB Chairperson
Assistant Professor of Education/Special Education
217 East Building
Fontbonne University
6800 Wydown Blvd.
Clayton, MO 63105

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research project on shared experiences of high achieving women in higher education senior leadership roles. This research project hopes to learn the following:

1. Obstacles women report as challenges on their career path.
2. Strategies women report they employ to address the challenges on their career paths.
3. The impact of mentorship or the lack of mentorship on women in higher education senior leadership roles.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a woman in a senior leadership role at a higher education institution.

If you decide to participate, you will take part in a short survey that should take no more than 20 minutes to complete. After completing the survey, participants will be asked if they would like to join a focus group discussion. Focus group participation is not a requirement for completing the original survey. The focus group will not meet longer than an hour. All data collected will be stored on a password-protected computer.

There are certain potential benefits and risks associated with your participation in this research. The benefits are contributing to emerging research and allowing your voice to be shared. The risks may include being inconvenienced or feeling uncomfortable answering questions and time involved to answer the questions.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In any written reports or publications, you will not be identified or identifiable.

Your decision whether to participate will not affect your future relations with Fontbonne University or the researcher in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without affecting such relationships.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me. If you have any additional questions later, please contact me at jmjohnson@fontbonne.edu or Gale Rice at grice@fontbonne.edu and we will be happy to answer them.

By clicking the link below you are hereby confirming that you have read the above information, agree to the terms of consent and have decided to participate in the survey.

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

++

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had your questions answered, and you have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Principal Investigator   Date

Revised October, 2019
Note: Questions and Concerns can also be referred to the IRB Committee Chair at: jfish@fontbonne.edu

Shared Experiences of High Achieving Women in Higher Education Senior Leadership Roles

Section 1

Demographics
1.Age
○
○ 31-40
○ 41-50
○ 51-60
○ >/=61

2.Race
○ Asian/Pacific Islander
○ Black or African American
○ Hispanic or Latinx
○ Mixed
○ Native American or American Indian
○ Other
○ White

3.Marital Status
○ Single, never been married
○ Married or domestic partnership
○ Divorced
○ Separated
○ Widowed

4.Highest Education Level completed
- ○ Bachelor's degree
- ○ Master's degree
- ○ Professional degree
- ○ Doctorate degree

5.What was your program of study?

6.Please list current and previous higher education institutions you have held a leadership position.

7.What is your current position?

Section 2
Personal barriers/challenges

8.PEC - Did you face any personal barriers/challenges when pursuing your leadership role in higher education?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

9.PEC - Please describe these personal barrier/challenges you faced pursuing your leadership role in higher education.

10.PES - Please describe strategies you employed to address any personal challenges you faced pursuing your leadership role in higher education.

11.PEM - Did you work with a mentor to address the personal barriers/challenges?
- ○ Yes

○ No

12.PEM - Was the mentorship experience formal, informal, or a mix of both?
○ Formal
○ Informal
○ Mix of formal and informal

13.PEM - Please describe the mentorship experience.
[   ]

Section 3

Professional barriers/challenges

14.PRC - Did you face any professional barriers/challenges when pursuing your leadership role in higher education?
○ Yes
○ No

15.PRC - Please describe these professional barriers/challenges you faced pursuing your leadership role in higher education.
[   ]

16.PRS - Please describe strategies you employed to address any professional barriers/challenges you faced pursuing your leadership role in higher education.
[   ]

17.PRM - Did you work with a mentor to address the professional barriers/challenges?
○ Yes
○ No

18.PRM - Was the mentorship experience formal, informal, or a mix of both?
○ Formal
○ Informal

○   Mix of formal and informal

19.PRM - Please describe the mentorship experience.

[ ]

Section 4
Institutional barriers/challenges

20.IC - Did you face institutional barriers/challenges when pursuing your leadership role in higher education?
○   Yes
○   No

21.IC - Please describe these institutional barriers/challenges you faced pursuing your leadership role in higher education.

[ ]

22.IS - Please describe strategies you employed to address any institutional barriers/challenges you faced pursuing your leadership role in higher education.

[ ]

23.IM - Did you work with a mentor to address the institutional barriers/challenges?
○   Yes
○   No

24.IM - Was the mentorship experience formal, informal, or a mix of both?
○   Formal
○   Informal
○   Mix of formal and informal

25.IM - Please describe the mentorship experience.

[ ]

26.Would you be willing to participate in a small focus group on barriers/challenges women face pursuing higher education leadership roles?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Maybe

27.Please provide the best email address for me to contact you about the focus group discussion

[ ]
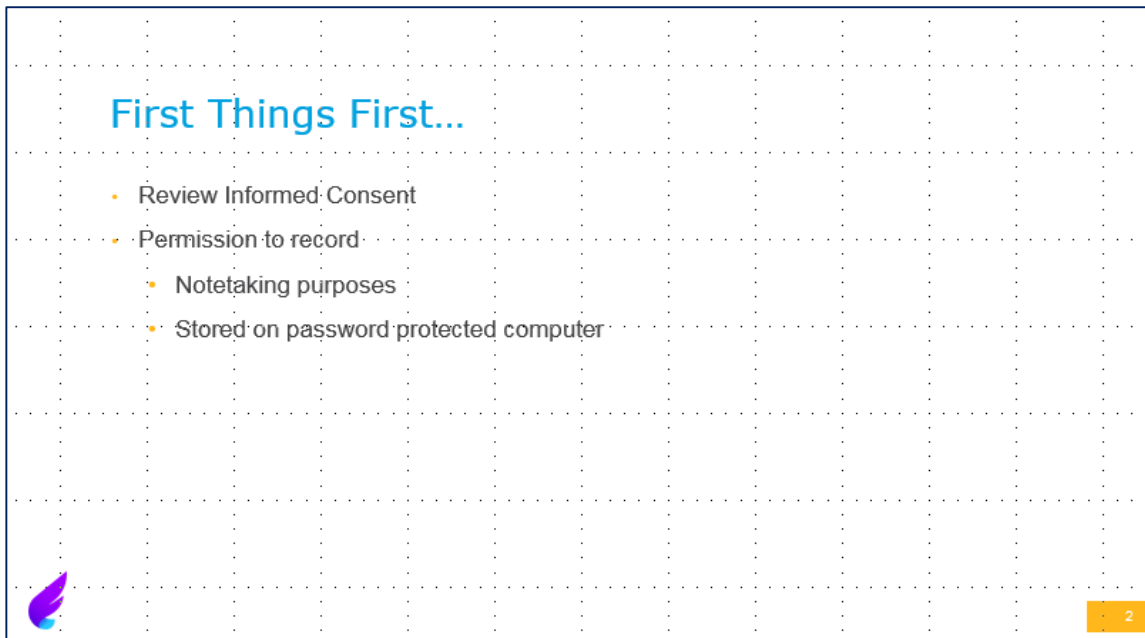
Appendix D: Focus Group Interview

Introductions

- Name
- Current position
- University
- What drew you to participate in my research study?

3

Overview

RESEARCH STUDY:

Shared Experiences of Women In Higher Education Senior Leadership Roles

- Participant Selection – women in senior leadership roles in higher education
- Research Purpose
  1. Challenges and Barriers.
  2. Strategies
  3. Mentorship

4

Action Research Pilot Study

Pilot Study Results

- 68.75% women report seeing themselves as mentors however:
  - Non-Academic – 26%
  - Academic – 71%
    - Advisor
    - Student
  - Leadership – 3%

5

Challenges and Barriers

- Obstacles women report as challenges on their career path.
  1. Personal
  2. Professional
  3. Institutional

6

Strategies

- Strategies women report they employ to address the challenges on their career paths.
  1. Personal
  2. Professional
  3. Institutional

7

Mentorship

- The impact of mentorship or the lack of mentorship on women in higher education senior leadership roles.
  - Personal
  - Professional
  - Institutional

8

Best advice from a mentor?

9

Do you see yourself as a mentor?

- Why?
- Why not?

10

Institutional Mentoring Programs

- Can you describe the mentoring programs your institution currently offers?
- Describe your participation in the mentoring programs offered by your institution?

11

Wrap up

- Anything you thought I would ask or hoped I would ask or any additional information you would like to share?

12

Appendix E: Pilot Study Findings